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# THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF LENINIST POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Edited by  
Tom Rockmore and Norman Levine



# The Palgrave Handbook of Leninist Political Philosophy

Tom Rockmore · Norman Levine  
Editors

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# 1

## Introduction

Tom Rockmore

Everyone knows that after—and as a result of—the Second World War, Germany was divided into two parts that were later reunified in 1990. The film *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) is a German tragicomedy about the ambivalent attitude of East Germans to the political *coup d'état* that overtook their country, its hopes and dreams for socialism of a different kind, and even its past, which began to disappear following reunification with, and absorption into, the Federal Republic of Germany. The destruction and then removal of the statue of Lenin in Berlin in 1992 symbolize the passing of Lenin's heritage in this part of the Soviet empire he did so much to create. The film suggests that nothing has really changed despite so much apparently having changed. It points to the continuing influence of Lenin, who, as much as if not more than Marx, contributed in practice to realizing a version of Marx's theoretical vision of a possible future.

Lenin, who was a many-sided figure, larger than life, a world-historical individual in the Hegelian sense of the term, made contributions of the most varied kinds. This book—the joint work of many hands—offers an encyclopedic grasp of Lenin's political philosophy understood in the widest possible sense of the term. It is difficult to define and even more difficult to quantify the amorphous concept of influence. Yet suffice it to say that Lenin

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is by any measure one of the twentieth century's most influential figures. Despite this, there has been surprisingly little philosophical effort to grasp Lenin's political philosophy, especially in recent decades. Lenin was arguably the single most important figure in the Bolshevik Revolution that led to the creation of the Soviet Union, including Russia and its associated satellite countries. And though, for reasons that still have not been successfully clarified, the Soviet Union has now ceased to exist, at the time of writing Lenin remains singularly important in his continuing impact on Marxism–Leninism, which is still the official ideology of a number of countries, above all the People's Republic of China.

The relationship of Marx to Marxism is one of the complex issues that we must face if we are to understand either the man or the movement, even in a broad, non-specific way. Marx's entire opus constitutes an effort to offer an alternative to traditional theory, however understood. Marx—who eschewed traditional philosophical theory, which he believed changed nothing in simply leaving everything in place—formulated what he believed was an intrinsically practical theory, or a theory focused on changing practice. Marxism in all its many forms has always sought and still seeks, wherever it has the opportunity, to realize itself in practice.

Marx has not always been well served by his followers. Many things done under his assumed patronage are, at most, only distantly related to his position, however interpreted. There are often important differences between Marx's position and the positions of those who have so often spoken and continue to speak in his name, invoking his prestige for practices that are sometimes consistent with, but often inconsistent with, the letter and even the spirit of his view. Marxism, which was mainly invented by Marx's colleague and friend Friedrich Engels, was inspired by Marx's own position; however, it was politically not identical (though certainly very similar) to that position, and was largely different from it philosophically. During its existence, under the aegis of Bolshevism in power, the Soviet empire was based on the political hegemony of a form of Marxism that Lenin mainly derived through his study of Engels' writings. The tardy appearance of several crucial Marxian texts, above all the so-called *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, also called the *Paris Manuscripts* or the *Manuscripts of 1844*, fostered a rich, philosophically interesting debate on Marxian humanism. The even more tardy appearance of Marx's *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus Value* raises a series of questions about Marx's position, which looks very different now from how it appeared in the late 1880s. This is compounded by the controversy surrounding the precise status of *German Ideology*; we now know that Marx and Engels did not write this, but it is routinely taken as a basic exposition of their single joint view,

more plausibly based on the political premise than on philosophical grounds. After Marx's death, Engels, in seeking to unite a disparate political movement that later came to be known as the First International, created Marxism.

At least since Plato, many observers have suggested that politics and philosophy are interrelated. Many examples could be cited. It is, for instance, sometimes noted that Hegel's left-wing and right-wing followers met on the field of battle at Stalingrad. Marx's relationship to Marxist politics is at the very least unclear. The Marxian contribution to various forms of Marxist dictatorship is counterbalanced by his concern, above all in the *Paris Manuscripts*, with what—when this seminal text appeared—quickly became known as “humanism,” and sometimes “Marxian humanism,” but more often “Marxist humanism.”

The term “Marxist humanism” is arguably inconsistent. Dictatorship and social freedom are obviously incompatible. Either one is interested in Marxism, which, since Lenin, is dictatorial, or one is interested in humanism, which presupposes freedom, hence rejects dictatorship. Marxist humanists and Marxist anti-humanists both tend to see Marx's position as turning from an early interest in alienation toward a later interest in the structure of modern capitalism. Those interested in so-called Marxist humanism tend to emphasize the Marxian theory of alienation, while those who reject Marxist humanism emphasize his later works, which are thought to be more concerned with the structure of modern industrial capitalism.

The difference in perspective between those who insist above all on the theoretical goal of social freedom and those who think social freedom can be achieved only through dictatorial means rapidly led to opposition. This antagonism often descended into open polemics between Marxism in power—which inevitably assumed a dictatorial form—and intellectual criticism, which, because of obvious restrictions within Russia and its allies, mainly arose in intellectual debate outside the Soviet bloc. The opposition between left-wing Marxist humanism in the West and Soviet-style dictatorship in the East paradoxically lasted only as long as the Marxist political reality it opposed, and which was its reason for being. When the Soviet dictatorship collapsed through the sudden, largely unexpected but irrevocable foundering of the Soviet Union late in the last century, it simultaneously swept away the Western debate on Marxist humanism—which, for various reasons, was never an important theme in the Russian debate—as well as Western interest in the main Marxist figures and doctrines.

Marxism is, in theory, based on the continuing Marxist reception of Marx's writings. Put simply, we can say that on the theoretical level Marxism is a nineteenth-century phenomenon that only achieved political reality in the

twentieth century. Hegel passed from the scene at the height of his powers in 1831. Marx, who was active from the 1840s to the 1880s, is a mid-nineteenth-century thinker; he entered the German university system soon after Hegel's passing, and emerged a decade later in 1841, at a moment when Hegel was still the central thinker of the period, with a PhD in philosophy. He only later turned to political economy in the process of formulating a non-standard theory of modern industrial society, through which he sought to transform capitalism into communism. Marxism, to which Marx did not subscribe—to which he literally could not have subscribed, since it did not exist in his lifetime—was created, shortly after Marx died, almost single-handedly by Engels, Marx's close colleague over many years, initially in his pamphlet on Feuerbach. Engels, through this short but powerful text, strongly influenced those who, in his wake, became Marxists, or, in principle, followers of Marx, whose theory they, like Engels and Marx, sought to realize in practice.

Marxism in power is a twentieth-century phenomenon that has lasted into the early part of the twenty-first century. Neither Marx nor Engels lived to see Marxism in power, something that was largely brought about by Lenin and his followers as the result of the Bolshevik Revolution. Since that time, there has been a widespread intellectual tendency to treat Lenin and those influenced by him as if they would somehow slink away without leaving a trace, disappearing into the recesses of history, though this is clearly far from the truth. We ignore Lenin and his heirs at our peril. Lenin was clearly, to utilize a Hegelian term, a world-historical individual—someone, according to Hegel, whose purpose lies in realizing history, though perhaps not, depending on the perspective, what that individual had in mind. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Genghis Khan were such figures. At the Battle of Jena, when he saw Napoleon, Hegel famously remarked that he had encountered world history on a horse. In the twentieth century, Mikhail Gorbachev is another such figure—someone who, according to all accounts, unwittingly as well as astonishingly brought the Soviet empire, which had emerged through violent revolution, to an end, even if this was not his intention, without a shot being fired.

As a world-historical figure, Lenin is worthy of careful study both for what he did and what he failed to do in his effort to bring about revolutionary change in Russia, leading eventually through the Soviet Union to the emergence of Putin's post-Soviet Russia. By virtue of Lenin's enormous and continuing influence, above all indirectly in the People's Republic of China as it exists today, it is important to grasp the warp and woof of Lenin's ideas. Though Lenin and a number of figures influenced by him have been studied

in the past, in proportion to his importance little attention has been paid to him in recent years. The single most important recent work we are aware of does not aim to examine Lenin's legacy; rather, through rallying the troops, as it were, its intention is to create political interest in Leninism, which is understood as a potentially viable approach, a task which seems exceedingly unlikely to succeed at present. The present volume is intended to play a somewhat different, clearly more academic, role in the debate. We are aware of no single effort to explore the length and breadth of Lenin's political philosophy in a single, comprehensive volume. And what there is in the debate is often only satisfactory at best from a revolutionary political standpoint, but far from satisfactory—indeed, unsatisfactory—from an academic one. Indeed, more often than not, when Lenin is not simply ignored, his view is misrepresented in the debate by both right-wing and left-wing observers, in both cases essentially for political reasons.

## ***The Handbook of Leninist Political Philosophy in Context***

The sudden, unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 not only witnessed the end of the Stalinist empire, but also the simultaneous decline of interest in Lenin. During the Stalinist era, Lenin was equated with Stalin; thus the collapse of Soviet communism was entangled with Lenin and he also faded into obscurity. The Cold War witnessed the ideological marriage, before, during and certainly after the Chinese revolution, of Lenin–Stalin–Mao. This political co-habitation was seen as a dictatorial triumvirate. The unforeseen collapse, break-up and disappearance of the Soviet Union, which inevitably discredited Stalinist Russia, also occasioned the discrediting of Lenin. As the KGB collapsed, so also did his reputation and influence.

The period of Lenin's "invisibility" lasted from 1991 until 2008, at which time interest in Marxism (and, arguably, its central figure, Lenin) was rekindled as a result of the global financial crisis, the spread of inequality, the recognition of the impact of global capitalism and the continuation of national liberation movements. Though capitalism did not fall to its knees, it certainly tottered during this period. The near-collapse of Wall Street and the worldwide economic crisis that ensued, which, at the time of writing, has still not been overcome, had two immediate consequences: the rebirth of interest in Marx, Lenin and other associated figures in the Marxist galaxy, and the modest beginnings of a new monographic literature.

In fact, the rehabilitation of Lenin began soon after his death in 1924, with Lukács' *Lenin: A Study of The Unity of His Thought*. This essay, in which Lukács unreservedly lauded Lenin's practical genius, called attention to the relationship of his thought to concrete practice. 1995 saw the publication of Kevin Anderson's *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study*, which presented a renewed approach to Lenin's thought.

Other works soon followed. Between 2005 and 2007 two monographs and a collection appeared emphasizing the positive or "emancipatory" aspects of Lenin's thought. Lars T. Lih published *Lenin Rediscovered*, a specialized study that addressed the origins of Lenin's essay *What Is To Be Done?* (1902). Paul Le Blanc's *Marx, Lenin, and the Revolutionary Experience* is primarily a narrative of political revolutionary movements. Since both of these books focus on particular aspects of Lenin's thought, neither can be seen as comparable in scope to this handbook. The third entrant, *Lenin Reloaded: Towards A Politics of Truth*, contains essays intended to provide a philosophical reassessment of Lenin by leading Marxist intellectuals who are specifically committed to Leninist revolutionary politics. The authors of these essays, from their individual and collective points of view, supposedly offer a viable alternative to contemporary capitalism at this point in time. By contrast, our aim in the present volume is to provide a scholarly and objective presentation of the main aspects of Lenin's political thinking, without any political bias for or against his view.

## Organizational Structure

The essays in the present volume, which address different aspects of his thought, attempt to encompass the immense scope and scale of Lenin's contribution. Though no single publication can be expected to address all the many themes in detail, we aim for comprehensiveness in order to make this handbook the very best possible work on the theme of Lenin's political philosophy.

The contributors to this handbook address a number of key themes in Lenin's political thinking in order to foster a much-needed reassessment. Since, in the period leading up to and then away from the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin subordinated absolutely everything else to bringing about a successful revolution and changing the course of history, there is no shortage of topics to be explored. The organizational structure is dictated by our

joint conception of the main themes that must be covered in any comprehensive treatment of Lenin's political philosophy.

After an extensive introduction, the book is divided into three parts, running from the abstract to the concrete, as Hegel suggested. It begins with some remarks on Lenin as a philosopher, including his specifically philosophical efforts, his interaction with specific philosophers, and his controversial view of the relationship of philosophy to society as a whole.

## Lenin and Philosophy

There is a deep difference between Lenin's continuing influence on philosophy through the political approach widely known as Marxism–Leninism, or through specific philosophical ideas such as the subordination of philosophy to political considerations, otherwise known as “partyiness” (*partiinost*), through Lenin's specific philosophical analyses, on the one hand, and, on the other, the view of Lenin himself as a philosopher. There is no doubt that Lenin's view of Marx and Marxism quickly achieved and later maintained canonical status in the Soviet Union and in selected countries outside it in what quickly became known as Marxism–Leninism. It is unquestionably the case that, after the Bolshevik Revolution, it was not practically possible to contradict or even to question any basic view attributable to Lenin and his heirs, in particular Stalin.

Lenin, who strongly influenced philosophy in the Soviet Union during his lifetime, has become even more influential since his death, above all through Marxism–Leninism. The latter is generally understood as a political philosophy, or, since the difference between philosophy and worldview is no longer maintained, as a worldview founded on ideas drawn from Marxism and Leninism, or Lenin's understanding of Marx and Marxism, especially the latter. The difference between a philosophy and a worldview, which Marxism–Leninism tends to blur, is a later reformulation of an ancient Greek distinction. Plato draws attention to this point in his defense of philosophy, which seeks truth as opposed to employing rhetoric that merely seeks to persuade by making the weaker argument appear to be the stronger. Philosophy in general, hence political philosophy, traditionally makes a claim for truth, whereas a so-called worldview (*Weltanschauung*) makes an ideological claim that Marxism is linked to officially recognized forms of Marxism–Leninism. Lenin, who

was unconcerned by the traditional philosophical concern with truth, regarded philosophy as a tool. In his thesis of partyness, Lenin, who suggests that philosophy must not be independent of, but rather politically subservient to, the aims of the revolutionary party, was less interested in uncovering the truth or in formulating a true philosophical theory than in defending Marxism against any and all forms of anti-Marxist criticism.

Leninism, also called Marxism–Leninism, emerged as the ruling ideology of the Soviet Union after the successful Russian Revolution. Leninism, or Lenin's understanding of Marx and Marxism as filtered mainly through his reading of Engels, went through a series of early stages. A crucial step lies in Lenin's theory of the party as the vanguard of the revolution, which led to the Bolshevik Revolution, and then was applied by Lenin from 1917 until his death; after his passing, his form of Marxism gained official status in the period from 1925 to 1929, when Stalin established Leninism as the official state ideology of the Soviet Union.

At the time of writing, Marxism–Leninism functions as the official ideology of the ruling communist parties of China, Cuba, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea. Prior to this, it was the official ideology of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the other ruling political parties that belonged to the so-called Eastern bloc. Furthermore, Marxism–Leninism is strongly influential in other countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela.

Marxism–Leninism takes related but different forms depending on the understanding of Marxism and Leninism, as well as the prevailing local conditions. Marx was throughout concerned with the transition from capitalism to communism. He formulated two main solutions to this problem, including a view of the revolutionary proletariat and a further view of an unavoidable and unmanageable economic decline leading to a crisis that would destroy capitalism. Marxist–Leninists follow Lenin in substituting a view of the party as the vanguard of the revolution for Marx's later conception of the supposed self-destruction of modern industrial capitalism. In addition, Marxism–Leninism tends to favor such ideas as proletarian dictatorship, a one-party state, state dominance over the economy, opposition to so-called bourgeois democracy, and opposition to private ownership of the means of production or capitalism. After his early interest in the revolutionary proletariat, Marx worked out a theory of the transition from capitalism to communism through the economic collapse of capitalism, as has been noted. The Leninist view of the party as the vanguard of the revolution follows Marx's later

view of the economic self-destruction of capitalism in favoring a political rather than an economic solution. Marxism–Leninism prefers proletarian dictatorship, which usually takes the form of a one-party state, leading to a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, and, as Luxemburg foresaw, often of one man over the party. Marxism–Leninism opposes so-called bourgeois democracy and, even in contemporary China, all Western ideas except Marxism. Marxism–Leninism claims to oppose capitalism in all its forms while practicing a form of state capitalism, as in the Chinese case.

Part I, ‘Lenin and Political Philosophy,’ contains a trio of texts written by three careful observers of Lenin and Leninism: Vesa Oittinen, Daniela Steila and Marina Bykova. In their own ways, each of these observers argues that Lenin, who was interested in philosophy for political reasons only, responded to controversies arising in the process of making a revolution by reducing philosophy, or, if there is a difference, Western philosophy, which historically raises a claim to truth, to its political dimension only.

In his detailed study titled ‘Which Kind of Dialectician was Lenin?’, Oittinen examines Lenin’s conception of dialectic in relation both to Hegel, as expressed in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, and to his Russian contemporaries, above all Bogdanov, the main target of Leninist polemics in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. “Dialectic” takes on different basic meanings in a long history beginning at least as early as Plato’s *Republic*, where it refers to the conceptual process through which one directly intuits or cognizes the basic principles of science and mathematics, hence all cognition. Kant employs “dialectic” to refer to the series of difficulties that arise in extending cognitive claims beyond their permissible limits. Hegel utilizes the same term to designate the complex development of the cognitive process. In the Second Afterword to *Capital*, Marx famously but certainly obscurely claims to “invert” Hegelian dialectic. Oittinen argues that Lenin’s simplistic conception of dialectic is more or less identical with a “concrete analysis of a concrete situation.” He attempts to show that Lenin’s interest in Hegel is dictated by two requirements: first, by the need to avoid the determinism inherent in the interpretation of Marxism favored by the Second International; and, second, by the requirement to ward off the influence of Kantianism (or more precisely Neo-Kantianism) on the workers’ movement.

There is a difference between Lenin’s influence on Marxism–Leninism, especially Marxist–Leninist philosophy, and Lenin’s own specific philo-

sophical role. The Western view of Lenin as a philosopher, as already noted, has attracted attention recently. Oittinen, who critically examines Kevin Anderson's version of this view, goes on to call attention to the widespread Marxist–Leninist view of Lenin as a philosopher and as a politician, committed not to truth but to realizing a certain vision of society before returning to an earlier, more subtle version of this thesis as articulated by the Russian philosopher Deborin. The latter was an important disciple of Plekhanov, who, after the Russian Revolution, participated in the debate between the “dialecticians,” which he headed, and the so-called “mechanists,” headed by Aksel'rod. The debate was ended in 1931 when Stalin identified dialectical materialism, also known as “diamat,” as central to Marxism–Leninism.

Oittinen focuses on Lenin's conflation of philosophy and politics. According to Oittinen, it is not possible to understand Lenin's conception of dialectic without grasping the primacy of politics in his thought. In reviewing the disputes between the Narodniks, or Russophiles, and the Zapadniks, or Westernizers, Oittinen argues that Russian stress on the so-called “subjective factor,” i.e., of a conscious elite leading the masses in order to reshape society, explains the specific role of politics in Lenin's thought. In his detailed critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and later writings, Marx famously excoriates Hegel for supposedly going from the abstract to the concrete and not from the concrete to the abstract. Oittinen, who compares Lenin's conception of concreteness with Hegel's, points to their differences. Hegel was concerned with epistemic totality, whereas Lenin, who focused on so-called fissures in concrete totality, was instead interested in the concrete possibility of social change. Oittinen goes on to point out that Lenin's interest in concreteness is in no way a novel contribution. It stems neither from Hegel nor Marx, but rather comes through Plekhanov, and ultimately from the Narodniks—specifically Chernyshevsky's interpretation of Hegel in an essay published in the mid-nineteenth century. Plekhanov, the first Russian Marxist philosopher and a strong critic of Lenin from a Menshevik perspective, was the author of the *The Development of the Monist View of History* (1895). Plekhanov, who is correctly recognized as the father of Russian Marxism, exerted an influence on Lenin at least until the outbreak of the First World War. In the *Monist View of History*, he stressed the contribution of Hegel and Feuerbach to Marx's position, which he, following Joseph Dietzgen and others, described as dialectical materialism. He further supported a dialectical account of economic determinism. Chernyshevsky was a mid-nineteenth century Russian philosopher, the author of the novel *What*

*Is To Be Done?*, whose title Lenin later appropriated, and was also an influence on Lenin and others.

Oittinen goes on to raise the question of whether Lenin later changed his mind about dialectic, claiming that he turned to Hegel, and specifically the *Science of Logic*, in order to counter Kantian influence. In this context, Oittinen disputes Anderson's view that, in his comments on Hegel's *Science of Logic* (also known as *Greater Logic*), Lenin either turned from materialism to idealism or in any way modified his earlier views. According to Oittinen, in the famous conspectus on Hegel, Lenin treated dialectic as a method of concrete analysis or as a theory of concreteness. The aim once again was practical, since, in analyzing Hegel's conception of dialectic, Lenin was seeking weapons to turn against Neo-Kantianism, which was popular at the time in Austro-Marxism. Oittinen supports, at least implicitly, what he describes as Lenin's effort to turn Hegel against Kant in claiming that the *Science of Logic* is the result of Hegel's concerted effort to overcome Kantian dualism.

Oittinen rounds out his analysis of Lenin's view of dialectic in remarks about Lenin's critical reading of Bukharin's supposed scholasticism in 1920. We should note here that Bukharin was an important Bolshevik and rival of Stalin who was executed in 1938 following the first wave of Moscow show trials. He is famously described in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Oittinen suggests that in his commentary on *Science of Logic* Lenin lists *in nuce* the faults in Bukharin's theoretical approach: a lack of concreteness and an uncritical attitude to concepts rooted in an idealist philosophy (that is, in positivism and Bogdanov's theories). Bogdanov, a many-sided intellectual figure, was a co-founder of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and an opponent of Lenin, and was influenced by Mach's theory of empiriocriticism, which Lenin strongly criticized in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909). Oittinen, who stresses the continuity over time in the development of Lenin's viewpoint, claims that Lenin's critical notes on the vestiges of "Bogdanovism" in Bukharin reveal that, after his lecture on Hegel's *Logic* in 1914–1915, his interpretation of Marxist philosophy did not change from the view he had expressed earlier in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, despite what is sometimes claimed.

The contributions by Steila and Oittinen are complementary. Oittinen focuses on a series of themes concerning Lenin's conception of dialectic by concentrating on Lenin's theoretical background. Steila, in contrast, pays special attention to what might be called a thick description of the intellectual context in which Lenin lived and worked—culminating

in his main philosophical contribution, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*—and is more interested in reconstructing the complex philosophical background against which Lenin worked out his ideas. In ‘[Lenin’s Philosophy in Intellectual Context](#),’ Steila directly addresses the Bolshevik leader’s relation to this comparatively more general domain. She begins by rejecting two widespread attitudes concerning Lenin’s stance toward theoretical issues: the Soviet view, originating with Stalin, that Lenin’s conception of Marxism should be taken as the cornerstone of Marxist philosophy, and the Western view, that Lenin is mainly a mere philosophical opportunist.

According to Steila, Lenin was interested in philosophy throughout his life. This suggests an interest that is not linked to specific concrete problems. She points out, for instance, that as part of the process of arriving at his own view of historical materialism, Lenin was already interested in 1894–1895 in the debate between Marxists and Populists on the theme of historical determinism. She further notes Lenin’s concern to master the writings of Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, as well as his desire, which he shared with the thinkers of the Second International, to develop his philosophical competence. She also points to Lenin’s study of Bogdanov’s writings as well as the rapid emergence of basic philosophical differences between them.

Steila also usefully points out that the Machists, who differed among themselves, shared a common rejection of absolutes of all kinds. Lyubov Aksel’rod was a Russian revolutionary, and, after Plekhanov, the most important Russian Marxist philosopher. Her pseudonym was “Orthodox” (*Ortodox*). She criticized Lenin, whose ideas she branded as non-Marxist. Lunacharsky was a Russian Marxist revolutionary and later the first Soviet Commissar of Education. Steila notes that, before Lenin’s work on empirio-criticism, the Menshevik view that Bolshevism and Machism were the same was represented by the Menshevik conviction that, as Aksel’rod put it, they were both expressions of the same subjective arbitrary will and vulgar empiricism. This view was no sooner formulated than it attracted critics. Orthodox Bolsheviks, who began to intervene against their Menshevik comrades, emphasized that Bogdanov and Lunacharsky did not represent the philosophy of the faction. For instance, in 1908, as Steila points out, Bogdanov gave a lecture in Geneva as a reaction against Plekhanov and his school; this was later published with the title *The Adventures of a Philosophical School*. During this period, Lenin was engaged in philosophical study intended to broaden and deepen his grasp of specifically philosophi-

cal themes, including issues pertaining not only to Menshivism, but also to Kant and Hegel. Lenin, who took part in these discussions about Machism, thought that Plekhanov, for instance, did not go far enough in reacting against Bogdanov, hence against Machism. As such, Lenin's study of philosophical themes eventually led to his sharp criticism of empiriocriticism.

Steila points out that Lenin's disagreement with Bogdanov was especially serious with regard to epistemology. Lenin advocated the independent existence of social being, whereas Bogdanov deemed that collective consciousness "builds" social being as its own object, a position that Lenin considered to be wholly idealistic. Together with Plekhanov, he equated Berkeley's immaterialism with Hume's agnosticism. From Lenin's perspective, what was at stake was the possibility of basing a sound political project on what he regarded as a subjective conception of knowledge. Lenin, who obviously linked politics to philosophy, like Plato seemed to think that a correct conception of knowledge underlies and makes possible a correct political approach. Steila cites with approval Robert Service's remark that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* provides the philosophical underpinning for Lenin's political program advanced in *What Is To Be Done?*

Yet it is never clear to what extent Lenin's philosophical interest is limited to or surpasses his philosophical concern. Steila, who holds a high opinion of Lenin's philosophical capacities, regards the latter's philosophical study as turning on the insight that, as she argues, it is only if reality is knowable and known that there can be a true theory leading with certainty to specific political goals. She contends that, in this context, "true" means to grasp the mind-independent world as it is beyond appearance. This theme, which was not invented by Lenin, dates back to Parmenides: for instance, Plato, under Parmenides' influence, defends metaphysical realism. Steila points out that the alternative, which Lenin rejected, consists in denying ontological realism, which in turn means denying the political consequences of historical materialism. In other words, Steila argues that Lenin's political stance was based on his earlier philosophical stance, more precisely, on his version of the Marxist approach to cognition, or the reflection theory of knowledge. Steila argues convincingly that Lenin's insistence on the "theory of reflection" is not arbitrary but is intended to guarantee objective knowledge of mind-independent reality, thereby confirming the necessary link between materialism and Marxism.

Lenin's book, as Steila points out, is not a philosophical work in the usual sense, since it is clearly rooted in the disputes concerning Marx and Marxism in the period prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, and in that sense

it is obviously dated. Yet despite its obvious limits, Lenin's study served as the unquestioned centerpiece of Soviet Marxism for decades and now remains influential in Chinese Marxism. Yet in the West, Lenin's later dialectical conspectus on Hegel (1914) is often counterposed to the apparently more mechanical view he worked out in his slightly earlier study of empiriocriticism (1909).

As part of her focus on contextualizing Lenin's philosophical interests, Steila helpfully notes that the reaction to Lenin's philosophical work on empiriocriticism is extremely varied. The Soviet Marxist reaction, as she points out, arguably culminates in Ilyenkov's study of Leninist dialectic and positivism. She further notes that Althusser's study is weakened by his own basic anti-Hegelianism, which is perhaps consistent with Engels' view, as well as with a certain form of classical Marxism, but which, by inference, Lenin does not share. Žižek, on the other hand, interestingly contends that the Leninist reliance on the theory of reflection leads to a kind of idealism. According to Aksel'rod, Lenin was unable to overcome quasi-Kantian dualism. Bazarov, a Russian Marxist revolutionary, who is now remembered for his contribution to economic planning in Russia, undertook to defend Lenin's viewpoint. Bogdanov rejected what he regarded as a kind of fideism. Yet Lenin himself never criticized the book, nor did he reject it later, and after his death and Stalin's rise to power, it became, as Steila suggests, the cornerstone of a newly emerging Stalinist orthodoxy. In summary, Steila provides a detailed survey of the different reactions to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, the most interesting of which took up the theory of reflection. On this crucial point, the views are very varied.

Bykova's careful, detailed discussion in '[Lenin and Philosophy: On the Philosophical Significance of \*Materialism and Empiriocriticism\*](#)' focuses, as the title suggests, on the philosophical import of Lenin's controversial study that is more often cited than read, more often defended than analyzed, more often rejected than examined. According to Bykova, after Lenin died and Stalinism emerged, important ideological support for the highly authoritarian Soviet state was found in Leninism. During this period, Stalin and others created the myth of the so-called Leninist stage in Soviet philosophy. A turning point was provided in an article in *Pravda* in 1930, written by M. B. Mitin, V. Ra'tsevich, and P. Yudin. According to the authors, Lenin provided the most developed understanding of Marxist dialectic. This and related claims were less important philosophically than as a kind of intellectual camouflage for Stalin. Bykova's focus is on revisiting Lenin's single most important philosophical work and in revising our views of its author. She notes the considerable effort Lenin repeatedly devoted to philosophy, including in this book as well as in his *Philosophical Notebooks*.

Bykova, who concedes that Lenin was not a trained philosopher, thinks his interest in philosophy is significant but needs to be understood in its wider context. Her concern is therefore not Lenin's philosophy, but rather Lenin *on* philosophy. She claims that Lenin's philosophical legacy needs to be understood in the specific circumstances of Russia in the first two decades of the twentieth century. His aim, she thinks, was to link Marxist theory and revolutionary practice, in which, in his opinion, philosophy played a central role. It is therefore incorrect, though often asserted, that Lenin reduces Marxism either to class ideology or to party ideology.

Bykova sees as particularly useful Lenin's sharp differentiation between philosophical materialism and his defense of materialist dialectic, both in materialism and empiriocriticism. She seeks to avoid either dismissing in principle or overly stressing Lenin's work in according it a sympathetic hearing. She suggests that the book should be read sympathetically as a concerted effort to set out the basic elements of dialectical materialism.

In her rereading of the book, Bykova places it in the context of the so-called Machist controversy; she reviews this in detail by examining its main adherents, including Mach, Avenarius, and, in Russia, Bogdanov. In his book, Lenin sharply counters Bogdanov's empiriomonism and empiriocriticism in following Plekhanov. Bykova, who thinks Lenin is concerned with establishing a true Marxist philosophical view, points out that in his study Lenin seeks to expose the errors of Bogdanov and Machism. Throughout this period, according to Bykova, Lenin understands Marxism as dialectical materialism. More specifically, Lenin criticizes empiriocriticism and vulgar materialism in simultaneously arguing for dialectical materialism.

In the third and last part of her essay, Bykova focuses on Lenin's understanding of materialism. She sees Lenin as following Engels in refuting idealism and defending materialism as a form of ontology. Yet she concedes that Lenin's arguments are not decisive. She goes on to point out that, according to Lenin, sense perception yields a knowledge of reality. In other words, Lenin thinks human beings can reflect reality by opting for the infamous reflection theory of knowledge.

## Lenin and Individual Figures

Lenin was intensely practical, and strongly—even obsessively—focused on bringing about and later on consolidating what came to be known as the Bolshevik Revolution. In the process of carrying out this self-assigned task, he interacted either directly or indirectly with a number of other individuals

who were centrally important in the international Marxist movement. The second part of this volume provides studies of five such individuals in chronological order: Engels, the founder of Marxism, to whom Lenin remained committed throughout his career; Luxemburg, his single most important critic before the Bolshevik Revolution; Trotsky, a co-participant in the October Revolution who was later forced into exile and subsequently assassinated on the orders of Stalin; Stalin, who, after Lenin's untimely death, became his undesignated successor; and finally Lukács, who, after his turn to Marxism, arguably became the single most impressive Marxist philosopher and, depending on one's interpretation, perhaps a central Leninist thinker.

Each of these chapters raises significant conceptual themes. There are different ways of understanding the relationship between Marx and Engels. Engels, and later most Marxists, always understood them to be two authors of a single theory; this is something that Marx never asserted (on the contrary, he denied), and that, on closer study of Marx's writings, scholars of Marx and Marxism increasingly tend to deny. Norman Levine belongs to the group of specialists who see the differences between Marx and Engels as crucial to understanding Marx's theories.

Marx famously distinguishes between initial, or crude, communism, a phase in which each person will receive back what they contribute, and its later, higher stage, in which each person will supposedly receive what they need. Levine's study, titled '[Engels' Co-option Of Lenin](#)', focuses primarily on what he understands as the clear and highly significant discontinuity between Marx's and Lenin's respective definitions of the second or "higher phase of communist society," in short, the *terminus ad quem* of Marx's entire theoretical effort, his aim in striving to bring about the transformation of modern industrial society from capitalism to communism. Levine develops his account as a series of four related subthemes, including Lenin's ignorance of Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* and other writings from the same early period; Lenin's lack of knowledge concerning the distinction between distributive justice and civic humanism, including its origins in Greek political thought; the absence of the concept of civil society in Lenin's thinking; and finally his manifest failure to appreciate the difference between materialism and naturalism. Levine's main theme is that not only did Lenin rely heavily on Engels for his view of Marx, not least since a series of important Marxian texts had not been published when Lenin was active, but he further misinterpreted in important ways those Marxian texts that had appeared when he was active and with which he was familiar.

Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* appeared for the first time in the Soviet Union in 1929 and three years later in the West. Levine points out that Lenin,

who died before it appeared, based his vision of the higher phase of a future communist society on Engels' understanding of scientific socialism. From the Marxist perspective, for obvious political reasons, Marx and Engels are routinely treated as an indivisible unit. Levine, however, argues three main points: first, there are important differences between their views; second, in the absence of Marxian texts that only appeared later, Lenin did not and could not have known many aspects of Marx's views; and third, for these reasons, Lenin could only have based his view of Marx and Marxism mainly on Engels. With this in mind, Levine's contribution focuses on what he describes as the contradictions between Marx's and Lenin's basically different views of the higher phase of communism through a series of remarks on Feuerbach and Hegel.

The precise contribution of Feuerbach to the formulation of Marx's position remains unclear. Some observers, for instance Lukács, think that the Marxist understanding of Feuerbach's importance is exaggerated. Engels, who was not trained in philosophy, had no hesitation in designating Feuerbach as the only contemporary philosophical genius when Marx began to write. Though critical of Engels, Levine, following many other writers, thinks that Marx's view is constructed on the basis of Feuerbachian anthropology or even on anthropological humanism. Levine is more critical of Lenin. Though Lenin was aware of Marxian writings that had already appeared when he was active, Levine thinks he was not always able to grasp them correctly or even to identify central topics. According to Levine, Lenin's ignorance or misinterpretations of Marx's texts from the early 1844–1845 period, which he read but did not understand, resulted in his later ignorance of Marx's understanding of the philosophical foundations of mature communism. For instance, although Lenin was an egalitarian, Marx, according to Levine, was an inegalitarian: that is, someone who believes that the inequality of talent is the basis for the satisfaction of needs.

Levine provides many examples in a series of references to a number of crucial Marxian texts. Here a single example must suffice. Thus Levine insightfully points out that, though he read *The Holy Family*, after 1895, Lenin never uses the term "civil society," and therefore he never grasps either Marx's consistent rejection of egalitarianism, which is especially obvious in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, or its significance for his position on the conception of civil society. Levine's point is that though Leninism is the basis of Marxism–Leninism, or supposedly a single theoretical commitment for which, over generations, so many Russians, Chinese and others have fought and died, Marx and Lenin, and perhaps many Marxists, have basically different ends in view. If Levine is correct, then anyone committed

to the political realization of the Marxian theory needs to take that point seriously.

Levine thinks that the discontinuities between Marx and Lenin, which inevitably concern the “higher phase of communist society,” hence the realization of Marx’s vision of communism, are especially important in Lenin’s alleged misinterpretations of Marx’s *The Civil War in France* and the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Unlike Marx, who never ceased to acknowledge the reality of scarcity, Levine thinks that Lenin relies on a world in which superabundance is a prerequisite to realize communism as well as a so-called technological utopia, in which the distinction between mental and physical labor, which Sohn-Rethel, for instance, explores, has simply been erased, and in which the division of labor has been overcome.

Unlike Marxism, which bases political considerations on the supposition of theoretical unity, Levine analyzes the disparity between Marx’s, Engels’ and Lenin’s three significantly different visions of a fully realized communist society. Here, as elsewhere, his point remains that either Lenin was ignorant of Marx’s view or when Marx and Engels took different positions, for whatever reason, he turned from the former to the latter. Levine, for instance, points out that Lenin’s vision of the realization of communism is akin to a view of future society as a single giant factory, which has Engels’ conception of scientific socialism in the background, and which basically conflicts with Marx’s theoretical view. For example, in *The Civil War in France*, in which Marx analyzes the tension between the state, which Engels thought would later wither away, and civil society, Marx, who did not share that view, argues for decentralization and, according to Levine, for the idea that, in principle, civil society can and must take precedence over the state. It follows that for Marx the so-called “higher phase of communist society” was understood by the government as the self-determination of civil society, which governed itself.

It has already been noted several times that, after his early account of the revolutionary proletariat, Marx turned to working out an account of the economic self-destruction of modern industrial society on the basis of his alternative, non-orthodox theory of capitalism. Throughout this period, beginning as early as the *Paris Manuscripts* and continuing to the end of his life, Marx continued to rely on a sparsely sketched, never-developed conception of the ripening of economic contradictions supposedly intrinsic to capitalism, above all on the level of the alleged decline in the rate of profit. Marx’s reliance on the self-destruction of capitalism through such contradictions, hence on an economic account of the transition from capitalism to communism, is countered by Lenin’s non-economic view of the party

as vanguard of the revolution. Lenin's basically non-economic political approach attracted strong opposition, above all from Luxemburg, arguably the most formidable adversary Lenin faced in the period starting around the time of *What Is To Be Done?* (1904) and ending with her assassination in 1919. Lenin and Luxemburg held sharply opposing views about a series of fundamental Marxist ideas, including the role of the party, democracy, the importance of economics to the transition from capitalism to communism, revolutionary spontaneity, and so on. It is therefore no accident if, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács, arguably the most important Marxist philosopher, hesitates in deciding whose position to defend.

Luxemburg and Lenin are often simplistically contrasted: the former pointing toward freedom in the form of a spontaneous transition to communism, and the latter representing an earlier, darker authoritarianism. In his balanced account, 'Luxemburg and Lenin,' Peter Hudis argues in detail that the failure to understand the points of agreement of these two figures contributes to concealing the more important elements that drive them apart.

Hudis, who knows Luxemburg well, works to relativize the obvious differences between them. In Hudis's opinion, Luxemburg and Lenin share a common Marxist tradition, as well as many political assumptions, and agree on many issues, though finally their legacies point, as he plausibly claims, in different directions. He develops his analysis in considering four main points, including Luxemburg's prescient, singularly important critique ("Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy" (1904)) of Lenin's organizational conceptions; her writings on the 1905–1906 Russian Revolution; her work within the Polish Social Democratic movement from 1908 to 1914 and its relation to debates with Lenin on the so-called "national question"; and finally her 1918 criticism (as well as defense) of the Bolshevik Revolution in her booklet *The Russian Revolution*.

Hudis points out that Luxemburg and Lenin were both born in the Russian empire and that both emerged as political figures within the Second International. Their limited degree of convergence is subtended by important differences, for instance with respect to the relation of revolutionary Marxism. Lenin, who early on was committed to democracy, later turns to proletarian dictatorship or, in reality, the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat. Hudis distances himself from the conviction that Luxemburg's 1904 critique of Lenin in *Organizational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* differs in important ways from Lenin's concept of organization. He points out that Luxemburg does not object to Lenin's conception of a single party as the vanguard of the revolution, which was parenthetically a

staple of the Second International from its formation. Rather, she objects to the imposition of bureaucratic control at the expense of democratic deliberation, or, more precisely, the failure to develop and maintain a deeper conception of democracy, an understanding of this political approach consistent with the very idea of proletarian revolution. Hudis, who concedes that Lenin was not an original thinker as concerns organizational centralism, since he merely followed Kautsky and Lassalle on this point, nonetheless affirms the contemporary importance of Luxemburg's insistence that revolutionary organizations must avoid ultra-centralism in remaining open to spontaneous impulses from below.

Another problem lies in whether, as Marx thought, Russia needed to go through a period of capitalism before reaching socialism or would rather be able to elide one or more stages, much as Mao later sought, through the so-called Great Leap Forward, to hasten the advent of socialism. Luxemburg was close to Lenin with respect to the 1905 Revolution, which implied a *direct* transition to socialism by a working class that had only just begun to experience capitalist industrialization, and therefore had not yet experienced an extended period of capitalist development. According to Hudis, she shared with Lenin the view that the *form* of the revolution was bourgeois while its *content* was proletarian, but she differed in her view that political parties do not make revolutions, which arise spontaneously. This agrees with Dunayevskaya's view that unlike Lenin, who took organization as central, for Luxemburg revolution was even more important than organization.

The fourth point concerns Luxemburg's *The Russian Revolution* (1918). Hudis suggests that she and Lenin were driven together by the Second International's infamous capitulation to the First World War. We come back to that point below. Though in *The Russian Revolution* she strongly supports the Bolshevik seizure of power, Hudis points out that she does not expect the revolution to accomplish the impossible. She recognized the deep contradiction between the expressed Leninist view of "all power to the soviets," a goal that was never realized except in theory, and the fact that power was in practice concentrated in the hands of the Bolshevik Party. Luxemburg, who distinguished between the Marxian theory of proletarian dictatorship, or merely temporary rule by the majority, and the reality of interminable Bolshevik dictatorship, sharply and famously opposed the latter. In short, she rejected, as Hudis notes, the Leninist preference both in theory and in practice for dictatorship instead of democracy. Hudis goes on to claim that Luxemburg's most important critique of the Russian Revolution lies in her insistence on democracy—democracy come what may, democracy even for those with whom one disagrees—as a necessary element of realizing revolu-

tion. Hudis goes on to question this view on the grounds that it is not clear how to make democracy integral to the revolutionary process if, as was the case in Russia, in reality the overwhelming majority of peasants are simply incapable of playing a relevant political role.

Democracy has always been a central issue in both Marx and Marxism. Engels thinks that, after the coming revolution, the state, like the bronze axe, will be found only in the museum. Yet democracy requires a democratic state as its practical basis. Hudis, who concedes that the relations between Luxemburg and Lenin are complex, concludes in suggesting that the differences between them on the organizational question, though important, are less so than the even more fundamental question of the relation of democracy to revolution. For that reason, he thinks that in a basic sense Luxemburg's work can be described as humanist, and hence specifically relevant to problems we now face.

Trotsky's relation to Lenin, Stalin and other Bolshevik revolutionaries is complex. It is well known that Trotsky went from being an integral part of the Bolshevik Revolution, arguably second in importance only to Lenin, to a revolutionary pariah after he lost the struggle for power when Lenin passed from the scene, eventually leading to his assassination. The complicated series of relations between the two men is analyzed by Löwy and Le Blanc in '[Lenin and Trotsky](#)'. They are depicted as fierce adversaries in the Russian socialist movement, who arrived at a mutual understanding in 1917 that enabled them to function as co-leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution. They further depict Trotsky as faithful to Leninism after his exile from Russia in the period lasting until his assassination.

Trotsky's views evolved greatly over time. After the 1903 Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) held in London, Trotsky sided with the Mensheviks in objecting, as did Luxemburg, to Lenin's stress on Jacobin centralism. In his pamphlet "Our Political Tasks" (1904), he criticized what he saw as a radical incompatibility between revolutionary democracy and Leninist Jacobinism. Very much like Luxemburg, he also objected to the party organization "substituting" itself for the Party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the party organization, and finally the dictator, later Lenin, substituting himself for the Central Committee. Trotsky, who at the time insisted on democratic pluralism, hence rejected a non- or anti-competitive form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Löwy and Le Blanc further point out that Trotsky and Lenin differed in their attitudes with respect to the Russian Revolution of 1905. All or nearly all Marxist observers before the Russian Revolution thought it would

be bourgeois-democratic. Lenin, as *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905) shows, was then caught up in the tension between revolutionary realism and the nature of orthodox Marxism in the Second International. At the time, and unlike Engels, Lenin further rejected the Paris Commune as an appropriate model, though he later returned to it in April 1917.

Trotsky, in contrast, relied on the model of the Paris Commune in formulating his conception of permanent revolution, which was first systematically expounded in *Results and Prospects* (1906). Löwy and Le Blanc go on to suggest that Trotsky's breakthrough with this concept, which they describe as one of the most astonishing Marxist insights of the twentieth century, made it possible to understand the future Russian Revolution as a continuous process encompassing the initial democratic phase and a later proletarian/socialist phase. They go on to claim that this insight successfully predicted future events in China, Indochina, Cuba, and elsewhere.

Löwy and Le Blanc further credit Trotsky with what they describe as a broad and original conception of the world-historical movement, appropriately divided into different phases, leading to the view that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be supported by the peasantry since it could not be justified by so-called mechanistic "economism." This raises the interesting question of why, if Marx aims at social freedom, which requires a democratic state, and if Trotsky himself once supported democracy from the Menshevik perspective against Leninist Bolshevism, he then changed his mind, and further why it is in the interest of the peasantry to support a dictatorship of the party over the people.

Trotsky and Lenin also differed on the social nature of the Russian Revolution. He agreed with Lenin that it required an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry; unlike Lenin, he believed that it privileged the proletariat. Löwy and Le Blanc suggest that the most important aspect of Trotsky's view of permanent revolution lies in what they refer to as its understanding of historical tasks, for instance the proletarian rejection of so-called economic enslavement. They see this idea as following from an understanding of class struggle in a revolutionary process.

The authors claim that Lenin's and Trotsky's views converged as a result of the First World War. For this reason, Lenin and Trotsky were often regarded as a single conceptual entity both within and outside Russia in the early days after the Revolution.

Yet the large measure of agreement between Lenin and Trotsky immediately prior to the Revolution was tested after it. Marxism in power, as Löwy and Le Blanc point out, was forced to make political compromises that some-

times ran against theory. During the so-called Red Terror, as the Commissar of War, Trotsky employed what the authors, though favorably disposed toward him, characterize as ruthless and authoritarian methods, which parenthetically run against his earlier emphasis on democracy. In the post-revolutionary situation, Marx's conception of the strictly transitory dictatorship of the proletariat was now interpreted as anti-democratic political rule by the Communist Party. This was now linked to the issue that infamously divided Trotsky and Stalin: the former thought the revolution in Russia could succeed only if it were conjoined with worldwide revolution, whereas the latter believed in the success of revolution in a single country. At stake, in other words, was the belief shared by Trotsky and Lenin that the Russian Revolution could only succeed through the replacement of capitalism by socialism on a global scale. Yet they differed on other themes, for instance concerning the degree of freedom to be allowed in the syndicalist movement.

Löwy and Le Blanc close their discussion with an account of Trotsky in the period after Lenin's death, at a time when he unsuccessfully sought to oppose Stalin and his allies. This deteriorating situation led to Trotsky's belief as early as 1933 that resistance was not possible and that a political revolution was necessary to replace what in the meantime had become a bureaucratic dictatorship through the working class.

It is widely known that Lenin, in failing health, drew up a political testament in which he presciently and certainly correctly warned against passing the leadership of the Bolshevik revolutionary state to Stalin. Hedeler's account in '[Lenin and Stalin, Theory and Politics](#),' provides a detailed look at the similarities and differences of their respective approaches to practice.

The chapter begins with a description of the return to Russia of various Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Stalin. Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in April 1917 after many years of exile. After the October Revolution of 1917, Lenin quickly became Chair of the Revolutionary government, and until 1922, when his health drastically declined, he was mainly responsible for the principles of the Bolshevik Party. During this period, according to Hedeler, Lenin took the position that the so-called orthodox Marxism of the Third International was engaged in an ongoing struggle against the Second International as well as with Kautsky, its central figure, whom Lenin had previously adopted as a model for his own brand of Marxism. Further, according to Hedeler, Lenin at this time made three new theoretical additions to Marx's position. These additions concerned a new type of political party, a new conception of imperialism as the highest and last stage of capitalism, and an account of the conditions for achieving socialism in a country in which it was not already in place.

Lenin, who believed in egalitarianism, was not a democrat and did not believe in sharing. When he was alive, Lenin monopolized power as much as possible. After his death, Stalin, who, like his predecessor, was unwilling to share power in any way, assumed the role of Lenin's successor. After Engels' death, Kautsky, the central intellectual figure of the Second International, offered a series of presentations of Marx's views that were widely adopted as the standard view of Marx by less informed observers, including Lenin. Though Lenin's view of Kautsky later changed at the outbreak of the First World War, Hedeler suggests that during this period Lenin relied on Kautsky's view of Marx, which he adapted to his own ends in seeking to bring about a revolution in Russia.

Among Lenin's many talents was his role as a theoretician of Marxism. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), Lenin castigated revisionism in establishing what later, through Stalin's intervention, became the officially sanctioned, orthodox view. The model through which the party adopted a particular view as sacrosanct—in Lenin's case, his wholesale refutation of revisionism in his materialist attack on empiriocriticism—returns in Stalin's relation to Lenin's legacy after his death. Hedeler further suggests that Stalin, who lacked Lenin's theoretical capacity, falsely represented himself as a faithful student of Lenin, whose views he described as a new and later phase of Marxism, in order to help cement his own central role after Lenin's death. As Hedeler points out, Stalin represented himself as a close student of Lenin on a number of occasions, including in his speech "On the Death of Lenin" to the Second Congress of the USSR, in which he emphasized the solidity of the party that was in the process of leading the working class to victory over its enemies, and in a series of lectures delivered at Sverdlov University in Moscow in spring 1924 on the theme of the "Foundations of Leninism," which he now cast as a central new form of Marxism. As a consequence, Leninism, as Hedeler points out, assumed the form of a specific school, which as early as 1926 had already acquired canonical status in *Concerning Questions of Leninism*, and what came to be called the supposedly single theory authored by the troika composed of Marx, Engels and Lenin. In this way, Stalin's view of Leninism gained official status. In these and other ways, Stalin successfully cloaked himself in Lenin's mantle, assuming and maintaining power in the vacuum caused by the latter's early removal from the scene.

Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death was more than a historical accident. As Hedeler goes on to show, before he fell ill, Lenin was associated with Stalin, who was his protégé in ways that Hedeler describes in detail. Lenin, who called Stalin "a marvellous Georgian," invited him to Krakow.

At the time, Lenin valued Stalin as an ally in the struggle against Trotsky for control of *Pravda*. He further intervened in order for Stalin to write an article for the newspaper *Prosveshcheniye* in St. Petersburg.

Hedeler examines three episodes in what he calls the biographies of Stalin and Lenin, beginning with an episode entitled 'A Marvellous Georgian.' In this context, Hedeler identifies Stalin's enemies among the Bolsheviks, such as Bukharin. The latter, supposedly the complete opposite of Stalin, was theoretically competent, but uninterested in practical questions. Lenin criticized Bogdanov, Bukharin's teacher, in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. According to Hedeler, Stalin, who was aware of these issues, led the struggle against Bukharin. An example of their deep disagreement concerns the policy of forced collectivization, which after Lenin's death Stalin favored but which Bukharin, who was opposed to the Soviet dictatorship, sought to stop. According to Hedeler, Stalin and Bukharin both favored the so-called party of a new type, in short Leninist Bolshevism, while disagreeing about what that meant. Stalin's position was outlined in his history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1938. While Lenin was alive, the party of the new type was dated to 1912, but after his death it was pushed back to 1903.

The second series of episodes is entitled, in reference to Stalin's sobriquet, 'Can You Not Remember Your Family Name, Koba?' Hedeler points out that the Russian revolutionaries resorted both to treatises as well as bombs in pressing their cause. The latter tactic, which was seen as outdated by Western Europeans, was not used by the Bolsheviks, who, when they seized power, employed other methods. Hedeler, for instance, mentions a spectacular bank robbery in Tiflis in 1907 in which Stalin allegedly participated. But Stalin later abandoned such tactics in embracing Leninism.

The third series of episodes follows from the statement in Lenin's so-called *Testament* about Stalin: "[he] cannot be trusted with the function of General Secretary." Hedeler, who points out that Lenin approved the appointment of Stalin as General Secretary, reconstructs the series of events that occurred in December 1922 in the period between Lenin's writing of *Letters to the Party* and his *Testament*, his death and its aftermath. The *Testament* comprises letters allegedly dictated by Lenin to his secretary in which he identified and discussed the tensions between Stalin and Trotsky, and in which he expressed doubts about Stalin. Though the letters were not intended to be available to Stalin, he soon became aware of their contents. This led, as Hedeler notes, to a great deal of activity, which reached a peak on March 11, 1923, when Stalin sent a telegram to indicate that Lenin was no longer capable of so-called creative thought, which indirectly suggested that the power

in the party had already passed from Lenin to Stalin. Finally, by the time of summer 1923, the troika composed of Stalin, Kamenev and Bukharin ceased to exist due to Stalin's hegemony. The next stage was an expanded effort to exclude Trotsky, Stalin's main rival. By December, Stalin had already achieved a majority among the party functionaries.

Hedeler goes on to summarize the various ways in which Stalin successfully maneuvered alone or with others to suppress aspects of Lenin's *Testament*, and above all his view that Stalin should not be appointed as his successor. Nothing that was made public was accurate. Efforts by Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, to make his wishes known were rebuffed, and, in the process, Lenin's worst fears about Stalin were confirmed. In this way the false view that the dying Lenin wished Stalin to take his place was confirmed.

In his conclusion, Hedeler identifies the obvious contradiction between Lenin's vision of a new social model and his "party of a new type." He suggests that Stalin unwittingly casts light on this situation in his speech on the 15th Party Day of the CPSU in December 1927. In the speech, he suggested that every time the party makes a turn, older members disappear. According to Hedeler, when the so-called *Short Course* was published, the last members of Lenin's Central Committee disappeared, but the contradiction between his new social model and his party of a new type remained.

The final chapter in this section, 'Lukács as Leninist,' is Rockmore's account of their complex philosophical and political relationship. Lukács is arguably the outstanding Marxist philosophical figure and Lenin is arguably, even more than Mao, the outstanding political figure. Engels, who invented Marxism, argued that Marx turned away from Hegel in following Feuerbach out of classical German philosophy, or German idealism and philosophy, and toward materialism or science. Western Marxism is, with some exceptions, not anti-Hegelian but Hegelian. Lukács, together with Korsch, played an important role in opposing Engels' anti-Hegelian approach to Marx—widely known as Hegelian Marxism. Since there is no reason to believe that Lenin was more than distantly aware of Lukács, the account focuses on Lenin's influence on Lukács and indirectly through him on Marxism of all kinds, especially Western Marxism, which is also widely known as Hegelian Marxism.

Marxism, or orthodox Marxism, extends the obvious large measure of political agreement between Marx and Engels, hence between Marx and Marxism, in further arguing for philosophical agreement based on the supposed single overall position worked out jointly and in complete agreement by Marx and Engels. The chapter takes issue with this idea and points to

a deep tension between Lukács' philosophical Hegelian Marxism and Lenin's political version of Marxist orthodoxy. In other words, it denies the fundamental Marxist assumption of the basic unity of Marx's theory, as canonically interpreted by Engels, and through him further interpreted as the basis of Marxist practice by Lenin, and, by implication, by others. It further suggests that this tension is later partially concealed by Lenin's later philosophical turn to Hegel in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, hence to a Hegelian view of Marx he never worked out, as well as by Lukács' political turn, after the invention of Hegelian Marxism, to Marxist political orthodoxy.

Lukács is often considered to be a tragic figure, someone whose philosophical critique of anti-Hegelian Marxism from the perspective of Hegelian Marxism overtly conflicted over many years with his unswerving political commitment. For this reason, he was constantly in the situation of needing to temper his philosophical insights to bring them into line with conflicting claims of political orthodoxy, and thus constantly threatened by the transformation of the classical philosophical pursuit of philosophical truth into a mere rhetorical illustration of the politically determined party line of the time. He began as a kind of Neo-Kantian before turning to Marxism at the end of the First World War. His breakthrough to Hegelian Marxism in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) was accompanied by an important criticism of Engels, remarks on the concept of totality in Hegel and by implication in Marx, and the anticipation under the heading of reification of Marx's theory of alienation at a time when the *Paris Manuscripts* had not yet been published. The chapter argues that Lukács is less significant today for his concern with revolution or for his conceptually brilliant but ultimately failed effort to unite classical German philosophy and political Marxism, which now appears dated, than for his philosophical, aesthetic and literary contributions. Though he was as devoted as anyone to realizing Marxist political ideals, he was typically unwilling to sacrifice reason for politics. Despite his desire to remain politically orthodox, Lukács criticized Engels throughout his long Marxist career. Lukács represents an extreme and extremely interesting example of a sustained, always intelligent—on occasion brilliant—effort, not merely to assert, but to argue in detail in favor of and against the Marxist philosophical point of view. His permanent philosophical contribution, which reaches an early, and unequalled, peak in *History and Class Consciousness*, lies in the innovative effort to understand classical German idealism as a unitary movement consistently concerned with aspects of the epistemic problem as it is inherited from the modern philosophical tradition.

Lukács based his Marxism on an innovative reading of the Kantian idealist tradition. For Lukács, as for Kant, the modern philosophical tradition divides into two approaches to cognition: first, the view that, in knowing, we know the mind-independent external world as it is—in short, that we know what we find or discover, in his case in a Marxist form of metaphysical realism, which has been the main epistemic strategy in the tradition at least since Parmenides; and second, the incompatible but enormously more promising German idealist version of the epistemically constructivist view, an insight identified with the Kantian Copernican revolution, and that argues that we know only what we in some sense “construct.”

Lukács’ concern with political orthodoxy led him to identify with views that were questionable at best; he saw this as the price that had to be paid in order to continue his philosophical research. His identification with Leninism, and then with Stalinism, is not the result of his inability to understand the events of his time. Rather, it is due to his desire to remain within the Marxist political movement, in which, in the final analysis, the political end justifies the political means. This bifurcated approach consistently undermines the texts of this gifted writer.

Engels suggests that Marx overcomes the problems of classical German philosophy through turning from idealism to materialism and from philosophy to science. In short, he thinks that Marx solves (or resolves) philosophical enigmas through extra-philosophical means. Lukács, who rejects the classical Marxist extra-philosophical approach to philosophical difficulties, argues in detail that Marx does not turn away from philosophy, which he never abandons, but rather he resolves the central problem or problems of German idealism in rethinking the Kantian version of constructivism. In pointing to Marx’s understanding of the historical subject as constructing itself and its surroundings within the framework of modern industrial society, Lukács helps us to grasp Marx’s contribution to the epistemic theme. Rockmore clearly thinks we should applaud Lukács when he distinguishes between Marx and Engels while calling attention to the former’s genuine philosophical importance as well as the latter’s basic philosophical mistakes. But we should resist him when he exaggerates that importance to take up all the space, so to speak. In developing a theory of cognition as a historical process, Marx, as Lukács depicts him, is finally not breaking with, but rather only further elaborating, Hegel’s own view of knowledge as necessarily dependent on its time and place, as indexed to the historical moment. In calling attention to the legitimate interest of Marx’s often unsuspected contribution to the problem of knowledge by philosophically separating Marx and Engels, or Marx and classical Marxism, Lukács is also reintegrating

Marx, against the best judgment of classical Marxism, into classical German philosophy; in short, into German idealism.

Lukács' critique of Engels, hence of orthodox Marxism, is initially expounded in *History and Class Consciousness* and restated in *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, a book that Lukács wrote to defend his politically unorthodox form of Marxism but which was unpublished during his lifetime. The book further defends his innovative epistemic approach to Marx. In both *History and Class Consciousness* and his later defense of this book, the central insight turns on the complex claim that Kant's obscure conception of the thing in itself is the central problem running throughout and linking together the main figures of classical German philosophy in a central enigma, which Engels, for instance, basically misunderstands, but which is understood by and overcome by Marx. According to Lukács, the Marxian identification of the proletariat as the identical subject-object in place of the mythical Hegelian absolute finally overcomes the problem of the thing in itself running from Kant onwards throughout classical German philosophy. Though Rockmore suggests that the deeper problem of German idealism lies in the concern with working out a viable version of epistemic constructivism, this in no way detracts from the importance of Lukács' largely successful effort to grasp Marx not as situated outside but rather within the mainline evolution of German idealism.

Lukács depicts Engels, and by extension Marxism, as being unable to offer a solution to the epistemological problem he did not understand. In failing to comprehend Kant's concept of the thing in itself, Engels proposes at best an illusory solution to knowledge of the thing in itself, or the mind-independent world, through so-called praxis and industry. With respect to classical Marxism, Lukács makes two points. He suggests that Engels fails to grasp Marx's response to a problem originating in Kant. He further implies that Marxism is very different from and incompatible with Marx's position, with which it claims to be identical and on which it claims to build.

Though Lenin did not write about Lukács, Lukács wrote about Lenin. Lukács' little book, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, emerged in a situation that was doubly difficult. On the one hand, there was the turmoil provoked by Lenin's death, with no clear line of succession. On the other, there was the nearly simultaneous flood of philosophical criticism that greeted the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*. Rockmore points out that, in turning to Lenin after writing *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács was obviously seeking political cover for his unorthodox anti-Marxist Hegelian interpretation of Marx. He was also expressing his agreement

with a political movement that had recently been victorious in the Russian Revolution. In the book, Lukács, who is not content with merely praising Lenin's organizational talents, further attributes to him remarkable philosophical insight, which is clearly incompatible with what is now known about the Bolshevik leader. Lukács' breakthrough to Hegelian Marxism in *History and Class Consciousness* has both philosophical and political components. He defends these two components separately. In *Tailism and the Dialectic*, he argues for his anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Marx, and in *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, he subordinates his philosophical interpretation of Marx to Leninist politics in seeking, despite his anti-Marxist Hegelian interpretation of Marx, to remain politically orthodox. The chapter concludes by noting that Lukács' breakthrough to an anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Marx in *History and Class Consciousness* led him to criticize Engels in that book and throughout his later writings. After *History and Class Consciousness*, he remained faithful to his most important philosophical insights in continuing to defend and to develop Marxian Hegelianism. Yet, beginning in his little book on Lenin, he inconsistently accepted the political hegemony of Leninism suggested in the Leninist political concept of partyness.

Lenin was not only a theoretician but, as Lukács and many others stress, above all he was practically oriented. The third and last part of this volume contains a series of nine studies, comprising roughly half the book, on Lenin and often specific problems—problems that arose in the course of bringing about a revolution and above all in confronting the many practical and, on occasion, more theoretical themes that soon appeared. Both Neil Harding and Natasha Gómez Velázquez discuss the relation between Lenin's success in bringing about a revolution in Russia and his conception of the party as the vanguard of the revolution. Democracy is a key question in the wake of the Bolshevik seizure of power, and this theme is addressed in chapters by An Qinian and Alan Shandro. Lars Lih and Paresch Chattopadhyay analyze elements of Lenin and Bolshevism, both in general and then in relation to the seizing of power. Alex Callinicos takes up Lenin's analysis of imperialism, which carries the analysis of capitalism beyond the point where Marx left it. The volume comes to a close with two contrasting accounts of the New Economic Policy (NEP); Edward Rees provides an overall review, while Wei Xiaoping compares and contrasts it with Deng's policy of economic reform.

In 'Lenin on Socialism and the Party in the Long Revolution,' Harding examines the many changes from a view of all society and no state to a later view of all state and no society in the revolutionary period from April 1917 to March 1921. The two organizational views point to obviously incompat-

ible models of the revolutionary political party. Lenin's conception of the party is arguably inspired by Marx's quasi-Platonic theory of the revolutionary proletariat as the heart of the revolution, but, since the proletariat is unable to direct itself, it is directed by those who alone are capable of knowledge—hence it is directed by philosophers. The first model of the party understands socialism as the consciously self-directed activity of equals in all aspects of productive and social life based on the immediate elimination of relations of domination and subordination within society. It expresses itself as a relation of people to people. The second model sees socialism as based on the planned organization of production and distribution by the state, and the promise of an end to material need. Neither model takes into account Marx's later suggestions, set out in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, of a distinction between communism stage one as based on what one contributes, or communism stage two as based not on what one contributes but rather on what one needs.

Harding points out that when Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917, he brought with him a ready-made, extremely radical program in a revolutionary situation in which neither he nor the Bolshevik Party had participated. The program, according to Harding, was the most radical ever to enjoy mass support, and it called for immediate participatory democracy: in short, for Marxism—now!

This Leninist approach was based on several presuppositions, the first of which is the conception of modern industrial capitalism as monopolistic. This view was exemplified by Bukharin's *Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State*, a sort of radicalized version of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and perhaps also, though Harding does not say it, on Hobson's classical study of imperialism. Harding claims that, in this context, Lenin's contribution lies in pointing to the transition from monopoly to *state-monopoly* capitalism after 1914. The second presupposition is Lenin's belief that, in the meantime, capitalism had become global and, as monopoly capitalism, parasitic—that is, based on the extraction of profit from colonies and semi-colonies. Harding goes on to insist on the importance of Lenin's view of war as a war of imperialist plunder. Lenin, who was at this point seeking to formulate the position that later resulted in *State and Revolution* (1917), based his views on Marx's writings on the Paris Commune in suggesting that, as a result of the revolution, society would swallow up the state itself. As Marx had done in 1871, Lenin avoided the effort to understand the success of the revolution in relation to a specific economic program. Harding suggests that Lenin's initial view of socialism in the period from April to October 1917 was not one of "milk and honey", nor even of enhanced consumption, but rather what he calls the

dignity of free activity and the absence of dependence. In other words, this was a view of Russia as a beacon or catalyst to light up the world revolution.

The difficulty of successfully carrying out a revolution in Russia only, which later divided Trotsky and Stalin and led to the former's exile and assassination, was already on the table before the Russian Revolution. Harding points out that Lenin had always pinned his hopes on a revolution in Russia being accompanied by a corresponding revolution in Germany; as this did not happen, and was apparently precluded by the abortive March Action of the German Communist Party, at least temporarily stabilizing capitalism, the necessary support for Lenin's view of the Russian transition to socialism was not there. Harding goes on to suggest that Lenin's failure to grasp this point in his overall theory could and ought to have been avoided. The result, in brief, was that the Bolshevik regime had to choose between a suffocating state bureaucracy, exacerbated, for instance, by Trotsky, and what Harding calls the resumption of working-class initiative and energy. The situation was further worsened by the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921, which Lenin recognized as a real threat, and whose sailors called for what Lenin himself had called for in 1917, but which was inconsistently but ruthlessly suppressed. These and other events forced Lenin to the conclusion that the institutional structures and constitutional character of the regime were of no importance whatsoever, since the only thing that mattered was the class content of the policies pursued. Harding points out that the result was a repudiation of the ethos of the Paris Commune. Instead of democratic institutions, the Russian government now turned to universal labor mobilization ordained by the state, discipline, and, in the circumstances, so-called one-man management. He contends that the Leninist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat arose in this desperate situation. In short, one dictatorship replaced another.

In this situation, Lenin, who was forced to change course, came up with the NEP as a solution in order to revive industry and the proletariat. His view at the time was that state capitalism was the most that the government could aim for. The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat arose at a moment when the regime, under extreme pressure, was changing its proximate goal to the attainment of state capitalism rather than socialism. This meant that, despite Marxist theory, in practice dictatorship could never be exercised by the whole class but could only be exercised by a so-called vanguard, parenthetically the Leninist version of Plato's philosophical class. Harding points out that this view was roughly in phase with Marx's conception of the revolutionary proletariat. He further points out that this view disagrees with the Marxist claim that social being determines social consciousness, but he does not develop this interesting insight.

In his account of Lenin and Stalin, Hedeler discusses Lenin's conception of the party of a new type. In her chapter titled 'Lenin's Conception of the Party,' this is studied in detail by Gómez from the perspective of a Cuban, hence a broadly Latin American, political theorist. Gómez distinguishes between twentieth- and twenty-first-century models of the proletarian socialist party, and, within the former, Leninist and social democratic variations. Her chapter analyzes the Leninist, social democratic and Latin American models.

She argues that, since Marx and Engels did not develop a conception of the party, the theory of the proletarian party only appeared early in the twentieth century. In her view, politics identifies the goal, or ultimate purpose, which Marxism seeks to realize through revolutionary action or in other ways, and the party is the means, or so-called "concrete praxis" to realize it. According to Gómez, Marx and Engels were, by implication, more theoretically than practically inclined, and were mainly concerned with the revolutionary goal and less concerned with the revolutionary or other appropriate means of reaching it, means that were only finally worked out by Lenin. She suggests that, from this perspective, Lenin can be said to complete Marxian and, if there is a difference, Marxist political theory in linking theory to concrete political practice. Gómez goes on to assert that during the nineteenth century a number of social democratic political parties emerged, which naturally gravitated toward Marxism, but which, after the Russian Revolution (which revealed the political inadequacy of the social democratic approach), became communist in moving away from social democratic views and toward Lenin. Yet this raises the interesting question of how she would understand the difference between Menshevism, which was close to social democracy, and Bolshevism, which in Lenin's conception began as democratic before later, under the press of circumstances, abandoning democracy for dictatorship.

Marx never distinguishes clearly between "socialism" and "communism," terms he rarely uses. Gómez uses these two terms as functional synonyms. Gómez contends that Marxism identified itself with communism in two ways: through its refusal of utopian, parenthetically supposedly non-scientific socialism as introduced by Engels; and in rejecting a social democratic approach that, she thinks, could not defend the workers' interests. Such an approach was attacked, for instance, by both Marx and Kautsky.

Gómez, who sees that Marx does not draw a distinction between social democracy and communism, notes that the model for a social democratic party that was outlined by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* led, when it was presented, to a contentious debate. Though, as the two names indicate, the

Bolsheviks were in the majority and the Mensheviks were in the minority as concerns the proper revolutionary approach, the Bolsheviks were directed by a minority—in fact by a single individual: Lenin. Lenin is typically described as very skilled in practice but as ideologically inflexible, and as exerting strong control as a giant among men with respect to the ideological debate. Gómez, however, depicts Lenin as being obliged by others, who freely expressed contrary opinions, and hence against his will, to ratify the principles of Bolshevism. The distinction between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks is described in different ways: for instance, Chattopadhyay, in this volume, argues that it ultimately turned on so-called proletarian dictatorship, or dictatorship over the proletariat, as distinguished from the realization of democracy. Gómez, in contrast, defines Bolshevism, which was incarnated by Lenin, as representing the truly revolutionary tendency, and Menshevism as representing Reformism, which she rejects.

Gómez contends that, since the Western European situation was basically different from the Russian situation, the so-called social democratic experience did not apply in Russia, which, on the contrary, called for a party of a new type. Gómez argues that the Leninist party model, which was specifically based on the Russian situation, was universally applicable. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin indicated his intention to create the proper revolutionary party for Russia, but, returning to the view developed in this volume by Lars Lih, this was unlike the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Though the SPD enjoyed influence based on its democratic surroundings, the lack of Russian democracy made it necessary to create a new model for Russia. Gómez contends that Lenin's thesis of party centralism pointed to the formation of a single social democratic party within the Russian Empire in order to bring together all the anti-tsarist or oppositional agencies spread throughout this enormous country.

Lenin, who was thinking that fewer than a dozen revolutionary professionals at the heart of his new form of revolutionary political party would suffice, at least early on still believed that the great mass of people would also take an active part, though due to difficult circumstances this view later changed drastically. In his pamphlet, Lenin, following the young Marx's quasi-Platonic conception of the revolutionary proletariat, strongly stressed that, as in Plato's *Republic*, a central role of the party was to provide political consciousness to everyone else. Though these principles were hotly debated, Gómez notes that Lenin's model of a centrally organized revolutionary party as necessary to bring about a revolutionary transformation was generally accepted. The result was what can be identified as a paradox: Lenin thinks that a centralized but non-democratic party is the only road to a success-

ful revolution, though in practice a non-democratic party leads—and in fact led—only to dictatorship. In other words, as one could have foreseen, but apparently no one did, an anti-democratic model of a revolutionary party, for instance the Leninist model of the party, does not and did not bring about democracy, but rather its opposite.

Gómez very usefully pays special attention to non-Leninist criticism of Lenin's ultra-centralist model of the party, including the central problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat, beginning with independent remarks from Luxemburg, then Kautsky, and finally what she calls "the left-wing critique."

Gómez gives especially careful attention to Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin's organizational model for a Russian revolutionary party. This model was strongly debated between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks before the Russian Revolution, as well as after it at the time of the Third International. Gómez points to a long list of critics of Leninist centralism, including Lukács, Karl Korsch, Louis Althusser, Löwy, Ernest Mandel, and, perhaps most famously, Rosa Luxemburg. These and others objected that Lenin's theory of the party diminished democratic activity and underestimated the competence of the proletarian classes to perform as historical subjects, or, perhaps better, to act as revolutionary agents.

The strongest critique was arguably formulated very early on by Luxemburg in a series of five points, which Gómez simply reproduces without commentary. Suffice it to say that, though historically Lenin prevailed over his critics, Luxemburg's objections to Leninist ultra-centralism, which have never been answered, turned out to presciently identify difficulties that were not and probably could not have been overcome in practice, and which in retrospect simply stultified any democratic intent in the Russian revolutionary situation.

Kautsky's book-length social democratic critique of the Leninist inability to offer a satisfactory view of the dictatorship of the proletariat led to a public debate with Lenin. Kautsky's *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (August 1918) was answered by Lenin in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (November 1918), leading to a schism between Western social democracy and revolutionary Bolshevism. Kautsky pointed out that the Russian Revolution did not establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Marxian sense but rather an authoritarian dictatorship of the Bolsheviks. Kautsky noted the earlier forms of class struggle pioneered by Blanqui—a non-Marxist socialist committed to revolutionary action by a small group as well as a merely temporary proletarian dictatorship—and by Bakunin, which

Lenin took as his model and in turn suppressed democracy and political rights.

Kautsky understood the Bolshevik dictatorship as following from, despite its name, its minority status. The Bolshevik Party could only maintain its hegemonic position through violence, which derived from the transformation of the bourgeois revolution of February into the socialist revolution of October. Kautsky further objected to the supposed Bolshevik misinterpretation of “dictatorship of the proletariat” as a permanent model of government foreign to Marxism—it was certainly foreign to Marx—but closer to the primitive socialism of Blanqui and Weitling, whose syncretic view combined elements drawn from Babouvist communism (Babeuf, a participant in the French Revolution, called for an end to private property), chiliastic Christianity and millenarian populism.

Kautsky, a social democrat, provided a social democratic critique; Luxemburg, above all, as well as others, provided a left-wing critique of Lenin’s theory of the party. Luxemburg agreed with Kautsky that Lenin’s dictatorship of the proletariat had simply eliminated democracy as such, but went on to praise the Bolshevik seizure of power. In *The Russian Revolution*, she outlined structures necessary for any working-class government, her version of Lenin’s view that any cook or bottle washer could direct the state. She further stressed her commitment to “the most possibly active and unlimited participation of the masses” and “democracy without boundaries.” As she had presciently pointed out in 1904, she was afraid that the Bolshevik model for a political party would become the Bolshevik model of government, as later came to pass.

Further criticism was formulated by such Dutch Council communists as Pannekoek and Gorter. The Leninist model of a revolutionary party centered on a vertical displacement of power from the proletariat to the elite. Pannekoek and Gorter objected that the real power should be situated in the masses at the base, organized as soviets or workers’ councils—in effect, calling Lenin’s bluff that the power of the people was effectively lodged in a dictatorship of the proletariat. Gorter went on to suggest that in the West the view of the majority was accorded more attention than in the East, where the party elite, which was intrinsically conservative, was in control. Pannekoek and Gorter further objected that, through the dependency of the proletariat, a centralized party necessarily reproduces the dependency of workers on the bourgeoisie.

Karl Korsch addressed the problem of the vertical hierarchy in his essay, “An Anti-Critique,” in which he argued against Lenin’s view, itself based on Marx’s quasi-Platonic view of the proletariat, as mentioned above, that

socialism must be brought to the proletariat from outside, which he saw as violating revolutionary theory. Gómez also mentions other critics, including Marcuse and Žižek.

Following a discussion of various criticisms of the Leninist conception of the party, Gómez turns to the Russian situation at roughly the same time as the introduction of the NEP in remarks on the 10th Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1921. The meeting concentrated for various concrete reasons on trade unions, and for more theoretical reasons on the themes of social democracy and its revolutionary representative system.

The debate unfolded through the formation of various factions, which heatedly opposed the so-called working-class opposition, as well as Trotsky, Bukharin and others. Because of the violent and unyielding debate, including factionalism and dogmatism, the meeting had already turned into a crisis in the party before it was interrupted by the Kronstadt revolt. The meeting, which at times threatened to split the party, culminated in a preliminary draft resolution about party unity requiring the dissolution of the various factions. Lenin, who thought that dissension only strengthened the opposition, opposed factionalism or disunity within the party, and brought about a consensus that members of factions could be expelled from the Central Committee and even from the party. Gómez points out that this point, which at the time was kept secret, was later used by Stalin to gain leverage against Trotsky.

About a year and a half later, Lenin dictated his *Testament*. Gómez points out that in these notes and elsewhere, factionalism in the party (as seen in the struggle for power after his passing) led Lenin to revise the vertical model of the party earlier adumbrated in *What Is To Be Done?* in order to preserve Bolshevism through dealing with the excesses of centralization.

With respect to other contributions in this volume, Gómez innovates in turning to the general theme of Latin America, which she regards as neither a replica, nor as a copy, but rather as a heroic reaction. She points out that the debate about organizational questions was later transferred to Latin America, where it attracted a wide variety of interested discussants.

She begins with the themes of revolution and the party in Cuba. She points out that when it was founded in 1925 the Cuban Communist Party initially followed the centralized model of the Russian Communist Party and the Popular Front, without any effort to adjust to the Cuban situation. Yet after Castro's victory in 1959, the Cuban Communist Party, which at the time was known as the Popular Communist Party (PCC), defied the Russian Communist Party (CPSU) by merging with the newly established Communist Party of Cuba. Gómez interprets this series of events as tacitly

indicating that the indigenous communist movement, which played no role in Castro's revolution, was also unable to play any role in its aftermath.

Since none of the actors in the Cuban revolution were active communists before seizing power, they were all relatively untainted by ideological considerations even after establishing a link to Russian socialism. In fact, during the 1960s, the PCC, which included the main revolutionary participants, was strongly opposed to the CPSU. For instance, when the CPSU embarked on a policy of peaceful coexistence with the USA, the PCC publicly opposed this decision in continuing to assist Latin American guerrilla and national liberation movements.

Political independence from the Soviet model was also accompanied in the second half of the 1960s by an intellectual critique of Soviet Marxism. This included the publication of such authors as Gramsci, Althusser, Lukács, Sartre and Trotsky, as well as public debate on a series of themes. These included the use of Soviet manuals to teach Marxism, the Soviet economic model, and the rejection of the Soviet model of "socialist realism." Yet Gómez, who is not persuaded by any version of the Leninist view of a revolutionary political party, points out that these debates failed to give proper weight to individual initiatives.

A change came about when, in the 1970s, hope faded that Cuba could develop an autonomous economy. This newfound awareness led to Cuba's entry into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), an economic association intended to integrate the economies of socialist countries, leading in turn to close alignment with the USSR. For instance, the Cuban initiative concerning socialism and revolution in general was suppressed by Russian Marxism–Leninism and its accompanying version of scientific socialism. The implosion of the Soviet economy further weakened the Cuban economic situation.

Throughout this period, and despite the steady weakening of the Cuban economic situation, the PCC continued to exert a hegemonic political role throughout the country as the "Party of unity and the vanguard," a slogan that not incidentally reflected the Leninist view of the Party, and as the so-called "superior leading force of society". The Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, which designates the party as the most advanced force in society, further stipulates the structural and functional principles of centralization in accordance with "Leninist principles." The political role of the party failed to acknowledge the economic situation, which was, however, remedied when the party further assumed centralized control of economic policy by proclaiming that economic development was the primary goal of the revolution. It is thus significant that the so-called "updat-

ing of the Cuban economic model” described in the programmatic document ‘Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution’ assigns essential functions in the implementation and governance of the model to the party. The Guidelines also recognize and encourage to a greater extent the establishment of diverse forms of property and management, which, however, will supposedly be implemented in a centralized way. It is apparent that, by virtue of economic difficulties, Cuba is drawing closer to the Soviet model.

Gómez goes on to point to the tension, perhaps even the contradiction, between the available Cuban networks of social, political and labor unions, which, even though they are weakened by so-called “extreme centralism,” are at least in principle sufficient to allow everyone to participate in a democratic decision-making process. Yet, as she notes, in practice there are only narrow possibilities for actual participation, even at the local government level. Gómez further thinks that the weakening of the leading role of the Communist Party points to a certain ongoing decentralization, which she describes as “the substitution of a vertical hierarchy through horizontal participation.” In her view, and for this reason, possibilities for participation in the governmental decision-making processes are likely to increase over time. In this respect, she makes two points. First, the historical dominance of the Marxist party over the Marxist state is a function of local conditions. Second, Cuba could well profit by emulating a number of unnamed but recent “left-wing” Latin American governments. Since Gómez holds that socialism is fulfilled in democracy, she believes that a new model of the party is now required to achieve socialism in our time.

Gómez brings her discussion to a close with further remarks on Latin America and a proposed new model of the party. Gómez, who distinguishes between theory and practice, points to new theoretical positions being formulated by such writers as Heinz Dieterich, a German socialist writer who lives in Mexico; Marta Harnecker, a Chilean social scientist and political activist; and Isábel Rauber, an Argentinian philosopher and social activist. She also highlights the new political positions illustrated by the actions of Hugo Chávez, the former president of Venezuela, Rafael Correa, until 2017 the president of Ecuador and Evo Morales, Bolivian president at the time of writing. Suffice it to say that, unlike the traditional European vertical or hierarchical model of the party, recent Latin American views turn toward horizontal forms of association. Gómez remarks that, compared with Leninist views of the party, these recent Latin American movements are more disposed toward alliances, pluralism and proposals arising from their constituents, but they are also constantly disrupted by tendencies

toward fragmentation. In indicating her own stance, she clearly states that despite these qualifications, twentieth-century socialism is obsolete and the Leninist model of the party is extinct. This raises the question of the case of Venezuela during the presidency of Chávez or its collapse into disorder following his death, the country being led at the time of this writing in a seemingly dictatorial fashion by Nicolás Maduro.

Despite these possible counter-examples, Latin America is clearly trying to find an alternative to the Leninist model. Gómez, who does not consider these questionable instances, describes several examples. Dieterich, she says, turns away from so-called privileged positions that will supposedly lead the masses toward what she describes as mass political practice: in short, toward spontaneous and creative action parenthetically similar to Luxemburg's view. She sees Correa, the Ecuadorean president, as "emphatic" about the thesis of a "citizens' revolution."

Gómez notes that successful revolutionary Latin American projects were supported by strong personal and charismatic leadership. She argues that the leadership of Chávez and Maduro in Venezuela, of Morales in Bolivia and of Correa in Ecuador, and to some extent Kirchner in Argentina, Lula and Dilma in Brazil, and Mujica and Tabaré in Uruguay, sought to achieve equality and social justice. Gómez notes the thesis that socialism must arise from the base, which she ascribes to Chávez, whose legacy is surely closer to Lenin than to Luxemburg.

Her suggestion that the revolutionary subjects must free themselves embodies a Marxian thesis, which is clearly incompatible with Leninism, hence perhaps also, despite her claim that it is Marxist, incompatible with Marxism. She correctly identifies the alternative between a top-down revolutionary change as a model through which the party reproduces its domination, but which she thinks is now discredited, and what she describes as the self-constitution of the revolutionary subject, which is close to Lukács' early view. The obvious problem lies in how to achieve that goal in concrete practice.

The Leninist model of the Party as the vanguard of the revolution, which is here to stay, obviously will not disappear merely because one or more observers would like that to occur. Gómez ends with the observation that if the Leninist model continues to exist then it must respect different views, abandon authoritarian methods, and above all practice so-called real pluralism.

Democracy, a central theme in both Lenin's theory and practice, which is constantly present though less often directly addressed, is discussed in detail by An Qinian from the perspective of a contemporary Chinese philosopher.

An unusual feature of An's chapter is his determined effort not to criticize, but rather to defend the concept of proletarian dictatorship not in theory but in practice.

In defending the Leninist approach to the controversial concept of proletarian dictatorship, An is simultaneously defending both Leninist dictatorship in the Soviet Union and Maoist and post-Maoist dictatorship in contemporary China. An's essay, ['A Few Questions Concerning Lenin's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'](#), focuses on what he calls its moral dimension. Lenin, who never provided a single concentrated account of this concept, and who never formulated a single final view of this thesis, came back to it often in his writings. According to An, the main theme of Leninist practice lies in what he calls the conception of a form of government whose actions depend on violence or dictatorial strength, and which, as a consequence, is not constrained by law. Now, in one sense Lenin's view is clear, since he consistently holds that the dictatorship of the proletariat refers to the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in a way unrestricted by any laws. Yet the problem is complicated since, according to An, the terms "proletariat" and "bourgeoisie," which are familiar but imprecise, do not have definite meanings.

According to An, the latter term refers at least to the bourgeoisie, and then to the squirearchy, sometimes also called the landed gentry, and finally to the aristocracy. It appears that those against whom violence is exerted will respond with violence in turn, in an inversion similar, say, to Hegel's famous analysis of the relation between masters and slaves. Yet, according to An, this is not the case since Lenin, who is not consistent, said different things at different times. For instance, in 1919 he claimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was composed of an alliance between the proletariat, the working people and the non-proletarian strata of workers, but some four months later he proclaimed that the strength of the Soviet Union lay in the alliance between the workers and peasants. An's point can be stated as the idea that Lenin, who was more interested in practice than in theory, continually adapted his idea of proletarian dictatorship to changing circumstances.

A similar point apparently holds for Lenin's view of the workers. Early in 1919, according to An, Lenin pointed to the workers as striving to build a new society without having themselves become new people, hence still in need of guidance from the Communist Party. It follows that the ruler of the proletarian dictatorship can only be the party, or at most a very few party leaders: in other words, a hegemony, or the dictatorship of individuals. In this context, An quotes Lenin as saying that there is no contradiction at all between Soviet democracy and individual dictatorship. In this context, An

points to the difference between Marx's conception and Lenin's, noting that the latter explicitly consists in the party leadership that exercises dictatorship over the entire society. An's answer to the obvious question of why this view is called the dictatorship of the proletariat lies in the role of the party leaders, who, from his perspective, represent the interests of everyone else. An has in mind a theory of political representation that, unlike Western democratic political representation, is not only not democratic but also anti-democratic.

An, who believes this view is profoundly justified, argues that the aim of socialist revolution lies not in the substitution of one form of private property for another, but rather in the abolition of private property as well as of so-called conventional ideas and concepts. An turns to Stalin to identify the way forward by pointing out the distinction between bourgeois revolution, which merely changes the form of private property, and proletarian revolution, which suppresses any form of private property. An goes on to say that Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat does not deviate from, but is inherent in, the Marxist conception of socialist revolution. His subtext is that, though Lenin was previously committed to democracy, later on he identified the only way in which the revolution could succeed—that is, through proletarian dictatorship understood as the dictatorship of the party over the people. An thinks that scientific socialism was established by Marx and Engels and that it is the natural outgrowth of the intellectual contribution to revolutionary socialism, which can finally only be understood by a few leaders. An states the same point in another way in suggesting that, for Lenin, society is a huge machine operated by only a few individuals. In other words, Lenin's view of the dictatorship of the proletariat is linked to the correct understanding of socialism.

At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, since capitalism was as yet undeveloped, it was not possible to rely on the model of the Paris Commune. But it was both possible and necessary to concentrate political power, consistent with the Russian tradition, in the hands of a small group or even of a single individual. In his last years, Lenin was widely admired as the single paramount leader, a status Stalin attained after passing through a series of manipulations leading, through a cult of personality, to his incarnating the role of a modern tsar. The authoritarian Russian tradition included such earlier figures as Peter the Great as well as the so-called People's Will (*Narodnaya Volya*), a nineteenth-century political organization that was known for its populism, its interest in indigenous socialism, and its advocacy of terrorism. For these and other reasons, An thinks that ordinary Russian

peasants could not possibly understand Bolshevism, and thus needed to be transformed through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Though Lenin appeared in a basically feudal country, An believes that Russian feudalism differs from other forms of feudalism in three main ways. First, peasants lived in village communities until the end of the 1920s. Second, there is the Russian Orthodox religious tradition, which rejected Roman Catholicism, and turned toward Byzantium. Third, situated at the eastern end of Europe, Russia was comparatively isolated. Since Russia was isolated from the capitalist West, it was only natural that many Russian intellectuals, who were predisposed to the Marxist message, sought to save Russia, or the so-called Third Rome, through turning from capitalism to socialism. It was hence relatively easy for Lenin's Third International to replace the Third Rome of Russian Orthodox Christianity.

In the final part of his discussion, An turns, as indicated above, to a moral evaluation of the idea of proletarian dictatorship. In noting that this conception is frequently criticized, An, who consistently shows a preference for scientific socialism, suggests the importance of seeking a scientific attitude, which he identifies as historical. According to An, Lenin's theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat closely corresponded to the social development of Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution and the level of understanding of the Russians. Given the level of Russian development, An thinks that the only real possibility lay in replacing one kind of tsar with another, and that it could not possibly lie in Western-style humanism. An further contends that the inability of Russia to accept anything less than such a leader is manifest in the later Russian reactions to Gorbachev and Yeltsin, two ineffective leaders, who were replaced by Putin, whose strong-arm methods have continually produced legendary support. He goes on to argue that, from Marx's point of view, Russia had not yet developed to a point where any other path to socialism was really possible. In short, Lenin's suggestion that someone who followed him would enter into heaven was naturally acceptable to someone who adhered to Russian Orthodoxy. An argues that Western social development was accompanied by untold hardships. An therefore believes that if we take into account the specific Russian situation, we will come to the conclusion that the Leninist theory and practice of proletarian dictatorship are reasonable.

In his chapter titled "[“Extracting the Democratic Kernel”: Lenin and the Peasants](#)", Alan Shandro offers an account of Lenin's approach to the Russian peasantry as a political force. According to Shandro, Marx acknowledged the democratic potential of the Russian village while remaining silent about revolutionary agency. Shandro, who concentrates on the Russian situation,

points out that Plekhanov ascribed agency to the proletariat rather than to the passive peasantry, while the young Lenin identified two social struggles: between the agricultural proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and between the peasantry and the landlords.

Russian populist revolutionaries discerned in the Russian *mir*, or village agricultural commune in tsarist Russia, a path of possible development in bypassing capitalism. Vera Zasulich was a Russian Menshevik revolutionary leader who corresponded with Marx in 1881 about the *mir*. In his answer to Zasulich's query about the fate of the Russian rural commune, Marx said that the analysis of *Capital* was limited to the transformation of one form of private property to another in Western Europe only. He added that the Russian commune could only be saved through revolution. According to Marx, the Russian village commune could develop either through increased private property or increased collectivization. In answering Zasulich, Marx was writing not as an actor but as an external observer capable of scrutinizing the guiding thread of historical development, and this cannot substitute for concrete analysis.

We can note that in his response to Zasulich, Marx said that village communism is what he calls the fulcrum for Russian moral regeneration. Lenin later reacted to Plekhanov, who claimed that commodity production was already taking root in Russia. Shandro points out that Plekhanov thought of the commune as passive, but fertile ground for the development of capitalism. According to Plekhanov, the peasant was passive with respect to the more active worker, the potential social revolutionary. Yet the price to be paid was the disintegration of the commune.

Marxism criticized populism. Plekhanov thought that the development of Russian forces of production would lead to a capitalist Russia. Lenin sought to undermine the new populism by showing that large-scale production inevitably arose from the social relations the populists sought to defend. According to Shandro, the populists lacked the conceptual apparatus required to grasp the situation. Further, according to Lenin, who detected the emergence of capitalism in Russia, the reality was a class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

Lenin treated the democratic revolution as a stage or phase in the Marxist conception of class struggle. The young Lenin, Shandro suggests, took the industrial working class as the vanguard of the exploited. In effect, he blurred the distinction between democratic and socialist revolutions in undermining social-democratic strategy. At this point, Lenin thought that a democratic revolution must precede a socialist revolution. Shandro observes

that Lenin's own analysis links the role of the peasantry to the fall of serfdom, leaving no room for an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, we find the identification of petty-bourgeois socialism as simultaneously reactionary and utopian. In the same way, according to Shandro, Lenin's critique of petty-bourgeois democracy exposes the socialist self-deception of populism. Since Lenin transposes the Marxist analysis of class development onto the Russian situation, democratic revolution becomes socialist revolution. In this context, the proletariat is the only effective revolutionary force.

Shandro points out that as the century drew to a close, Lenin returned to the problem of class struggle in the countryside, once again taking up the two contradictions mentioned above. On this basis, Lenin, in *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, assigned the peasantry a specific role in the political struggle. Lenin distinguished between a democratic revolution that was supposedly advantageous to the big capitalist, the financial magnate and the "enlightened landlord," and a different kind of revolution advantageous to the peasant and the worker. Hence, he envisaged two possible courses and outcomes of social revolution in Russia. According to Lenin, the proletariat must see that its eventual success required an alliance with the peasantry.

Shandro goes on to point out that Lenin's strategy, which understood the peasantry as a distinct social force, required an alliance not only with poor peasants, but rather with all peasants, specifically including the peasant bourgeoisie. In other words, Lenin understood the proposed alliance of workers and peasants not through an identity of class interest but rather through a confluence of distinct social interests.

Shandro notes that the importance of the peasant movement led Lenin to revise his account of events in the countryside and to develop a historical materialist basis for his conception of the peasant movement. In texts written around 1906, Lenin acknowledged that the landed estate in Russia was at the time based on feudal bondage rather than on capitalism, and that the feudal element was stronger than he had thought. Accordingly, he now began to insist on nationalizing the land as a condition of bourgeois revolution.

Lenin's view of the nationalization of the land brought him into conflict with the Mensheviks, including Plekhanov, who floated the idea of so-called "municipalization," or the transfer of landed estates to local self-government. Lenin rejected this idea on the grounds that it would leave intact the distinction between landlord and peasant lands. Rather, he supported the so-called divisionists, who believed in the seizure of land by the peasants themselves.

According to Lenin, municipalization is both wrong and harmful, while division is wrong but not harmful.

Shandro concludes his essay in indicating that the course of action Lenin formulated in respect to the peasants served as a guide in the struggle for hegemony, at least until the First World War. He further suggests that in this way Lenin anticipated aspects of Gramsci's celebrated analysis of intellectuals and peasantry. Shandro, who thinks Lenin's approach is fraught with tension, identifies the importance of his analysis of peasant populism from the perspective of historical materialism in encouraging the emergence of the peasantry as a so-called independent, non-proletarian political force. He ends with the obvious point that extracting the kernel of democracy from the peasantry would prove not to be simple, either politically or theoretically.

The meaning of the term "social democracy," which has changed over time, now mainly refers to a political, social and economic approach that promotes social justice within the framework of capitalism. The social democratic approach, which now constitutes an alternative to revolutionary Marxism, was earlier allied with certain forms of Marxism. In his chapter, titled '[The Impact of the SPD Model on Lenin and Bolshevism](#)', Lars Lih points to the link between Bolshevism and social democracy. He contends that Bolshevism was a Russian movement that sought to bring European "revolutionary social democracy" to absolutist Russia. Lih points out that Bolshevism conceived itself to be the Russian branch of revolutionary social democracy, which is understood in different ways. At present, social democracy, which is reformist and non-revolutionary, is an alternative to dictatorial communism, but before the First World War, it aimed at achieving socialism through an international workers' movement.

Lih notes that in Germany the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or SPD), which was the largest political party by the 1890s, included a non-revolutionary, revisionist or reformist wing and a revolutionary, Marxian wing, in which Karl Kautsky was the central figure, and which influenced the Russian Bolsheviks. The Western European social democrats belonged to a legal organization, but before 1905 there were no legal parties in Russia. Since, as Lih notes, no socialist parties were ever legalized, the first socialist priority in Russia was anti-tsarism. In practice, this meant that the Russian socialist proletariat could strive for an alliance with the peasants.

Lih calls attention to the link between the Marxist view of the proletariat and social democracy. According to Marx and Engels, the proletariat was entrusted with the historical task of taking over state power and instituting

socialism, hence with liberating themselves. Lih says this was the basic orientation for social democracy and the German SPD.

Lassalle, the founder of the SPD, promoted international socialism in Germany. He was a pioneer in two ways, first, with respect to the emotional aspects of this historic mission, and second, in relation to the idea of the permanent campaign, which interested Lenin. Lih points out that both before and after they came to power the Bolsheviks were embarked on a resolute effort to spread the message.

The SPD served as the model socialist party for socialists everywhere, in Germany by virtue of its party press, and undertook a wide range of activities, including running for political office, bringing political indictments, and generally creating emotional fervor. In Russia, in the two decades before the First World War, Kautsky had an enormous influence on Bolshevism in general and on Lenin in particular. Lenin credited Kautsky, through the formula that social democracy merged socialism and the workers' movement, with expressing the basic ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*. Kautsky, in putting political demands next to economic demands, especially emphasized political freedom. Lih points out that the Russian social democratic movement, especially the Bolsheviks, also emphasized political freedom. The Russian social democrats understood the proletariat as naturally destined for leadership roles in the movement that would be denied to liberals.

Lenin, who converted to social democracy around 1894, saw it, according to Lih, as a way out of the impasse reached in the Russian revolutionary movement in the 1880s. He took Kautsky as a model until the outbreak of the First World War, and was especially interested in imitating Kautsky's Erfurt Program. In *What Is To Be Done?*, he contrasts the German trade unionist model with the English model. Though a permanent campaign was not possible early on, Lenin pressed that point as much as possible.

Russian social democracy adopted the German premise of political freedom for the proletariat. The Russian effort to follow the German SPD model imposed two requirements: uniting various committees into a larger national whole, something Lenin believed was achieved prior to the 1905 revolution, and fighting for political freedom. According to Lih, prior to 1905, Lenin saw his task as building a Russian version of the SPD. Later, when he became disillusioned with the SPD and with Kautsky in particular, he continued to take it as his theoretical model.

As Lukács points out in his study of Lenin, the latter combined enormous practical capacity with intellectual originality. Lenin's view of imperialism is frequently understood as his most important contribution to Marxist theory. This is discussed at length in Alex Callinicos' contribution to the volume,

‘[Lenin and Imperialism](#)’. Callinicos, who has no doubt that Lenin’s view of imperialism remains relevant, says the more puzzling question is why Lenin, who was obviously competent in political economy, and who had an excellent grasp of Marx’s *Capital*, only turned to this theme so late. He points out that already in the 1890s, this theme was in the air in political events such as the wars in South Africa, military developments such as the arms race, as well as in works by Hilferding, Luxemburg and, above all, Hobson.

Callinicos’ chapter is distinguished by its wide frame of reference. He points out that Kautsky’s failure to oppose the outbreak of the First World War forced Lenin, who had previously taken him as a model, to turn in another direction. According to Callinicos, Lenin, who is more consistent than Kautsky, does not so much criticize Kautsky as defend him against himself. Callinicos further points out that Lih, unlike many other observers, believes that even after 1914, Lenin remained committed to Kautsky’s version of Marxism while criticizing the latter’s own supposed deviations from it. Lih believes that the conditions in which texts are created is a crucial factor in Lenin’s case. The fact that, unlike Kautsky, Lenin was operating in an unstable situation, influenced his otherwise orthodox version of Marxism. Callinicos points to Lenin’s text entitled *The Collapse of the Second International* (written in May–June 1915), which he regards as key to understanding Lenin’s view at the time. In bringing together a series of determinations, Lenin advances an understanding of capitalism as a complex totality, which he discovered prior to the war but that he employs here and later to provide a so-called totalizing grasp of the capitalist world system.

In this text, Lenin, who sensibly thinks that different periods demand different responses, argues that in the epoch of imperialism, Marxists, or communists, must not seek out the progressive side of conflicts but rather they should use them as an opportunity for revolutionary transformation, when possible, in seeking the defeat of their own nation. In this period, Lenin also criticized Kautsky’s theory of ultra-imperialism. Callinicos, who thinks Lenin’s study of imperialism is directed against Kautsky’s, believes that beyond imperialism there lies only socialism. He points out that Lenin, who comprehends imperialism as the transition to socialism, violently rejects Kautsky’s apparent openness to transnational capitalist pacifism.

Lenin, who relies on Hilferding, goes on to argue, in opposing Kautsky’s supposed transnational pacifism, that violence is a constitutive feature of mature capitalism. Callinicos, who suggests that Lenin must explain why a transnational organization cannot transcend the nation-state, points out that the latter relies on the concept of uneven growth. Kautsky assumes the possibility of permanent agreement among nation-states. Lenin, who denies this

possibility, relies on two premises: capitalism is an anarchical system, and uneven economic and political development is a law of capitalism.

Callinicos agrees that uneven development increases the difficulty in maintaining temporary equilibrium. He further points to a difficulty emerging from the tendency of imperialism to promote the national organization of capitalism, or the long-term tendency for capital to be concentrated and centralized. Callinicos, who identifies the failure of the Marxist observers of the Second International to rely on Marx's thesis of the falling rate of profit, further points to Lenin's reliance on Malthus' view of under-consumption, but never on Marx's view of the falling rate of profit.

In remarks on imperialism and anti-colonial revolt, Callinicos suggests that Lenin's casual treatment of crisis theory points to his reliance on politics in his grasp of imperialism. He cites Arrighi, an Italian scholar of political economy and sociology, who thinks that imperialism tends to generate national liberation movements. Callinicos responds that after the outbreak of the First World War it was no longer possible for the pro-war opportunists and the working-class movement to collaborate. Lenin, who thought that imperialism would unite the left against it, believed in the so-called theory of the labor aristocracy, namely that the pro-war left was simply "bought off" by capitalism. He further supported national self-determination in order to promote cohesion against nationalism as well as nationalist revolts against imperialism in contradicting Luxemburg's argument for the economic obsolescence of national conflicts as well as the Easter (up)rising in Dublin in 1916. Callinicos closes in supporting the view central to Lenin's conception of imperialism, *contra* Luxemburg, of the colonial masses as agents of their own liberation.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the complete nationalization of industry during the period known as war communism led to a rapid decline and collapse of the economy. The NEP, which Lenin called "state capitalism," was his economic response to the situation through which he restored a limited measure of capitalism. More precisely, the NEP took a step backward toward capitalism to stimulate the economy, which at that point was almost moribund.

The final three chapters that bring this section to an end all comment in different ways on Lenin's NEP. In his mainly narrative account, '[Lenin and the New Economic Policy](#)', Edward Rees points out that, from the perspective of commentators, this marks a controversial pause between so-called war communism and the Stalinist administrative command economy.

He begins by situating the NEP within the Bolshevik attitude to the economy and the transition to socialism. According to Rees, the Bolsheviks,

who had no experience in managing an economy, thought socialism would mean replacing private property, the market and money with collective ownership and collective distribution. In the summer of 1918, following Marxist theory, most industries were nationalized. But the introduction of ideological priorities had ruinous results, leading only two years later to virtual economic collapse.

Different observers offered different recommendations, but Lenin, who was ideologically committed to war communism, rejected the proposed changes; he did not put forward what became the NEP until in March 1921 at the Tenth Party Congress. The NEP, which parenthetically acknowledged the defeat of economic theory in economic practice, retreated from war communism to a mixed economy, in which peasants were notably permitted to sell whatever surpluses they had on the free market in a new form of the market economy, where small- and medium-sized enterprises were leased to individuals, and in which the rouble was backed by gold. Yet the new policy did not take hold immediately. It was, for instance, accompanied by the severe famine in the winter of 1921–1922. At the Eleventh Party Congress in May 1922, though Lenin insisted that the NEP was a response to circumstances beyond the party's control, this only resulted in scathing criticism. The introduction of the NEP in 1921 in no way weakened the dictatorship of the proletariat. In a difficult situation, Lenin threatened his enemies with retribution and advocated severe discipline, including show trials, as well as various forms of terror and further curbing of intellectual freedom.

Rees notes that the NEP resulted in a change in Lenin's rhetoric, for instance in suggestions for orienting the economy toward the interests of the peasants and for encouraging foreign investment. Though the rhetorical tone changed, it is unclear whether the policies changed as well.

After Lenin's death, the NEP was credited to his legacy in the struggle over his succession. Rees lists different voices that were raised in the debate. On the left, where the NEP was contested, E. A. Preobrazhenskii was a Bolshevik economist who favored the rapid industrialization of peasant Russia through state-owned heavy industry. He argued that the NEP represented a concession to capitalist elements, and unjustly favored the peasantry against the workers and agriculture against industry. Numerous figures took part in the debate. They included Lev Kamenev, a Bolshevik revolutionary, who was a member of the first Politburo, founded in 1917 to manage the Bolshevik Revolution. G. Y. Zinoviev, another member of the first Politburo, was a long-time head of the Communist International. In 1924, Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin rejected Trotsky's calls to temper the NEP as underestimating the peasantry and breaking with Lenin's policy. Bukharin, the chief

party ideologist, who supported Stalin, defended the NEP. The repudiation of the NEP was driven by ideological, economic and military arguments linked to Stalin's ascendancy. The turn away from the NEP was shaped by practical considerations in terms of state objectives, and by an ideological agenda privileging the creation of a socialist economy in a way unlike the temporary retreat from war communism.

Rees, in his account of the transition from the NEP to the command administrative economy—in short, from Lenin to Stalin—notes that the Fourteenth Party Congress proclaimed itself the congress of industrialization. Rees points out that general agreement in 1927 that the period of economic reconstruction was complete in turn raised the question of the further relevance of the NEP. In 1928, Stalin turned against the NEP on the grounds that the economic recovery had been achieved, that the Soviet party-state was much stronger, and that the growth of capitalist forces under the NEP required decisive counter measures. The assault on the NEP was associated with building up Gosplan, or the State Planning Committee, leading, in 1929–1930, to dramatic increases in industrial output targets, and the further collectivization of agriculture.

Rees, who points out that the shift away from the NEP was justified by a series of crises, notes that economic historians, including not only Bukharin, but also the Marxist economist M. H. Dobb, E. H. Carr, the English historian of the Soviet Union, and the economist Mark Harrison, have long debated the viability of the NEP. Rees notes that forced agricultural collectivization achieved the goal of socializing peasant agriculture by severely demoralizing the peasantry and eliminating the kulaks, and so on, at the cost of the famine of 1932–1933, the development of the gulag system, and the growth of the police state.

Rees suggests perceptively that the NEP was not primarily an economic policy but rather a political strategy, with economic and social aspects, a policy dictated by the weak support for Bolshevism in Russia. From the governmental perspective, the structure of Russian society, including the lack of educated socialist cadres, appeared inimical to the transition to so-called real socialism. Governmental weakness provoked temporary concessions, which were later overturned, in the effort to “sovietize” other nationalities.

Most observers acknowledge Stalin's theoretical weakness. Rees' remarks on Stalin and the end of the NEP point to Stalin's supposed theoretical innovations, including socialism in one country, the command economy as so-called revolution from above in replacement of the NEP, and the view that class conflict intensified under socialism, leading to the expansion of state power. The command economy led to hopelessly unrealistic produc-

tion targets, the eradication of the private sector, control of the arts through socialist realism, and so on. The foreseeable consequences, as Rees points out, included the hypertrophy of the party-state, the enlargement of the police state, rampant state terror, and efforts to regiment the lives of people.

In conclusion, Rees suggests that the turn to the NEP was a major defeat for the government. It has already been noted that Lenin's shift to the NEP was accompanied by temporarily abandoning class war and terror in a turn toward milder policies. Observers regard these changes in different ways. According to Stephen Cohen, an American scholar of modern Russian history, this represented an effort to rethink the real possibility of Bolshevism. Yet according to Paul Gregory, an American economist, the NEP was incompatible with the goal of industrialization. Rees ends by pointing to the obvious continuity of the attempt at forced modernization undertaken by Peter the Great and Sergei Witte, the economist, minister and prime minister in mid-nineteenth century Russia, and Stalin's command economy.

In 'NEP, the Logical Sequel to the Bolshevik Seizure of Power,' Paresh Chattopadhyay treats Lenin's NEP as an economic innovation not only contrary to the Marxist point of view, but as further following seamlessly from what went before. According to Chattopadhyay, the foreseeable result was a process through which what had been a democratic Soviet movement became a Bolshevik dictatorship. According to the Bolsheviks, their seizure of power supposedly completed an earlier bourgeois revolution by means of a socialist revolution. Chattopadhyay, however, suggests that this claim, which, from the Marxian perspective, qualifies as an obvious attempt to leapfrog or bypass the natural, but also obligatory, stages of social development, is based on total abstraction from the real situation in arriving at the Leninist view.

Chattopadhyay's text briefly discusses the Bolshevik Revolution, which Lenin described as a workers' socialist revolution, and then argues, in examining the period from 1921 to 1924, that the NEP, which marked a retreat from revolutionary socialism, was its logical sequel. The discussion begins with the Bolshevik seizure of power that, as Chattopadhyay points out, was neither initiated nor directed by the working class, which represented no more than a small minority, whereas the *Communist Manifesto* called for an immense majority. Rather, the Bolshevik Revolution was led by so-called petty bourgeois intellectuals, who constituted the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, and were not accountable to the working class. According to Oskar Anweiler, an authority on direct political representation, to whom Chattopadhyay refers, though the October Revolution was prepared by the

Bolsheviks, only a minority wanted to seize power. Further, according to Chattopadhyay, Lenin's private correspondence shows disdain for the soviets.

Chattopadhyay goes on to point out that from the start the Mensheviks stood for a self-governing mass movement of workers and peasants, which was starkly different from Lenin's cadre of professional revolutionaries. Thus, according to Israel Getzler, the biographer of Julius Martov, the Menshevik leader saw the revolution as the progressive development of a revolutionary self-government, while Lenin saw it as a planned seizure of central power synchronized with an armed uprising.

Chattopadhyay points out that a minority government has to be coercive. The Bolshevik government's minority status was further increased by its refusal to collaborate with other factions. Chattopadhyay quotes the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter, who suggests that the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks obscured the fact that the former had broken away from classical Marxism. He is further not persuaded by the view of the anti-Stalinist left that blames the failure of the October Revolution and the absence of proletarian revolution in Europe. Proletarian revolutions in Europe would not have altered the single-party, minority rule exerted by the Bolsheviks.

Chattopadhyay cites and briefly discusses a long list of experts who individually and collectively criticize the Leninist approach. Thus, according to Franz Borkenau, an Austrian pioneer of the theory of totalitarianism, Moscow split the Western labor movement. Roy Medvedev, the Russian philosopher, points to violence exerted against the peasantry. Maurice Dobb noted that the generalized attack on the Russian peasantry led to repeated peasant (up)risings.

The period from mid-1918 to spring 1921, which is called war communism, more or less coincided with the civil war in Russia. It was, as Chattopadhyay observes, a period of popular unrest, in which, though times were increasingly difficult, the illusion or rather delusion arose, affecting even Lenin, that if the Russians could just hold out a little longer, they would reach socialism. In other words, there was a view that reached to the highest pinnacle of Bolshevism that war communism was the period that would lead to socialism.

Chattopadhyay singles out the rebellion at Kronstadt as a kind of turning point. Lenin, he says, was clear that the sailors were in favor neither of the White Guards nor of the Bolshevik state power. Though war communism destroyed the economy, Lenin, who was aware of the effect of widely unpopular Bolshevik policies on the population, reacted by conceding increased

freedom to the middle peasants through the NEP, thus creating the possibility of local free trade at the same time as he blocked the possibility of power for the soviets. The foreseeable consequence, as Chattopadhyay points out, is that Lenin completed the formation of a centralized single-party dictatorship, putting Russia firmly and irrevocably on the road to Stalinism.

The first and most important measure of the NEP was to lower and change the form of peasant taxation while allowing peasants to sell their excess produce. About 90% of industrial enterprises were nationalized. The nationalized enterprises, in the same way, were allowed to govern themselves after paying government taxes, and hence to dispose of residual production. As controls were gradually relaxed, capitalism reappeared on a small scale, for instance in the form of various kinds of cooperatives. During the NEP, economic management was based on market principles, which drastically increased production from pre-NEP levels. Yet the new system did not work well by real world standards, since industrial prices were above, and agricultural prices below, their 1913 levels. Yet improvements were made in the period 1924–1925.

Lenin was faced simultaneously with the economic problems created by the heavy-handed Bolshevik approach and the political problems concerning the claimed transition to socialism. Though the NEP at least partly improved the economic situation, at the very same time the transition to socialism remained a troubling thorn in the Bolshevik side. According to Chattopadhyay, Lenin identified two main conditions: first, a series of special transitions superfluous in capitalist countries; and second, in Lenin's words, agreement between the proletariat, which held state power—though this was only theoretically the case—and the majority of the peasant population. In other words, what Lenin had in mind was agreement between the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, which really held power, and the peasantry over which it ruled.

Though Lenin simply ignored the Marxian view that revolution depends on economics, he thought that the post-revolutionary transition to socialism could be prepared by state monopoly capitalism; this contradicted his earlier reliance on the party as the revolutionary vanguard. This view implied that a free market was one of the forms of transition from war communism to socialism. As concerns socialism, Lenin was still interested in the potential of the alliance between workers and peasants. He was also hopeful about the socialist potential of cooperatives based on the premise that, if state power belongs to the working class—which was theoretically true but false in practice—then the working class and the means of production belong to the state, and thus the only remaining task is cooperative organization.

Chattopadhyay begins his conclusion by pointing to passages in which Marx makes different versions of the claim that radical socialist revolution presupposes appropriate material or economic conditions. As he points out, Marx builds his idea of social revolution on the great force of negativity that he credits to Hegel in the *Paris Manuscripts* and that he interprets in economic terms, through the intrinsic and unmanageable final economic crisis that derives above all from the declining rate of profit. According to Marx, capital creates the conditions of its own negation: in other words, the basis of the new society that will supersede it. Marx later amplified this idea in the famous Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where he argues that, at a certain stage, capitalism reaches its intrinsic developmental limits and therefore supersedes itself in the emergence of a new social stage, which, as he later points out, has an economic prerequisite, or the production of what Marx calls material wealth. He further notes that according to Marx, no social stage ever perishes before it has brought forth new productive forces. Chattopadhyay's important insight is that, from Marx's perspective, a revolution could only have a bourgeois or pre-socialist character since the objective and subjective conditions for a socialist revolution—not in Lenin's sense, but in Marx's sense—did not exist. Hence, a truly socialist revolution did not, and in fact could not, come about in Russia—at the time a materially backward country—since it was not possible according to the Marxian analysis. Chattopadhyay points out that, according to Carr, the same economic backwardness that made it relatively easy for the Bolshevik seizure of power made it difficult to move forward from a bourgeois revolution, which was perfected through the NEP, to a socialist revolution. For this reason, Chattopadhyay suggests that Lenin's claim in October 1917 that the socialist revolution had already begun was simply absurd. He ends by citing Marx's clear statement in *Capital* that the precondition for the transition to production through free association is a long and painful process of development that Russia had obviously not reached when the Bolsheviks seized power; and this, from a Marxian perspective, explains the failure of the Bolshevik Revolution.

It has frequently been noted that Lenin's form of Marxism centers on the so-called party of a new type, or vanguard of the revolution. It is no exaggeration that, through this innovation, which was based on Marx's early view of the cooperation between the philosophers and the revolutionary proletariat, Lenin transformed Marx's obscure theories into a potent revolutionary force, which, under the name of Marxism–Leninism, has remained influential in Eastern Europe as well as in Asia. Since the Chinese revolution was based on Marxism–Leninism, it is not surprising that, as Wei Xiaoping shows in

detail in ‘[Lenin’s NEP and Deng Xiaoping’s Economic Reform](#),’ there are deep similarities between the two programmes.

Wei studies problems arising in the historical transformation from a capitalist economy to a socialist economy through a detailed comparison of Lenin’s NEP with Deng Xiaoping’s Economic Reform. Although they are separated by 60 years, they occurred in similar historical contexts. More precisely, each took place after the historic transformation from a capitalist form of economy (half-capitalism and half-feudalism) to a socialist form of economy, and each faced similar problems of economic stagnation brought about as a result. It is perhaps not an accident that, not only were the problems similar, but the policies that independently arose for dealing with them were also similar. Moreover, the guiding principle of the policy was almost the same. Wei’s chapter considers the historical background of Deng’s Economic Reform, including its step-by-step logical progression, and further considers the background of Deng’s thinking. According to Wei, there is no direct connection between Lenin’s and Deng’s economic views. Deng’s conception of Economic Reform did not arise, or did not arise directly, from Lenin’s conception of economic reform. Yet Lenin and Deng each constructed views of economic reform as a result of dealing with concrete practical problems that emerged after instances of historical transformation occurring separately in Russia and then later in China.

Wei compares and contrasts Deng Xiaoping’s Economic Reform with Lenin’s NEP. The NEP was proposed in 1921, three years after the October Revolution in Russia, while Deng’s Economic Reform was initiated in 1978, nearly 30 years after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power.

The chapter begins with a comparison of the historical context of the NEP in 1921 and the Economic Reform in 1978. After the victory of the Socialist Revolution, the Bolsheviks undertook a decisive transformation from capitalism to communism. At the time, Russian agriculture was still almost feudal in character. The transformation, which included the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and commodity production, failed to increase and actually decreased production. Lenin, who was confronted with this series of problems as the first person to attempt to apply Marx’s theories, remembered Marx’s view that the transitional period would be lengthy in formulating the NEP. Wei contends that the NEP was formulated to deal with the actual problems after the dramatic transformation of communism rather than to come to grips with problems arising in the historical transition period. She further points to differences between Marx’s theory of the transition and Lenin’s actual practice. Wei sees this disparity as evidence that Lenin was not dogmatic but focused on practice, and

hence able to adjust when practice differed from theory. She suggests that Lenin's flexible attitude was not shared by his collaborators. It is thus significant that, after Lenin died, Stalin returned to the discredited policies of economic communism.

Under the pressure of circumstances, including the First World War, the civil war, and war communism, Lenin was forced to innovate very rapidly after the Bolsheviks came to power. Since he was the unchallenged leader in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, he enjoyed free rein in initiating his policies. The situation was radically different in China, where Deng, who was limited by the prevailing situation, was constantly challenged by Mao. The latter persistently interfered with Deng's efforts to stimulate the Chinese economy. Deng actually began to reform the economy in 1963–1964 through a policy of dividing community fields in the countryside into parcels for each family, who had a determinate level of responsibility under contract, together with a free market. Mao in turn criticized this policy as returning to the capitalist road. Deng was again criticized by Mao in 1972, when he once more tried to organize the economy. This interference only ceased with Mao's death in 1976. For this reason, Deng, despite earlier abortive efforts, was only able to begin his Economic Reform in 1978.

Wei notes that, in general, the reform in 1978 was similar to the reform earlier proposed in 1964. She divides Deng's Economic Reform into three stages, beginning with a first phase based on contractual responsibility with a monetary incentive. In the second stage, which extended from 1992 to 2001, the market was introduced, including market mechanisms for private ownership and planning for public ownership. Wei suggests that planning functioned badly for public ownership, since in China there is no clear demarcation of public property. She points out that the problem of property rights has never been solved; in fact, through successive changes, it has only become murkier. The third stage of Economic Reform runs from 2001 until the present. The fact that in the meantime China has joined the WTO has further pushed it toward market competition.

Though there is no direct relation between Deng's and Lenin's economic policies, Wei thinks that the need to face concrete problems in both cases forced them to readjust Marx's theories. In the context of the proposed transition from capitalism to communism, both Deng and Lenin were faced with the complex relationship between individual self-interest and public ownership. They saw this relationship differently. Lenin understood the difficulty of economic production as calling for respect for the peasant's self-interest. He was not worried about a possible return to capitalism, since the peasant's production and labor had always belonged to the individual.

According to Wei, replacing the direct collection of surplus food by simply handing in surplus food in the form of a tax left an appropriate space for peasants. Roughly the same situation emerged in China nearly 30 years after the historical transformation from the old society to a new socialist system. As a result of this transformation, each individual peasant was responsible for farming his or her land, but the land itself remained under collective ownership.

The basic problem in each case was roughly the same. As the amount of public ownership, or collective ownership, increased, the individual peasant's enthusiasm understandably weakened, production waned, and overall economic productivity either failed to increase or tended to stagnate. In Russia, the logical result of enhancing the relation between individual peasants' self-interest and their work was immediately resolved through the NEP. Yet since this was not possible in China, after 1978 the market economy slowly developed step by step, until in 1992 it was clearly advocated in Deng's speech during his famous "Southern tour".

Wei further sketches a comparison between what she calls the principle of the NEP in 1921 and the Economic Reform in 1978. She suggests that the retreat from communism to a planned economic approach would have been successful in each case in the short run, but in the long run would have threatened the very idea of post-revolutionary society. Though Lenin sought to combine individual self-interest with national interest in the NEP, his aim was to transcend the capitalist institution of private property and the free market. Wei points out that Deng's policy of allocating collectively owned land to individual peasants in each family, combining individual interest with personal responsibility through a contractual arrangement, was actually closer to Marx's conception of a historical transition.

Wei argues, without ever using the term, that Lenin and Deng shared a basically pragmatic approach to economic problems. When Lenin died, Stalin, as noted above, stopped the NEP. According to Wei, Western scholars overlook the basic differences between Lenin's and Stalin's economic approaches. She helpfully notes that Lenin called state capitalism the approach through which the Bolshevik state allowed individual capitalists to be active in the economy and permitted free markets. In contrast, Western scholars, who identify the model of Stalin's socialism as state capitalism, view the term as referring to capitalist calculation on the level of the state, even if no capitalists remain.

Wei further thinks that both Lenin and Deng allowed private ownership to function and reintroduced a form of the market. Wei claims that, in Deng's Economic Reform, the change in the principle of economic dis-

tribution resulted in a change in the underlying economic model as well as in the relations of production. Yet since Lenin did not have enough time to arrive at a similar result, it follows that he left only the theoretical problems of the historical transformation from capitalism to communism for us to think about.

Wei concludes that though Lenin's NEP and Deng's Economic Reform were separated by many years, both the social context and the basic economic situation that prevailed after the countries' respective revolutionary transformations were not only similar, but the strategies invoked to deal with them were similar as well. Yet the source of their views was different, since Deng's Economic Reform was not (or not clearly) based on Lenin's NEP. To be more precise, as Wei points out, Deng's economic ideas do not come from Bolshevism, but rather from the experience of Chinese socialism.

She concludes with the insight that both Lenin and Deng faced the same problem: the transition from capitalism to socialism not only in theory but also in practice. At stake in this change is the transition from a system based on distributive justice—or, in other words, a system based on rewards—to a very different system based on equality. This problem, which Wei indicates has never been solved, remains a key difficulty in Marxism today.

## Author Biography

**Tom Rockmore** is an American philosopher, now living in Avignon, France. He studied in the USA and Germany. He has held regular or visiting appointments in Yale, Nice, Fordham, Vanderbilt, Laval, Duquesne, Temple, and Peking. He is currently Distinguished Professor of Humanities, Professor of Philosophy and Member of the Institute of Foreign Philosophy in Peking University, China. His area of research encompasses all of modern philosophy, with special attention to aspects of German idealism. He has published many books on various philosophical themes, most recently on German idealism and epistemic constructivism.

# Part I

## Lenin and Political Philosophy

# 2

## Which Kind of Dialectician Was Lenin?

Vesa Oittinen

Lenin's theoretical legacy has been controversial from the beginning. The discussion began immediately after his death in 1924, when a demarcation from the Marxist interpretation of the Second International, from Kautsky and Plekhanov, became a pressing necessity for the Bolsheviks now in power. As a result of the discussions of the party intelligentsia and philosophers of the young Soviet state, the concept of "Marxism–Leninism" was coined. Although it soon degenerated into an ideological stamp, the original intention of the term was to specify the new elements that Lenin's seemingly successful political activity would add to Marxism. Interestingly enough, the term had a temporal dimension, since Leninism was defined as the Marxism of a new epoch, the "epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolutions." So the difference between Marx's and Lenin's thought was, according to original intention of this formula, not so much theoretical or methodological, but rather reflected the difference of the epochs.

As to the philosophical content of Lenin's Marxism, there was more ambivalence in defining it. During most of the 1920s, the most important philosophical work of Lenin that was known to the public was *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), a rabid attack against the subjectivism and positivist methodology of an ultra-leftist movement in the Bolshevik fraction, whose main representative was Aleksandr Bogdanov. Lenin's

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*Philosophical Notebooks*, written in 1914–1915 and containing his notes on Hegel’s *Logic*, were first published in their entirety only in 1930 as volume 12 of the *Leninskij sbornik*,<sup>1</sup> at a moment when a Stalinist interpretation of the Leninist legacy had already begun to take shape.

In this chapter, I will discuss the question of Lenin’s dialectics both in relation to Hegel as expressed in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, and to his Russian contemporaries, above all Bogdanov, who is the main target of polemics in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. I attempt to show that Lenin’s interest in Hegel is dictated by two demands: first, by the need to avoid the determinism inherent in the Marxist interpretation of the Second International; and, second, by the requirement to ward off the influence of Kantianism (actually, Neo-Kantianism) on the workers’ movement. As regards the dialectics, Lenin’s idea of it seems to have been rather simple: it is more or less identical to a “concrete analysis of a concrete situation.” In Lenin’s writings there are no Hegelian triads or such dialectical deductions as in, for example, Marx’s *Capital*. Lenin has, however, an idea of mediation, which is related to Hegel’s respective concept.

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Abram Deborin, the most important Marxist philosopher of the 1920s and the head of the movement of the so-called “dialecticians,” initially was of the opinion that Plekhanov was the more important theoretician of Russian Marxism and Lenin merely a “great practitioner.” However, in 1926 Ivan Luppol, another philosopher of the “dialectician” movement, had already published a book, *Lenin i filosofija*,<sup>2</sup> where he attempted to demonstrate that Lenin was a thinker in theoretical matters too. Luppol showed that in many articles that seemingly dealt with “practical” questions only, Lenin actually applied philosophical argumentation. Only a few years later, Luppol himself became a victim of Stalin’s terror, but his reading of Lenin was already incorporated in the official Soviet doctrine.<sup>3</sup> This official doctrine

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<sup>1</sup>A part of the *Notebooks* was, however, made accessible already in 1925 in *Pod znamenem marksizma* (issue 1-2/1925). It should be mentioned here that the final edition of the *Notebooks*, published in Vol. 38 of Lenin’s *Collected Works* (*Sochinenija*, 4th edition), contains much more material than only the notebooks on Hegel’s philosophy, which Lenin wrote down in 1914 and 1915. The earliest text in the volume is a conspectus of Marx and Engels’ *The Holy Family* (1895), and it contains further marginal notes from Lenin in different books on philosophy from over a long period. So one might speak of *Philosophical Notebooks* in *sensu lato* and *sensu stricto*. In this chapter, I refer to them in the latter sense, i.e. containing the excerpts from Hegel’s works.

<sup>2</sup>German translation: I. Luppol, *Lenin und die Philosophie*, Wien: Verlag für Literatur und Politik, 1929.

<sup>3</sup>For details of the discussions of the 1920s, which were ended abruptly by an intervention of Stalin himself in 1929/1930, see e.g. Yehoshua Yakhot, *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (the 1920s and 1930s)*, Oak Park (Michigan): Mehring Books, 2012.

underlined the continuity of Lenin's philosophical thought from the earliest publications onwards, a continuity that, in the interpretation of party officials, assumed an altogether monolithic character. For them, Lenin had put forth his Marxist ideas in their final form and with a rigorous consequence already in the writings of his youth, starting from the pamphlet *What the 'Friends of People' Are* (1894), which was directed against the theories of the Narodniks. During the entire Soviet epoch, it was risky to try to contest this official interpretation.

However, since the publication of the *Philosophical Notebooks*, one cannot have avoided picking up the formidable difference between these notes and the earlier work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1909. In fact, the differences are so big that they might not be taken to be works of the same person. The standard Soviet answer to this discrepancy was that in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* Lenin defended on a general level the materialist approach in scientific inquiry and political analyses, whilst in the *Philosophical Notebooks* (which were not intended for publication) he focused on the question of dialectics. This is not a bad argument per se and might explain a great deal of the differences between the two texts. But the duality, nevertheless, prevails. Not surprisingly, in the West, there has emerged a tradition of reading Lenin as a philosopher that radically differs from the Soviet view. According to this interpretation, most prominently represented by Raya Dunayevskaya and later especially by Kevin Anderson, there is a rupture between the "earlier" Lenin representing a kind of dogmatic materialism and vulgar "theory of reflection", on the one hand, and the cunning "Hegelizing" dialectician of the *Philosophical Notebooks*, on the other hand—a turning point that seems to echo the famous *rupture épistémologique*, which Althusser believed he had detected in Marx's intellectual development.

In Anderson's reading, Lenin, who immediately after the outbreak of the First World War had retired to the Canton Library of Bern in order to study Hegel's *Science of Logic* more thoroughly than he hitherto had had time to do, had already in jotting down the first notes of Hegel's introductory chapter, "begun to break with the simplistic categories of idealism versus materialism that had been the philosophical foundation of the Marxism of the Second International, including his own before 1914".<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the first-hand acquaintance with Hegel led Lenin, and so Anderson, to an abandonment of his earlier views:

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<sup>4</sup>Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism*, Urbana/Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995, p. 34.

Only six years earlier, in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin had developed a crude reflexion theory, wherein ideas were seen as photocopies of matter. Now he writes that there is profundity in Hegel's concept of a move from the ideal to the real, which, unlike the reflection theory, gives a sort of ontological autonomy to ideas.<sup>5</sup>

For Anderson, absorbing and digesting Hegel's dialectical method helped Lenin to accomplish the theoretical breakthroughs that characterized him as the Marxist thinker he was:

After 1914 Lenin's work on Hegel helped to shape some of his innovative political and economic concepts around issues such as imperialism, national liberation, the state, and revolution [...] We have seen the continuing influence of Lenin's Hegel studies in his subsequent use of categories such as transformation into opposite, subjectivity, self-movement, and self-consciousness, as well as Hegel's concept of a dialectical interrelationship between the universal and the particular, all of which [...] form an important part of the grounding for Lenin's dialectical theory of imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

This is, at first sight, a convincing interpretation. Thus it is no wonder that it has found support, and to speak of "two Lenins" has indeed been *en vogue* in some circles. But a closer reading of Lenin's texts soon reveals that the matter is not so simple. Above all, Lenin does not seem to denounce the ideas of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* even after 1914. When the book was issued again in 1920, Lenin did not change anything in it, save correcting some printing mistakes. Moreover, he stressed in the foreword to the second edition that the ideas expressed in the book had a general validity for Marxist theory, independently of the dispute with Russian Machists: the book, he hoped, "will prove useful as an aid to an acquaintance with the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism, as well as with the philosophical conclusions from the recent discoveries in natural science."<sup>7</sup> And when, in the well-known article of 1922, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism," in which he drafted the tasks of the newly founded journal *Pod znamenem marksizma*, he spoke about the necessity for Marxists to systematically study Hegel's dialectics, he did this quite in accordance with

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<sup>5</sup>Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>7</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in: *Collected Works*, vol. 14.

the scope of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, i.e., as a part of a materialist interpretation of the results of natural sciences.<sup>8</sup>

## Lenin The Political Thinker

In 1929, the Stalinization of Soviet philosophy was launched and Deborin was forced to take back his assessment of Lenin as purely a practitioner. Despite this concession, one cannot deny the simple fact that Lenin was, in the first instance, a politician. Lenin did not pretend to be a great theoretician, and when, in a letter to Gorky in 1908, he said that he was only an “ordinary Marxist in philosophy”,<sup>9</sup> it was not intended as a joke. This does not, of course, mean that Lenin would not have had innovative theoretical ideas. But it is important to take into account that Lenin’s thinking and thus even his theoretical ideas were always refracted through the prism of politics. There is a difference between thinking philosophically (or theoretically) and thinking politically. Philosophy consists of an analysis of concepts and it is motivated by a pursuit of truth; a politician, on the other hand, examines the interests of different groups and classes and seeks the possibilities of realizing them. This difference can be formulated as the opposition between logic and rhetoric. The logician (the philosopher) is interested only in truth as such, whilst the rhetorician will convince, in order for his goals to become realized. A politician must take note of the “subjective factors” and relations of forces in quite another manner than a “pure” theoretician.

This tension between logic and political rhetoric is discernible in most of Lenin’s works. For example, he did not publish his critique of Bogdanov’s empiriomonism at once, because it was politically inopportune, but waited for a suitable occasion. And when he finally set out to write *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, the book was not intended as a purely philosophical study, but also as a political pamphlet, with the goal of dethroning a movement in Lenin’s own party fraction, which he deemed to be noxious. The rhetoric goal explains the harshly polemical,

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<sup>8</sup>V.I. Lenin, *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, in: CW vol. 33, especially: “In my opinion, the editors and contributors of *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* should be a kind of ‘Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics’. Modern natural scientists (if they know how to seek, and if we learn to help them) will find in the Hegelian dialectics, materialistically interpreted, a series of answers to the philosophical problems which that are being raised by the revolution in natural science and which make the intellectual admirers of bourgeois fashion ‘stumble’ into reaction”.

<sup>9</sup>Letter to Gorky, 25. 11. 1908, in: CW vol. 13. Actually, in the Russian original, Lenin’s expression is yet stronger: he calls himself a *ryadovoi marksist*, that is, a “low-ranking soldier” of Marxism.

even lambasting tone of the book, for which Lenin has later often been reprehended. Many present-day academic readers may feel repelled by the manner of argumentation Lenin uses, but then they seem to presuppose that they are dealing with a purely philosophical study, which *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is not.

Hence, Deborin's initial thesis of Lenin as a practician rather than a theoretician requires elaboration. There exists a constant tension (or "dialectics," if you prefer the word) between theory and practice, logic and rhetoric in Lenin. Igor Pantin, a Soviet-Russian historian of merit, speaks of the "main contradiction of a Leninist style of thinking," which according to him consists in the attempt to unify the viewpoints of a Marxist scholar, who studies the objective processes in society, with that of a political thinker, "appearing as an actor in the historical drama of Russia":<sup>10</sup>

When we speak of Lenin, we do not have the right to forget that he was a *political thinker*, not a philosopher, not a sociologist, not an economist [...] In difference from the natural sciences, where the character of the knowledge is 'non-subjective', the object of the science of politics does not only contain Man, his will, consciousness, abilities, but even construes them as the decisive moment. A political theory does not depict the reality as a knowledge of the objects 'as such'. It comprises, as an important component, that which *ought to be*....<sup>11</sup>

An answer to the questions of "Lenin's dialectics" cannot be given, if one does not grasp the role—indeed, the primacy—of politics, in Lenin's thought. In the case of Russian politics, this means that the revolutionaries, who want to overcome the existing, autocratic and oppressive social system, become confronted with such principal problems as social determinism and the role of the subjective factor in history. This is a discussion that had already started in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the movements of the *zapadniki* ("Westerners") and Slavophiles emerged among the Russian intelligentsia as a reply to the one-sided and half-hearted modernization policy of the Russian autocratism. The Narodniks, the first revolutionary movement in Russian history with significant support, emerged in

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<sup>10</sup>I.K. Pantin, *Filosofija političeskogo deistvija V.I. Lenina*, in: *Lenin online. 13 professorov o V.I.Uljanove-Lenine*, Moskva: URSS, 2010, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup>Pantin, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

the 1870s from the *zapatniki* by the way of a radicalization, but nevertheless inherited its problems.<sup>12</sup>

The main dilemma was well formulated by Nikolai Mikhailovsky (1842–1904), who, together with Piotr Lavrov (1823–1900), was known as the founder of the so-called “subjective sociology.” Mikhailovsky is still today remembered for the critique he presented of Marx in a famous article published in the journal *Otechestvennye Zapiski* in 1877. His main target was the determinism of Marx’s views of history, which he equated with those of Herbert Spencer. According to Mikhailovsky, Marx depicts for Russia a gloomy future, when he asserts that Russia must inevitably go through the same stages of historical development as Western Europe. Referring to Chap. 24 of *Capital*, where Marx described the dramatic and bloody history of the so-called primitive accumulation in England, Mikhailovsky asked whether Russia would really be pre-determined to experience the same horrors. He answered his own question negatively, claiming that there were real developmental alternatives for Russia. According to Mikhailovsky, Russia’s path would be different from that of the West: the country had its peasant communities, the *obshchinas*, upon which a more or less self-subsistent “peasant socialism” could be constructed and a Western-style industrialization avoided.<sup>13</sup>

We need not go into details of the discussion here. Marx himself attempted to answer Mikhailovsky’s critique in a letter that, however, was never sent to the journal. He partially acknowledged the validity of Mikhailovsky’s critique by admitting that the description of the primitive accumulation in *Capital* was based on the materials of, above all, English history and was not intended as “an historico-philosophic theory of the *marche generale* [general path] imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself”.<sup>14</sup>

But if alternatives exist, then the important question arises of how to realize them. The “subjective sociology” of Mikhailovsky and Lavrov was an attempt to provide an answer to this. Both of these Narodnik theoreticians had great trust in the ability of people to resist oppressive circumstances and they stressed the importance of the subjective factor in history, which they,

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<sup>12</sup>Of course, the Narodniks did not constitute a homogeneous movement. A useful study of the Narodniks available in English is Franco Venturi’s *Roots of Revolution*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960.

<sup>13</sup>N.K. Mikhailovsky, *Karl Marks pered sudom g. Yu. Zhukovskogo*, in: *Otechestvennye Zapiski* No. 10, October 1877.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Marx, Letter to the Editor of the *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, November 1877.

however, imagined of consisting more of outstanding personalities than of broad popular masses. According to Lavrov's "subjective method in sociology," the individual will by introspection find the moral ideas in himself, and then put them forth as the leitmotifs of his practical activity. In a series of articles that Lavrov published in the journal *Nedelya* in 1868–1869, he urged his readers to develop into "critically thinking personalities" and become active in promoting the emergence of a fair society.

Lavrov's advice led to one of the most severe defeats in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement. Some years after the *Nedelya* articles, a movement of "going to the people" (*khodzenie v narod*) broke out among the Narodnik intelligentsia. In the years 1873–1874, hundreds of students and other members of the intelligentsia went to the villages of the Russian countryside, trying to teach the peasants their "true interests" and encouraging them to revolt. The movement ended in catastrophe. The Narodnik intelligentsia did not get any support from the peasants. On the contrary, they were viewed with suspicion and were often even reported to the police. It was easy for the czarist authorities to suppress the whole movement. As the anecdote said, the "going to the people" turned into "going to the jail."

It would be easy to dismiss the subjectivism and voluntarism of the young Narodniks as purely political naïvety. It must be remembered, however, that there were some so to speak "objective" grounds for this subjectivism. In the 1960s, the Soviet scholar Grigori Vodolazov delivered an acute analysis of the pre-Leninist history of the Russian revolutionary movement, where he pointed to the significance of the core idea in the doctrines of the Narodniks. The idea had remained the same since the non-published dispute between Marx and Mikhailovsky: the perspective of skipping the capitalist phase of development. "The objective possibility of accelerating the development process of certain countries (using the results from more developed countries) made the function of the conscious element more important", wrote Vodolazov.<sup>15</sup> One might call this situation the "paradox of a catch-up development": peripheral countries like Russia may actually profit from their backwardness in the sense that they are more free in choosing suitable development paths than the already advanced countries that have reached their present developmental stage without having clearly reflected on their goals.

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<sup>15</sup>G.G. Vodolazov, *Osobennosti razvitiya sotsialisticheskoi mysli v Rossii v otrazhenii russkoi zhurnalistiki 60–70-kh godov XIX v. Avtoreferat dissertatsii*, Moskva, MGU, fakultet zhurnalistiki, 1967, p. 19. Quoted here according to Paolo Venturi, *Studies in Free Russia*, Chicago/London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 274. Later, Vodolazov presented the results of his dissertation in a popular book: *Ot Chernyshevskogo k Plekhanovu*, Moskva: MGU, 1969.

The possibilities of the “subjective factor,” i.e., of a conscious elite leading the masses in order to reshape society were thus a more important issue in Russia than in the West. It is precisely this issue that explains the specific role of politics in Lenin’s thought. The social theory of Marxism was a science and, during the epoch of the Second International, it was generally assumed that this required submission to a strictly deterministic world-view; but in Russia, it was necessary to “complete” Marxist determinism with an acknowledgement of the subjective factor. Let us now see how Lenin solved the equation.

## Lenin and the Concreteness of Truth

The next generation of Russian revolutionaries took the lesson to heart and turned to Marxism, which seemed to give a better theoretical foundation for the strategy of changing society than the subjectivism of the Narodniks. The first Marxist circle was founded in 1883 in Geneva by Russian emigrés, and the following year Georgi Plekhanov published his pamphlet *Nashi raznoglasijsja* (*Our Differences*), which was directed against the Narodniks and their illusions that the course of history could be changed by individual, or even terrorist, acts. Returning to the question of Mikhailovsky, although not mentioning it explicitly, Plekhanov wrote:

All laws of social development which are not understood work with the irresistible force and blind harshness of laws of nature. But to discover this or that law of nature or of social development means, firstly, to be able to avoid clashing with it and, consequently, expending one’s efforts in vain, and, secondly, to be able to regulate its application in such a manner as to draw profit from it. This general idea applies entirely to the particular case we are interested in. We must utilise the social and economic upheaval which is proceeding in Russia for the benefit of the revolution and the working population. The highly important circumstance that the socialist movement in our country began when capitalism was only in the embryo must not be lost on us. This peculiarity of Russian social development was not invented by the Slavophiles or the pro-Slavophile revolutionaries.<sup>16</sup>

The laws of social development thus define the course of history and social development in a deterministic manner. However, Plekhanov hints that

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<sup>16</sup>G.V. Plekhanov, *Our Differences*, in: *Selected Philosophical Works* Vol. 1, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, p. 274.

it is possible to “regulate the application” of these laws when one becomes conscious of them and is “able to avoid clashing with” them. He acknowledges, further, the validity of the Narodnik view of the “peculiarities” of Russian development, which must be taken in account in drafting a strategy for the revolutionaries. Although Plekhanov here mentions the specificity of Russia only *en passant*, it is actually a most important comment. The general laws of social development may exert determining influence in the last instance, but “the devil is in the detail,” i.e. a detailed analysis of the processes can nevertheless find open spaces for free agency. Plekhanov himself did not always follow his own hint but got often stuck in abstract reasoning, whilst Lenin always attempted a “concrete analysis of the concrete situation”.

Bertolt Brecht loved to repeat the expression “Truth is always concrete,” which, according to him, was the *idée-maîtresse* of Hegel’s dialectics; he even painted these words on the rafter of the house he lived during his exile in Denmark in the 1930s, in order to keep them constantly in his mind. The expression indeed sounds Hegelian, but actually one seeks it in vain in Hegel. Brecht seems to have taken it from Lenin and interpreted it as a Hegelian trait in Lenin’s thought. The concreteness of the truth is an idea Lenin stresses so often that one can consider it as a hallmark of his approach. One characteristic quotation may suffice here, from the important work from 1904 of *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*:

[G]enuine dialectics does not justify errors of the individuals, but studies the inevitable turns, proving that they were inevitable by a detailed study of the process of development in all its concreteness. One of the basic principles of dialectics is that there is no such thing as abstract truth, truth is always concrete.<sup>17</sup>

The concrete analysis, accordingly, shows that there are possible choices after all, “loopholes” in the seemingly impenetrable wall of determinations. To detect them is Lenin’s way to circumvent the determinism that characterized the Marxism of the Second International.

But, it might now be objected, is not Hegel’s entire philosophy, especially those of its parts that are called *Realphilosophie*, i.e. philosophies of history, art, religion, politics and so on, just seeking for a concrete truth, drawing incessantly upon empirical facts? In the first instance, one should remember, that Lenin and Hegel had quite opposite concepts of truth.

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<sup>17</sup>V.I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, in: CW, vol. 7, p. 409.

For Lenin, truth was essentially, in accordance with the “theory of reflection” he supported, the good old Aristotelian correspondence relation:  $x$  is true, if  $x$  “corresponds” to the fact  $y$  outside of the mind. The question of what a “correspondence” means is of course problematic. But the main idea is that facts have priority and subjective thoughts are secondary, i.e. dependent on the facts, if they are assumed to be true. For Hegel, on the contrary, the Aristotelian interpretation of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* is insufficient. For him, a more deep definition of truth is to say that it is a “correspondence of a content with itself” (*Übereinstimmung eines Inhalts mit sich selbst*, in: *Enzyklopädie*, § 24 Zusatz 2), which is “a quite different meaning of the truth as the first-mentioned” [i.e. the Aristotelian—V.O.]. It is thus clear that Lenin’s and Hegel’s views on truth are not identical, despite the fact that both stress—or seem to stress—the same thing, namely the concreteness of truth.

Moreover, Hegel had other things in mind when he criticized the abstract concept of truth in favor of its “concreteness.” For him, abstractness was created above all by the Kantian distinction between subjective and objective. When Hegel said that “truth is the whole” (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*; *ibid.*), he meant the whole as a totality where the distinction between the subjective and the objective, or the subject and the substance, has in the last resort become sublated. This sublating is a process in which the substance becomes more and more mediated with the subject, until they finally obtain a synthesis in the “Absolute Idea.” For Hegel, the whole reality of the universe consists of this process, and so he can claim that the “execution” (implementation, *Ausführung*) of the process is at least as important as its final result. Thus, although Lenin’s and Hegel’s views on the necessity of a concrete approach to reality seem at first glance to be similar, there is actually a deep difference between them. Lenin’s “concrete analysis of a concrete situation” is factual—it consists of an empirical inquiry; Hegel, for his part, discarded the empiricist approach, which according to him, “instead of seeking the truth in the thought itself” falsely tries to obtain it “from the experience” (*Enz.*, § 37).

Hence, when Lenin says that “the ABC of dialectics [...] tells us that there is no such thing as abstract truth, the truth is always concrete,”<sup>18</sup> he is saying something quite different from Hegel’s intentions. He is not constructing a totality in which all the details would form moments submitted to the teleological movement of the Whole. For Lenin, the idea of the con-

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<sup>18</sup>V.I. Lenin, *One Step Forward ...*, CW vol. 7, p. 482.

creteness of the truth is the way that makes it possible to escape the grip of abstract determinism. To my mind, it is important to see that although both Hegel and Lenin criticized abstract theories, their incentives were different: for Hegel, the goal was to construct an organic, richly detailed totality, while for Lenin there were no such “totalist” ambitions; what he aimed at was to find, by means of a detailed analysis, the fissures in the seemingly monolithic façade of such a determinist theory of history as Marxism was interpreted by the protagonists of the Second International.

It is interesting to note that the idea of a “concrete analysis” in Lenin does not come from Marxism, nor from Hegel, but from the very Narodniks who rebelled against the dogmatic interpretation of a predefined succession of socio-economic formations presented by the Marxists, which seemed to deny all alternative perspectives for Russia. It was the Narodnik theoretician Chernyshevsky who formulated the principle in 1855–1856, in an essay that dealt with Russian literature:

The essence of this method [the dialectical method—V.O.] lies in that the thinker must not rest content with any positive deduction, but must find out whether the object he is thinking about contains qualities and forces the opposite of those which the object had presented to him at first sight. Thus the thinker was obliged to examine the object from all sides [...] Gradually [...] the former one-sided conceptions of an object were supplanted by a full and all-sided investigation [...] In reality [...], everything depends upon circumstances [...] Every object, every phenomenon [...] must be judged according to the circumstances, the environment, in which it exists. This rule was expressed by the formula: ‘There is no abstract truth; truth is concrete’, i.e., a definite judgment can be pronounced only [...] after examining all the circumstances on which it depends.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, for Chernyshevsky, Hegel’s dialectics consist above all of a concrete analysis of all the sides of the phenomenon in question. In his essay, Chernyshevsky does not give a more specified presentation of Hegel’s method. He does not speak about the mediation of subject and substance, nor of subjectivity as an absolute, self-referential negativity, nor of the triadic movement of categories—all of which are essential traits of Hegel’s dialectical method. It is only the “concreteness” of the analytical approach that counts.

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<sup>19</sup>N.G. Chernyshevsky, *Ocherki gogolevskogo perioda russkoi literatury*, quoted here according to G.V. Plekhanov, *The Development of the Monist View of History*, in: Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works* vol. I, p. 547.

One cannot help but agree when, in a seminal article on Lenin's dialectics, Robert Mayer constates that "Lenin [...] was not saying anything original about the dialectic in 1904 when he identified it with concreteness and tactical relativism." This view was borrowed from Plekhanov, who in turn had taken it from Chernyshevsky. But Lenin turned it against Plekhanov's own fraction in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, by showing that a "principal weakness of Menshevism and other revolutionary trends was an undialectical tendency to rely on abstract and universal rules for solutions to concrete tactical problems."<sup>20</sup>

So one could say that the interpretation of dialectics as a theory of "concreteness" was a Chernyshevskian, not a Marxist trait in Lenin's thought. It is an indication that elements of Narodnism were continuously present in Lenin's theoretical horizon and that he remained conscious of the problems of the previous, pre-Marxist generation of Russian revolutionaries. Actually, the stress on the importance of a "concrete analysis" when doing research on Russia's social reality was a concession to the "subjective sociology" of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky; it is an attempt to find antidotes for the abstract—indeed, semi-positivistic—determinism of the Marxism of the Second International.

## Did Lenin Change His Mind?

But did Lenin retain this interpretation of dialectics even after 1914, when he made closer acquaintance with Hegel's *chef-d'oeuvre*, the "Grand Logic"? To answer the question, it is important to take first a glance at the overall situation. For Lenin, the outbreak of a world war in August 1914 was a shock. Especially shameful in his eyes was the treacherous action of the "revisionist" majority of Social Democrats worldwide. The majority of the German Social Democrats and many of Russian Mensheviks supported the war. They explained their position by abstract reasoning about the necessities of "defense"—in the German case, defense against the aggressive and reactionary Russian czarism; in Russian case, against the aggressive German imperialism. The analyses conducted by the "revisionist" majorities in the respective parties about the causes and the real essence of the imperialist war were clearly insufficient.

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<sup>20</sup>Robert Mayer, "Lenin and the Practice of Dialectical Thinking," in: *Science & Society* 63:1 (1999), p. 46.

The year 1914 thus signified a palpable break in Lenin's and, generally, the Bolsheviks' situation. For Anderson, this "crisis of world Marxism in 1914" was the reason for "Lenin's plunge into Hegel"<sup>21</sup> and led to a dissociation from the Marxist interpretations of the Second International in general, which were unable to do justice to the changed realities that made a socialist revolution a reality looming on the horizon. That Lenin had in these years a renewed interest in Hegel is indubitable, but how to interpret it is more difficult. Contrary to Anderson's claims, this new interest does not seem to have led to a break with Lenin's previous philosophical views, expressed most fully in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1909. As Lars T. Lih wryly comments, there were no traces of rethinking nor attempts to reject the Marxist orthodoxy in Lenin in 1914. On the contrary: "According to Lenin himself, it was not he who had changed but the others. He insisted that the vision of a world revolution [...] was part and parcel of a universal consensus among pre-war revolutionary Marxists."<sup>22</sup>

Why did Lenin decide to delve into Hegel's *Science of Logic*, possibly the most difficult and abstruse work that philosophy had hitherto presented, in 1914, just after the outbreak of war? It seems he had already long felt the need to make a closer acquaintance with the method of dialectics as described in Hegel's own words. James White has recently proposed the hypothesis that it was actually not the outbreak of war but a slightly earlier event, namely the publication of Marx's and Engels's correspondence in four volumes by Dietz Verlag in 1913, which diverted Lenin's interest into the theory of dialectics.<sup>23</sup> In the correspondence between Marx and Engels, dialectics was a recurrent theme. Lenin planned to write a review of the book during the course of 1913, but did not get the article ready; the sketch of it was published much later, in 1920, in *Pravda*. Here he writes:

If one were to attempt to define in a single word the focus, so to speak, of the whole correspondence, the central point at which the whole body of ideas expressed and discussed converges—that word would be *dialectics*. The application of materialist dialectics to the reshaping of all political economy from its foundations up, its application to history, natural science, philosophy and

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<sup>21</sup>Kevin Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 3, the rubric.

<sup>22</sup>Lars T. Lih, *Lenin*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup>James D. White, "Lenin and Philosophy: The Historical Context," in: *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 67:1, 2015, pp. 123–142.

to the policy and tactics of the working class—that was what interested Marx and Engels most of all.<sup>24</sup>

However, despite these words, Lenin does not in the review draft explain in more detail what one should understand by “dialectics.” Only some months later in Bern, 1914, does he have time to get to the heart of the matter and read Hegel himself, and it is obvious that he had already felt the need to do so before the appearance of the Dietz edition of Marx’s and Engels’s correspondence.

## Lenin’s Anti-Kantianism as Anti-Revisionism

There is one motive for reading Hegel to which the researchers have, to my mind, not paid enough attention. As previously mentioned, the “treachery” of the leaders of the Second International, which so shocked Lenin, must have had its roots in some kind of theoretical deficiency. The main protagonists of the German Social Democrats, such as Kautsky and Bernstein, were not able to make a concrete analysis of the concrete situation, but were caged in their abstractions. It was only natural to see the theoretical causes of this abstractness in Kant’s philosophy, which was expressly embraced by the “revisionists” in German social democracy such as Bernstein, or at least tolerated, as by Kautsky. Plekhanov, as one of the most important theoreticians of the left in the Second International, had already in the 1890s denounced the growing influence of Kantian “ethical socialism” in the workers’ movement.

Plekhanov and Lenin do not seem to have studied Kant in detail. Nevertheless, the Königsberg thinker was for both of them an arch-abstractionist and a formalist, the philosophical source of revisionism. So it was only natural to invoke Hegel in order to drive the specter of revisionism out from the revolutionary movement.

This “anti-Kantian” motive continues in Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks*. Even from the beginning, he quotes from Hegel’s preface to the first edition of *Science of Logic*: “In Kant, the ‘empty abstraction’ of the Thing-in-itself instead of living *Gang*, *Bewegung*, deeper and deeper, of our knowledge about things.”<sup>25</sup> In the *Notebooks*, Lenin identifies Kant with Machists and

<sup>24</sup>V.I. Lenin, *The Marx–Engels Correspondence*, in: CW vol. 19.

<sup>25</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: CW vol. 38.

“other agnostics,”<sup>26</sup> against whom he fought in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, thus indicating that his motives in reading Hegel do not conflict with his earlier critique of the idealist theory of cognition of Bogdanov and Machism. As to Plekhanov’s earlier critique of Kantianism, Lenin acknowledges it but adds that it did not go as far as needed:

Plekhanov criticises Kantianism (and agnosticism in general) more from a vulgar-materialistic standpoint than from a dialectical-materialistic standpoint, *insofar as* he merely *rejects* their views a limine, but does not *correct* them (as Hegel corrected Kant), deepening, generalising and extending them, showing the *connection* and *transitions* of each and every concept.<sup>27</sup>

Here, too, we see that Lenin interprets Hegel above all as “the thinker of the concrete”, not taking note of the subtleties of the dialectical logic. The intention to use Hegel as an antidote to the Kantian revisionism in the workers’ movement must be seen as one of the main incentives in Lenin’s turn to Hegel.

Disavowing the significance of Kant’s heritage has grave consequences for Marxist philosophy, which Lenin seems not to have foreseen. To be precise, it is not the critique and its arguments that have gone wrong, but its target: Lenin repudiates Kant, but means in fact the Neo-Kantians and their subjectivistic interpretation of critical philosophy. In other words, Lenin inappropriately equates the ideas of German “ethical socialists” and revisionists with the genuine philosophy of Kant. In doing so, he does not differ from the other writers of the left wing of the Second International, such as Mehring and Plekhanov, who attacked Kant in the same manner, although they should have attacked the Neo-Kantians. The latter provided an interpretation of Kant’s philosophy that was far more subjectivistic and idealistic than the original doctrine of the Königsberg thinker. Kant was an opponent of subjective idealism of the Berkeleyan kind and even added a special section with the title ‘Refutation of Idealism’ to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* where he defended the reality of the outer world. Above all, Kant’s concept of the things-in-themselves was meant as a guarantee of the objectivity of our sensations: if there were nothing “behind” the appearances

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<sup>26</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: CW vol. 38. Actually, he had made the same identification in the above-quoted letter to Gorky from 1908: “Our empirio-critics, empirio-monists, and empirio-symbolists” have confused “in the most disgraceful manner materialism with Kantianism” (CW vol. 13).

<sup>27</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: CW vol. 38, p. 179.

that would cause them to emerge, our sensations would indeed be merely subjective. For Kant, the things-in-themselves were, “although unknown to us, nonetheless real” objects (*Prolegomena* § 13). For Neo-Kantians, on the contrary, the things-in-themselves were an unnecessary hypothesis that would only lead to a cumbersome dualism of subjective and objective components in our knowledge. Consequently, they recommended its abolishment. The empirio-criticism of Mach had a similar position, as it held that the difference between an outer object and the sense-impression it creates in us was an unnecessary duplication.

## Lenin on “Elements of Dialectics”

The greatest part of Lenin’s excerpt of Hegel’s *Logic* is a synopsis only, where Lenin makes either direct quotations from Hegel’s text or retells the content of the relevant passages in his own words. In reading Lenin’s notes on Hegel, one should bear in mind that they were as such not intended for publication, and so they must be interpreted with a certain caution. Kevin Anderson seems now and then to forget this hermeneutic rule; for example, when he quotes from Lenin the note: “The idea of the transformation of the ideal into the real is *profound!* [...] Against vulgar materialism. NB. The difference of the ideal from the material is also not unconditional, not boundless,”<sup>28</sup> Anderson then comments that this passage is “the turning point”, where “Lenin begins to identify himself fairly openly with Hegel’s idealism.”<sup>29</sup> However, even a superficial look at Lenin’s later, published texts on philosophy should have made it clear that Lenin did not retreat a millimeter from his previous materialist positions. So Lenin in the passage quoted by Anderson must either only sum up Hegel’s view, not his own, or he has again changed his mind on this central question of philosophy almost immediately after he had jotted down the sentence in question.

Although it is not always easy to distinguish passages and formulations that summarise Hegel’s views from those expressing Lenin’s own thoughts, there are some passages in the Hegel conspectus, where Lenin steps aside from rewriting Hegel and formulates some reflections concerning what he just has read. One such passage is at the end of the notes on *Science of Logics*, with the title *Summary of Dialectics*; another is a longer fragment, written

<sup>28</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, in: CW vol. 38, p. 114.

<sup>29</sup>Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

in 1915, *On the Question of Dialectics*, which, according to the editors of Lenin's works, "is contained in a notebook between the conspectus of Lassalle's book on Heraclitus and the conspectus of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*."<sup>30</sup> It seems that these fragments give the most "authentic" picture of Lenin's ideas concerning dialectics and Hegel's importance for Marxism.

In the first fragment, *Summary of Dialectics*, Lenin departs from Hegel's definition of the "dialectical moment" in the judgment, which runs as follows: "This equally synthetic and analytic moment of the *Judgment*, by which (the moment) the original universality [general concept] determines itself out of itself as other in relation to itself, must be called dialectical."<sup>31</sup> One almost sees Lenin shaking his head, when he comments: "A determination which is not a clear one!" But Lenin tries, nonetheless, to capture the essential features of Hegel's dialectics. He lists as many as sixteen "elements of dialectics," among them "the entire totality of the manifold *relations* of this thing to others"; the idea of development; the thing or phenomenon as the sum and unity of opposites; "not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other"; "the endless process of the discovery of *new* sides, relations, etc."; "the repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower"; and "the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)."<sup>32</sup>

If one considers more closely all these definitions of the "elements" of dialectics, it soon becomes soon that they are mostly nothing but further specifications of the view on dialectics that Lenin had already arrived at long before the assumed "turn" of 1914. Even in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, dialectics is for Lenin above all a theory of concreteness, a method of taking into account all the details and sides of the phenomenon to be analyzed.

This impression gets confirmed when we read the second fragment, *On the Question of Dialectics*, which was apparently written a bit later than the previous one. Here Lenin first mentions "unity of opposites" as a characteristic of dialectics, but then continues: "Dialectics as *living*, many-sided knowledge (with the number of sides eternally increasing), with an infinite number of shades of every approach and approximation to reality (with a philosophical system growing into a whole out of each shade)—here we have an immeasurably rich content as compared with "metaphysical"

<sup>30</sup>V.I. Lenin, CW vol. 38, p. 580.

<sup>31</sup>In the original: "Dieses so sehr synthetische als analytische Moment des *Urteils*, wodurch das anfängliche Allgemeine aus ihm selbst als das *Anderere Seiner* sich bestimmt, ist das *dialektische zu nennen*" (Lenin's quotation from Hegel, CW vol. 38, p. 220).

<sup>32</sup>V.I. Lenin, CW vol. 38, pp. 220–221.

materialism.”<sup>33</sup> He stresses the richness, many-sidedness and concreteness of the dialectical research:

Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral. Any fragment, segment, section of this curve can be transformed (transformed one-sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into the quagmire, into clerical obscurantism (where it is *anchored* by the class interests of the ruling classes). Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and subjective blindness—*voilà* the epistemological roots of idealism.<sup>34</sup>

I think it is not necessary to dwell long upon the point that “rectilinearity and one-sidedness,” as well as “petrification” and “subjectivism” all characterize, for Lenin, both the Machian idealism he fought in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the alleged Kantianism (in reality, Neo-Kantianism) of the revisionists in the Second International, against which Lenin sought philosophical weapons in his *Notebooks* of 1914–1916. In both cases, Lenin’s interests are not purely theoretical, but are mixed with political motives. Once more: one should not try to find in Lenin any “impartial” philosophical inquiry, irrespective of the political and social situation of the day.

Lenin’s attempt to fix the elements of dialectics in a series of points, misses several important characteristics of Hegel’s thought. Above all, Lenin does not take into account the deepest motive of Hegel, namely his insisting that the duality or contradiction between substance and subject must be overcome. This overcoming presupposes an objective idealistic approach. According to Hegel, there are already “germs” of ideality in the matter (i.e. the opposition between spirit and matter is relative only), and the task of the dialectical exposition is to show how these germs develop into a full-fledged ideality. The result is a successive series of sublations, which, taken together, constitute what Hegel famously called “Exposition of God as He was before the creation of world and the finite spirit.”<sup>35</sup> The dualist thinker whom Hegel wanted to overcome was Immanuel Kant, and one does not go altogether wrong characterizing Hegel’s whole *Logic* as a grandiose attempt to refute Kant. It was, for Hegel, important to remove the Kantian dualism

<sup>33</sup>VI. Lenin, CW vol. 38, p. 360.

<sup>34</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, I (Einleitung), in: Hegel, *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999, p. 34.

between the (transcendental) Ego and the things-in-themselves, a dualism that, according to him, generated only pernicious abstractions.

It is indeed striking that Lenin, in his eagerness to employ Hegel's arguments against Kant as a weapon against the revisionists in the workers' movement, does not take account of the fact that the critique against Kant in the form Hegel attempts it, is possible only by accepting the objective-idealist premises of the latter. The thing-in-itself, this materialist "stumbling-block" contained in Kant's doctrine, can be removed only if the duality of the substance (to which the thing belongs) and the subject (the Ego) is sublated in a higher unity. Now Lenin, despite of all his materialism, suddenly embraces Hegel's objective-idealist methodology! The reason for this "blindness" of Lenin was, of course, that the "pure" philosophical motive became intermingled with the political motive of anti-revisionist struggle.

## Lenin and Bukharin's "Scholasticism"

To round up the picture of Lenin's views on Hegel and dialectics, I will analyze some of Lenin's latest statements from the year 1920, which concern Nikolai Bukharin's "scholasticism." That Lenin was critical of Bukharin just in this respect is generally known. In his "testament" to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, which he dictated to the stenographer in December 22, 1922, Lenin characterized Nikolai Bukharin in a contradictory manner. On the one hand, he stressed, that Bukharin was "not only the most highly valued and important Party theoretician, he is also legitimately regarded as the favourite of the entire Party." But then the praise abruptly turned into rebuke: "[i]t is very doubtful if his theoretical outlook can be considered as fully Marxist, as there is something scholastic about him (he has never studied dialectics and never quite understood it, I think)".<sup>36</sup>

I have come across only two studies from the epoch before *Perestroika* that attempt to analyze at length the relations between Bukharin and Lenin from the viewpoint of dialectics. The first is Kevin Anderson's article from 1987 scrutinizing the "contrasts" between Lenin's and Bukharin's analyses of imperialism,<sup>37</sup> the other is Richard Day's over a decade older study on dialectical method in Lenin's and Bukharin's political

<sup>36</sup>V.I. Lenin, CW vol. 36, p. 595.

<sup>37</sup>Kevin Anderson, "Lenin, Bukharin and the Marxian Concept of Dialectics and Imperialism: A Study in Contrasts", in: *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 1987, vol. 15 (Fall), pp. 197–212. The date "30. V. 1920" is written by Lenin towards the end of the book (p. 401).

writings.<sup>38</sup> Since Bukharin, too, insists that he is applying the dialectical method in his writings, it seems that a comparative approach seems undoubtedly to be the most appropriate if one wants to identify the differences between Bukharin and Lenin on this question.

I choose as my point of reference a text seldom taken into account in the literature on Lenin: his marginal notes and comments to Bukharin's book *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda* (*The Economy of the Transition Period*), published in Moscow in 1920. In this book, Bukharin tried to analyze the economic perspectives of the development of post-capitalist Russia. Lenin seems to have read the book immediately after it was published, since his notes were jotted down in May 1920, according to the editors of *Leninskij sbornik*, where they were published for the first time.<sup>39</sup> Richard Day has used the same publication in his aforementioned study, but only partially; to my mind, a closer reading of Lenin's notes is very instructive and sheds light on the character of "dialectics" both in Bukharin and in Lenin himself.

The book was written in a period when Bukharin still represented a "leftist" standpoint in politics and thus Lenin's keen interest in it was quite understandable. The first remark from Lenin's pen comes in the opening of the book, concerning the sub-title 'A General Theory of the Transformation Process', where Lenin comments at the margin: "What's this? 'General'? à la Spencer?"<sup>40</sup> The comment indicates that Lenin will place Bukharin's ideas in the context of positivism rather than in the tradition of Marxism.

This is an important point that seems to have escaped the analyses of Anderson and Day, as they do not pay enough attention to the fact that Bukharin was, in many questions of theory, heavily influenced by Aleksandr Bogdanov, Lenin's old adversary. As Bogdanov fell into disgrace in the eyes of the Bolsheviks before even the October Revolution after the fierce attack against him by Lenin in 1909, it was not opportune for Bukharin to stress too much his ties with Bogdanovian ideas. However, despite this, in *Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda*, he refers several times approvingly to Bogdanov. Lenin is quick to note Bogdanovian elements in Bukharin. For example, when Bukharin criticizes Kautsky for not being able to analyze the crisis of capitalism in a dialectical manner, Lenin comments at the

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<sup>38</sup>Richard B. Day, "Dialectical Method in the Political Writings of Lenin and Bukharin", in: *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, vol. 9:2 (June 1976), pp. 244–260; available also as electronic version in: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3230922>.

<sup>39</sup>See V.I. Lenin, *Zamechanija na knigu N.I. Bukharina: "Ekonomika perekhodnogo perioda"*. Maj 1920, in: *Leninskij sbornik X*, Moskva–Leningrad 1929, pp. 345–403.

<sup>40</sup>Lenin, *Zamechanija*, p. 348.

margin: “Dialectical process! Exactly so! And not scholastics à la Bogdanov. The author [Bukharin—V.O.] puts the dialectical process alongside the *Begriffsscholastik* of Bogdanov. But one should not put them alongside. It is either—or.”<sup>41</sup>

This comment of Lenin makes quite clear that the “scholasticism” in Bukharin’s views is of Bogdanovian (and ultimately, Positivist) origin. At the same time it is obvious, that Lenin did not regard Bukharin as a hopelessly lost case, but saw the influence of Bogdanov only as one—albeit strong—string in his theoretical constructs.

On another locus in Bukharin’s book, where the author speaks of how the elements of a social structure can be considered from the viewpoint of the system of production, Lenin continues his evaluation: “The error of ‘Bogdanovian’ terminology is here obvious: *subjectivism*, solipsism.”<sup>42</sup> The question is not, who ‘considers’, for whom this is ‘interesting’; the question is, what is independent of human consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> A couple of pages later, Lenin again comes to Bogdanov’s “pernicious” influence on Bukharin. When the latter uses the expression “dialectico-historical viewpoint,” Lenin jots down a note: “From this phrase one can in an especially clear-cut manner see, that for the author, who is corrupted by the eclecticism of Bogdanov, the dialectical ‘viewpoint’ is only one possible ‘viewpoint’ among many equal viewpoints.”<sup>44</sup>

According to Lenin, it is “naïve” to declare, as Bukharin does, that one can take “terms” from Bogdanov and use for other purposes. In declaring so, Bukharin did not see, that the terms of Bogdanov and their meanings are grounded in his philosophy, which is “a philosophy of idealism and eclecticism.” In his book, Bukharin is sometimes standing on his feet, sometimes again topsy-turvy, writes Lenin—alluding, perhaps, here to the well-known dictum of Marx that Hegel is standing on his head.<sup>45</sup>

Besides Bogdanov’s influence, there are other moments in Bukharin’s book that Lenin sees as tokens of his inability to use the dialectical method correctly. For example, when Bukharin writes, that the “system of (socialist)

<sup>41</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 361. In original: “Диалектич(еск)ий пр(о)ц(е)сс. Именно! А не схоластика à la Богд(ано)в. Автор ставит его *рядом* (и на 2 месте) с *Begriffsscholastik* Богданова. Но *рядом* поставить нельзя: или—или.

<sup>42</sup>In his later prison notebooks of 1937, the *Philosophical Arabesques*, Bukharin included a ponderous and strangely affective verdict against “solipsism.” It seems to me that it is an attempt to get rid of just this accusation here in Lenin’s notes.

<sup>43</sup>*op. cit.* p. 385.

<sup>44</sup>*op. cit.* p. 387.

<sup>45</sup>*op. cit.*, pp. 400–401.

dictature” is a “dialectical negation” of state capitalism, Lenin comments: “The author abuses the *word* ‘dialectical negation’: one should not use it without *before* having shown with *scrutiny* the facts.”<sup>46</sup> It is thus an incorrect procedure to impose the general laws of dialectics directly on concrete empirical material.

Lenin repeats the same argument against Bukharin’s too abstract approach some 20 pages later, but now in another formulation. When Bukharin writes that the nation-state had become already before the First World War “a pure fiction,” Lenin remarks acidly: “Not a *pure fiction*, but an impure form. The violation of “dialectical materialism” consists of a *logical* (not material) *leap* over *several* concrete stages.”<sup>47</sup>

The examination of the book ends with a parody of a *recensio academica*, evoked by Bukharin’s attempts to use “scientific” vocabulary. Mocking this kind of coquetterie, Lenin writes:

The excellent qualities of this excellent book suffer from a kind of de-qualification, because they are limited, *primo*, by the fact that the author does not ground sufficiently his postulates with a solid, albeit selected amount of factual material, although he has a complete command over them via literature. A more extensive groundwork consisting of facts would have freed the book from the defects in its ‘sociological’ or rather ‘philosophical’ aspect. But *secundo*: the author does not examine the economic processes with sufficient concreteness *in actu*; he often falls in what is called – as *terminus technicus* – the *Begriffscholastik*, and does not consider that many [of his] unsuccessful formulations and terms are rooted in a philosophy *sub specie* ‘*Grundgedanken*’ along the lines of *idealismi philosophici seu agnosticismi*: (*recht oft unbesehen und unkritisch von anderen übernehmen*), and not along *materialismi*. Permit me to express the hope that this small fault will disappear in subsequent editions of the book [...] We congratulate the academy for a magnificent work by one of its members.<sup>48</sup>

My English rendering does not do justice to the waggish tone of the Russian original. Despite the parodic form, Lenin gives here *in nuce* the faults of Bukharin’s theoretical approach: lack of concreteness and a too uncritical attitude to the concepts rooted in an idealist philosophy (that is, in Positivism and Bogdanov’s theories).

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<sup>46</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 378.

<sup>47</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 399.

<sup>48</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 402.

At the same time, Lenin's critical notes on the vestiges of "Bogdanovism" in Bukharin reveal that, otherwise, as many have claimed, Lenin has not, after studying Hegel's *Logic* in 1914–1915, principally altered the interpretation of Marxist philosophy he gave in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* of 1909. The verdict on Bogdanov remains unchanged, and the critique of Bukharin repeats the same motifs we already have encountered in trying to grasp Lenin's idea of dialectics: it is an exhortation always to make concrete analyses. As such, this approach does not have anything specially "Hegelian" in it. An all-sided and concrete study of the objects being studied is a general requirement of all scientific inquiry. To call Lenin's political and economical analyses examples of the Hegelian method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete, as some authors have done,<sup>49</sup> is, to my mind, an over-interpretation. We may see such an ascent—or at least traces of it—in Marx's *Capital*, which begins with the analysis of the dual nature of the commodity and proceeds then to the categories of value, money, capital, wage labor and so on. But Lenin never wrote a work like Marx's *Capital*, which especially in its first chapter, proceeds in a strictly deductive manner, deriving one concept from another; his analyses were always more "open."

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<sup>49</sup>See, for example, Evald Ilyenkov in his seminal work *Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Marx's Capital*, published in 1960, in the initial phase of Khrushchev's "thaw" period. This work introduced again, after the demise of the Deborin school in 1929, a "Hegelian" interpretation of Marxism in the Soviet Union. Ilyenkov declares "the ascent from abstract to the concrete" as the quintessence of both Hegel's and Marx's method and lets the reader know, that Lenin, too, was an adherent of this method: "A 'logical argument' of the 'on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand' type, an argument more or less accidentally isolating various aspects of the objects and placing them in more or less accidental connection, was rightly ridiculed by Lenin as argument in the spirit of scholastic formal logic [...]. If the Party reasoned about trade unions according to this principle, there could be no hope for any principled, scientifically worked-out political line. It would have been tantamount to a complete rejection of a theoretical attitude to things in general" (Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, Chap. 2; (cited here according to the Internet version, in: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/abstra2.htm>).

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# 3

## Lenin's Philosophy in Intellectual Context

Daniela Steila

In analyzing Lenin's attitude toward theoretical issues, one should first of all abandon two opposite prejudices: on the one hand, the idea that Lenin's thought should be considered the cornerstone of Marxist philosophy, which has been dominant in the Soviet Union for decades; on the other hand, the idea, quite popular in the West, that Lenin was an opportunist, keen to bend his theory to the superior tasks of political praxis.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, "a serious intellectual biography of Lenin", as Alex Callinicos pointed out, would reveal "less his casual attitude to theory than the systematic manner in which every significant turn in events drove him to reconsider how best the situation was to be understood from a theoretical perspective".<sup>2</sup> The constant connections between theory and praxis in Lenin's actions and thought seem to characterize him more as "a political thinker, a philosopher of politics, and only subsequently as a philosopher *ex professo*."<sup>3</sup> However, Lenin's interest in philosophy as such is supported by reliable evidence throughout his whole life.<sup>4</sup> Nikolaj Valentinov, a philosophical adversary who described him without any leniency, disclosed that young Lenin had arrived in Siberia with a few books, but had left with many trunks, since his sister Anna had procured him volumes by Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte, d'Holbach and Helvétius.<sup>5</sup>

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Among Lenin's first published works are a number of philosophical essays, where he developed his ideas on historical materialism against both "subjectivism" and "objectivism." In 1894–1895, at the peak of the debate between Marxism and Populism, Lenin dealt with the problem of determinism in history. N.K. Mikhajlovsky's subjectivist sociology notoriously insisted on the individual's creative role within history, while the Marxists claimed a scientific interpretation of historical reality that was soundly founded on principles as certain as the laws of natural sciences. And it would be exactly knowledge of the historical laws that would be required to guarantee the success of Marxist praxis. Lenin summarized: "The idea of determinism, which postulates that human acts are necessitated and rejects the absurd tale about free will, in no way destroys man's reason or conscience, or appraisal of his actions. Quite the contrary, only the determinist view makes a strict and correct appraisal possible instead of attributing everything you please to free will. Similarly, the idea of historical necessity does not in the least undermine the role of the individual in history: all history is made up of the actions of individuals, who are undoubtedly active figures. The real question that arises in appraising the social activity of an individual is: what conditions ensure the success of his actions, what guarantee is there that these actions will not remain an isolated act lost in a welter of contrary acts?"<sup>6</sup>

The success of praxis depends on the correct knowledge of historical forces and dynamics. Lenin emphasized it clearly while polemicizing on the opposite front against the "objectivists," who were dominated by the pure necessity of historical process, which they interpreted from a positivist standpoint as a strict series of facts. Lenin wrote: "when demonstrating the necessity for a given series of facts, the objectivist always runs the risk of becoming an apologist for these facts," while "the materialist discloses the class contradictions and in so doing defines his standpoint." The historical materialist "does not limit himself to speaking of the necessity of a process, but ascertains exactly what social-economic formation gives the process its content, *exactly what class* determines this necessity. [...] [M]aterialism includes partisanship, so to speak, and enjoins the direct and open adoption of the standpoint of a definite social group in any assessment of events."<sup>7</sup> According to Lenin, Marxism therefore guaranteed correct answers to both theoretical and practical problems and, however complex a situation might be, Marxist analysis would lead to the most consistent and effective strategy.<sup>8</sup> Since his encounter with Marx and Engels, whom he had been studying with commitment and devotion from the end of the 1880s onwards, Lenin convinced himself of what he maintained in 1913: "The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true."<sup>9</sup>

Plekhanov, the so-called “father of Russian Marxism”<sup>10</sup> had the same deep conviction: a sound philosophical basis, a comprehensive worldview that accounted consistently for both nature and history were to him the only certain guarantee of the success of any possible human action. Lenin acknowledged Plekhanov’s philosophical authority even when, in politics, he was the farthest from his master. In 1921, Lenin still maintained “for the benefit of young party members that you *cannot* hope to become a *real*, intelligent Communist without making a study—and I mean *study*—of all of Plekhanov’s philosophical writings, because nothing better has been written on Marxism anywhere in the world.”<sup>11</sup> Plekhanov surely influenced Lenin’s philosophical instruction. In June 1899, complaining about his own “lack of philosophical education,” Lenin confessed to Potresov: “I do not intend to write on these subjects until I have learned more. That is just what I am doing—I have started with Holbach and Helvétius, and am now taking up Kant.”<sup>12</sup> The French materialists were among Plekhanov’s most authoritative sources, and the discussion about Kant was at the time the center of his polemics against German and Russian revisionism.<sup>13</sup> In order to improve his own philosophical education, Lenin took Plekhanov’s path.

The idea that a socialist consciousness could develop “only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge” was actually quite widespread among the Second International Marxists.<sup>14</sup> For Lenin, at the beginning of the century, that meant the necessity of a strong intellectual leadership within the revolutionary organization. In *What Is To Be Done?*, as is well known, the idea is very clearly expressed: “Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers”.<sup>15</sup> “The history of all countries,” Lenin noticed, “shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness”.<sup>16</sup> The belief that an inspiring leadership should develop the socialist consciousness of the masses and conduct them to success was maintained by Lenin during his whole life,<sup>17</sup> though with different nuances.

While in the programmatic work of 1902 the leading role of a revolutionary *élite* was undoubted, in 1904, in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, within the context of the split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, Lenin insisted that the intellectuals should take lessons from the proletarians: “The proletariat is trained for organization by its whole life, far more radically than many an intellectual prig”.<sup>18</sup> Trotsky immediately commented on this presumed turn in Lenin’s thought: “The proletariat, the very proletariat you were told yesterday ‘spontaneously tends towards trade unionism,’ is today invited to give lessons in *political* discipline! And to whom?

To the same intelligentsia which in yesterday's plan was given the role of bringing proletarian political consciousness to the proletariat from the outside!"<sup>19</sup> To Trotsky this was the sign "that Lenin simply used Marxist theory for his own political maneuvering".<sup>20</sup> Taking a more favorable attitude, one might say that Lenin was trying to adapt his positions to a different context, and to preserve at the same time the task of a strongly structured revolutionary organization. Rosa Luxemburg participated in the discussion with her *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy*, published in July 1904 simultaneously in Germany, in *Die Neue Zeit*, and in Russia, in *Iskra*. According to Luxemburg, class consciousness emerges from the interaction between the party and the proletarian mass. The working class should "acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the Social Democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility," since "the self-discipline of the Social Democracy is not merely the replacement of the authority of bourgeois rulers with the authority of a socialist central committee."<sup>21</sup>

Quite curiously, the comrade who intervened in Lenin's defense was Alexandr Bogdanov, who was soon to become his main philosophical opponent. In *Rosa Luxemburg contra Karl Marx*, published under the pseudonym "Rjadovoj," Bogdanov (which was itself a *nom de plume*; his actual surname was Malinovsky) relied on Marx's authority, and ascribed to him the idea that the discipline of the working class directly depended on working conditions.<sup>22</sup> That is why, according to Bogdanov, the proletarian vanguard was already mature enough to lead the political organization and develop its own new culture. The question whether a new proletarian culture would be produced during the struggle against capitalism, and would then bring the revolution to success, or whether it would be a consequence, and not even an immediate one, of the revolution itself, was soon to set Bogdanov and Lenin against one another for their entire lives. Recently, Craig Brandist maintained that "the notorious conflicts between Lenin and Bogdanov were actually focused more on understandings of how to pursue a hegemonic project in present circumstances than on the philosophical polemics over Bogdanov's 'Empiriomonism.' While Lenin focused on the directly political dimensions of hegemony, Bogdanov foregrounded the need to develop an elaborated proletarian culture in advance of the seizure of state power."<sup>23</sup>

In 1904, their disagreement on this point went almost unnoticed. At that time, the two main Bolshevik leaders exhibited a solid alliance. During the summer, Bogdanov and Lenin met for the first time in Switzerland, in order to discuss common projects and Bolshevik publications. At the time,

Bogdanov was already a well-known revolutionary and a leading thinker. Lenin was well aware of his ideas: in 1897 Bogdanov had published *A Short Course of Economic Science*, which Lenin reviewed with enthusiasm, possibly thinking 'Bogdanov' was a new pseudonym of Plekhanov's.<sup>24</sup> A couple of years later, during his stay in Siberia, Lenin had "studied" Bogdanov's "energeticist book, *The Historical View of Nature*"<sup>25</sup>; in the summer of 1903 in Geneva, he and Plekhanov had discussed "with a delegate from the editors of the symposium" *Studies in the Realistic World-View*,<sup>26</sup> a collective book, in which a heterogeneous group of authors, including Bogdanov, took a stand against the influential volume *Problems of Idealism*.<sup>27</sup> According to Lenin's later report, both he and Plekhanov agreed to contribute to the common anti-idealist enterprise, he "on the agrarian question, Plekhanov on *anti-Machist philosophy*."<sup>28</sup> Initially the delegate accepted those conditions, but neither Lenin nor Plekhanov finally contributed, which is not surprising, since the volume turned out to be the first collective statement of the group of thinkers who were to become the "enemies" of Orthodox Marxism. In the preface, they stated "*a monistic ideal of knowledge*,"<sup>29</sup> which some of the authors (Suvorov, Lunacharsky, Bazarov, Bogdanov himself) discovered in Richard Avenarius's and Ernst Mach's ideas, where they found a radical rejection of dualism, starting from the fundamental dualism of thinking and being, physical and psychical.<sup>30</sup>

When Lenin met Bogdanov in person, he knew the latter's philosophical thought, but also his dedication as a revolutionary and his talent as a writer. At that time, Lenin needed reliable support in Russia, and new forces to use in the press against the Mensheviks. Bogdanov and his friends could give him both, and Lenin decided to make a pact with them, "a tacit bloc, which tacitly ruled out philosophy as a neutral field"<sup>31</sup>: the Bolsheviks were not going to discuss philosophy on the party press. All the evidence, however, confirms Lenin's version that privately the conflict had already exploded during his first meeting with Bogdanov, as they "immediately gave each other presents—I [Lenin], my *Steps*, he, one of his *current* philosophical work", probably the first volume of *Empiriomonism*.<sup>32</sup> Lenin's reaction was immediate: "I at once (in the spring or the early summer of 1904) wrote to him in Paris from Geneva that his writings strongly convinced me that his views were wrong and as strongly convinced me that those of Plekhanov were correct."<sup>33</sup> Valentinov took note of Bogdanov's comments about his harsh debate with Lenin in the summer of 1904: "We excitedly discussed for two days and almost had a real fight. I heard Lenin's judgments on philosophy for the first time and convinced myself that it was better not to quarrel with him on those subjects. He had a lot of passion in fighting, but little

knowledge.”<sup>34</sup> The private fights went on for years: when, in the summer of 1906, Lenin and Bogdanov together with their wives shared a country house named “Vasa” in the Finnish village of Kuokkala, close to the border, the philosophical conflict was still on.<sup>35</sup> In public, however, in front of the Social Democrats of both factions, Lenin and Bogdanov behaved as good partners: Lenin did not mention his disapproval of his comrade’s ideas, Bogdanov intervened on the present-day issues (the polemic against the Mensheviks, the relations with the Liberals, the war against Japan), using his battle-name “Rjadovoj” instead of the pseudonym “Bogdanov,” which was his signature on the philosophical works.<sup>36</sup>

Such an agreement between Bogdanov and Lenin could not but worry Plekhanov and his followers, who started acting as the defenders of Marxist orthodoxy. The first essay that appeared in November 1904 against Bogdanov’s “Machism” on the page of *Iskra*, at that time a Menshevik paper, was signed by L.I. Aksel’rod (Ortodoks). She openly wrote to her sister: Lenin “is becoming Bog[danov]’s ally and probably they will edit together their publications. [...] [T]he essay is now necessary from a political standpoint.”<sup>37</sup> The central idea in her essay was that “empiriomonism” was nothing else than “a new form of revisionism,” such as Bernstein’s in Germany, and legal Marxism in Russia; some Marxists, lacking theoretical solidity, betrayed their own principles, and yielded to bourgeois philosophers. But the very beginning of the essay clearly showed that, together with the polemic on philosophy, its aim was to cause a disturbance among the Bolsheviks and to undermine their “bloc.” Ljubov’ Aksel’rod recalled that “about one year and a half ago Lenin suggested to me to intervene against the new ‘critic’ of the Marxian theory, expressed in comrade Bogdanov’s works.”<sup>38</sup> The intention to put Lenin in a difficult position with his ally was clear.

At that time, the pact between Lenin and Bogdanov was often referred to in the political debates by Plekhanov, who had become more and more averse to “centralism,”<sup>39</sup> which, according to him, was turning into open “Blanquism” and “Bonapartism.”<sup>40</sup> Lenin’s voluntarism in political strategy seemed to be wholly consistent with the theoretical subjectivism that Plekhanov saw in “Machism.”<sup>41</sup> Lenin reacted during the Third Congress of the party (actually a Bolshevik Congress) in 1905 by talking about Plekhanov’s polemics against the organ of the faction: “Unable to prove that *Vpered* wants to ‘criticize’ Marx, Plekhanov drags in Mach and Avenarius by the ears. I cannot for the life of me understand what these writers, for whom I have not the slightest sympathy, have to do with the question of social revolution.”<sup>42</sup> Plekhanov in his turn observed that Mach and Avenarius

as philosophers were actually secondary subjects in a political journal, but the Bolsheviks' interest in their thought turned out to be wholly consistent with their parting from orthodoxy in the direction of subjectivism. Surely, Lenin could not be defined as a Machist, and to him—Plekhanov continued—“Mach and Avenarius are in fact alien ‘subjects.’ But to him any philosophical ‘subject’ is alien as well, since he has never cared about anything in philosophy. Therefore, in this respect, he counts for nothing. This is in the first place. And, in the second—who knows?—maybe even Lenin the Marxist started to give into the influence of surrounding *Machists*. As for myself, I confess that, according to the French saying *ce sont les enfants des autres qui gâtent les nôtres*, I explain the many blunders of the journals *Vpered* and *Proletary* exactly with the harmful influence of the ‘critics of Marx’ gathering around him [Lenin].”<sup>43</sup> Lenin was described as a kind of victim of his own allies, being weak in his philosophical knowledge, and rather disinterested in theoretical integrity, while the Machist “heresy” was taking over the Bolsheviks.<sup>44</sup> A deep concern with the criticism of experience seemed so widespread among the Russian revolutionaries that it became a good indication of political belonging. In a short novel published in a journal in 1907, a coroner, charged with the examination of the body of a young man who has killed himself, finds something interesting within the victim's papers, and states: “They are translations from German. A book about philosophy. Look at this: ‘Mach's followers find that critical monism in this development’... Uhm... yes... ‘By abstracting the given tendency from its real essence’... ‘Chapter 3: Empiriomonism and orthodoxy’... It makes no difference, it means revolutionary material...”<sup>45</sup>

The so-called “Machists” did not represent a unique or homogeneous school. They only shared an anti-metaphysical attitude against every absolute, including the idea of absolute truth, the attention to genetic analysis and evolutionism, and the belief that any knowledge has practical implications (all themes that they considered typical both of Mach and Avenarius and Marxism), thereby distancing themselves from Plekhanov's and Lenin's “orthodoxy.” In July 1907, Bogdanov could reproach “comrade Plekhanov” that he was arguing with his philosophical adversaries “*on credit*,” without really coping with the philosophical questions, but just imposing his more or less grounded reputation of being a sound Marxist thinker.<sup>46</sup> But in a few months, a real *Machomakia* exploded among Russian Marxists,<sup>47</sup> and a new front opened among the Bolsheviks, which added itself to the many contrasts that troubled the faction at that time. First of all, Bogdanov and Lenin were on different sides regarding the decision to take part in the election for the State Duma, Lenin being more moderate, approving partici-

pation, and Bogdanov maintaining the opinion that the Social Democrats' priority should be the restart of the revolutionary drive. Second, the clamor provoked by the discovery of direct Bolshevik responsibility for the famous robbery at the Bank of Tbilisi, where the bandit Kamo's group acted with the endorsement of the Bolshevik "Financial Commission", convinced Lenin that it was better to distance himself from the comrades who were personally involved, including Bogdanov. Furthermore, at that moment Lenin could count on other sources of financial support, particularly on a substantial part of the heritage of Nikolaj Schmit, a rich Bolshevik sympathizer who had been arrested for participation in the 1905 riots, and who had killed himself in jail.<sup>48</sup> The fact that finally persuaded Lenin to openly intervene in the philosophical debates against his own Bolshevik comrades, however, was the circumstance that more and more often Machism was identified as the Bolshevik philosophy *tout court*. As already shown, the Mensheviks' insistence on the idea that Bolshevism and Machism were both expressions of the same "subjective arbitrary will and vulgar empiricism,"<sup>49</sup> and the Bolsheviks' silence, Lenin's first of all, in the press, made the identification of Bolshevism and Machism a fairly widespread opinion. The journal of the German Social Democratic Party, *Die Neue Zeit*, celebrated the seventieth anniversary of Ernst Mach's birth by publishing the translation of Bogdanov's preface to the Russian edition of Mach's *Analysis of Sensations*,<sup>50</sup> with a short note by the German translator, where one could read: "Russian Social-Democracy, unfortunately, reveals a strong tendency to making this or that attitude toward Mach a question of factional division within the party. Grave tactical differences of opinion between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks are aggravated by a controversy on a question, which, in our opinion, has no bearing whatever on these differences, namely, whether Marxism, from the point of view of theory, is compatible with the teaching of Spinoza and Holbach, or of Mach and Avenarius."<sup>51</sup> Lenin could not accept that the Menshevik identification of Bolshevism and philosophical revisionism was confirmed and corroborated by such an authoritative source. *Proletary* immediately published a resentful reply: "In this connection the Editorial Board of *Proletary*, as the ideological spokesman of the Bolshevik trend, deems it necessary to state the following. Actually, this philosophical controversy is not a factional one and, in the opinion of the Editorial Board, should not be so; any attempt to represent these differences of opinion as factional is radically erroneous. Both factions contain adherents of the two philosophical trends."<sup>52</sup>

On February 24, 1908, during the meeting when the reply to *Die Neue Zeit* was discussed, the editorial board of *Proletary*, at that time composed

of Lenin, Bogdanov and Dubrovinsky, also debated the publication of an essay by Gorky.<sup>53</sup> Lenin himself had invited the latter to write some notes on modern literature for the journal,<sup>54</sup> but when he received an essay close to Bogdanov's and Lunacharsky's ideas, which expressed an almost religious enthusiasm for the overcoming of the single personality within the collective, Lenin declared that its publication would break the "neutrality" of the newspaper. According to Lenin, it was better to be protected from Mensheviks' attacks on the philosophical front, where the Bolsheviks seemed to be weak. Lenin wrote a few days later to Gorky that the Mensheviks "will gain if the Bolshevik faction does not dissociate itself from the philosophy of the three Bolsheviks [Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and Bazarov]. *In that case*, they will definitely win. But if the philosophical fight goes on outside the faction, the Mensheviks will be definitely reduced to a political line and that will be the death of them."<sup>55</sup> It was certainly a tactical decision, which seems to contradict Lenin's deep belief that philosophy mattered as such within the revolutionary party. Lenin himself confessed that it was a temporary solution: "Can, and should, philosophy be linked with the trend of Party work? With Bolshevism? I think this should not be done at the present time."<sup>56</sup> For this reason, Lenin stood against the publication of Gorky's essay, though he knew that his censure would raise endless debates: "I know I am being abused for this: he wants to stop other people's mouths, while he has not yet opened his own!"<sup>57</sup> Within the editorial board, Bogdanov brought up the question of how to understand the philosophical "neutrality" of *Proletary* as it was claimed in the answer to *Die Neue Zeit*. Bogdanov told Gorky that he put the problem in these terms: "if the board understands this 'neutrality' so that it will find and eradicate the 'empiriomonist spirit' in essays that don't contradict the principles of revolutionary Marxism, I will not be able to stay within the board, obviously, since I am soaked in that 'spirit' myself."<sup>58</sup>

The intention to keep the polemics about philosophy away from the party press did not mean that Lenin disregarded ideological contrasts. At the beginning of 1908, a new volume came out with several different articles on the same model of the *Studies in the Realistic World-View*. This time it was called *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism*,<sup>59</sup> and collected essays by Bazarov, Bogdanov, Lunacharsky, Suvorov and Berman, the Menshevik P.S. Jushkevich and his friend Iosif Gel'fond. The preface pointed out the common elements among these very different authors: the acknowledgement of a strict bond between their philosophy and socialism, and a deep interest in natural sciences and their methods. According to Lenin, "the book, *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism*, has considerably sharpened the old differences

among the Bolsheviks on questions of philosophy,”<sup>60</sup> and that pushed him to come back to some old notes he had started writing during the summer of 1906, when Bogdanov gave him the third volume of his *Empiriomonism*. Then, Lenin told Gorky, “it became clearer to me than ever that he was on an absolutely wrong track, not the Marxist track. I thereupon wrote him a ‘declaration of love,’ a letter on philosophy taking up three notebooks.”<sup>61</sup> He then showed his essay to a few friends, including Lunacharsky, and he thought of publishing it with the title *Notes of an Ordinary Marxist on Philosophy*, thereby emphasizing that, even though he was no “expert,” he could still judge which was the correct Marxist path. Lenin’s notes were never published, but in February 1908, moved by his irritation with *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism*, Lenin asked his relatives to find the notes and send them back to him, so that he could develop them into a radical critique of the Machists’ new ideas. Reading the *Studies*, Lenin persuaded himself that enough was enough: “No, really, it’s too much,” he wrote to Gorky. “To be sure, we ordinary Marxists are not well up in philosophy, but why insult us by serving this stuff up to us as the philosophy of Marxism!”<sup>62</sup> Lenin concluded that “some sort of fight among the Bolsheviks on the question of philosophy” was “quite unavoidable. It would be stupid, however, to split on this.”<sup>63</sup> A few weeks later he insisted: “A fight is *absolutely* inevitable. And party people should devote their efforts not to slurring it over, putting it off or dodging it, but to ensuring that essential party work *does not suffer* in practice.”<sup>64</sup> But the “neutrality” of political work could not be adduced to this aim any more: “there cannot and *will not be* any neutrality on such an issue.”<sup>65</sup> Neutrality could only be relative, and the philosophical discussions should develop with the necessary inflexibility, but in a different field than the everyday political struggle. “Only so will the faction not be committed, not be *involved*, not be compelled tomorrow or the day after to *decide*, to *vote*, i.e., to turn the *fight* into a chronic, protracted, hopeless affair.”<sup>66</sup>

At that point, Lenin considered it necessary to intervene publicly, though not on the party press, against what looked to him like a dangerous heresy. On March 24, Lenin wrote to Gorky: “You must understand [...] that once a party man has become convinced that a certain doctrine is grossly fallacious and *harmful*, he is obliged to come out against it. I would not be kicking up a row if I were not absolutely convinced [...] that their book is ridiculous, harmful, philistine, fideist—the whole of it, from beginning to end, from branch to root, to Mach and Avenarius.” Plekhanov was right in his attack against the Machists, but in Lenin’s opinion “he is unable or unwilling or too lazy to say so *concretely*, in detail, simply, without unrec-

essarily frightening his readers with philosophical nuances." It was time to speak out: "at all costs I shall say it *in my own way*."<sup>67</sup>

Right away, Gorky reported to Bogdanov that Lenin "snorts like a boiling *samovar*, puffs in every direction with his polemical steam, and I am afraid somebody might get burnt."<sup>68</sup> Lenin was irritated not only by the epistemology he had found in the *Studies*, but also by a possible "religious" drift, as he had seen in Lunacharsky's essay, which taught "the workers 'religious atheism' and 'worship' of the higher human potentialities."<sup>69</sup> In Lunacharsky's opinion, Marxism could not be just a "scientific" worldview, but it should turn to the "emotional" aspects of enthusiasm and passion for the ideals,<sup>70</sup> to a new "religion of the humankind," to which also Gorky was very attracted. In general, Gorky thought that Bogdanov and Lunacharsky represented: "the beauty and the strength of our party, raise enormous hopes; in a short time the entire European socialist proletariat will listen to their voices, and I am ready to bet on it!"<sup>71</sup> Gorky, however, admired Lenin too, so much so that he was sure that sooner or later Lenin would convert to the new ideology and would find an agreement with his adversaries. Gorky wrote to Bogdanov: "Lunach[arsky] is right when he says that 'Il'ich [Lenin] does not understand Bolshevism,' but I believe so much in the strength of his brain that I am sure he will understand."<sup>72</sup>

To this aim, Gorky invited to Capri, where he was living, all the leading figures of the philosophical dispute: Bogdanov, Bazarov, Lunacharsky and Lenin. The latter made it immediately clear that he had no intention to speak with them about philosophy. On the eve of his journey to Capri, on April 16, he wrote to Gorky: "It is useless and harmful for me to come: I *cannot* and will not talk to people who are preaching the union of scientific socialism and religion." Then he announced he had already "*sent to be printed* the most formal declaration of war,"<sup>73</sup> meaning his essay *Marxism and Revisionism*, which he had written for the volume *Karl Marx, 1818–1883*. There Lenin's attack against the new "revisionists" took the form of an open declaration of support to Plekhanov. Lenin wrote: "the only Marxist in the international Social-Democratic movement to criticize the incredible platitudes of the revisionists from the standpoint of consistent dialectical materialism was Plekhanov. This must be stressed all the more emphatically since profoundly mistaken attempts are being made at the present time to smuggle in old and reactionary philosophical rubbish disguised as a criticism of Plekhanov's tactical opportunism." In order to leave no doubt about his real objective, Lenin declared in a footnote about the *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism* his intention to "prove in a series of articles, or in

a separate pamphlet, that *everything* I have said in the text about neo-Kantian revisionists essentially applies also to these ‘new’ neo-Humean and neo-Berkeleyan revisionists.”<sup>74</sup>

At the same time, he still insisted on the necessity to keep the faction united at all costs, since “*on no account* is it permissible to mix the disputes of writers about philosophy with a *Party* (i.e., *factional*) matter.”<sup>75</sup> It was probably with the aim of preserving the Bolsheviks’ unity that Lenin agreed to go to Capri in the end. Later, Marija Andreeva, Gorky’s partner, remembered that Lenin stopped any diplomatic effort as soon as he set foot on the island: “Aleksij Maksimovich [Gorky] started talking with Vladimir Il’ich [Lenin] about the passionate attachment that Bogdanov felt for him, Lenin, and about Lunacharsky and Bogdanov, marvelously talented, smart people... Vladimir Il’ich cast a glance to Aleksij Maksimovich, rolled his eyes, and said very firmly: ‘Don’t even try, Aleksij Maksimovich. Nothing will come of it.’”<sup>76</sup>

For a week, Gorky and his guests talked in a more or less friendly manner, went to museums in Naples, to Pompeii, approached Vesuvius, fished and played chess, as is well known from some of the most famous and most counterfeit photographs in history.<sup>77</sup> Many years later, Bogdanov stated that the meeting in Capri had been organized in order to prepare a volume of Bolshevik essays.<sup>78</sup> If that was the aim, Lenin certainly had not agreed to participate. At the time, he was already seriously working on his grasp of philosophical themes. In March, he had already written to Gorky: “I am neglecting the newspaper because of my hard bout of philosophy: one day I read one of the empirio-critics and swear like a fishwife, next day I read another and swear still worse.”<sup>79</sup> For about a year, Lenin almost abandoned any party work, and wholly devoted himself to the study and refutation of his adversaries’ philosophy.<sup>80</sup> Soon after the Capri meeting, Lenin went to London, where, in the British Museum Library, he consulted the literature he could not find in Geneva. So he sank into philosophical texts he had mainly neglected until then. When Lenin had just finished writing *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, Valentinov tried to convince him to read some of Mach’s and Avenarius’s works, but Lenin gave all of them back in a couple of days, together with eleven pages of notes with the title *Idealistische Schrullen*, which he had underlined twice. Valentinov “immediately convinced himself that of all the books that had been given to him, Lenin had only leafed through Mach’s, and had transformed them into a real gobbledygook, since he did not understand Mach’s thoughts at all. Avenarius’s books he did not even touch.”<sup>81</sup> In London, however, Lenin was not only studying Mach and Avenarius, but also, and mostly, their European followers, in order to be

able to outline a general picture of bourgeois philosophy, and to connect his Russian adversaries to it.

While Lenin was studying in London, in the émigré communities debates and conferences continued to take place, and Bolshevik Machists and orthodox Mensheviks faced one another, according to the usual scheme of the polemics between the two factions, which Lenin wanted to overthrow.<sup>82</sup> Starting from May 1908, to the great surprise of the Social Democratic activists and the ubiquitous Russian police agents, orthodox Bolsheviks began to intervene against their Machist comrades, and to emphasize that Bogdanov and Lunacharsky did not represent the philosophy of the faction. Particularly momentous was an episode that happened on May 28, 1908: Bogdanov gave a lecture in Geneva about reacting against Plekhanov and his school, which was later published with the title *The Adventures of a Philosophical School*.<sup>83</sup>

Foreseeing the arguments that Bogdanov was going to use, Lenin sent to Dubrovinsky a list of ten questions as a draft of a polemical speech touching on the main topics covered by the book he was writing at the time. Dialectical materialism was declared to be the philosophy of Marxism, and again and again Engels' authority was restated in regards to the "division of philosophical systems into *idealism* and *materialism*," in order to conclude that Mach could be classified among the idealists, as his follower Petzoldt had himself admitted. Lenin, through Dubrovinsky, provoked Bogdanov by asking: "Does the lecturer acknowledge that recognition of the external world and the reflection of it in the human mind form the basis of the theory of knowledge of dialectical materialism?"<sup>84</sup>

In fact, Lenin's disagreement with Bogdanov was especially serious as regards epistemology. While Lenin advocated the independent existence of social being and its inflexible priority in regard to both single and collective consciousness, Bogdanov deemed that collective consciousness "built," if not created, the social being as its own object. Lenin considered that to be a wholly idealistic position, and, together with Plekhanov, equated it with Berkeley's immaterialism and Hume's agnosticism. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin wrote that Mach's and Avenarius's "claim to have risen above materialism and idealism, to have eliminated the opposition between the point of view that proceeds from the thing *to* consciousness and the contrary point of view—is but the empty claim of a renovated Fichteanism."<sup>85</sup> Lenin insisted that one could not base a sound political project on unavoidably subjective knowledge.

The event of May 1908 provoked great bewilderment. Dubrovinsky was known as a "practical man," without any competence in philosophy, but he

was on the editorial board of *Proletary* and was very close to Lenin. The fact that he had openly attacked another member of the same editorial board seemed a break with the declared “neutrality” of the ideological center of the faction. Two leading Bolsheviks, Grigory Aleksinsky and Mikha Ckhakaja, who attended Bogdanov’s lecture, immediately protested to Lenin that Bogdanov had “remained in his exposition on a purely theoretical field”; Dubrovinsky (under the pseudonym of Dorov), on the contrary, “in front of a heterogeneous public from different parties, contented himself with suspecting quotations and accusing him of bourgeois revisionism” and so on. Aleksinsky and Ckhakaja remarked: “comrade Dorov’s behavior was particularly hard for us, as Bolsheviks: 1) because his speech provoked a clear sympathy and approval from the Menshevik part of the meeting, and 2) because, while he was performing as a ‘practical Bolshevik,’ like comrade Dorov recommended himself to be, he considered necessary to rely on You in his speech to instill in his listeners the obviously false idea that You personally sympathize with such thoughts, harmful for the interests of our faction, and that You cover them with your great political authority.”<sup>86</sup> Lenin answered Aleksinsky with a curt note ending with a vulgar comment and declared that he wanted to interrupt any personal relationship with him.<sup>87</sup>

Bogdanov protested by giving out a “general point of view”, and a little while later he explained it to Gorky: “in public speeches, moves aimed to discredit and compromise the unity of the faction are not allowed”, but such a statement was rejected by the two other members of the editorial board: Lenin and Dubrovinsky.<sup>88</sup> A few weeks later, on June 23, Bogdanov resigned from the editorial board of *Proletary*. The pretext was the difference of opinions about the attitude to be adopted toward the Social Democratic group at the State Duma,<sup>89</sup> but the quarrel was not merely about a simple tactical disagreement: it actually concerned the “leading role of the political organ of the faction” itself. Bogdanov wrote that his adversaries “expect such a role to lead the faction along a way decided in advance by the editorial board itself, by mechanically removing all the nuances of disagreement.”<sup>90</sup> Once again it was question of a different approach to the relationship between the *élite* and the masses, the ideological leadership and the party. According to Bogdanov, the ideological leadership of the faction had to enable the proletariat to develop its own truth by openly debating different positions; for Lenin, by contrast, only a leadership that firmly possessed the unique authentic truth could lead the masses to victory. With those ideas, as Robert Service wrote, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*—the book where Lenin claimed the possibility of a sure and univocal truth—was consistently “a philosophical counterpart to the politics of *What Is To Be Done?*”.<sup>91</sup>

Lenin's book is a very complex work, and not just an essay on philosophy, as it is enlivened by wholly political, passionate and vehement polemics, but it is not a pure tactical gesture either, as if Lenin's interest in philosophy could have been completely deceptive. On the contrary, Lenin took the philosophical problems very seriously. First of all is the question of whether reality is knowable or not; however, his reasons were not only theoretical, because, if the reality is knowable and known, then a true theory would exist, which can lead revolutionary praxis to victory with absolute certainty. Therefore, Lenin's momentous work is ambiguous in its contents and its style, and is difficult to categorize. As James White remarked, "at first sight Lenin's book is an impressive work of scholarship and erudition. [...] From the sources Lenin utilized it is clear that he had made an extensive study of the empiriocriticist school," but "despite this expertise, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is on the whole an uninformative book. [...] The tone is abusive; at every stage words like 'nonsense' and 'gibberish' are used, leaving the reader in no doubt about what conclusions Lenin wishes to be drawn from the material he presents."<sup>92</sup> Quotations and references to their literature are not there to account for the different authors' thought, but they are shown as evidence of the Russian Machists' subjection to the bourgeois philosophy: "they *slavishly* follow the lead of the reactionary professorial philosophy."<sup>93</sup> By juxtaposing different authors from Berkeley and Hume to Petzoldt and Cornelius, Lenin wanted to show that all the Machists belonged to idealism.

The defining point of materialists and Machists was the acknowledgment of an existing reality, independent from the subject, which orthodox Marxists considered undeniable, since doubting ontological materialism necessarily meant compromising the political meaning of historical materialism. Actually, the Machists did not deny the existence of reality at all; by contrast, in Russia they sided with "realism" against the "idealistic turn" at the beginning of the century.<sup>94</sup> In their opinion, however, both the object and the subject were constructions starting from the primary data of sensations. Bazarov wrote: "it is not us who know, i.e. 'reflect,' 'describe,' 'symbolize' etc. objects, which are given to us *before* such a description, but it is the objects that 'give themselves,' or, if you like, 'are created' for us (i.e. for our memory) only within the creative act of knowing."<sup>95</sup> The central theme of Lenin's polemics became epistemology: the "theory of reflection" should guarantee at the same time the independent existence of external reality and the objectivity, and therefore the practical effectiveness, of knowledge, thereby confirming the necessary link between materialism and Marxism. Lenin wrote: "Consciousness in general *reflects* being—that is the general thesis of *all*

materialism. It is impossible not to see its direct and *inseparable* connection with the thesis of historical materialism: social consciousness *reflects* social being.”<sup>96</sup>

Relating to the nature of “reflection,” in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin dissociated himself, within the field of orthodox Marxism, from Plekhanov and his “theory of hieroglyphs”, which the Machists often criticized. In Plekhanov’s opinion, the material object that exists outside us and independently from our consciousness acts on our sense organs and thereby provokes a sensation, which is obviously subjective, since it is not identifiable with the movement by which it is provoked. In this sense, reality gives itself to us as a kind of “translation,” which our physiological sensorial apparatus acquires in its own “language.” But we are sure that “not only do the basic forms of our thinking fully correspond to the relations which exist among things by themselves, *but also that they cannot fail to correspond* to things themselves, otherwise our existence in general would become impossible.”<sup>97</sup> Plekhanov used the term “reflection” only when talking about “concepts,” whereas our knowledge accounts for reality in its complexity and in the contradictory possibilities of development. At the level of sensation, where the subject immediately relates with the object as a “thing,” which only at a deeper consideration reveals itself also as a “process,” Marxist epistemology needed only to guarantee the “correspondence” between subjective sensation and objective phenomenon without implying identity. Plekhanov found support for this point in the theories of I.M. Sechenov, a very well-known Russian physiologist who had been Helmholtz’s student and who, like Helmholtz, defended a theory of knowledge according to which sensations are “symbols” rather than “images” of reality. While working in London, with Western sources more easily available than Russian ones, Lenin ascribed Plekhanov’s “theory of hieroglyphs” directly to Helmholtz, but he insisted that it was only “an obvious mistake in his exposition of materialism.”<sup>98</sup> Plekhanov wanted to turn left “from the Kantian Helmholtz, just as from Kant himself”, in moving toward materialism. The Machists, on the contrary, turned right, in coming back to Hume’s and Berkeley’s agnosticism.

Ontological materialism seemed to Lenin, as well as to Plekhanov, the only possible philosophical view compatible with natural sciences. In his argument, Lenin simply inverted the statements of recent physics that appeared to contradict the basic principles of materialism into a confirmation: “natural sciences leads to the ‘*unity of matter*’ [...]—such is the real meaning of the statement about the disappearance of matter, its replacement

by electricity, etc., which is leading so many people astray. 'Matter disappears' means that the limit within which we have hitherto known matter disappears and that our knowledge is penetrating deeper; properties of matter are likewise disappearing which formerly seemed absolute, immutable, and primary (impenetrability, inertia, mass, etc.) and which are now revealed to be relative and characteristic only of certain states of matter. For the *sole* 'property' of matter with whose recognition philosophical materialism is bound up is the property of *being an objective reality*, of existing outside the mind."<sup>99</sup> To Lenin, the crisis of modern science represented nothing but a stage on its way from "metaphysical" to "dialectical materialism,"<sup>100</sup> which will be able to grasp the processes of natural laws, and not just the images of objects. However, the basis was always to maintain the so-called primary being of nature. To Lenin, as well as to Engels, "the necessity of nature is primary, and human will and mind secondary. The latter must necessarily and inevitably adapt themselves to the former."<sup>101</sup> On the basis of such an ontology, Lenin deduced the necessity of social consciousness to adapt to the objective laws of economic development, "objective, not in the sense that a society of conscious beings, of people, could exist and develop independently of the existence of conscious beings [...], but in the sense that social being is *independent of the social consciousness* of people." And he concluded: "The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt *to it* one's social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible."<sup>102</sup> In Lenin's opinion, to reject what he considered a dangerous subjectivist heresy responded to the theoretical demand of affirming the unique authentic truth, and at the same time to the practical necessity of binding political praxis to the objective dynamics of social transformation.

Such a combination of different aspects certainly makes *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* a sort of "dated" work, thoroughly connected with a certain historical and political context. It is not surprising that scholars interested in Lenin's thought concentrate on his *Notes on Hegel* much more than on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which functioned as the core of the official Soviet dogma for decades. In the West, the dialectical Lenin of 1914 has been mostly counterposed to the "mechanical materialist" Lenin of 1909.<sup>103</sup> Louis Althusser pays serious attention to Lenin's first openly philosophical work in his *Lenin and Philosophy*,<sup>104</sup> although he was conditioned by his own anti-Hegelian interpretation of Marxism. In the Soviet Union, Evald Il'enkov undertook an insightful and original analysis of *Materialism*

and *Empiriocriticism* in his *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism*.<sup>105</sup> More recently, Slavoj Žižek emphasized one of the deepest problems of the epistemology that Lenin put at the center of his work in 1909: Lenin's "theory of reflection" implies the possibility to know reality as it is, to get to objective truth, but "the partiality (distortion) of 'subjective reflection' occurs precisely because the subject is included in the process it reflects—only a consciousness observing the universe from the outside world would see the whole of reality 'the way it really is,' that is, a totally adequate 'neutral' knowledge of reality would imply our existence, our external status with regard to it, just as a mirror can reflect an object perfectly only if it is external to it." Lenin's philosophy, according to Žižek, ends up showing an idealistic core, since it presumes that an "alien" and independent subject can reach reality, but such a subject cannot actually exist. Žižek concluded: "The point is not that there is an independent reality out there, outside myself; the point is that I myself am 'out here,' part of that reality."<sup>106</sup>

In the name of "truth," whose absolute possession Lenin claimed against the Machists' unavoidable relativism, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* presents both philosophical arguments and deliberate insults. Lenin's sister Anna, who handled the difficult search for a publisher, asked him to soften the general tone of the work.<sup>107</sup> At first, Lenin agreed to tone down some passages against his Bolshevik comrades, but a little before the publication he changed his mind: "We have *completely broken off* relations with them. There is no reason for toning them down, it is not worth the trouble."<sup>108</sup> Anna Il'inichna asked almost everybody to print the book, including Pjatnicky, Gorky's partner in the publishing house "Znanie." Pjatnicky at first seemed favorable<sup>109</sup> but, before he could personally go to Capri to persuade Gorky, the writer firmly rejected the idea: "I am against it because I know the author. He is a great and a smart mind, a wonderful person, but he is a fighter, and a knightly deed will make him laugh. If 'Znanie' will publish *this* book of his, he will say:—what idiots!, and these idiots will be Bogdanov, me, Bazarov, Lunacharsky."<sup>110</sup> Bogdanov intervened as well to prevent Lenin's book being published by "Znanie": "there is no room for us, where could we arrange our opponents?"<sup>111</sup> Lenin himself doubted from the beginning that his book could be published by his adversaries' publishing house. On November 17, he wrote to his mother: "I hope for very little from 'Znanie' itself; the 'boss' there, who gave Anyuta a half promise, is an old fox and will probably go back on it after sniffing at the atmosphere on Capri, where Gorky lives. We shall have to look elsewhere."<sup>112</sup> According to another orthodox Marxist, who at that time was also working on a refuta-

tion of the Machists, the difficulty in finding a publisher depended on the publishers' fear of printing books on philosophy, but also on the Machists' fortune, since they "rule everywhere in the publishing houses."<sup>113</sup>

Even before it was published, Russian Social Democrats talked about Lenin's book for months,<sup>114</sup> and Lenin insisted that it should be published as soon as possible: "it is *hellishly* important to me for the book to appear sooner. I have not only literary but also serious political commitments that are linked up with the publication of the book."<sup>115</sup> When the book finally appeared, at the end of April 1909, it provoked a certain clamor, but it did not have the success Lenin hoped for. In the press, a very small number of apolitical journals noticed the book: in *Kriticheskoe obozrenie*, a certain M. Bulgakov reviewed Lenin's book together with his adversaries' most recent publication, the *Studies on the Philosophy of Collectivism*; the journal *Russkie vedomosti* published a review by I.A. Il'in; and in *Vozrozhdenie*, an article by A.I. Abraamov appeared. In general, Lenin's work was disdained as an amateur's effort in philosophy.<sup>116</sup>

In the Bolshevik press, two quite positive reviews appeared. The first one appeared a few days after the publication of the book in a journal in Baku. Its author was an unknown "T-n," who was later identified as the Georgian Bolshevik Dzhaparidze.<sup>117</sup> Vaclav Vorovsky, a faithful supporter of Lenin, while reviewing a translation of a book by the physiologist Max Verworn, promoted *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. He especially appreciated the fact that Lenin enlightened Russian readers, who had been dazed by the Machists.<sup>118</sup> Even for the very few enthusiastic reviewers of Lenin's book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* appeared as a popular work, oriented to the Social Democratic base that had been forced to face philosophy because of the polemics among the party leaders, but still remained ignorant and inexperienced in the field.

In general, Lenin's contemptuous tone irritated some of those who had been looking at the debates from the outside. For instance, Semen Frank, a philosopher himself, condemned Lenin in a few lines by defining *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as "the [most] extreme degree of intellectual and cultural decline orthodox Marxist dogmatism has ever arrived at."<sup>119</sup> Ljubov' Aksel'rod, who shared many of Lenin's ideas, rejected the "rudeness" of Lenin's work, "which insulted the reader's esthetic sense."<sup>120</sup> Not only the injuries, but also the many quotations thrown together one after the other, were intended to impress an unprepared reader. Bogdanov considered it a deceitful action that would hold back the development of the authentic proletarian culture. He stated that "to fill the reader's brain with

thousands of hurriedly pulled out, badly sorted out, weakly connected, at times even distorted, quotations is actually a bad, anti-social action.”<sup>121</sup>

The most interesting point for the critics of Lenin's work was of course his theory of reflection. On the side of Plekhanovite orthodoxy, Ljubov' Aksel'rod counterposed to Lenin's epistemology Plekhanov's theory of "correspondence," and deemed that Lenin, who considered sensations as "images or copies of things," opened again "an impassable, dualistic abyss between the object and the subject."<sup>122</sup> If sensations were just copies of things, then these turned out to be the unknowable things-in-themselves of the Kantian tradition, while Plekhanov's materialism viewed sensation as a medium and a bond between subject and object, for sensation was considered as the subject's reaction to the stimulus coming from the external thing. On the Machists' side, Bazarov intervened on that topic in his preface to a collection of essays published in 1910. First of all, Bazarov denied that "copies" were necessary to justify the external existence of things; on the contrary, the realism that the Machists had supported since the beginning of the century acknowledged the world as something "given" more consistently and drastically than any materialism. Moreover, according to Bazarov, once the existence of "copies" is maintained, the problem of defining their originals comes up, since those originals seem to have disappeared in the indefinite haze of Kant's "things in themselves." Bazarov thought, on the contrary, that a relationship of functional, not causal, dependence between the sensation and the brain process that necessarily goes with it would be enough to establish the "primary" importance of the matter, which was so momentous for Lenin.<sup>123</sup> Bogdanov criticized Lenin's work as the result of some sort of "fideism," since he professed a real "faith" in absolute values, first of all in a supposed absolute "truth." Bogdanov wrote: "the 'faith' is one's relationship with an authority recognized by her; not just her trust in it, or her agreement with it, but a relationship founded *on obedience*, on the removal of personal thinking and criticism, on the refusal of research, on the suppression of all the possible doubts, on an act of will, directed toward passivity in knowledge."<sup>124</sup>

A dogmatic attitude and a "mechanist" epistemology are exactly the problems that Lenin himself reconsidered later when he came back to philosophy, in particular to the study of Hegel's thought. Lenin, however, never rejected his first philosophical work; on the contrary he approved a second edition at the beginning of the 1920s. A preface by V.I. Nevsky connected the old polemics with Bogdanov's new ideas, but behind Nevsky clearly stood Lenin's authority: Lenin himself made editorial corrections to

Nevsky's text, and the preface was included in Lenin's *Collected Works*, in 1926.<sup>125</sup> Bogdanov's leading role within the *Proletkul't* mass organization during the 1920s is clearly enough to explain Lenin's new attack on him, as well as Lenin's disagreements with Bukharin, who somehow seemed to refer to Bogdanov.<sup>126</sup> Bukharin himself reproached Nevsky because he had not considered 'Tekhtology', the "universally organized science", which was the last of Bogdanov's proposals, and he had just forced it on the old empirio-monism. Bukharin concluded: "It can be disputed but it is necessary at least to understand it. Nevsky, however, does not have this *minimum* requirement."<sup>127</sup> Lenin's answer did not allow any doubt: "Bogdanov has fooled you by disguising (*verkleidet*) an old dispute and trying to *shift it onto a different plane*. And you are taken in by it!"<sup>128</sup> In that context, it seemed wholly justified to come back to the old polemics against Bogdanov, and republish *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. This work, however, was not translated into other languages until 1927, while others of Lenin's works were. At that time, it became a cornerstone of developing the new Stalinist orthodoxy and, as such, it was imposed on international communist parties all over the world<sup>129</sup>. At the end of his life, Bogdanov noticed in bewilderment that professors "quote with reverence a childish book [...] in support of physical and biological theories."<sup>130</sup> *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is an unusual book, full of political passion and real philosophical questions. But, as it became the core of Soviet ideology, every actual philosophical reflection was inhibited, suffocated, forgotten.

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## Notes

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16. *Ib.*, p. 375.
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25. V.I. Lenin, "A Letter to A.M. Gorky" (1908). In *Collected Works*, vol. 13, p. 448. Cf. A.A. Bogdanov, *Osnovnye elementy istoricheskogo vzgljada na prirodu* (Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel', 1899).
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27. Cf. *Problemy idealizma* (Moskva: izd. Moskovskogo psikhologicheskogo obshchestva, 1903).
28. V.I. Lenin, "A Letter to A.M. Gorky", p. 449.
29. *Ocherki realistskogo mirovozzrenija* (Sankt Peterburg: izd. vo S. Dorovatovskogo i A. Charushnikova, 1904), pp. VI–VII.
30. Cf. D. Steila, *Nauka i revolucija. Recepcija empiriokriticizma v ruskoj kul'ture (1877–1910 gg.)* (Moskva: Akademicheskij proekt 2013).
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33. V.I. Lenin, "A Letter to A.M. Gorky", pp. 448–449.
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36. A.A. Bogdanov [Rjadovoj], *Roza Ljuksemburg protiv Karla Marksa*; Id., *Iz-za chego vojna i chemu ona učit?* (Genève: izd. CK RSDRP, 1904); Id., *Liberal'nye programmy* (Genève: izd. RSDRP, 1904); Id., *Liberaly i socialisty* (Genève: izd. RSDRP, 1904); Id., *O socializme* (Genève: izd. Socialdemokraticeskoi partijnoj literatury, 1904).
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77. Cf. Alain Jaubert, *Le commissariat aux archives. Les photos qui falsifient l'histoire* (Paris: Barrault, 1992).
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# 4

## Lenin and Philosophy: On the Philosophical Significance of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*

Marina F. Bykova

Writing on Lenin and philosophy is not an easy task. The challenges that one encounters by addressing Lenin's philosophical legacy are of both an ideological and a conceptual nature.

Until quite recently, the third largest country in the world lived under the political system that was allegedly initiated by Lenin. The revolution led by Lenin changed the existing social order of the Russian Empire by transforming the working class into a real socio-economic power, the goal for which Marx actively fought in both theory and practice. Yet the disastrous evolution of the Soviet state resulting in a highly authoritarian political regime led to the emergence of the totalitarianism that found its realization in the Gulag and in the severe limitation of civil and political rights and freedoms. This state needed its ideology, the theory that would justify its practice and give approval to its policies. The sought-for ideological support was found in Lenin, who shortly after his death was established as a superior authority to which the Soviet state could appeal to confirm its actions. In the early 1930s, the Bolshevik Party<sup>1</sup>—then led by Stalin—was quick to declare Leninism, social and political principles expounded by Lenin, its new ideology. This is how a myth of a special “Leninist stage in Soviet philosophy” was born. Initially formulated in the infamous “article by the three

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[authors]”<sup>2</sup>—written by three young orthodox-minded philosophers of the Institute of Red Professors, Mark Mitin, V. Ral'tsevich and Pavel Yudin, and published in the official party newspaper *Pravda*—the thesis of the Leninist stage did not only recognize the new epoch in the Marxist philosophy that Lenin had initiated, but also insisted on Lenin's great achievements in philosophy. The authors saw Lenin's chief philosophical contribution in offering “the richest and most complete understanding of Marxist dialectic.”<sup>3</sup> Certain later works also deemed Lenin's philosophical ideas novel, praising him for his criticism of recent revisionist and anti-Marxist theories, for clearly distinguishing between materialism and idealism, and for introducing the notion of *partiinost* into Marxist philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the general nature of this statement, it served as a theoretical foundation of what soon became the obsession of official Soviet philosophy, namely “a thorough working out of the Leninist stage in the development of dialectical materialism.”<sup>5</sup> Yet beside the official declaration of the new era Lenin had supposedly introduced, there was barely any serious work in this period that would provide a detailed analysis of Lenin's philosophical insights.<sup>6</sup> All claims about Lenin's contribution to philosophy remained largely unsubstantiated. There was virtually no genuine attempt to justify them. This has led some critics to believe that the true focus of the Leninist stage was not Lenin himself or his own philosophical achievement. The strategy of presenting Lenin as the ultimate authority was nothing else but a kind of necessary camouflage for establishing the cult of Stalin,<sup>7</sup> who was openly declared “Lenin [of] today” and who at that time was already well positioned to interpret and employ “Lenin's wisdom” in both theory and practice according to his own political and ideological goals.

While the discussion of the real goal of the Leninist stage in the Soviet philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noticing that the agenda of this stage had not been prepared by any genuine philosophical interest. In this sense, the rhetoric of Leninism—which might be interesting as important evidence of the development of Russian intellectual discourse in the early Soviet period—has a very limited philosophical value, especially with respect to the analysis of Lenin's achievement in philosophy.

However, it seems to be clear that it is impossible to deny Lenin's serious and more or less consistent engagement with philosophy. During his years as a revolutionary activist and a political practitioner, he published a number of articles, pamphlets and books on a variety of philosophical topics. If, however, we recall that Lenin was not a philosopher by training or by temperament, then the question of motivation of his philosophical exploration becomes very important.

The theme of Lenin and philosophy has received considerable attention over recent years.<sup>8</sup> It has proved attractive, and not merely because, as a practitioner and the leader of the Russian Revolution, Lenin had won for himself a place in history. He apparently attached great significance to philosophy and philosophical inquiry. Not only did he produce extensive works on the subject, but he also sought answers to many practical questions by turning to philosophy and its historical sources. Lenin's contemporaries and biographers, as well as admirers and critics alike, are all puzzled by the fact that in the most difficult and critical moments in Russian history as well as in his own life as the revolutionary, the party leader, and the head of the state, he would delve into philosophy, putting aside all other practical tasks that had required his urgent attention.

After the failure of the First Russian Revolution of 1905, the rolling back of the revolutionary wave led to panic and confusion not only among those who showed some sympathy toward revolution but also among the Bolsheviks themselves. Philosophy was in crisis. The trap of "one reactionary philosophy" was so strong that even its closest and the most loyal proponents—Anatoly Lunacharsky, Maxim Gorky, Alexander Bogdanov—fell into it. There appeared many philosophical camps, schools, and theories: God-seeking, God-building, empiriocriticism, empiriomonism, empiriosymbolism, etc. This invasion of ideas determined not only how one thought, but also how one acted. And in this critical moment, when there was an urgent need to find a new revolutionary tactics, Lenin spent weeks and months in the National Library in Geneva and the Library of the British Museum in London, studying philosophical as well as scientific (especially physics) literature and discovering for himself all the peculiarities of philosophical argumentation. He commented on this period: "I am neglecting the newspaper [*Proletarii* [The Proletariat]] because of my hard bout of philosophy," and wanted to talk about the subject matter "*concretely*, in detail, simply, without unnecessarily frightening ... readers with philosophical nuances. And at all costs I shall say it *in my own way*."<sup>9</sup> Philosophy told "in his own way" is depicted in the *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*,<sup>10</sup> his first and one of the most important philosophical books.

In 1914, Europe began to experience the devastating effects of World War I. In chauvinistic frenzy, yesterday's comrades in the Second International left the organization and returned to their national quarters. Lenin was in exile in Bern. Here again he spent an enormous amount of time in the

library, reading and decrypting the dialectical puzzles of Hegel's *Science of Logic* and studying philosophical writings by such thinkers as Clausewitz, Lassalle and others. As a result of these efforts, eight notebooks on philosophy (known as the *Philosophical Notebooks*)<sup>11</sup> came into being.

In the summer of 1917, only a few months before the October Revolution, Lenin escaped to Razliv, where, living in a tent, he wrote a book about the materialist conception of history, entitled *The State and Revolution*.<sup>12</sup>

The year of 1922 was again a "critical time." The old scheme of "war communism" had been eradicated. The question of the development of socialism, which became urgent, required the consolidation of all sound and democratically oriented intellectual forces. Lenin published an article "On the Significance of Militant Materialism"<sup>13</sup> that called for a resolute "militant atheism." He also set the task of creating "a society of materialist friends of the Hegelian dialectic" and of developing a closer cooperation between materialist philosophers and natural scientists, who, according to Lenin, were natural allies of philosophical materialism.

What did Lenin's extensive engagement with philosophy and philosophical ideas really mean? How can we fit this concern into a common picture of Lenin as a revolutionary practitioner, a master of political struggles, and a "hard pragmatist,"<sup>14</sup> who supposedly never hesitated or doubted while acting and thus had no need to turn to philosophy (or any other sources of new ideas) in search for answers to enduring questions? The above view seems to contradict the historical facts. Instead, the more complex, more acute and more pressing the given moment of history was, the deeper and more urgent was Lenin's interest in philosophy. Even at the end of his life, the terminally ill Lenin kept on his nightstand and attentively studied the book *Hegel's Philosophy as the Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Man* by the Russian émigré philosopher Ivan Ilyin.

Indeed, traditionally, Lenin is viewed as a great revolutionary, a witty polemicist and an organizational man. While this common image of Lenin might be true, it omits a vital philosophical dimension. Philosophical inquiry undoubtedly played a crucial role in Lenin's intellectual and political life. And by eliminating the essential philosophical tenets from Lenin's legacy, we are in danger of losing sight of something important about Lenin himself. At the same time, we should avoid idolizing Lenin and reading his works as sacred texts. This tendency is typical not only of the Soviet period literature, but also of more recent publications by a variety of political and social movement groups and their theoreticians.<sup>15</sup> It would also be wrong to try measuring Lenin and the theoretical significance of his work by the

standards we usually apply to professional philosophers. We should rather see Lenin for what he really was and assess his philosophical legacy in the historical context in which it emerged.

Lenin was a practitioner of revolution and a man committed to taking decisive political actions; he was also a social and political theoretician. He was not, however, a philosopher in any traditional sense. And even though many believe that he fits well the ideal of the philosopher as envisioned by Marx, who said that “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways—the point is to change it,”<sup>16</sup> it might be hard to argue that Lenin’s kind of engagement with philosophy warrants labeling him as a representative of the profession. Lenin himself did not have any illusions in this regard either. In his letter to Maxim Gorky, he admitted: “[P]hilosophy. I am fully aware of my unpreparedness in this sphere, which prevents me from speaking about it in public.”<sup>17</sup> This does not mean, however, that Lenin had nothing genuinely philosophical to say and that his theoretical and practical contributions are philosophically irrelevant. On the contrary, I believe that the philosophical dimension of Lenin’s legacy is very significant and that we have something important to learn from his specific way of “philosophizing.” Thus the title of my chapter: ‘Lenin and Philosophy’<sup>18</sup> and not “Lenin’s Philosophy,” which, in my opinion, does not exist, at least not in the same way as Plato’s, Kant’s or Hegel’s philosophies. Neither is it a discussion of what Lenin says *about* philosophy, which would be a kind of metaphilosophical exercise of a rather low value. Rather, my topic is the question of Lenin’s contribution to philosophy and philosophical enterprise. The aim of this essay is to explore the philosophical importance of Lenin’s thought. It attempts to reevaluate Lenin’s philosophical legacy by examining his major and perhaps most controversial and often misinterpreted philosophical work *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. With that in mind, the emphasis will be on the philosophical significance and originality of key concepts and ideas he formulated.

I argue that Lenin’s philosophical legacy was essentially a unique elaboration of Marxist thought that he developed further both theoretically and practically in the light of the specific historical circumstances and experiences of Russia in the two first decades of the twentieth century. Yet it is important to see that he did not merely “excavate Marxist theory from beneath layers of European social democracy” and mechanically apply it to Russian circumstances. In his effort to find solutions to urgent practical issues and as the leader of Russian revolution and of the newly established state, he turned to philosophical and other theoretical sources in his attempt to bring together and further Marxist theory and revolutionary practice. In

the process, he offered an array of new philosophical, political and social ideas, thus advancing Marxist thought. While Lenin attentively read Marx and Engels and in his own philosophical exploration largely relied on their guidance,<sup>19</sup> he was never a merely “passive recipient” of Marx and Engels’s ideas as some commentators suggest.<sup>20</sup> Neither did he just attempt to “align his thinking with that of Marx and Engels.”<sup>21</sup> As an independent thinker he not only highly valued the dialectical content of Marxism but also used the dialectical method in his theoretical and practical work. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the Marxist doctrine, he understood the necessity of its further development to fit the changing political and social situation. Although he did not create an independent theoretical system, he regenerated, reenergized and deepened elements of Marxist thought that his ideological and political opponents intended to bury. As an adherent of Marxism, he did not question the truth of Marxist doctrine, but at the same time he never treated it like a holy source, which merely inspired awe and assumed a passive attitude. Lenin’s appreciation for Marxism can be rather described in terms of active reverence: Lenin showed a deep respect for Marxist doctrine, which acted as a stimulus for his extensive engagement with Marx and Engels—the engagement that led to a further development of the Marxist doctrine. This explains Lenin’s genuine interest in philosophical questions, which he displayed throughout his career. He took philosophy to be a vital part of the Marxist doctrine, openly recognizing its importance not only for revolutionary practice but also for a deeper and more accurate understanding of Marxist thought and for the further advancement of Marxism that he championed. It is true that Lenin’s legacy is inseparable from Marxism and that many of his philosophical writings have as one of their goals the defense of what he considered authentic Marxism. However, Lenin’s commitment to Marxism goes much further than its mere defense, and has a more constructive determination than merely the preservation of the Marxist doctrine, as Frederick C. Copleston and many other commentators believe.<sup>22</sup> In addition, there is a tendency to interpret Lenin’s Marxism exclusively as the theory and practice of revolution and class struggle,<sup>23</sup> which oversimplifies Lenin’s theoretical position and downplays its philosophical significance. It “reduces” Lenin’s Marxism to the ideology of political class struggle, and, eventually, to merely party ideology, which is exactly how Leninism was construed in the Stalinist period.

Both these narratives, I would suggest, are flawed, because they neglect the great significance of the philosophical dimension in Lenin’s particular version of Marxism that largely distinguishes it from other variant forms of Marxism. By emphasizing philosophical tenets and advancing philosophical

methodology, he took Marxist doctrine further theoretically. Lenin not only defied the vulgar ideology of class, the populist perception of class struggle, and the unjustified abstract appeal to given position. His ideas philosophically resisted fragmentation by discipline, and instead pointed toward totality and indivisible progress. He challenged the still-existing walls separating theory from practice and science from philosophy. Perhaps the most important among Lenin's philosophical achievements were, first, his sharp and uncompromising differentiation between philosophical materialism and philosophical idealism that clearly demonstrates the dividing line between the two; and, second, his defense of materialist dialectic, which reconfirmed it as the core of the Marxist world outlook. Lenin effectively demonstrates both of these results in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which presents the fundamentals not of materialism in general, but of *dialectical* materialism (materialist dialectic), a dimension that some commentators are not ready to acknowledge. Instead, they insist on the idea that Lenin develops in the book the position of "naïve materialism," or "realism"<sup>24</sup> at best, thus misconstruing not only Lenin's understanding of materialism, but also his understanding of dialectic.

It must be noted that, for many critics, the contributions mentioned above do not appear to be Lenin's own accomplishments or at least not his so-called decisive contributions. A largely hostile attitude towards Lenin's philosophical achievement still prevails in the West. Indeed, many of Lenin's philosophical ideas can be traced back to Marx and Engels or, even more precisely, especially in what concerns dialectic, to the Hegelian roots of Marxist doctrine. Yet I argue that the closer consideration of Lenin's book reveals important new concepts that Lenin brings to the table in addressing important philosophical issues. My attempt in what follows is to provide a more sympathetic yet also critical assessment of Lenin's philosophical thought. The aim is to avoid either falling back into the narrowly construed confines of Marxist–Leninist (orthodox) canonization or blindly following largely dismissive Western critiques.

## II

There is still no consensus among scholars concerning the theoretical aim as well as the philosophical significance of Lenin's first book-length contribution, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which was published in Moscow in 1909 under the pseudonym of Vl. Ilyin. While some commentators consider the book a canonical philosophical text by describing it as "a classic of

dialectical materialism,”<sup>25</sup> others openly question the philosophical character of the work in doubting that it belongs to the history of philosophy at all.<sup>26</sup> Many Western critics, even those sympathetic to Lenin and inclined to view the work as philosophical, disagree about its author’s main motivations and the extent of his philosophical sophistication. There is a strong belief that the author’s “attack on empiriomonism was not motivated by anything approaching lively interest in philosophical problems for their own sake”<sup>27</sup> and that the author had “mainly pragmatic and polemical intentions.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, some commentators point to the “amateur” character of the work, which is supposedly reflected in the philosophical deficiency of the arguments Lenin presents.

Certainly, the philosophical significance of the work is not an uncontroversial matter. The work is indeed polemical, as is explicitly indicated in its subtitle—*Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*—something that was not well known to the contemporary reader. This subtitle clearly indicates the author’s intention to provide a criticism of “a reactionary philosophy.” Yet the philosophical content of this criticism still requires close analysis. Furthermore, the work is not wholly original. It draws heavily on Engels and his popularization of Marxist philosophical views, especially in *Anti-Dühring*, as well as on the views of Georgi Plekhanov, Lenin’s philosophical mentor and the principal Russian Marxist theoretician of that time. Nevertheless, I would suggest that *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* should be read as a distinctive philosophical work, which, despite its polemical nature, can be viewed as an attempt to provide an outline for the fundamentals of a dialectical form of materialism in defending it against philosophical idealism. In this process, it clarifies key notions, concepts and principles of dialectical materialism; gives important insights about its theory of knowledge; and shows its relevance to the recent revolution in science, thus further advancing Marxist philosophical doctrine, in particular in reconfirming its instrumental role in the changing historical and social situation. It is worth noting that the conception of dialectical materialism that Lenin defends in the book is not identical to the infamous *diamat* preached by Soviet orthodox and dogmatic Marxism–Leninism, which was transformed into an ideology that served to justify the political system installed in Russia. Although Lenin, too, associates the work not only with philosophical, but “also [with] serious political obligations,” dialectical materialism as he conceived it in the book still appears as a philosophical theory, and not as the sort of ideological dogmatism characteristic of philosophy in Russia in the Soviet period. Thus I intend to take the philosophical content of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* seriously in order to show that a more sympathetic reading

of the work reveals important details about Lenin's version of Marxism as well as his contributions to philosophy. I believe that this work, despite its many weaknesses, plays an essential role in Lenin's larger project of overcoming the self-contradictions of nineteenth century philosophy. As such, it deserves careful consideration and analysis.

### III

Lenin's work is largely a response to the "Machist" controversy, which caused a crisis within Marxism during the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, before turning to Lenin's philosophical arguments in the work, it is necessary to describe at least in broad outlines the philosophical context in which these arguments were developed.

The controversy is closely associated with the philosophy developed in the late nineteenth century by Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius. This philosophy, commonly known as "Machism," arose out of the decay of positivism into competing materialist and idealist views.

As one of the first serious attempts to apply the methodology of the natural sciences to the study and reform of modern society,<sup>29</sup> the positivism of the nineteenth century positioned itself as a scientific (as opposed to a metaphysical or idealistic) philosophy. Yet, in fact, here it is more accurate to say that science displaced philosophy both theoretically and practically. The role of philosophy was reduced to merely correlating the findings of different scientific disciplines, while all forms of primary research into the nature of the world were assigned to science. This, however, allowed positivism to reject traditional metaphysics and respond (at least to some extent) to associated ontological and, especially, epistemological issues. In heavily relying on discoveries and assumptions of contemporary science, positivism, which thus committed itself to empiricism and to an empiricist epistemology, insisted on the limitless ability of human consciousness to know all the aspects of the world without exception. There was a hope that the empiricist approach would enable an overcoming of the ontological dualism of early modern philosophy while at the same time avoiding the agnosticism of Hume and Kant. Extending this anti-metaphysical attitude beyond the physical realm to the social sciences, positivism also proposed to apply the methods of empirical science to social reality and eventually use them to resolve the problems of contemporary society. In an era when the existing philosophical and political movements discredited themselves by their inability to provide answers to urgent theoretical questions and to offer solutions to pressing

political and social issues, positivism had thus appeared as a promising scientific alternative, and was initially received with a great enthusiasm.<sup>30</sup>

Although in the rest of Europe, positivism served as a major theory that was able to address in a satisfactory way both intellectual and political concerns, in the German-speaking countries the political goals of positivism received much less attention than its philosophical foundations. Here, it was considered as a successor to the idealist and post-idealist systems dominant in the early decades of the nineteenth century. However, positivism as an intellectual doctrine could not withstand the philosophical challenges of rigorous analysis and soon the tension between its two main philosophical components, materialism and empiricism, that was initially largely suppressed by diverting attention to social and political issues, became a critical concern.

After the failed revolutions of 1848 and the growing political reaction, the emptiness of the political hopes of positivism became clear. At this point, positivism's decay was unavoidable. This process culminated in the emergence of two opposite philosophical schools of thought: mechanistic (or "vulgar") materialism, which represented the materialistic intuitions of positivism; and idealism, in which the empiricist elements of positivism were brought to their logical conclusion. The materialism of this period was represented by such figures as Jacob Moleschott, Karl Vogt, Ernst Haeckel, and others. Scientists by training, they attempted to provide a philosophical (and largely ontological) framework for the materialistic assumptions of modern science. However, they overlooked the epistemological problems raised by science's empirical methods and proved unable within a mechanistic materialism to deliver its secure epistemic foundations. By contrast, the idealism that emerged in the writings of Ernst Mach (1836–1916) and Richard Avenarius (1843–1896) gave methodological priority to positivist epistemology over positivist ontology. But despite being more philosophically astute than its counterpart, the idealism of Mach and Avenarius was no more successful than mechanistic materialism at resolving the serious philosophical tensions within positivism. A physicist by training, Mach was well versed in philosophy. He was greatly influenced by Hume and Berkeley, especially by their rejections of metaphysical speculation and the appeal to sense data. Rebuffing materialism with its explanation of mental events as the functions of the brain, Mach instead attempted to explicate scientific and practical concepts as well as all objects of experience in terms of perceptions and sense-data. Following Hume, he assigned primary epistemic status to the immediately given data of sense experience, while considering physical objects as well as the categories we utilize for the pur-

pose of thinking of them as methodologically posterior. Turning to the German tradition, he also rejected all forms of Kantian apriorism, insisting on its metaphysical and unscientific character. As a result, he overlooked the important fact that some features of the world might be grounded in the cognitive structures of the knowing subject itself, and not in experience. Unable to see the theoretical advantage of Kant's transcendental idealism with its focus on the unity of the knowing subject, Mach's idealism, as Lance B. Richey rightly points out, "resulted in a regression to the pre-critical problems of Hume and Berkeley which Kant believed himself to have overcome."<sup>31</sup>

According to his fundamental philosophical assumptions, Mach was a realist. He believed that there was an external world accessible through our experience. He, however, was not consistent in his application of this assumption to epistemological problems. For example, he openly denied the existence of atoms and molecules, because we are not able to perceive them, but rather can only infer their existence from our knowledge about the construction of matter.<sup>32</sup> As a result of the ambiguity of his views about the status of the external world, Mach's position was interpreted idealistically even among his most loyal supporters, despite the fact that he himself vigorously rejected the charge of idealism. One of these supporters was Richard Avenarius, a German-Swiss philosopher, who had greatly contributed to the development of Mach's radical position of empirical criticism, or "empiriocriticism," as it is commonly called.

In attempting to overcome the skepticism, and especially the subjectivism, of earlier philosophical systems (which was a persistent feature for both Hume and Mach), Avenarius introduced the "principle of coordination." According to Avenarius, both the skepticism of Hume and the transcendental idealism of Kant were consequences of a wrong fundamental assumption (which he calls "introjection") that an unknowable world exists beyond our subjective sense experiences. There is thus an unavoidable opposition between "my" experience of the world (the concept of the subject) and the world itself (the concept of the object). Instead, he presupposes the original relationship between the subject and the object. This relationship is rooted in "pure" experience, which is fundamental to both subject and object. In other words, subject and object must be regarded as standing in a relationship from the start. What governs this relation is the "principle of coordination," which allows us to "unify" the world into a single and self-consistent realm of experience. But Avenarius's attempt to get around the problem of the subject by replacing introjection with the principle of coordination fails.

His effort did not only relinquish the epistemological aspirations of Mach (and empiriocriticism in general), but also revived the important ontological issues left unsolved by Kant and other early philosophers. While Avenarius's empiriocritical presupposition might appear to be a ground for determining the relation of the subject (the "I") to the world (the objective surrounding) in such a way that both are present as common and inseparable elements, in fact, it points to a number of substantial problems. First, it is not clear what determines the "coordination" that the "I" (the individual or self that encountering its surrounding) experiences and to what extent the activity of the "I" can impact it. Second, the concept and the ontological status of the 'I' remain obscure. Avenarius rejects any transcendental subject. But at the same time, when he equates the "I" with the central nervous system, which is for him nothing more but a vital function, he describes it as "the central term" of coordination. Since he eventually makes it into the condition of the appearance of all its other components, he thus falls into subjective idealism. Although Avenarius himself tries to avoid this conclusion in claiming that it contradicts his empiriocritical presupposition, it is difficult to see how it can be avoided if his basic tenets are maintained consistently.

It should at least be clear that Mach and Avenarius did not just have strong idealistic tendencies, but their underlying (empiriocritical) assumptions were idealistic in their very nature and content. This idealism seriously influenced some Russian Marxists in the first decade of the twentieth century, prompting Lenin to address the Machist controversy in his *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.

Despite some obvious political motivations, Lenin's target in the work was primarily the key philosophical questions, which he believed were of great importance not only to Marxist philosophy but also to Marxist revolutionary theory and practice as well. Working within the Russian context, Lenin responded to Russian Machism, which caused serious philosophical (and political) struggle within Russian Marxism at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, Machist epistemology was favored and eventually adopted by a large portion of the Russian intelligentsia representing both Bolshevik and Menshevik theorists and including such diverse thinkers as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Viktor Chernov, Nikolai Valentinov and others. Yet the unofficial "ideological" leader of the movement and the key figure among all of them was Alexander Bogdanov, the Bolshevik, who represented a young generation (as opposed to Plekhanov<sup>33</sup>) of Marxist writers in Russia. Many of Bogdanov's philosophical ideas were already present in embryonic form in his initially published works, which mainly focused on economic problems and the historical view of nature.<sup>34</sup>

Bogdanov was not only familiar with Mach's and Avenarius's main ideas. He also believed that he had found in their philosophy a foundation needed for preserving the objective and scientific character of Marxist political theory. In fact, he was indebted to empiriocriticism for many of the ideas and concepts. In his informative discussion of Bogdanov, David Rowley deftly summarized his approach as follows:

Following the empiriocriticism of Ernst Mach, Bogdanov espoused a strict empiricism and denied the possibility of a priori knowledge of any sort at all. He explicitly rejected the notion of absolute truth, cause and effect, and absolute time or space – as well as absolute ethical value. Bogdanov defined reality in terms of experience: The real world is identical with human perception of it.<sup>35</sup>

Although Bogdanov agreed with the main philosophical tenets of empiriocriticism pioneered by Mach and Avenarius, he thought that they were not able to overcome the dualism of the “dependent” and the “independent” series and to appropriately show the unity between the events that took place in the mind and those that took place in the external world. According to Bogdanov, Mach and Avenarius failed to develop a monistic explanation because they employed an approach from the point of view of the isolated individual rather than that of society as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Thus he proposed a philosophical system of “empiriomonism,” which he elaborated in a series of articles published as a three-volume collection under that title, which appeared between 1904 and 1906.

Lenin viewed Bogdanov as the most important representative of Russian Machism and much of his critical philosophical arguments developed in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* were directed against Bogdanov and his “empiriomonism.” Some commentators present the clash between Lenin and Bogdanov as a minor theoretical debate within Russian émigré politics.<sup>37</sup> But this misconstrues the real motivation and goals of Lenin's work and underplays its significance. It is hard to believe that Lenin, who was busy with the intrinsically practical revolutionary task, would decide to devote almost the entire year of 1908 to refuting Bogdanov and other Russian Machists just in order to contribute to an inferior theoretical dispute. To Lenin, the appearance of Bogdanov's empiriomonism (and empiriocriticism in general) within the framework of Russian Marxism was as much a political as a philosophical event. It was not an easy situation. Indeed, considered in the then current political and ideological context of the Russian Social Democratic Party, which was split into two opposing fractions (Bolsheviks

and Mensheviks),<sup>38</sup> the situation was highly paradoxical. The Bolshevik Lenin sharply criticized and argued against his comrade Bogdanov after openly declaring that, in the realm of philosophy, he was himself allied with Plekhanov, the acknowledged leader of the Menshevik fraction. Lenin wrote: “It takes physical strength to keep oneself from being carried away by the mood, as Plekhanov does! His tactics are the height of ineptitude and baseness. In philosophy, however, he upholds the right cause. I am for materialism against “empirio-” etc.” He continues: “Can, and should, philosophy be linked with the trend of Party work? With Bolshevism? I think this should not be done at the present time. Let our party philosophers put in some more work on theory for a while, let them dispute and ... *seek a meeting of minds*. For the time being, I would stand for *such* philosophical disputes as those between materialists and “empirios” being separated from integral Party work.”<sup>39</sup>

Why does Lenin declare that the boundary line in the realm of philosophy did not necessarily coincide with the boundary line in the realm of politics and that the differences in political views should not stand here in the way of the philosophical critique? Certainly, there was a very profound connection between his philosophical positions and his political views. This connection simply cannot be ignored. And Lenin had no doubt about it. He was fully aware of the entire, complicated, confused context in which he was forced to enter the “philosophical brawl.” But he believed that the “most urgent thing” in the existing circumstances was to fight against Bogdanov’s Machism, even if doing this required cooperating with Plekhanov, Lenin’s political opponent. He considered Bogdanov and other Russian Machists as being “misguided and dangerous,” and not just because they threatened to hinder effective political action by redirecting attention to intellectual critique,<sup>40</sup> nor because they might destroy Russian Social Democracy.<sup>41</sup> There were much deeper political and philosophical reasons that prompted Lenin to engage in this vital philosophical debate.

It is worth recalling that, at that time, Plekhanov was one of the few Marxists—someone sharply critical of philosophical revisionism of all kinds—who basically focused on Machism. He showed that Machism in general, and its Russian variety in particular, was nothing more than the subtly refurbished subjective idealism of Berkeley and Hume, disguised by a new name. Recognized as one of the leading Russian Marxist theoreticians in Russia and abroad, Plekhanov masterfully exposed the empty pretensions of Machism to represent the most modern scientific philosophy that was said to become the philosophy of the proletariat. But, since Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and other Russian Machists, whom Plekhanov criticized, were

affiliated with the Bolshevik fraction, readers following the debate had an impression that the philosophy these thinkers energetically preached was the official theoretical credo of Bolshevism. And the Menshevik Plekhanov, of course, did not miss a chance to reinforce such an impression by portraying the Bolsheviks as revisionists, who had shifted away from the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels and toward the controversial philosophy of Machism.<sup>42</sup> When Lenin joined the battle and sided with Plekhanov in the theoretical struggle with Bogdanov and other Russian Machists, he was far from accepting any political compromise. On the contrary, he was motivated by his understanding that further silence in the matter of Machist philosophy would only strengthen the Mensheviks' tactical line in the revolution. His important political and ideological goal was not only to reinstate the authentic Marxist ideas rejecting any kind of revisionism, but also to clearly demonstrate that Bolshevism, and not the fraction of Plekhanov, had its theoretical foundation in the philosophy of Marx and Engels, and strongly adhered to Marxist ideas. The task was extremely difficult. It was necessary not only to thoroughly expose the essence of Bogdanov's (and of other Russian Machists') revisions of the philosophical views of Marx and Engels, but also to reestablish and clearly explain the "true" Marxist position in philosophy. And this is what Lenin effectively executes in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, delving into intricate philosophical questions and problems.

It is worth emphasizing that, despite Lenin's active participation in politics, in his critique of Russian Machism he was driven not only, and certainly not exclusively, by political or ideological considerations. Though this point is often contested, in fact Lenin's objections to Bogdanov and empiriocriticism in general have an important philosophical ground that is usually overlooked. He was largely concerned with Bogdanov's epistemological presuppositions, such as his radical empiricism and idealism, and the implications these tendencies must have both for political activity and for Marxism, especially for understanding history and the external world, as well as for the justification of objective truth claims. Lenin was aware that "if truth is [just] a form of human experience, there can be no truth independent of humanity; there can be no objective truth."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, by his denial of an independently existing material world, which can ultimately explain the contents of human consciousness and the objective logic behind the development of history, Bogdanov was close to accepting the pre-Marxist belief that history was determined not by objective social laws, but rather by the random actions of individual agents caused by their subjective moral volitions. For Lenin, this view appeared to be only one step away from the

traditional religious worldview that declared God to be the one supreme agent of the world, who did not only determine the purpose and the end of history, but also “*produced nature*.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus Lenin saw his goal in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* in exposing Bogdanov’s (and Machism’s) “dangerous theoretical mistakes” by showing their actual implications for revolutionary theory and practice. He equated Machism with idealism and fideism and rejected both as incompatible with the scientific and political character of Marxism. He warned that “behind the epistemological scholasticism of empiriocriticism one must not fail to see the struggle of parties in philosophy, a struggle which in the last analysis reflects the tendencies and ideologies of the antagonistic classes in modern society.”<sup>45</sup> The parties in philosophy to which Lenin referred were philosophical materialism and philosophical idealism. He further had in mind the ideological struggle between the two as concerning the question of the independently existing material world and the primacy of matter. Lenin’s work was the defense of philosophical materialism over philosophical idealism, of the objectivity of the world over its explanation based on an individual subjective experience, of the supremacy of matter over any idealistic and fideistic approach to reality. And whatever the political motives of Lenin’s assault on empiriocriticism, it can hardly be dismissed as a purely political (intra-party) dispute. It illustrated the essential connections that Lenin saw between theory and practice and which were vital for political activity, but also, and even to the larger extent, it illuminated the problems confronting any form of Marxist philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century. For Lenin, the idealism of Mach and of his Russian followers was not suitable for Marxist philosophy. Likewise, he realized that the vulgar (mechanistic) materialism that arose out of positivism was also unable to deliver the desired result. Thus, he concluded that any new attempt at a Marxist philosophy that could adequately justify political praxis would require a complete break with the entire philosophical heritage of positivism, for which idealism and mechanistic materialism appeared as the only possible philosophical options. This radically different philosophical position came to be dialectical materialism, which Lenin reinstated and advanced in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.

Some commentators claim that in this work Lenin was still far from being able to argue for a dialectic materialist position and that both the author’s arguments and the author’s own views were not distinguishable from those of the early materialists, who did not know dialectics.<sup>46</sup> The same commentators point to the *Philosophical Notebooks* as the first place in his writings where Lenin introduced the methodology of dialectical materialism. They

insist on Lenin's inability to discuss dialectics in his early years, simply because he was not familiar with it at that point and his first exposure to dialectics was supposedly only in 1912 when he started reading Hegel's *Science of Logic*. On this view, there is an essential "gap" between the two works that indicates a philosophical deficiency of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and its inability to deliver on what was promised, since its extent was limited only to presenting the fundamentals of materialism in general, and Marxist materialism or dialectic remained outside of its scope. This reading is not only erroneous, but is also inconsistent with Lenin's own philosophical development as well as with ideas he put forward in his writings. It is worth recalling that according to the memoirs of N.K. Krupskaya, Lenin studied the classics of world philosophy, including Hegel's writings, specifically his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, while in exile in Shushenskoe from 1897 to 1900. Those who are familiar with Hegel's *Phenomenology* would agree that the essence of Hegelian dialectic comes through in this text much more clearly, vividly and concretely than in the *Science of Logic*, reading which requires special philosophical training. Thus, it seems plausible to claim that Lenin was perfectly well acquainted with Hegelian dialectic and had a good grasp of it much earlier than while writing the conspectus, now known under the title *Philosophical Notebooks*. In the *Notebooks* he turned to a special, more critical, investigation of Hegelian dialectic based on his study of Hegel's other texts, including not only *Science of Logic*, but also the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Yet, as a mature Marxist, Lenin had read these and other texts of Hegel's much earlier, far before he was ready to perform their critical analysis, the results of which are depicted in the *Notebooks*. In this sense, I agree with E. Ilyenkov, who argued that there is a clear continuity between *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and the *Notebooks* in terms of Lenin's understanding of philosophy.<sup>47</sup> While, in his earlier work, Lenin formulated the *fundamentals* of dialectical materialism, introducing issues central to his understanding of dialectics, which had already been developed, in his later work he further sharpened and refined the details relevant to dialectics, which benefited from a more Hegelian treatment.

But all this time, the single philosophy that Lenin took to be true and authentic was Marxist philosophy, which he equated with dialectical materialism, and nothing else. Not simply materialism and not simply dialectic, but only materialism understood dialectically. This organic unity of both was what gave man—understood generically—a needed means to grasp the external world and to explain the objective tendencies and lawful nature of the development of this world. All other kinds of materialism

were, for Lenin, unable to perform this task and remained just a wishful desire. Similarly, dialectics without materialism turned into a purely verbal art that often had nothing to do with the real world and its existence. In May 1908, in “Ten Questions to a Lecturer,” Lenin sought a “straight” answer from Bogdanov: “Does the lecturer acknowledge that the philosophy of Marxism is *dialectical materialism*?”<sup>48</sup> He empathetically stressed the last two words that contained the key to his own understanding of philosophy and also clearly showed where his disagreement with Bogdanov lay. Lenin consistently developed this position in his book, whose significance was not exhausted by the fact that it defeated “one reactionary philosophy” and put an end to its false pretensions to be “the only scientific philosophy” and serve as the philosophy of “all contemporary science.” Much more important was that by debating with Bogdanov and other Russian (and non-Russian) Machists, Lenin masterfully outlined his own understanding of problems that philosophy faced in his time in the light of the new economic and political situations as well as of scientific and technological advances. He also proposes various solutions to these problems, some of which proved to be successful.

Thus, in his work, Lenin employed two—one negative (critical) and one positive (constructive)—approaches that generally coincided with the book’s two main aims: first, he criticized and rejected both empiriocriticism (of Bogdanov and his like-minded forerunners) and vulgar materialism (of Vogt, Haeckel and, ultimately, Dietzgen as well). Yet the temper of his criticism differed from his fierce attack upon Machism to a relatively more gentle treatment of materialists. And, second, he argued for dialectical materialism, thus offering a positive philosophical program, which he further explicated and defended against both idealistic and vulgar materialistic philosophical positions. In Lenin’s work, both critical and constructive approaches were essentially intertwined, so it is often difficult to separate one from another. This is, in fact, what distinguishes this work from any other. It was not only polemical, but a positive philosophical program was introduced as a result of the necessary conclusion of the criticism and rejection of existing philosophical positions. Instead of starting with the argument for dialectical materialism, Lenin first showed the philosophical limitations and eventual failure of the self-proclaimed philosophical scientists to come up with a philosophical theory suitable for Marxism’s theoretical and practical purposes. And Lenin applied this methodology throughout the work. If anything, this pointed to Lenin’s serious concern with the philosophical crises within Marxism that potentially contained dangerous consequences for Marxist theory and practice. And it was this philosophical impasse that Lenin had to confront and

that is depicted in the *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. No doubt, Lenin's criticism and the ultimate dismissal of the philosophical ideas of his opponents required not only courage and perseverance, as well as philosophical erudition, but also awareness of the intellectual situation, mastery of philosophical argumentation, and really good judgment.<sup>49</sup>

## IV

Let us take a closer look at Lenin's "positive program" and discuss some of his key philosophical ideas formulated in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. I will focus on one main feature of Lenin's work: his understanding of materialism. Certainly, this analysis cannot offer an exhaustive discussion of Lenin's philosophical ideas introduced in the book. Yet I believe that the conception under consideration can effectively illustrate the philosophical innovations Lenin offered here. The book provided a significant philosophical response to and advancement beyond the positivist philosophical systems Lenin criticized, and as such it was a valuable contribution to Marxist philosophy. This should be sufficient to distinguish Lenin from his philosophical predecessors and to demonstrate the philosophical significance of his ideas.

Lenin's understanding of materialism seems to create a problem for commentators. As I mentioned earlier, many observers are disappointed with Lenin's notion of materialism, associating it with naïve materialism and realism or even believing, along with Pannekoek, that "what we find in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* is nothing more than a repetition of the biological materialism which Büchner, Moleschott and others put forward without success half a century earlier, in which it was simply assumed that a physical account of brain processes can be substituted for the concept of the mental without difficulty or remainder."<sup>50</sup> But even those who take the philosophical content of Lenin's materialism seriously still view it as a pure epistemological notion that he used to address a narrow circle of problems that emerged as a result of his polemic with one of the minor schools of subjective idealism. Indeed, what was this materialism that Lenin so fiercely and firmly defended in his book?

First, it needs to be made clear that Lenin's materialism, at least that which is presented in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, should not be associated with any kind of reductive materialism of mind (or consciousness). Lenin's interest in materialism in this work was not defined by the traditional mind-body problem, or by psychological issues of any kind. Instead, he developed his understanding of materialism in response to idealist

and skeptical views about the external world. The strong tendency toward skepticism and idealism was typical of the empiricist tradition, which dominated modern science and prevailed in Machism. Lenin clearly recognized it in his judgement of Bogdanov and other supporters of empiriocriticism. Second, Lenin's account of materialism was not associated exclusively with epistemology, and its philosophical significance is not limited to the bounds of the special argument against a specific form of subjective idealism. In fact, having moved beyond the epistemology of the positivist tradition, Lenin also broke with its understanding of materialism. Contrary to philosophers of previous generations, he did this not by choosing between epistemology and ontology, but rather by attempting to unite them in a new theory that went by the name of dialectical materialism.

Following Engels, Lenin held that all philosophical positions were ultimately either materialist or idealist. Lenin wrote:

[I]n connection with every problem of epistemology touched upon and in connection with every philosophical question raised by the new physics, we traced the struggle between *materialism* and *idealism*. Behind the mass of new terminological artifices, behind the clutter of erudite scholasticism, we invariably discerned *two* principal alignments, two fundamental trends in the solution of philosophical problems.<sup>51</sup>

The two camps were divided based on their accounts of the reality of the external world, its independence from the thinking subject, and the degree to which knowledge of it was possible. There was no third option, be that either "agnosticism" or "empiriocriticism." All other possibilities were said to collapse into idealism. Lenin's tactic was thus to demonstrate empiriocriticism's commitment to idealism and to commend the materialist case against it. Yet, Lenin conceived materialism not just as a pure epistemological formula (even though epistemological questions become an integral part of his account of materialism), but first of all as a fundamentally ontological view. His materialism was committed to the strong thesis that matter (the physical) is "primary" with respect to consciousness (the psychical, mental). Furthermore, he declared that the question of the primacy of matter was "the root question" that divided philosophers into materialists and idealists.<sup>52</sup> Lenin's materialism was a form of ontology that claimed that in the first instance the external world was just matter in movement, that is, it was the matter that underwent constant change. Consciousness was then nothing else but the property of highly developed matter, a function of the brain.<sup>53</sup> The content of consciousness was determined through a

variety of interactions of the subject with the external world, which existed independently of our experience of it. Idealism, on the other hand, claimed that what was primary was our mental process, our mind and thoughts. What was perceived, and which behaved ordinarily, was not an entity in itself, but was created in or by the mind. This was the view that, according to Lenin, emerged in Bogdanov's theory of empiriocriticism.

Bogdanov attempted to rebut this charge of idealism. For him, "materialism" and "idealism" were just terms that described the old-fashioned dualism of the psychical (mental) and the physical that empiriocriticism successfully overcame. While idealists were supposed to believe that reality was fundamentally mental or ideal, according to Mach, the basic constituents of reality were the "elements" that were given to us in experience. We may refer to some of these elements as "physical" and to others as "mental." This, however, was not the difference in the substance of the elements, but rather the difference in the organization of our perception of them. Bogdanov further clarified how to differentiate between the two. For him, the distinction between the mental and the physical was the distinction between individually and socially organized experiences. The mental and the physical were thus not two basic realms of being, but just the same "elements" under different descriptions. Bogdanov denied that experience was either mental or physical. For him, the mental-physical distinction was drawn within experience itself, and only for "technical" purposes. Yet, he did not say anything about the ontological status of experience that in his system became the substance of the world. Moreover, Bogdanov's view of socially organized ("collective") experience was consistent with methodological solipsism. What he understood by collective experience had nothing to do with the social or intersubjective experience as the term may suggest. What was under consideration here was still individual, but also shared experience. In addition, Bogdanov appealed to collective experience only in order to explain how, on the basis of individual experience alone, the subject could acquire the concept of objectivity. The answer that he provided was that each subject determined the objectivity by appealing to his own experiences of the behavior of others. There was no doubt that this answer would be (and in fact was<sup>54</sup>) endorsed by many methodological solipsists.

Lenin was thus rightly accusing Bogdanov of idealism and solipsism. The problem, however, was that he did not go further. Although he effectively showed the idealist essence of empiriocriticism (including Bogdanov's version of it), he did not convincingly refute it. And even though he offered an account of why empiriocriticism's idealism was dangerous, by pointing to its two disastrous philosophical consequences (it inevitably collapsed into solipsism

and eventually led to conceptual relativism),<sup>55</sup> the arguments he provided came to be of rather a combative nature, and thus may not prove to be conclusive. I do not want to speculate about Lenin's tactical aims here, including whether he was indeed ready to settle "for the weathering effect of incessant criticism in lieu of one solid blow."<sup>56</sup> What, however, should be taken into account is the fact that, for Lenin, the critique of idealism was rather a secondary element of the overall strategy employed in the book. He saw his main goal to be in reinstating and advancing Marxist materialism, about which he said "you cannot eliminate one basic premise, one essential part, without departing from objective truth, without falling a prey to bourgeois-reactionary falsehood."<sup>57</sup> And he effectively illustrated this idea by his critique of Bogdanov and empiriocriticism, which eventually collapses into idealism, thus encroaching on the philosophical foundation of Marxism, more precisely on its materialism. This explains why Lenin so vigorously defended materialism.

Let us now return to our original question about Lenin's understanding of materialism. There is one more important issue that needs clarification. As I mentioned earlier, some commentators equate Lenin's materialism with philosophical realism.<sup>58</sup> How justified is this belief and to what extent does it correctly describe the form of materialism that Lenin proclaimed? Although there are many different forms that realism can take, philosophical realism in general is the belief that there exists an external, objective world that is ontologically independent of thinking subjects. If we accept this definition of realism, then it should be clear that all materialists are realists. This, however, does not mean that the reciprocal statement "all realists are materialists" is also true. A simple glance at the history of philosophy is enough to see this point. Plato, for example, was a realist. However, his realism was not grounded in his advocacy that only material beings exist. He was a realist because he advocated the existence of entities such as forms and numbers. Similarly, many scholastics were realists not because they insisted that only material beings are real, but because they favored the thesis that universals are *real*. The same is true with mathematicians. Many of them describe themselves as realists, not because they believe that only material beings exist, but because they defend the thesis that mathematical entities, which are ideal, are real. The point that I am trying to make here is that realism tends to be a much broader position than materialism. While the materialist holds that the world is material and objective reality comprises *only* material beings (since *only* material beings *are*), the realist accepts that a wide variety of different types of entities are equally real. It is doubtful thus that Lenin's position can be equated with realism. Furthermore, Lenin himself was very explicit about his distrust of "realism." He wrote: "Following Engels,

I use *only* the term materialism ... and consider it the sole correct terminology, especially since the term “realism” has been bedraggled by the positivists and other muddleheads who oscillate between materialism and idealism.”<sup>59</sup> And this was for him not just terminological play. He emphasized that the key idea of the philosophy of materialism was that “the world is matter in motion, that the external world, the physical world familiar to all, is the sole objective reality.”<sup>60</sup>

Lenin held that human beings come to know reality through sense perception. The thinking subject was able to build up a conception of the world based on the senses, or more exactly on the material of perception as a result of the subject’s sense experience. However, his *materialist* position was not just a simple acknowledgement of “the existence of an external world and its recognizability in our sensations.”<sup>61</sup> For him as a materialist, matter—the objective reality given to us in sensations—was the foundation of the theory of knowledge (epistemology). On the contrary, for idealism of any kind, the basis of epistemology was consciousness that appeared under one or another name, be it the “psychical” or the “system of forms of collectively organized experience.” It was also not true that the world was recognized in our sensations. In sensations, the external world was only *given* to us, in the same way as it was given to a dog or any other living creature. It was recognized not in sensations, but in the activity of thought, the science of which was, according to Lenin, the materialistic theory of knowledge (epistemology) understood dialectically, as dialectical logic.

The discussion of Marxist dialectical logic is beyond the scope of this chapter. Furthermore, it would be difficult, if at all possible, to do it better and to offer a more insightful discussion of this topic than the one provided by the twentieth century Russian-Soviet Marxist Evald V. Ilyenkov.<sup>62</sup> I would like only to emphasize that dialectical logic and its application in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* is where the dialectical essence of Lenin’s materialism lies. Contrary to Mach, Bogdanov and other empiriocritics, for whom logic was just a collection of “devices,” “methods” and “rules” that regulated our thinking, Lenin, following Marx and Engels, conceived logic as the philosophical theory of cognition. It described the (universal) laws, which govern the objective processes of how man (as mankind) was gaining knowledge of the world. These laws were not randomly chosen principles or rules of cognition. They were rather understood as the objective laws of development of the material world, of objective reality itself. These laws were reflected in our consciousness, leading to the building up of conceptions and theories that were portraits—models of the external. It was fundamental to

Lenin's position that human beings are capable of constructing theories that adequately reflect the way things are. The adequacy of the concept or theory was verified by practice understood as a social and historical joint activity of generations of people over centuries.

It should be clear that Lenin's materialism was not the same kind as the naïve materialism of the previous philosophy, nor did he just uphold mechanistic materialism. Instead, he defended the position of materialist dialectic. Conceived as the logic and theory of knowledge of contemporary materialism, dialectical materialism was the true legacy of Marxist philosophy.

The materialist epistemology that Lenin developed in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* also warrants special attention. This epistemology, known as the reflection (often called "copy") theory of knowledge, had been subject to extensive criticism. According to Lenin, the material world is a knowable reality, and we, thinking subjects, are able to form conceptions and theories that reflect reality. The adequacy of our conceptions and theories depends upon the degree to which they resemble, or correspond to, how things really are. The closer our conceptions resemble the world, the more adequate they are. The true conception is said to be the one that corresponds to the world. Thus we can think of our theories as a series of attempts to copy reality. Lenin explained: "The recognition of theory as a copy, as an approximate copy of objective reality, is materialism."<sup>63</sup>

Lenin saw his "copy theory" of knowledge as the necessary epistemological counterpart to any materialism. Furthermore, he believed that this was the only way out of the idealism and agnosticism of his opponents, among whom he identified not only the Russian Machists, but also such philosophers as Berkeley, Hume and Kant. The similarity that Lenin saw in the representatives of both parties was that all of them adopted an empiricist epistemology, which inevitably led to idealism and agnosticism. The problem that Lenin correctly saw in empiricism was that it understood our knowledge of the world as being constructed out of a collection of sense data immediately presented to consciousness. Our access to the world was then eternally mediated by the screen of sensations that, like a "wall," separated human consciousness from the external world.<sup>64</sup> Many skeptical approaches to the existence and nature of the world that preoccupied philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—as well as idealism, which penetrated skepticism—had their roots in this empiricist belief. Lenin made it clear at the beginning of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* that the theories of Russian Machists were nothing else than a repetition of the same empiricist-idealist mistakes that Berkeley had made two centuries ago. Lenin wrote:

Berkeley denies ... the theory of knowledge, which seriously and resolutely takes as the foundation of all its reasoning the recognition of the external world and the reflection thereof in the minds of men. ... In our further exposition we shall frequently find “recent” “positivists” repeating the same stratagem or counterfeit in a different form and in a different verbal wrapping.<sup>65</sup>

Lenin’s attack on empiricism was not just a polemical device used in the book. This was rather an indication of his philosophical judgment about the serious failures of empirical epistemology, both in its classic and contemporary forms. For him, the reflection theory of knowledge became a sort of materialist epistemological test. He saw it as a benchmark for Marxist philosophy. Thus, he criticized Plekhanov’s theory of knowledge, according to which our ideas were just “symbols” or “hieroglyphs” of the external world. Lenin charged him with not being truthful to Marxism and instead providing support for the empiriocritical position:

[O]ur Machist would-be Marxists fastened with glee on Plekhanov’s ‘hieroglyphs’, that is, on the theory that man’s sensations and ideas are not copies of real things and processes of nature, not their images, but conventional signs, symbols, hieroglyphs, and so on.<sup>66</sup>

Lenin stated his materialist position about knowledge very clearly. He insisted that our knowledge was in fact a “reflection” or “copy” (sometimes he also uses the term “photograph”) of the external world. There existed “the direct connection between consciousness and the external world.” A sensation, which empiricists turned into an insuperable barrier between human consciousness and the external world, was in fact “only *an image* of the external world.”<sup>67</sup> Not only did Lenin find firm support for this epistemological theory in Engels, who in his works spoke of the “mental pictures or images” of things that Lenin traced back to sensations. Lenin also maintained that this materialist view of knowledge was consistent with the “naïve realism” commonsense assumption of an independently existing world that could be known by the mind. He noticed that “materialism deliberately makes the ‘naïve’ belief of mankind the foundation of its theory of knowledge”<sup>68</sup> and saw in this fact a sort of plausible justification for his reflection theory of knowledge. It is doubtful, however, that this might provide a sufficient philosophical explanation, especially since Lenin did not present any detailed discussion of how mental images reflected or reproduced physical objects. Instead, by referring in this context to “naïve realism” he drew his opponents’ fire upon himself. Not only was it understood by many critics

as Lenin's explicit equation of materialism and realism, but it also allowed them to talk about his epistemology as a version of "naïve realism."<sup>69</sup> Ironically, Lenin himself employed here the expression "naïve realism" not as a term of abuse, but as the recognition of the commonsense understanding that, in his opinion, would not require any further explanation. In this sense, the accusation that Lenin's philosophy was naïve realism is not completely groundless. The terminology he used to lay down his reflection theory of knowledge was too vague and not very precise. For instance, he talked about our sensations, our consciousness being "copies," "photos," or even "mirror-reflections" of the objective things. Taken literally, it did not make a lot of sense. It sounded indeed very *naïve* to believe that my consciousness—a product of the psychological activity of my mind—could be a "copy" of the physical thing. As a result, Lenin's "copy theory" of knowledge is often dismissed as "amateurish" and "pre-critical." Furthermore, the fact that Lenin himself failed to raise or answer traditional objections to "naïve realism" did not help his cause either. Perhaps the most extensive criticism of Lenin's epistemology was voiced by logical positivism that dominated the Anglo-American philosophical landscape throughout almost the entire twentieth century. It should not come as a surprise, for the empiricist problematic was and still remains central within this tradition. Interestingly, in the Russia of the late Soviet and post-Soviet period, there also emerged a number of critical epistemological studies<sup>70</sup> of Lenin's reflection theory. However, it would be difficult to point to any publication that offers a complete and sophisticated analysis of Lenin's thought. Since I cannot comment here on Lenin's reflection theory in detail, I would like to mention only a few points that are important for our overall discussion about Lenin's materialism.

In my opinion, in considering Lenin's epistemological theory, it is important to take into consideration his overall goal in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* and the specific role that his reflection theory of knowledge plays. It seems to be clear that, for Lenin, epistemology is not an end in itself and that he employs his reflection theory of knowledge in order to defend materialism against idealism and agnosticism (that he also eventually links to idealism). Accordingly, Lenin immediately rejects the empiricist view that our knowledge is "of discrete *sensibilia* capable of a variety of different combinations," whose connections are governed by an arbitrary principle determined by some external factors (e.g., scientific for Mach and ideological for Bogdanov). Lenin's reflection theory offers, on the contrary, a coherent argument for cognition. He maintains that our knowledge is not an approximate construction of ideas out of raw sense data, but rather is knowledge of real

objects that exist in nature, which “reflects” real connections between them. Instead of being drawn into debates about some particular characteristics of specific theories of knowledge, he focuses on “the really important epistemological question that divides the philosophical trends.” For him, the central question is whether what we know reflects the world as it is, whether our ideas correspond to real features of the external world, or whether our mind is the single source of our knowledge and we just impose our ideas upon the world.<sup>71</sup> It should be abundantly clear that Lenin’s most fundamental concern in epistemology is and remains the defense of materialism. His goal in using the “copy theory” is to advance materialistic theory of knowledge and to remove any ground for raising idealistic, agnostic and also skeptical objections against knowledge. He argues that, while a copy, “an image can never wholly compare with the model ... [t]he image inevitably and of necessity implies the objective reality of that which it ‘images.’” By contrast, the “[c]onventional sign, symbol, hieroglyph” or any other notions used to describe sense data, “are concepts which introduce an entirely unnecessary element of agnosticism.”<sup>72</sup> It is worth emphasizing that Lenin never claims that the reflection theory guarantees the indubitability of knowledge and that our ideas and concepts are immune from error or imprecision. We differentiate between true and false ideas by testing our ideas in our practical activity. Thus, practice is a criterion of truth.

Although he argues for the correspondence theory of truth, it does not mean that the concepts and theories that we have about the world cannot be false. It is rather the case that the falsity of a concept is determined only by its relation to the world and whether it accurately describes (i.e., corresponds with) that world. Furthermore, the correspondence of the concept with the objects of the real world does not mean the identity between the two. In the passage cited above, Lenin openly states that it is “beyond doubt that an image can never wholly compare with the model.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, when he sometimes uses imprecise and confusing terms such as “copy,” “photograph,” “image,” and so on, he communicates a very precise idea, namely, that our knowledge is a real knowledge of the material world—a reflection of objective reality. There is another important connotation, not often recognized by commentators. This is Lenin’s attempt to reconcile a materialist theory of knowledge with a purely materialist ontology. In fact, by saying that an image is a “copy” of the real world, Lenin also states that the mind “reflects” reality. Thus, reality—the material world—is primary in respect to consciousness. The obvious commitment to materialism in the text seems to rule out certain misconceptions concerning Lenin’s theory of knowledge. I should, however, recognize that even then there still remains a whole host

of problems that would require further clarification.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, Lenin himself does not provide any guidance on which path to follow. Still, I think the existence of an important philosophical connection between Lenin's reflection theory of knowledge and his commitment to a strict materialistic ontology may provide some help in this regard.

Lenin insists that his materialism is philosophical in its character. Responding to the revolution that occurred in modern physics around the turn of the century and to the challenge it posed to traditional materialism, he separates out the most important conceptual features of matter, retaining only the philosophical content and leaving other more specific features to science. Thus, questions concerning the structure of matter and non-perceived physical entities such as electrons should not be addressed by philosophy; they belong to the scientific domain. Lenin's materialism is not committed to any substantive account of the nature of matter. He is adamant that the ever-developing story of the structure of matter is the province of natural science, and not of philosophy. Philosophical materialism is committed only to one single property of matter, which is the property of being an objective reality that exists outside of the mind.<sup>75</sup> He states:

Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.<sup>76</sup>

From the philosophical perspective, this account of materialism seems to be pretty conclusive. Furthermore, Lenin correctly identifies the need for philosophy to properly distinguish between the philosophical function of materialism and its scientific role. Whereas materialism as a philosophical thesis is a commitment to an external world that exists independently of thinking subjects, the scientific role of materialism consists of providing a particular explanatory framework for natural phenomena. Nobody made this distinction prior to Lenin, and it was hardly obvious before his critical analysis of Russian Machism in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. Yet Lenin's version of materialism is not without its problems. The most serious one is that if materialism as a philosophical thesis is completely separated from and fully independent of any scientific question about the structure of matter, then it is not clear what role Lenin's materialism can play in everyday scientific practice. Lenin himself proclaims the unity of philosophy and natural science, entrusting philosophy with a function to verify and correct errors in our scientific knowledge. However, it remains unclear in what way his materialism can offer this sort of corrective if it has no immediate access to the

results of the proposed scientific inquiry. The relation and the principles of interaction between a philosophical and a scientific materialism would require a more detailed explanation, which Lenin does not provide.

Despite these theoretical shortcomings, Lenin's version of materialism is a clear advance over the versions developed by his predecessors, even in the absence of explicit answers to problems mentioned above.

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One of my aims in this essay was to put Lenin's work into the historical context in which it was written. I believe that it is possible to adequately understand a theoretical work only if it is read with a view to the context of the political and social situation to which it responds. When we consider the historical epoch after the first Russian Revolution of 1905, including the political and ideological struggles of the period, Lenin's decision to turn to philosophical questions appears in a different light than the simple intellectual exercise of a philosophical amateur. Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, which was written at the end of a half-century reign of positivism that captivated the most brilliant minds of his time, both in science and philosophy, is a significant philosophical achievement. It was the first philosophical assault on positivism from the position of (dialectical) materialism.

Not only did Lenin see the dangerous consequences of positivism for philosophical inquiry. He also realized the damaging effects of the positivistic position for Marxism and Marxist philosophy. In this way, he responded to the crisis of Marxism that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and that he saw in Russian Marxism and empiriocriticism. His answer to the challenge was his defense of the consistent materialist position that he advanced in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. Despite its problems and combative style that often stands in the way of the impartial evaluation of the book by distracting attention from its philosophical argument, the book's ability to identify and, to some extent, overcome problems of previous philosophy is a significant theoretical result that secures it an important place in the history of philosophy.

## Notes

1. The official party name was the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) (RCP(B)), and it was not until 1952 that the party formally dropped the word 'Bolsheviks' from its name.

2. See Mitin, M.B., Raĭtsevich, V., and Yudin, P., “O novykh zadachakh marksistsko-leninskoi filosofii” [On the New Tasks of Marxist–Leninist Philosophy], *Pravda*, 7 June, 1930, pp. 5–6. It is worth mentioning that the main focus of the article is more general, namely the discussion of importance of philosophy for social practice and of the necessity of applications of the philosophical theory to practical problems relevant to building of socialism. The authors praised Stalin for shown an example of “deepened understanding of Marxist–Leninist dialectics” and his fight against deviation from Marxism on both fronts—Left and Right. One of such “deviations” was Debordin and his confederates. Although the authors do not openly attack the Debordinites, the article treats them as the real enemy on the philosophical front, those who “undervalue Lenin as a philosopher.”
3. *Ibid.*, Sect. 4.
4. See, for example, Mitin, M.B., “K itogam filosofskoi diskussii” [On the Results of a Philosophical Discussion], *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* [Under the Banner of Marxism], No. 10–12, 1930, pp. 25–59.
5. O zhurnale “Pod znamenem marksizma” [On the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*], originally published as a journal editorial article in *Pod znamenem marksizma* (1930, No. 10–12, pp. 1–2) and later reprinted in *Pravda* (26 January 1931).
6. For more details about this period, see Bakhurst, D., *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet Philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 92–99.
7. Yakhot, J. *Podavlenie filosofii v SSSR: 20–30 gody* [The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR: 1920–30] (New York: Chalidze, 1981), pp. 196–220. David Bakhurst makes this point as well. See: Bakhurst, D. *Consciousness and Revolution*, pp. 94–96.
8. Budgen, S., Kouvelakis, S., and Žizek, S. (eds.), *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth* (Duke University Press, 2007); Lih, L.T., *Lenin* (Reaktion Books, 2008).
9. Lenin, V.I., *Collected Works* in English, 4th ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977; 1st printing 1962), vol. 34, pp. 387, 388 (All following references to this edition are abbreviated as *LCW*).
10. The full title of Lenin’s book is *Materialism and Empiriocriticism. Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*. It was written in the period from February to October 1908 (with the Supplement to Chapter IV, Section I—in March 1909) and published in Moscow in May 1909 by the Zveno Publishers—*LCW* 14:17–362.
11. *Philosophical Notebooks* consists of a set of notes and book summaries along with Lenin’s own critical remarks and evaluations. The work comprises the content of ten notebooks, eight of which produced in 1914–1915 were entitled by Lenin himself *Notebooks on Philosophy*. The material in *Philosophical Notebooks* does not constitute a complete work written by Lenin for

- publication. First published in 1929–1930 as a part of *Lenin Miscellanies IX and XII*, these philosophical writings were only in 1933 organized in a separate book with the title of *Philosophical Notebooks*, by which the content of the volume is known today—*LCW* 38.
12. The book *The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Task of the Proletariat in the Revolution* was written in August–September, 1917 and first published in 1918—*LCW* 25:381–492.
  13. First published in *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*, 1922, No. 3—*LCW* 33:227–236.
  14. See Liebmann, M., *Leninism under Lenin*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Merlin Press, 1975).
  15. See, for example: Lih, L.T., *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done? in Context* (Haymarket Books, 2008); Le Blanc, P., *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Haymarket Books, 2015); Le Blanc, P., *Marx, Lenin, and the Revolutionary Experience: Studies of Communism and Radicalism in the Age of Globalization* (Routledge, 2006); Boer, R. “Lenin and Religion,” Blog *Philosophers for Change* at [philosophersforchange.org](http://philosophersforchange.org).
  16. Marx, K. “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *Earlier Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 422.
  17. *LCW* 34:381.
  18. I should confess that the title of this essay was partially influenced by Althusser’s “Lenin and Philosophy” (See: Althusser, L., *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). And although the conclusions that Althusser drawn in his study are substantially different from the ideas I am arguing for in this essay, I believe that Althusser’s approach to Lenin and his philosophical legacy is very productive.
  19. A major influence on Lenin was the correspondence between Marx and Engels published in 1913. (Bebel, A and Bernstein, E. (eds.), *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Engels und Karl Marx 1844 bis 1883*, vol. I (Stuttgart: Detz, 1913)). Lenin attentively read the correspondence, providing a series of conceptual annotations and notes on it. (See: Lenin V.I., *Konspekt Perepiski K. Marksa i F. Engelsa 1844–1883 gg.* [Notes on the Letter Exchange Between Marx and Engels in 1844–1883] (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1959).) In his philosophical studies of 1913 and beyond, Lenin turned to authors mentioned in the correspondence, using it as a kind of “reading guide” and commenting on some of Marx’s and Engels’s ideas formulated therein. On the role of the *Briefwechsel* in Lenin’s philosophical evolution, see White J.D., “Lenin and Philosophy: The Historical Context,” *Europe–Asia Studies*, vol. 67, No. 1, January 2015, esp. pp. 133–137.
  20. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 139.
  21. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

22. See Copleston, F.C., *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1986), p. 292ff.
23. See Krausz, T., *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Balint Bethlenfalvy with Mario Fenyo (New York: Monthly Review Foundation, 2015)—cf. especially footnotes 7 & 8 on p. 357; Le Blanc, P., *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*.
24. Bakhurst, D. *Consciousness and Revolution*.
25. Ilyenkov, E., *Leninskaia dialektika i metafizika pozitivizma* [Lenin's Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1980), p. 4.
26. Besançon, A., *The Intellectual Origins of Leninism*, trans. Sarah Matthews (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 206.
27. See Copleston, F.C., *Philosophy in Russia*, p. 292.
28. Liebmann, M., *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 442.
29. Cf. "Positivism," Bottomore, T. (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: Blackwell, 1991).
30. For a full discussion of the development and influence of positivism in nineteenth century Europe see: Simon, W.M., *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963).
31. Richey, L.B., "Editor's Introduction: Pannekoek, Lenin, and the Future of Marxist Philosophy," Anton Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher: A Critical Examination of the Philosophical Basis of Leninism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), p. 18.
32. See Mach, E., *Principles of the Theory of Heat: Historically and Critically Elucidated*, ed. Brian McGuinness (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986).
33. By that time, Plekhanov had already established himself as the leading Russian Marxist theoretician.
34. See: Bogdanov, A.A., *Kratkii kurs ekonomicheskoi nauki* [Short Course on Economic Science] (Moscow: Izd-vo kniznogo sklada A.M. Murinovi, 1897); Bogdanov, A.A., *Osnovnye elementy istoricheskogo vzgliada na prirodu* [The Main Elements of the Historical View of Nature] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel', 1899); Bogdanov, A.A., *Poznanie s istoricheskoi tochki zreniia* [Cognition from the Historical Point of View] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia A. Leiferta, 1901).
35. Rowley, D.G., "Bogdanov and Lenin: Epistemology and Revolution," *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1996), p. 5.
36. Bogdanov, A.A., *Empiriomonizm: stat'i po filosofii* [Empiriomonism: Articles on Philosophy] (Moscow: Respublka, 2003), p. 14.
37. See, for example, Pannekoek, A., *Lenin as Philosopher*.
38. A dispute in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in 1903 between Vladimir Lenin and Julius Martov led to the party splitting into two factions: the Bolsheviks ('majority') and the Mensheviks ('minority').
39. *LCW* 34:381–382.

40. In fact, this was the tendency among the Young Hegelians that Marx and Engels had attacked in *The German Ideology* some sixty years earlier. Lenin was certainly concerned about it as well. However, it was not his chief motivation when responding to Bogdanov and his followers in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.
41. This is the justification suggested by F.C. Copleston (See his *Philosophy in Russia*, p. 292).
42. Plekhanov accused the Bolsheviks of revisionism as early as at the Third Party Congress in April 1905, and he openly repeated the charge at the Fifth Party Congress that took place two years later. For Lenin, it was a signal for action. He must have feared, and not without reason, that Bolshevism would be seen as revisionism that renounced Marxist ideas.
43. *LCW* 14:123.
44. *Ibid.*, 14:229.
45. *Ibid.*, 14:358.
46. See: Copleston, F.C., *Philosophy in Russia*; Pannekoek, A., *Lenin as Philosopher*; Anderson, K., *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995) and several of the contributors to the recent volume *Lenin Reloaded*—Cf.: Michael-Matsas, S., “Lenin and the Path of Dialectics,” *Lenin Reloaded*, pp. 101–119; Anderson, K.B., “The Rediscovery and Persistence of the Dialectic in Philosophy and in World Politics,” *ibid.*, pp. 120–147.
47. Ilyenkov formulated this position in his 1979 work that was translated into English and published in an English version in 1982. See: Ilyenkov, E., *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism. Reflections on Lenin’s book Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (New Park Publications, 1982). A similar position is expressed in Bakhurst D., *Consciousness and Revolution*, p. 100.
48. *LCW* 14:15.
49. It was Louis Althusser who praised Lenin for having good judgment. In his famous essay “Lenin and Philosophy” he empathetically writes: “And Lenin denounces and knocks down all those ephemerally philosophical scientists who thought their time had come. What is left of these characters today? Who still remembers them? We must concede at least that this philosophical ignoramus Lenin had good judgment. And what professional philosopher was capable, as he was, of committing himself without hesitation or delay, so far and so surely, absolutely alone, against everyone, in an apparently lost cause?”—Althusser, L., *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 29.
50. Pannekoek A., *Lenin as Philosopher*, p. 50.
51. *LCW* 14:335.
52. *Ibid.*, 14:335–336: “Whether nature, matter, the physical, the external world should be taken as primary, and consciousness, mind, sensation (experience—as the *widespread* terminology of our time has it), the psychical, etc.,

- should be regarded as secondary—that is the root question which in *fact* continues to divide the philosophers into *two great camps*.”
53. See LCW 14:42–57, 14:351.
  54. See, for example, Russell, B., *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (Routledge, 2009).
  55. LCW 14:78–87, 14:94–97, 14:134–138, 14:308–312.
  56. This is the approach suggested by David Bakhurst in *Consciousness and Revolution*, p. 108.
  57. LCW 14:326.
  58. One of them is Bakhurst, who explicitly states that “Lenin’s materialism is a form of philosophical realism” (Bakhurst, D., *Consciousness and Revolution*, p. 108). He recognizes that “Lenin himself rejects the term ‘realism,’ but still prefers ‘to keep the term in play’” (*ibid.*, Note 8). See also Pannekoek A., *Lenin as Philosopher*, c. 51.
  59. LCW 14:60.
  60. *Ibid.*, 14:220; see also 14:169.
  61. This is how Mikhail Bulgakov introduces Lenin’s position in his review of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* published as Bulgakov, M., “Review of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* by N. Il’in’ [Lenin],” *Kriticheskoe obozrenie* [The Critical Review], No. 7–8, 1909.
  62. Ilyenkov, E., *Dialectical Logic, Essays on its History and Theory* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977). English trans. by H. Campbell Creighton is available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/essays/>. See also: Ilyenkov, E. *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* (New Park Publications, 1982).
  63. LCW 14:265.
  64. *Ibid.*, 14:51.
  65. *Ibid.*, 14:29.
  66. *Ibid.*, 14:232.
  67. *Ibid.*, 14:51, 14:69.
  68. *Ibid.*, 14:69–70.
  69. In fact, one of the first who accused Lenin of naïve realism was Akselrod, an admiring pupil of Plekhanov and a fellow Menshevik. She argued that Lenin espoused not materialism but “naïve realism,” which identifies objects and our perceptions of them, and is fundamentally akin to Machism. For more contemporary examples, see: Joravsky, D., *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science: 1917–1932* (New York: Routledge, 2009), especially pp. 17–23; Jordan, Z.A., *Philosophy and Ideology: The Development of Philosophy and Marxism-Leninism in Poland since the Second World War* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1963), p. 35ff.
  70. See, for example, Lektorsky, V.A., *Deiatel’nost’: teoriia, metodologiya, problema* [Activity: theory, methodology, problems] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990);

Lektorsky, V.A., "Otrazhenie" [Reflection], *Novaia filosofskaiia ensiklopediia* [The New Encyclopedia of Philosophy], vol. 4 (Moscow: Mysl', 2001); Kuvakin, V.A., *Mirovozzrenie Lenina: formirovanie i osnovnye cherty* [Lenin's Worldview: Development and the Main Features] (Moscow: Nauka, 1990).

71. See *LCW* 14:159.

72. *Ibid.*, 14:235.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Some of these issues are mentioned and discussed by David Bakhurst, who devotes a special section in his study to ambiguity in Lenin's materialism. See: Bakhurst, D., *Consciousness and Revolution*, pp. 111–123.

75. See *LCW* 14:260–261.

76. *Ibid.*, 14:130.

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## Author Biography

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# Part II

## Lenin and Individual Figures

# 5

## Engels' Co-option of Lenin

Norman Levine

The primary focus of this chapter is on the total discontinuity between Marx's and Lenin's definitions of "the higher phase of communist society." However, it also contains four subsidiary themes: 1) Lenin's ignorance of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (hereafter referred to as *The Manuscripts*) as well as other essays from the period 1844–1845; 2) Lenin's lack of knowledge of the principle of "distributive justice" and of civic humanism, the humanist *polis* tradition of Greek political thought; 3) the absence of the concept of "civil society" in Lenin; and 4) Lenin's failure to appreciate the difference between naturalism and materialism.

In order to grasp Lenin's design of "the higher phase of communist society,"<sup>1</sup> it is imperative to know the works of Marx that Lenin did not read. Lenin's essay, *Karl Marx*, was written in 1913, but only published in 1918.<sup>2</sup> In 1902, Franz Mehring published a four-volume anthology of the known works of Marx, Engels and Lassalle entitled *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle*.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Lenin did read the four-volume *Marx–Engels Correspondence*, published by Dietz Verlag in 1913.<sup>4</sup>

The Mehring anthology did not contain all the works of Marx and Engels and from the perspective of this essay in particular the works of the young

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Marx. Specifically, Mehring's anthology did not contain *The Manuscripts*. David Ryasanov was the first to publish a complete edition of *The Manuscripts* in his *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* in 1927. Lenin died in 1924 and, consequently, he was totally ignorant of *The Manuscripts*. Lenin was the victim of a black hole regarding Marx's 1844–1845 theoretical explorations regarding the philosophical foundations of communism.

In addition to his black hole regarding *The Manuscripts* Lenin was also oblivious of these other works of Marx: 1) *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*; 2) *Critical Marginal Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform". By a Prussian*; 3) *Comments on James Mill*; 4) *Outline of the History of the State*; and 5) *List of Socialist Writers*.

One vitally important exception to Lenin's black hole regarding Marx's early 1844–1845 manuscripts was his knowledge of the *Thesis On Feuerbach*. Initially written by Marx in 1845, it remained invisible until Engels published it as an appendix to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Lenin read this and presumably knew the appendix, which contained the *Thesis On Feuerbach*, but never comments on it. It is important to draw attention to Lenin's omission regarding the *Thesis* at this point, but a deeper analysis of the significance of Lenin's self-induced blindness to this significant text of the early Marx will be made later in this essay.

By contrast, it is instructive to recall that the five works that formed the substructure of Lenin's vision of "the higher phase of communist society" were all written by Engels. These five works and the dates of their publication are: 1) *The Housing Question* (1872); 2) *Anti-Duhring* (1878); 3) *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (first published in French in 1880 and in English in 1892); 4) *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State* (1884); 5) *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886). While Lenin suffered from a black hole regarding Marx's *The Manuscripts*, he was dependent upon Engels's "scientific socialism" for his definition of "the higher phase of communist society."

Within the confines of this chapter, it is impossible to present a detailed analysis of Marx's philosophy put forth in *The Manuscripts*. The primary theme of this essay concerns the contradictions that separated Marx and Lenin on "the higher phase of communist society." Therefore, the brief summary of Marx's complex *The Manuscripts* will only focus on those principles and authors that provided the substructure of Marx's philosophical foundations of "the higher phase of communist society." From this vantage point, the pre-eminent figure is Feuerbach, with Hegel running a close second.

Marx converted to Feuerbachian anthropology. Following Feuerbach, Marx accepted that humankind was a “species being.” Through anti-Enlightenment individualism and anti-Enlightenment’s theory of individual rights, Feuerbach and Marx both maintained that humans were inseparable from the “species.” An additional mode to describe “species being” was the phrase “I-and-Thou,” an epigram that captured the interconnection between the Self and the Other. The Self only recognized itself through its reflection with the Other. The anthropology of “species being” was a principle leading to the separation between naturalism and materialism.

Essentially beginning in the eighteenth century, European materialism was the belief that the dominant energy propelling the movement of society originated in nature. A product of the Scientific Revolution, recognizing a separation between the subject, the human species, and the object, nature, materialism placed causal finality in the laws of nature. Prioritizing the external, materialism maintained that the laws of nature, independent of any human interventions, were the absolute causal laws of change in nature, human development and society.

Conversely, naturalism, also a product of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, understood that human actions were also determining forces in the history of society. Naturalism recognized humankind as a subjective force, a power that contributed to the formation of society and the human “species.” Human history was determined by both material and natural forces, or by the laws of nature that were shaped and directed by human praxis. The Self was kinesis.

The last article in Marx’s *The Manuscripts* is *Critique of Hegel’s Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, Marx describes the relation between the Self and nature as a metabolism, in which human praxis is instrumental in shaping the course of society and history. The notion of praxis, or practice, was crucial to the totality of Marx’s thought. Praxis was the subjective side of the metabolic process through which the “species” imprinted itself upon the course of history. Praxis was an inherent part of Marx’s naturalism, and was the tool by which the Self helped fashion both society and nature. In Marx’s naturalism, praxis was the “I” and nature was the “Thou.”

Feuerbach never embraced communism, but Marx was enormously indebted to him. Marx’s communism was predicated upon Feuerbachian anthropology. A major theme in Marx’s writings during his early 1844–1845 period was humanism, or the end of subjugation and alienation deriving from the existence of private property and classes. Feuerbach provided the philosophical justification for Marx’s progress toward communism by

supplying him with an anthropological naturalism proving that communism was in accordance with ‘species being.’

Marx never criticized Feuerbach’s naturalism, or anthropology. He only maintained that Feuerbach did not go far enough. He also never criticized Feuerbach’s philosophy of nature, but rather asserted that he fulfilled Feuerbach. According to Marx, the anthropological humanism of Feuerbach must be realized and the process of realization could only be accomplished in praxis.

The damage Lenin suffered because Marx’s *The Manuscripts* remained invisible to him was only increased by his failure to properly interpret three texts of Marx that *were* visible to him. In 1895, Lenin read *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels and made roughly 27 pages of notes. These are located in his *Philosophical Notebooks*.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Lenin published an article titled, simply, “Karl Marx,” which contained a bibliography of books he had read about Marx and Engels. In this bibliography Lenin wrote: “In 1844, under the editorship of Marx and Arnold Ruge, there appeared in Paris *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* in which this transition was finally made. Among Marx’s articles published in that magazine the most noteworthy are ... (besides ‘Literarischer Nachlass,’ also published as a separate pamphlet) ‘On the Jewish Question’ ...”<sup>7</sup> The fact that Lenin read the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* meant that he was familiar with two other articles of Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction* as well as Engels’s *An Outline of a Critique of Political Economy*. All three of these articles appeared in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* and there was only one published issue of this journal. Taken together, and exclusively focused on the works of Marx, this bibliographical excavation means that Lenin read *The Holy Family*, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, and *On The Jewish Question*, all providing vital insights into Marx’s Feuerbachian—anthropological—humanist period from 1844 until 1845. Even though the young Marx of *The Manuscripts* was hidden from Lenin the young Marx of *The Holy Family*, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, and *On The Jewish Question* was known to him.

Lenin’s knowledge of the above mentioned texts did not preclude three outcomes: 1) his misinterpretation of them; 2) his failure to properly assess texts of Marx he knew; and 3) his ignorance of Marx’s article *Critical Marginal Notes on the Article “The King of Prussia and Social Reform.”* By a Prussian (henceforth *Critical Marginal Notes*).

In terms of category 1, the evidence of Lenin’s misinterpretation of Marx was exhibited in his *Conspectus on The Holy Family*, while his failure to comment on Marx’s exposition was manifested in his silence regarding *On the Jewish Question* and *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of*

*Right: Introduction.* Furthermore, in addition to Lenin's ignorance of *The Manuscripts*, other published articles by Marx were also unknown to Lenin. For example, he was unaware of *Critical Marginal Notes*, which was first published in the *Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe* in 1932. The losses that Lenin sustained due to his ignorance of *The Manuscripts* were magnified because of his inability to access *Critical Marginal Notes*, or category 3. Within the limitations of this essay, the following critique of categories 1 and 2 and 3 will be constrained.

Before proceeding to Lenin's misinterpretation of Marx, it is instructive to comment on two aspects of Marx's *The Holy Family* that reverberated in Lenin's *Conspectus*. One of these tremors was the Utopian Socialists and the other was the concept of "civil society."

Lenin's 'Conspectus of the Book *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels' contained ample references to the Utopian Socialists Charles Fourier and Robert Owen.<sup>8</sup> Saint-Simon is not mentioned in the *Conspectus*, but is referenced in Marx's *The Holy Family*, so Lenin was cognizant of Marx's knowledge of Saint-Simon, who manifested a decisive role in Lenin's depiction of the "higher phase of communist society" in his 1917 *State and Revolution*. Attention is drawn to Saint-Simon at this point in order to document the importance of this vital social philosopher to Lenin continuing from 1895 until *State and Revolution* and beyond.

Lenin's reading of Marx's *The Holy Family* also acquainted him with the idea of "civil society." Lenin copied three references Marx made about "civil society" in his *Conspectus*.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of civil society was pivotal to Marx's definition of communism. Continuing the concept of civil society as it was developed in the eighteenth century, in particular in the book *A History Of Civil Society* by Adam Ferguson, Marx was aware of a dichotomy between the state and civil society. The state was an expression of class domination, but "civil society" was the substructure to the state. Civil society was the expression of the anthropological ties that drew humankind together; it was the natural interdependence that bound humankind into families, *gens* and tribes. Marx predicted that the state would disappear under communism, but civil society would then replace the state. Marx was not an anarchist. He drew a distinction between state and governance. With the extinction of the state, civil society would provide the regulations of economic life and this regulation was governance. A deeper analysis of Marx's concept of civil society will be offered in the later discussion of the vision of communist society set forth in *The Civil War in France* (1871).

Attention is drawn to Lenin's knowledge of the term "civil society" in Marx because after 1895 Lenin never used it again. "Civil society" is not employed in *State and Revolution*. Lenin employs the word "society," but not "civil society" and a huge difference separates the two. When Lenin abandons "civil society," he surrenders the idea that a replacement for the state exists and he consequently plunges into anarchism. The end of the state in the highest level of communism only leaves habit, no structures for government and thus anarchy.

## Lenin's Misinterpretations

In his 1895 *Conspectus*, Lenin committed a huge misinterpretation of Marx, an intellectual malfunction that rendered "the higher phase of communist society" in *State and Revolution* a total distortion of Marx. To avoid constant repetition, I will employ four synonyms in the remainder of this essay for the phrase "higher phase of communist society" and these synonyms are mature, attained, realized and finalized communism.

*The Holy Family* contains two sections that deal with the eighteenth century background to the 1789 French Revolution, one section entitled 'Critical Battle Against the French Revolution' and the second entitled 'Critical Battle Against the French Materialism.'<sup>10</sup> The limits of this chapter do not allow an extended discussion of Marx and Lenin and French materialism, but do permit a relatively in-depth discussion of the 'Critical Battle Against the French Revolution' and on this issue it is necessary to compare Marx's original text against Lenin's interpretation of Marx in *Conspectus*.

A careful reading of 'Critical Battle Against the French Revolution' demonstrates that Marx did not believe that mature communism would be based on the principle of equality. In relation to finalized communism, Marx was not an egalitarian.

In his 'Critical Battle Against the French Revolution' Marx wrote:

Robespierre, Saint Just and their party fell because they confused the ancient realistic and democratic republic based on real slavery with the modern spiritualist democratic representative state which is based on emancipated slavery, on bourgeois society. What a terrible mistake it is to have to recognize and sanction in the *Rights of Man*, modern bourgeois society, the society of industry, of universal competition, of private interest freely following its aims of anarchy, of the self-alienated material and spiritual individuality, and yet subsequently to annul the manifestation of the life of that society in separate

individuals and at the same time to wish to model the political head of that society after the fashions of the ancients.<sup>11</sup>

This sentence was a critique of Robespierre, Saint-Just and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Marx rejected the views of Robespierre and Saint-Just and those proclaimed in the *Declaration* because the principles they espoused were not the proper correctives to the slavery of bourgeois society. With the triumph of capitalism, the *Declaration* would only strengthen the domination of the private propertied class.

With capitalist society enshrining the principles of the right of private property, this only legitimized the power of the bourgeoisie. To constitutionalize the equality of possession only legalized the inequality of property because the principle of equality only sanctioned the bourgeoisie to acquire more property and increased their domination of society in general. Marx argued that capitalist society offered the best illustration of how a political principle, equality, was perverted after the capitalist revolution into a slogan that hid the movement of the bourgeoisie toward enhanced wealth and dictatorial political power.

Since capitalist society, for Marx, meant the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and since such a dictatorship was sanctioned by the principles of equality it was necessary for communist society to create a new ideological substructure. Since equality inevitably led to inequality in a bourgeois society then it was necessary to develop a new political vocabulary, which would provide theoretical substantiation for communism.

Marx's 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program* contains his clearest expression of the theoretical foundations of communism:

In the higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly ... only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.<sup>12</sup>

Marx's description of the philosophical foundations of realized communism was not egalitarian. It proposed a new metric for both production and distribution. Transcending the "narrow horizon of bourgeois right," production in the "higher phase of communist society" would

be based on “ability” and distribution would be based on “need.” In realized communism, the inequality of “ability” and “need” would be overcome.

Later pages of this essay will go into greater detail regarding Marx’s depiction of the “higher phase of communist society.” However, at this point an analysis of Marx’s abandonment of the concepts of right and equality is called for because the discussion centers on Lenin’s misreading of *The Holy Family*. Lenin never surrendered egalitarianism and this was one distortion contributing to his misrepresentation of attained communism in *State and Revolution*. Lenin never grasped the necessity of transcending the bourgeois concepts of right and equality. Lenin did not recognize that, in 1917, Robespierre and Saint-Just had outlived their time.

## Lenin’s Failure to Properly Assess Texts of Marx He Knew

### *On the Jewish Question*

In addition to other insights, *On the Jewish Question* was a major source of Marx’s differentiation between a political and a social revolution. For Marx, a political revolution destroyed the bourgeois state apparatus, but not the social conditions that initially gave rise to the bourgeois state. In order to achieve communism, political revolution must be succeeded by a social revolution because the social revolution would eradicate the social conditions out of which bourgeois capitalism arose. It is in this context that Marx used the term “permanent revolution,” which related to the continuity between the political and social revolutions.

Lenin did learn the difference between political and social revolutions from Marx and did perpetuate these ideas. But Lenin did not understand Marx in terms of the content of the communist social revolution. In *On the Jewish Question*, Marx wrote:

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a species-being in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his ‘forces propres’ [own powers] as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social powers from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished<sup>13</sup>

In this paragraph, Marx employed the idea of “species being” to characterize communism, or “species being” constituted its essence. In addition, communism was not anarchy, because Marx asserted that the powers of the “species” must be “organized” as “social powers,” or “civil society.” Communism existed when the powers of the “species” became the organizing principles of “civil society.”

Although Lenin did perpetuate the distinction between political and social revolutions, he never defined “the higher phase of communist society” in terms of “species being” or “civil society.” Leninist communism discontinued Marx’s definition of communism because Lenin purged “civil society” and “species being” from his own definition. Lenin’s failure to comprehend Marx’s meaning of “species being” and “civil society” opened a huge schism between Leninism and Marx.

### ***Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right:* Introduction**

In his essay *Karl Marx*, Lenin indicated that he had read Marx’s *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.<sup>14</sup> This is an error because the latter was first published in the *Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe* in 1932. Lenin had actually read *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, which was initially published in the journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* with which Lenin was familiar.<sup>15</sup>

Even though Lenin did not read the full version of the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, his reading of the Introduction proved to contain both benefits and omissions. Marx devoted the major portions of the latter to a discussion of the relationship between theory and praxis. Marx set forth a critique of Hegelian philosophy specifically, and of philosophy in general, because philosophy in-itself was abstracted from reality. Neither a political nor social revolution could be accomplished without the transition from theory to practice. Lenin adopted the theory–practice equation and on this issue was the successor to Marx.

Unfortunately, Lenin’s discontinuity from Marx was displayed in his failure to adopt the concept of “civil society.” The pages of the Introduction overflow with references to “civil society.”<sup>16</sup> Yet again, Lenin’s misinterpretation of Marx regarding the “highest phase of communist society” was revealed by his failure to grasp the significance of “civil society.” The concept of “civil society” is a vacuity in Lenin after his *Conspectus* and this

vacuum proves that his definition of communism is a fatal deviation from Marx.

### ***Critical Marginal Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform." By a Prussian***

Lenin's ignorance of this article burdened him with a huge vacancy regarding the nature of the "higher phase of communist society." In the course of this essay, Marx frequently uses the term "community" to refer to finalized communism.<sup>17</sup> By utilizing the word "community," or in other instances "association," Marx meant that the disappearance of the state allowed community to become the governing agency in realized communism. "Communism" and "association" were synonyms for "civil society." Governance meant organization and regulation and it was the purpose of the "community" and "association" to supply this governance.

The vacancy that Lenin suffered when he ignored the terms "community," "association," and "civil society" meant that he lacked any theoretical principles by which to govern the "higher phase of communist society." Without "civil society," Lenin fell victim to utopianism because his theory was devoid of any governance of civil society. Lenin bequeathed the utopian dream of "habit," but this was psychology and not governance by "civil society."

This chapter has thus far focused on the losses Lenin incurred through his ignorance of, or misinterpretations of, Marx's texts from his early 1844–1845 period. These early texts expressed Marx's philosophical foundations of mature communism. The 1848 *Communist Manifesto* set forth principles of communism, but not specific recommendations for the structure of a communist society. It was only in the 1870s that historical events provided Marx with the opportunity and stimulus to affirm the structure, sociological and political dimensions of the "higher phase of communist society." The two historical events that encouraged greater structural, sociological and political specificity from Marx were the Paris Commune of 1871 and the 1875 foundation of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany.

Marx wrote his *Civil War in France* in 1871 as an analysis of the creation of the Commune of Paris. In order to properly understand the specific social and political policies advocated by Marx, it is first necessary to analyze several vital concepts of Marx's revolutionary methodology. In discussing the *Civil War in France*, the center of gravity will fall on Part Three of Marx's

work. This discussion will begin with an analysis of the meaning of the concept "political" in Marx.

There are three levels to the meaning of political in Marx: 1) Political-as-Strategy; 2) Political-as-State; 3) Political-as-Legislation-and-Administration.

### 1) Political-as-Strategy

Previous discussions in this essay dealt with the issue of political and social revolutions. In this context, political predominantly referred to the bourgeois democratic revolution. The political revolution of the bourgeoisie brought about a democratic suffrage, but still left the capitalist social order of class domination in existence. For Marx's theory of revolution, the bourgeois stage of the political revolution must advance to the social revolution, or the end of private property and class. The Political-as-Strategy referred to a stage in the revolutionary continuity.

### 2) Political-as-State

The Political-as-State referred to the state as a form of oppression. In the era of capitalism, the state was an instrument of domination controlled by the bourgeoisie. When Marx called for the overthrow of the state, he meant the nineteenth century bourgeois state as well as the termination of private property and class.

### 3) Political-as-Legislation-and-Administration

Political-as-Legislation-and-Administration meant governance. In any "civil society," particularly industrial international capitalism, legislation and administration were indispensable, referring to the self-government of civil society. Government was necessary for the administration of railroads, the establishment of rules for hospitals, and governance for seaports, and governance was the democracy of "civil society".

Marx's call for the overthrow of the state was not a call for the total abolition of politics. The end of the state in Marx meant the end of the Political-as-Strategy and the end of the Political-as-State. However, it was not a call for the end of Politics-as-Legislation-and-Administration. Attained communism was the rule of governance, or the self-government of "civil society" by means of legislation and administration generated in "civil society" itself.

Hereafter, when referring to Politics-as-Legislation-and-Administration the designation of “Politics(3)” will be employed.

The “higher phase of communist society” was the government of “civil society” and government meant the establishment of laws and regulations. Politics(3) survived in “the higher phase of communist society.”

Another important distinction needs to be drawn before the *Civil War in France* can be adequately understood and this is Marx’s call for the end of the division of labor. To properly understand Marx’s call for the end of the division of labor, it is necessary to divide this category into two parts: 1) The Division of Labor and Class; 2) The Division of Labor and the Inequality of Skills and Talents.

#### 1) The Division of Labor and Class

The end of the Division of Labor and Class meant that private property should not determine vocation. The advantages of private property should not provide an advantage for those seeking positions in Parliament, churches, universities and corporations. Positions in the job market would be distributed on the basis of talent and intelligence and not wealth. When Marx called for the end of the division of labor, he did not mean that all occupations in the complex industrial society could be fulfilled by every person, but rather that the ownership of property would not be the determining factor for the person who received the employment.

#### 2) The Division of Labor and the Inequality of Skills and Talents

Marx recognized the inequality of vocations and the inequality of skills. Therefore, to properly assess The Division of Labor and the Inequality of Skills it is necessary to separate this category into two parts: 2A) The Division of Labor as Occupation; 2B) The Division of Labor as Skill and Talents.

##### *2A) The Division of Labor as Occupation*

Not all occupations were equal. The occupation of an astronomer required great mathematical abilities, and the occupation of a crane operator required great physical strength. Occupations, because they required different skills, were not equal, or they were differentiated in terms of talent. The end of the division of labor did not mean occupational egalitarianism, or the belief that every man could fulfil every occupation. Inequality was a feature of occupational specialization.

2B) *The Division of Labor as Skill and Talents*

Just as occupational requirements were unequal, so skill and talent were unequal. Individuals differed in terms of talents and skills. Some people possessed greater intelligence than others, while some had greater ability in music. An inequality of talent and intelligence was a factor of nature. The inequality of talent incurred an inequality of production. The “higher phase of communist society” did not transcend the inequality of occupations or skills and this meant that in the area of occupations, production and distribution finalized communism was not egalitarian.

This essay has, up to this point, focused on the philosophical foundations of realized communism as expressed predominantly in Marx’s writings from the 1844–1845 period of his life. It also outlined Lenin’s black hole, or the losses Lenin suffered through his ignorance of most of Marx’s texts of 1844–1845 as well as his misinterpretation of several important texts of Marx from this early period. The discussion will now advance to the mature Marx of the 1870–1875 period when he changed his focus, when he moved from philosophical foundations to concrete programmatic formulas of actual legislative-administrative and socio-economic structures of the “higher phase of communist society.” Marx’s *Civil War in France* (1871) and his *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) contain his most detailed outlines of the socio-economic organizations of attained communism. Lenin knew both of these works and they were not part of his black hole.

*The Civil War in France* was an address Marx gave to the International Workingmen’s Association. It is composed of four parts because Marx wrote several drafts to his speech. The commentary contained here focuses on the third draft.

In his address to the International Workingmen’s Association Marx described Politics(3), in which he outlined the legislative and administrative structures of both local and the national communes. Upon the destruction of the state, the communal organization would be adopted by all the cities and towns of France. Patterned upon the 1871 Commune of Paris, the local communal polity would be administered on the basis of universal suffrage. In addition, the entire administrative apparatus, the entire bureaucracy, would no longer be monopolized by the propertied class, but open to all members of the national and local communes. Furthermore, the national solidarity of France, or any other nation, would not be shattered. National unity would be maintained and each local commune would send delegates to a national commune in the capital. A National Communal Constitution

would be written indicating the legislative and administrative powers to be retained by the local communes and the national commune. Marx's address stressed decentralization. The Communal Constitution protected localization, whereby the majority of legislative and administrative decisions would be decentralized in the local communes.<sup>18</sup>

Marx's description of the "higher phase of communist society" retained Politics(3). Anti-Bakunin Marx rejected anarchism.

Attained communism was the enthronement of "civil society" and Politics(3) and "civil society" and governance were synonyms. The only way to liberate "civil society" was to eradicate the bourgeois state. When the bourgeois state was annihilated "civil society" would regain its supremacy and its freedom to manifest itself.

Not only would the commune create a Politics(3) as an expression of "civil society," but it would also accomplish the liberation of labor. With the abolition of private property the instruments of production would no longer be monopolized by the bourgeoisie. The worker, now the possessor of the means of production, was free to determine the mode of production. Co-operative communities created the condition for co-operative production. In addition, co-operative communities would create a national plan for production and thus transcend the anarchy in production. Democratization would control national production because the national plan would be a product of the commune.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these general principles, Marx's *Civil War in France*, Part Three, also promulgated many specific reforms. The standing army would be replaced by a militia and the professional police by civil volunteers. The end of private property would be the death-knell of the bourgeois class and universal suffrage would guarantee the complete democratization of "civil society." The bureaucratic and administrative hegemony of the bourgeois class would end. Schools, government offices, Parliament, would no longer be monopolized by property, but thrown open to all men or women who were qualified by skill and talent. All workers received equal pay.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the *Civil War in France*, a second major source of Marx's views on "the higher phase of communist society" was the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, which was predominantly an attack on the German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle. The discussion here will relate to two vitally important concepts explored by Marx in his *Critique*. The first concept relates to the issue of labor certificates and the second to the metric regarding production and distribution.

## Labor Certificates

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx attacks Lassalle's ideas regarding labor certificates.

In order to achieve equality between production and distribution Lassalle proposed that all workers carry labor certificates and on these certificates the number of hours the individual labored would be stamped. After completing his weekly work schedule, the worker would carry his certificate to a store, which would distribute to him goods that were equal to the hours he contributed to production. If a worker labored 40 hours he would receive goods, milk, bread, clothing that were calculated to equate to 40 hours of labor.

Lassalle's labor certificates were an attempt to create equality between production and distribution. The metric he used to achieve equality was the quantity of hours worked. Labor time became the calculus of equality. If the amount of labor time contained in the goods distributed to fulfill the needs of the worker was the same amount of labor time expended in the production of these goods equality was the result.

Marx rejected this Lassallean formula. According to Marx, production was not based on time, nor were needs universal. Marx drew attention to the disparity between labor time and abilities. A natural inequality of ability existed and, as a result, an inequality of production would result. The more talented individual would produce more than the less talented. An inequality of need also existed and the person with more needs would require a greater distribution of goods.

## The Metric Regarding Production and Distribution

When Marx sought a formula to guarantee maximum production and distribution to satisfy needs, he abandoned the concept of equality. He recognized that unequal ability resulted in unequal production and that unequal needs resulted in unequal distribution.

In *Critique of the Gotha Program* Marx famously prescribed: "From each according to his ability to each according to his needs."<sup>21</sup> Marx recognized the natural inequality of ability and need, but assumed that unequal production would increase thus guaranteeing that unequal distribution would fulfill all needs.

In order to ensure the complementarity between ability and needs, Marx surrendered the mathematics of labor. In terms of the relations between production and distribution, he kept the labor theory of value but abandoned labor as the equation of distribution. When Marx abandoned the mathematics of labor, he returned to ethics, he resurrected the notion of “distributive justice”.

“Distributive justice” was an ethical principle mandating that the more prosperous citizens must ensure that the less prosperous had their needs met. Answering to the needs of the poor was considered a principle of justice. The ethical principle of justice necessitated that the poor have their needs met by distribution from the creative. The ethical principle of “distributive justice” was not egalitarian; it did not deal with equality, but with justice.

Marx learned about “distributive justice” from the writings of Aristotle, a representative of Classical Greek Humanism. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle propounded the theory of “distributive justice”, which became the equation upon which production and distribution were practiced in the communism of Marx.<sup>22</sup>

Marx’s doctoral dissertation of 1841 was entitled ‘The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature’ and demonstrated his early penetration into Classical Greek culture.<sup>23</sup> Volume One of *Das Kapital* contains numerous references to the work of Aristotle, particularly Aristotle’s *The Politics* and *The Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>24</sup> The employment of the ethics of “distributive justice” to describe the methods of production and distribution in his version of communism demonstrate that the spirit of civic humanism continued in Marx. Some of the virtues of the *polis* lived on in his vision of communism, in which he provided a proletarian image of the Greek citizen. The commune was a proletarian perpetuation of the ethics of the *polis*.

The discontinuities between Marx and Lenin regarding realized communism are most clearly revealed in Lenin’s misinterpretation of Marx’s *Civil War in France* and the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. The following analysis will demonstrate that on this issue Lenin either separated himself from the thought of Marx, or drew most of his inspiration from Engels and consequently on the question of the “higher phase of communist society” Lenin perpetuated the ideas of Engels. In this context, it is necessary to speak of Engelsian Leninism.

Lenin looked upon Engels as a twin of Marx. Engels and Marx spoke with one voice. The five works of Engels that Lenin selected as encapsulating the thought of Marx were: 1) *The Housing Question* (1872); 2) *Anti-*

*Duhring* (1878); 3) *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (first published in French in 1880 and then in English in 1892); 4) *The Origin of The Family, Private Property And The State* (1885); and 5) *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886). When Lenin read these books, he assumed he was reading Marx.

Even though both Marxian and Engelsian Leninism presented opposed descriptions of the “higher phase of communist society,” they did share a common enemy and this nemesis was anarchism. And while both sought to eradicate anarchism, they eventually reached differing solutions. Anarchism was a ghost that hung over Engels’ and Lenin’s writings.

The most precise formula illustrating the schism separating Marx and Lenin over the mature communism is to divide the topic into two categories: A) Areas of Agreement; and B) Areas of Disagreement.

## A Areas of Agreement

### 1. Army and Police

Both Marx and Lenin agreed that the army and police must be democratized. The professional army must be transformed into a militia. The police must cease being an organ of social control under the auspices of the propertied class. The preservation of civil order must not become a monopoly of the economic elite. Lenin made this demand in his *State and Revolution*<sup>25</sup> and he echoed the same demands Marx made in *Civil War in France*.<sup>26</sup>

### 2. Occupational Democracy

Marx and Lenin agreed that all occupations should be available to all citizens. No administrative, legislative, governmental, educational, or bureaucratic occupation should be privileged for the propertied.

As a means of destroying the bureaucracy of wealth and class, both Marx and Lenin advocated the principle of the automatic rotation of occupations. Workers would automatically rotate and exchange jobs and this rotation would prevent a particular group from dominating any occupation. Job rotation prevented any occupational dictatorship.<sup>27</sup>

As a means of ensuring vocational democracy, both Marx and Lenin advocated equal wages for all workers. Regardless of the nature of the occupation, regardless of the skills required to fulfil any occupation, all workers

would receive the same wages. The equality of wages reaffirmed the principle of economic democracy.<sup>28</sup>

However, Marx's agreement on the equality of wages did not mean that he believed that all labor was equal. A cornerstone of Marx's theory was that class based on property was inherently a social institution of domination. The equality of wages was a strategy to prohibit the development of class. Equal pay would prevent any particular group from evolving into a wealthy class. But the equality of wages did not mean that Marx recognized the equality of all forms of labor. The inherent inequality of skills and talents meant the inequality of productive capacity. Physical and mental labor must be accorded equal social respect, but this did not negate the recognition of the inequality of production between mental and physical labor. Marx was aware of the distinction between inherent productive capacity and the social evaluation of labor.

On all the above-mentioned issues, the militia and police, occupational democracy, job rotation, equal wages, the termination of bureaucracy as an empire of the propertied class, Marx and Lenin were in agreement. On these issues, Marxian Leninism existed.

However, massive spaces of disagreement existed between Marx and Lenin and this essay will now pivot and analyze these spaces of contestation. Engels enters in these distances of disagreement and his appearance created the foundations of Engelsian Leninism.

## The Concepts of Equality and Right

The section, "the higher phase of communist society" in *State and Revolution* is a defense of the bourgeois principles of equality and right. Lenin's exit from Marxian Leninism arose through his gross misinterpretation of Marx's 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to point out that although Lenin's interpretation is dominated by his erroneous reading of Marx, there were aspects of it that he appropriated correctly. Previous paragraphs in this essay described how Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* negated the Lassallean idea of labor certificates on the basis that the productivity and distribution of labor could not be captured by means of the mathematical quantification of labor. On the issue of labor certificates, Lenin stood with Marx. The section titled 'The Higher Phase of Communist Society' is absent of any reference to labor certificates.

However, there is a difference between Lassalleanism and the principle of the equality of labor. Whereas Marx disavowed Lassalleanism, he did not advocate the principle of the equality of labor. For Marx, the productive talents and skills of different individuals were unequal, and therefore the belief in the equality of labor was a fiction. Marx also recognized that needs differed. Lenin exhibited a bipolarity on the issues of certificates and the equality of labor and needs in Marx. On the issue of certificates, Lenin and Marx were united in their rejection. Nevertheless, on the problem of the equality of labor and needs, Lenin estranged himself from Marx and this estrangement was one of the causes of Lenin's embrace of Engelsism.

The central theme of "the higher phase of communist society" in *State and Revolution* was Lenin's attempt to demonstrate how bourgeois notions of equality and right could only be realized in the higher phase of communism.

In *State and Revolution*, and other political treatises, Lenin drew a distinction between socialism and communism, or socialism was the first phase of communist society. He proposed a three-stage development toward "the higher phase of communist society": the first stage was the overthrow of capitalism; the second was socialism, or the first phase of communist society; the third stage was "the higher phase" itself. However, in stage two the complete realization of equality and right was not possible. Lenin wrote:

And so, in the first phase of communist society (usually called socialism) 'bourgeois right' is not abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic revolution so far attained, i.e. only in respect of the means of production. 'Bourgeois right' recognizes them as the private property of individuals. Socialism converts them into common property. To that extent ... and to that extent alone ... 'bourgeois right' disappears.<sup>30</sup>

For Lenin, the advance from the lower to the higher phase of communist society was only possible on the basis of advanced technological achievements. Lenin fell victim to technological metaphysics, or the belief that attained communism could only be reached on the basis of industrial-factory superabundance. A vast national supply of commodities was the precondition for the attainment of realized communism. Industry was a cornucopia from which communism emerged.

Lenin's commitment to a technological metaphysics was a display of his enslavement to dialectical materialism. An advocate of Georgi Plekhanov, Lenin understood materialism to be a synonym for natural science and

therefore it was only by means of the control of nature, machinery and technology that the conquest of needs could be consummated.

Lenin made productive abundance the dividing line between socialism and communism, as the necessary condition for the final conquest of equality and right. In order to justify his adherence to the universality of equality and need, Lenin again quoted from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."<sup>31</sup> Not only was Marx's formula the foundation of universal equality and need, but it was also the condition for the final disappearance of the state.<sup>32</sup> Industrial materialism became the precondition for anarchy.

However, Lenin never undertook an examination of the inequality of ability. He simply assumed that workers "will voluntarily work according to their ability."<sup>33</sup>

In addition, Lenin never addressed the inequality of needs. On this issue he wrote: "There will then be no need for society: in distributing products, to regulate the quantity to be received by each, each will take freely according to their need."<sup>34</sup>

Industrial productivity would manufacture enough commodities sufficient for the needs of every member of communism. The superabundance would allow citizens to go to a spacious department store and take what they needed. Lenin's *State and Revolution* concluded as a utopianism of commodities.

Lenin's devotion to materialism was the foundation for his belief that material goods were the source of the gratification of needs.

Another instance of Lenin's misinterpretation of Marx surfaced over the question of the relationship between mental and physical labor. The source of Lenin's misunderstanding was again Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* and this famous phrase contained in the text:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished, after labor has become not only a livelihood but life's prime want ...<sup>35</sup>

In terms of the above paragraph, Lenin distorted Marx on two vital concepts: 1) "the antithesis between mental and physical labor"; 2) "the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor." I will discuss each of these distortions separately.

## **“The Antithesis Between Mental and Physical Labor”**

Lenin erroneously interpreted Marx as asserting that the distinction between mental and physical labor would be overcome in the “higher phase of communist society.” He believed in the rotation of occupations such that, if trained properly, every individual would be capable of performing every vocation in mature communism. Lenin believed in a technological utopia. Not only would such a utopia produce economic superabundance, but it would also produce the industrial conditions for eradicating the difference between mental and physical labor; thus economic superabundance was also the grounds for the achievement of equality.

## **“The Enslaving Subordination of the Individual to the Division of Labor”**

Lenin also erroneously interpreted Marx as asserting that the “higher phase of communist society” would make the division of labor extinct. Lenin’s misconception derived from his belief that the rotation of jobs—one week a bank clerk, the next a crane operator—or the termination of the difference between mental and physical labor provided the grounds for the end of the division of labor. For Lenin, equality meant that all citizens performed the same occupations and were free to consume as much as they needed. Equality would be reached when every worker, performing in different occupations, objectified the same quantity of labor time.

The doctrine of equality as the epicenter of Lenin’s definition of communism is definitively expressed in his description of the “higher phase of communist society” in *State and Revolution*, where he wrote:

Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletarians’ struggle for equality and of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of classes. But democracy means only formal equality. And as soon as equality is achieved for all members of society in relation to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labor and wages, humanity will inevitably be confronted with the question of advancing further from formal equality to actual equality.<sup>36</sup>

Marx’s interpretation of these two principles was a total repudiation of the Leninist diversion. When Marx wrote about the “antithesis between mental

and physical labor” he did not refer to the equal expenditure of labor time, but rather to societal evaluation of mental and physical labor. In bourgeois society, physical and mental labor were assigned contrasting evaluations. For Marx, in the “higher phase of communist society”, mental and physical labor would remain distinct, but their sociological accreditations would be freed from bourgeois class denigration.

Marx’s primary concern was with human activity, the free expression of human skills and talents. Following Hegel, Marx looked upon human objectification, the inherent drive for human predication, as a basic motivating force in the being of humans. The “higher phase of communist society” would allow skills and talents to be expressed in a unhindered fashion. An exponent of Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Marx envisioned mature communism as the free metabolism between humankind and nature. In addition, Marx was a champion of Feuerbachian naturalism and advanced the thesis that human agency, the “I”, sculptured external materiality, the “Thou.”

For Marx, in mature communism, talents and skills would remain unequal, but communist society would not allow this inequality to eventuate into any class domination. Equality was not the essence of communist society for Marx, but rather the freedom to labor in accordance with the inherent predicating powers of the human species. Marx’s acknowledgement of the inequality of ability and talent meant that he also recognized the need for the division of labor. Contrary to Lenin, in Marx’s realized communism the division of labor still subsisted.

In realized communism, what expired was the division of labor based upon property, or the domination of the capitalist class. With the overthrow of capitalism, the universal criterion for the division of labor was no longer property, but the inequality of talents and abilities. In mature communism, the division of labor continued, but the division of labor would derive from the inequality of talent and abilities.

Lenin assumed that the division of labor could be eliminated because his presumption was the equality of labor time. Lenin quantified labor and this arithmetical calculus led him to assume that the division of labor could be subtracted from society. Marx recognized that the inequality of talent was inherent in humanity and thus that the division of labor corresponded to “species being.” However, the division of labor did not mean an inequality of wages. Both Marx and Lenin affirmed that all workers must receive the same wages.

As previous paragraphs demonstrated, the source of Lenin’s misinterpretation of Marx’s maxim “From each according to his ability to each according to his needs” arose from the fact that Lenin erroneously assumed that

this constituted an advocacy of equality. This famous sentence of Marx was not a defence of egalitarianism, but rather a new demonstration of how inequality of talent was the premise for the satisfaction of need.

Marx's maxim was a restatement of Aristotle's theory of "distributive justice" and a demonstration of how the inequality of ability was the means for the satisfaction of unequal needs. "Distributive justice" for Marx was a form of complementarity, the procedure by which the inequality of need would be satisfied by the inequality of production, which raised productive outcomes.

The concept of "distributive justice" was a total vacancy in Lenin's political philosophy of communism. Rather than appeal to ethics, Lenin resorted to mechanistic behavioralism, or how external materialism conditioned human behavior.

As a means to fully elucidate Lenin's succumbing to mechanistic behavioralism, it is necessary to divide this category into the following eight parts: A) Vast Plan; B) Syndicates; C) Accounting and Control; D) The Postal Service; E) Centralization; F) Habit; G) The End of Society; and H) Anarchism

#### A) Vast Plan

Production in realized communism would be organized on the basis of a vast plan. Lenin believed in centralized planning, the promulgation of a set of rules to be obeyed by every branch and person of the communist society. Lenin visualized mature communism as one huge national factory. He pictured the routinization and repetition of factory discipline as a model for the entirety of attained communism.

#### B) Syndicates

Lenin pictured communist society as a "syndicate."<sup>37</sup> A syndicate was a collective of local factories, and therefore behavior in an attained communism would imitate the regimentation of the factory. The routinization of factory life would become the operating procedures for the totality of an attained communist society.

#### C) Accounting and Control

Behavior in a communist society would follow the regimentation of accounting and control. The image of an advanced technological factory was the model for individual behavior throughout a nation. Human behavior would imitate the accounting principles of a book-keeper.

## D) The Postal Service

Lenin portrayed human behavior in attained communism as the universalization of the post office. Social and individual behavior would imitate the disciplined activity “of millions of workers in the huge, complex, socialized apparatus of the postal service, railways, big factories, large-scale commerce, banking, etc., etc.”<sup>38</sup> The aim of behavior was the attainment of the highest productivity and so individuals must be as regimented as machines. Lenin wrote: “The whole of society will become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labor and pay.”<sup>39</sup>

## E) Centralization

Centralization was another attribute of attained communism. The organization of communist society “as a single office and a single factory” required a centralized structure. Lenin believed he was in complete accord with Marx because he was of the opinion that Marx believed in the centralization of finalized communist society. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin stated that “Marx was a centralist.”<sup>40</sup>

## F) Habit

Lenin substituted habit for any form of civil society to supervise a vast economic plan. Lenin wrote: “an order under which the functions of control and accounting becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will become a habit ...”<sup>41</sup> In another section of *State and Revolution*, Lenin repeated his call for habit to evict state, government and “civil society”; he wrote “that the necessity of observing the simple fundamental rules of the community will very soon become a habit.”<sup>42</sup> Lenin equated finalized communism with mechanistic behavioralism. The need for any social regulation would be replaced by motivational conditioning, while psychological training would eliminate the need for societal organs of administration and legislation.

## G) The End of Society

In fully mature communism, Lenin not only called for the end of the state, but also for the end of government. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin wrote: “from this moment the need for government of any kind begins to disappear altogether.”<sup>43</sup>

The call for the end of government was an expansion of his demand for the end of the state. The end of the state meant the end of the domination of the bourgeois class. The end of government meant the termination of all administrative and legislative practices. Lenin's call for the elimination of government introduced a major problem in his theory of mature communist society: how were the administrative and legislative practices which were needed to standardize the functioning of his nation-wide syndicates to be generated? Lenin evaded the question regarding the processes to be established for the regulation of his nation-wide syndicates.

Earlier paragraphs in this essay noted that in Lenin's 1895 "Conspectus of the Book *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels," he did reference Marx's concept of "civil society" and that after this initial 1895 citation the concept of "civil society" evaporates from all of Lenin's writings.

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin not only called for the abolition of the state and governance, but also for the abolition of society. In his 1917 text, Lenin wrote: "There will then be no need for society, in distributing products, to regulate the quantity to be received by each ..."44

Lenin's description of finalized communism rested on the extinction of state, governance and society. In essence, Lenin's portrait of mature communism was devoid of any administrative or legislative institutions, or the existence of any organ through which the management of a vast plan could be both originated and administered.

## H) Anarchism

Lenin's relationship with anarchism was two-fold: rejection and capitulation. Rejection was further subdivided into its strategical and political aspects. On the strategical level, Lenin criticized both Blanqui and Bakunin. He rejected the Blanquist and Bakunist ideas that the seizure of power by the proletariat could be achieved by a revolutionary elite through a coup. Lenin's strategy toward the making of the October 1917 revolution was a gradual path, a consistent development in which it was necessary to at first compromise with and temporarily acquiesce in the control of the bourgeois state. Bolshevism did not initially mean an insurgent coup by a devoted minority, but the gradual movement, facilitated by the alliance between party and proletariat, toward the ultimate seizure of power executed by the Communist Party and the Soviets.

Politically, Lenin rejected the anarchist program of the "smashing" of the apparatus of the state as advocated by Bakunin and Blanqui, the immediate

disappearance of the state after the minority coup. Instead, Lenin adopted the policy of Engels, who first wrote of the “withering” of the state apparatus after the majoritarian proletarian seizure of power. The “withering” of the state in Engels, to be copied by Lenin, meant the gradual erosion of all state functions.

However, Lenin capitulated to anarchism by his adoption of its political vision. When Bakunin and Blanqui spoke of the end of the state, the revolutionary “smash,” they envisioned a post-state condition without any administrative or legislative functions. The post-state solution of the anarchists was predicated on the abolition of any societal organ to regulate administrative or legislative functions.

But this was exactly Lenin’s paradigm for “the highest phase of communist society.” His image of attained communism was a social condition devoid of any organ regulating social productive or distributive functions and this was a duplication of anarchism. When Lenin negated Marx’s vision of “civil society,” he capitulated to anarchism.

In addition to Lenin’s succumbing to anarchism, he additionally surrendered to Engelsism.<sup>45</sup> The pinnacle of success for mature communist society was equality, and by equality Lenin meant that all members of realized communism were able to appropriate, from the production of abundance, objects that would satisfy all needs.

The Leninist form of equality was predicated on the belief that under realized communism social production would expand to the extent that it was able to produce the quantity of goods necessary for the fulfilment of all personal needs. Lenin’s theory of mature communism was the utopianism of materialism, the belief that the increased capacity of the factory was capable of fulfilling all needs, or equality.

Lenin harbored the idea, no doubt, that mature communism could achieve this materialist panacea. He drew an analogy between humankind’s control over nature and its future control over production. Lenin was aware of how the Scientific Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had equipped humankind with a knowledge of the forces of nature which led to the control of nature. Similarly, Lenin assumed that, based upon scientific advances, it would also learn to guide the factory system to a level of production that would create a panacea of commodities.

In agreement with Plekhanov, nineteenth-century dialectical materialism was the fulfilment of the Scientific Revolution, the perfection of social control over external nature. Lenin referred to the two processes,

the control over nature establishing the conditions for the control of industry, as “scientific socialism.” Humankind’s domination of nature set the precedent and proof of its capacity to dominate industry. The phrase “scientific socialism” was invented by Engels; it was never used by Marx. When Lenin adopted its principles, he permitted himself to be co-opted by Engelsism. Lenin’s co-option by Engelsism was the birthplace of Engelsian Leninism.

However, before advancing to a study of the similarity between Engels and Lenin on the question of finalized communism, it is first necessary to make visible the disparities between Marx and Lenin on the question of realized communism as a means of preparing for the presentation of Engelsian Leninism.

The above analysis of Lenin’s vision of realized communism explored eight aspects of it. I will now proceed to demonstrate how Marx negated all these eight axioms of Lenin’s “the higher phase of communist society.” I will organize Marx’s refutation of Lenin’s vision of mature communism into six parts: I) The War Between State and “Civil Society”; J) The 1871 Commune as the Victory of “Civil Society”; K) “Civil Society” and Decentralization; L) “Civil Society” and Governance; M) Transcending Anarchism; and N) Divergent Visions.

#### I) The War Between State and “Civil Society”

The principle of the Political(3) structures of the “higher phase of communist society” were outlined in his 1871 *Civil War in France*.

It is important to note that major differences separate Lenin’s *State and Revolution* and Marx’s *Civil War in France*. In his work, Lenin does map specific features of his vision of “the higher phase of communist society”. Although he cannot provide a total picture of mature communism, he does set forth, as this essay has already outlined, many basic principles that act as the architecture of mature communism.

Marx does not attempt such a comprehensive blueprint. The purpose of *CWF* is not to outline a mature communism, but rather to deal with the antecedent, the prior stage of finalized communism. Marx and Lenin had contrasting goals. Marx never attempted what Lenin undertook and this is another illustration of the divergence between them. In the description of realized communism, Marxian Leninism never took place.

However, even though the *CWF* is not a comprehensive draft of attained communism, it does contain indispensable principles for the construction of

mature communism. Marx's foundational principles reveal the ends toward which he was striving. Consequently, I take these principles as accurate guidelines to the foundations upon which he would construct his mature communism.

The basic argument of *CWF* is the struggle between state and "civil society." It is an exegesis on *Class Struggles in France*. In both works, Marx described the struggle between state and civil society from the 1789 French Revolution until the Paris Commune of 1871. The history of revolutions in France, 1789, 1830 and 1848, witnessed the continued conquest of "civil society" by the state. The revolutionary history of France was merely a continuation and duplication of the history of Europe since the fifteenth century, which was a 300-year war in which the state acquired dictatorial control over "civil society."

The first draft, 'The Character of the Commune,' contains this revealing paragraph:

The centralized state machinery which, with its ubiquitous and complicated military, bureaucratic, ecclesiastical and judicial organizations, wraps itself around the vital civil society like a boa constrictor, was first forged in the days of absolute monarchy as a weapon of developing modern society in its struggle for emancipation from feudalism.<sup>46</sup>

This quote is crucial for two reasons: First, it offers Marx's interpretation of European history as a civil war between state and "civil society." Until 1871, it was a civil war in which the state was continuously victorious. "Civil society" was consumed by the "boa constrictor" of the state.

Second, Marx employed the phrase "civil society" in this quote. Earlier sections of this essay alluded to the centrality of the concept of "civil society" in Marx's theory of governance. For Marx, it was the proper realm out of which government evolved. It was devoid of class and thus devoid of state, and since class and state were abstracted then true democratic governance was possible.

However, regardless of the prominence of the concept of "civil society" in Marx's theory of governance, he only uses this phrase twice in *CWF* and thereafter refers to "society." His second use of the term "civil society" occurs at the beginning of the second paragraph of 'The Character of the Commune,' when he again draws attention to the state's unstoppable absorption of "civil society" by describing this process as the state's "parasitic growth upon 'civil society.'"<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of the fact that Marx substituted “society” for “civil society” in the majority of *CWF*, the present essay assumes that Marx employed these terms as synonyms. Marx utilized the word “society” numerous times in the text and because the term “civil society” played such an important role in Marx’s Political(3) thought and because he utilized the term “civil society” in the first and second paragraphs of the first draft of the *CWF*, this essay maintains that when Marx wrote “society” he meant “civil society.”

#### J) The 1871 Commune as the Victory of “Civil Society”

For Marx, the model vehicle for the overthrow of the state was the Paris Commune. It was not only considered to be a step toward mature communism, but was a demonstration that the state could be superseded, thus allowing for the governance of “civil society.”<sup>48</sup>

#### K) “Civil Society” and Decentralization

In *State and Revolution*, as previously noted, Lenin described the “higher phase of communist society” as centralized. He also averred (although this was a complete distortion) that Marx was an advocate of a centralized society.

In the section ‘Address of the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association’ of the *CWF*, Marx unequivocally announced his opposition to centralization. The ‘Address’ contains four specific reasons for Marx’s opposition to centralization.

- 1) Marx associated centralized power with the state. He argued that centralized power “originates from the days of absolute monarchy.”<sup>49</sup> Since the overthrow of the state was a central program of the communist movement, Marx rejected any program leading to the growth of state power.
- 2) Marx praised the Paris Commune for preserving the national unity of France while decentralizing it into “the smallest county hamlets.”<sup>50</sup> The national unity of France was to be subdivided into small districts, which would administer their own local affairs through district assemblies. Local control and democracy were more achievable when the districts to be governed were small. Each local district would send delegates to the

National Delegation in Paris, thereby preserving national unity, but this would allow only a minimal number of important functions to be the provenance of the National Delegation, while the majority of self-government remained in the small district hamlets.

- 3) Marx proposed the relocation of power from central government to “civil society.” He wrote: “While the merely repressive organs of the old government powers were to be amputated, the legitimate functions were to be transformed from an authority usurping preeminence over society itself and restored to the responsible agents of society.”<sup>51</sup> “Civil society” should replace the state as the source of government and this entailed the decentralization of government into local communes.
- 4) Marx’s disavowal of Leninist centralization in realized communism also meant that Marx refuted the Leninist notions of a “vast plan,” “syndicates,” “accounting and control” and the national “Postal Service.” All these Leninist attributes of realized communism derived from Lenin’s inclusive principle of centralization. Consequently, when Marx disavowed centralization, he concomitantly abandoned the ideas of a vast plan, syndicates, accounting and control and the Postal Service as a paradigm for attained communism.

Furthermore, Marx’s decentralization was a negation of Lenin’s theory of habit. Marx believed that mature communism rested upon the foundation of local self-government, each commune would regulate its own affairs and its inhabitants would be active agents. Marx did not believe that the administration of the commune would be carried out by habit, or by conditioned memorization. Rather, local self-government required the participation of all the members of the commune and each must act on the basis of informed self-determination.

#### L) “Civil Society” and Governance

The termination of the state according to Marx did not mean the extinction of governance. As previous paragraphs have indicated, a 2000-year old civil war characterized the history of Europe and the protagonists in this civil war were the state and “civil society.” The Paris Commune was significant because it symbolized the victory of “civil society” over the state. The 2000-year civil war was over, leaving only “civil society” in existence. Therefore, the post-Paris Commune was the resurrection of “civil society”.

Marx's "higher phase of communist society" was a manifestation of government, or government was the self-determination of "civil society". Politics(3) was the process by which "civil society" governed itself.

Marx's theory regarding Politics(3) was a rejection of the Leninist idea of "The End of Society." In attained communism, society did not end—it just assumed a new form of governance.

#### M) Transcending Anarchism

Lenin's vision of attained communism was anarchist. In his vision, both the state and self-governing "civil society" were extinct. After decades of struggling against Bakunin and Blanqui, Lenin capitulated to them. Since attained communism displayed no state, or "civil society," this was anarchy and Lenin became a tribune for their ideas.

Marx's vision of mature communism was not anarchist because Marx found Politics(3) in "civil society." Marx did not capitulate to anarchism, but rather repudiated the ideas of Bakunin and Blanqui.

#### N) Divergent Paths

Lenin's vision of finalized communism was anti-Marxist. Thus, Marxian Leninism did not exist when theorizing mature communism.

Therefore, another source must be looked for when seeking to discover the origins of Lenin's mature communism. This source was Engels, who supplied Lenin with all the formulas for his theory of mature communism.

Such a thesis requires that a separation be drawn between Marx and Engels.<sup>52</sup> I believe that such a duality did exist. Significant areas of disagreement separated Marx and Engels. Consequently, two forms of Leninism came into existence. When Lenin followed Marx this gave birth to Marxian Leninism and when he followed Engels this gave birth to Engelsian Leninism, which was a more accurate characterization of Lenin's description of mature communism.

This essay will go on to identify the texts of Engels from which Lenin obtained his model of mature communism.

#### 1) Vast Plan

In *Anti-Duhring*, Engels wrote:

Only a society which makes possible the harmonic cooperation of its productive forces on the basis of one single vast plan can allow industry to settle in whatever form of distribution over the whole country is best adopted to its own development and the maintenance of development of the other elements of production<sup>53</sup>

*Anti-Duhring* was the origin of Lenin's idea regarding a "vast plan" for regulating production in realized communism

## 2) Syndicates

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels wrote:

If the crisis demonstrates the incapacity of the bourgeoisie for managing any longer modern productive forces, the transformation of the great establishments for production and distribution into joint-stock companies, trusts and state-property shows how unnecessary the bourgeoisie are for that purpose. All functions of the capitalists are now performed by salaried employees.<sup>54</sup>

## 3) Post Office

In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels inferred that mature communism would be patterned on the model of the post office. He wrote:

In any case, with trusts or without, the official representative of capitalist society – the state – will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into State property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication – the post office, the telegraphs, the railways.<sup>55</sup>

## 4) Administration of Things and Centralization

*Anti-Duhring* contained this paragraph:

The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to commodity production and therefore to the domination of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by conscious organization on a planned basis.<sup>56</sup>

Engels repeated his assertion that in mature communism the need of the state would be replaced by the administration of things in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

[T]he government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and by the conduct of the processes of production.<sup>57</sup>

#### 5) The End of the Division of Labor

*Anti-Duhring* contained this sentence:

Certainly, in order to see that the revolutionary elements will do away with the old division of labor ...<sup>58</sup>

#### 6) The End of the Division of Labor Between Town and Country

*Anti-Duhring* went on to say:

... along with the separation of town and country ...<sup>59</sup>

It additionally made the following comment on the division between town and country:

This is most of all true of that lever of production which, prior to the introduction of large-scale industry, was by far the most powerful – the division of labor. The first great division of labor, the separation of town and country, condemned the rural population to thousands of years of degradation.<sup>60</sup>

#### 7) The End of Society

*Anti-Duhring* displays the following analysis of the disappearance of both state and “civil society”:

When ultimately it becomes really representative of society as a whole, it makes itself superfluous. As soon as there is no longer any class of society to be held in subjection, as soon as, along with class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on the former anarchy of production, the collisions and excesses arising from these have also been abolished, there is nothing more to be repressed which would make a special repressive force, the state, necessary [...] The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and the direction of the process of production.<sup>61</sup>

## 8) Anarchy

On the question of materialism, a line of continuity stretched from Engels to Plekhanov to Lenin. In his pamphlet, *Socialism: Utopian And Scientific*, published in 1880, Engels coined the phrase “scientific socialism.” In his attempt to separate Marx from the utopian socialists, he identified Marx with the materialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ Scientific Revolution. For Engels, following Descartes and Newton, just like the laws of nature controlled the cosmos, those of economics controlled the evolution of history. As the laws which guided nature were materialistic, so were those which guided society.

Influenced by Engels, Plekhanov discovered a synonym for “scientific socialism.” He invented the phrase “dialectical materialism”, which meant that the laws which controlled the evolution of society functioned in terms of dialectical principles. Plekhanov cemented the belief that Marxism and dialectical materialism were inseparable and made the latter the credo of Bolshevism.

On the philosophical level, Plekhanov was the teacher of Lenin and even though they took different political paths after the 1902 split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Lenin still perpetuated the doctrine that Marx was a dialectical materialist. Without a knowledge of the 1844–1845 Marx, particularly *The Manuscripts*, Lenin fell victim to the Engels–Plekhanov entrapment and remained an exponent of Engelsian materialism. As earlier passages of this essay have documented, this assessment of Marx is false—Marx advocated naturalism. Lenin’s entrapment in the Engelsian–Plekhanov distortion of Marx, the invisibility of those texts of Marx that established Marx’s naturalism, was the cause of his materialistic interpretation of finalized communism.

A second line of continuity stretched, excluding Plekhanov, from Engels to Lenin and this path of continuity included the utopian socialist Saint-Simon. Even though Engels’ pamphlet *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* was an attempt to divorce Marx from utopian socialism, his vision of realized communism devolved from Saint-Simon.

In order to understand Engels’ perpetuation of the goals of Saint-Simon, it is necessary to draw a line of demarcation between means and ends, or goals. Engels embraced the means of Marx in the achievement of communism and one of these means was materialism. But Engels envisioned the goals of communism according to the utopian ideals of Saint-Simon. In terms of means or practice, Engels espoused the proletarian revolution, but in terms of ends, the reconstruction of society after the triumph of the

proletariat, Engels adopted the vision of Saint-Simon. In his 1843 essay, 'Progress of Social Reform on the Continent,' written for *The New Moral World*, Engels praised the work Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. But it was the writings of Saint-Simon that exerted the greatest influence on Engels, specifically Saint-Simon's *Letters From An Inhabitant Of Geneva*.<sup>62</sup> Saint-Simon remained a presence for Engels, in terms of his vision of achieved communism, from the young Engels of 1843 until the mature Engels of the 1878 *Anti-Dubring*, which contained his best description of achieved communism.

Saint-Simon proclaimed that the factory system created a new mode of production and that this called for the birth of a new social order. This new social order must be constructed based on technological precision. In order to ensure this, the government of this new mode of production must be assigned to well-trained and scientifically precise technocrats, who would direct the industrial system; this new form of governance would ensure economic abundance and eradicate economic need. Liberal and monarchical governments were now outmoded and a new form of government should be under the control of technocrats. Economics would replace politics. Saint-Simon wrote: "the most important influence must be that of men of peaceful occupations and habits, and that the ablest of the men ought to be in charge of national interests."<sup>63</sup> Mechanical skills took precedence over elections. Human behavior in Saint-Simon's technological hierarchy would be conditioned by physiology. On this issue, he wrote: "Physiological observations have shown that societies as well as individuals are subject to two moral forces of equal intensity and acting alternatively: one is the force of habit ..." <sup>64</sup> Habit become the basis of peaceful social interaction.

Saint-Simon's dream that the Industrial Revolution created the need for a new productive apparatus based on materialist technological abundance flowed into Engels, and Engels transferred this vision of a post-legislative and post-political society based on biological physiology and habit to Lenin.

Engelsian Leninism was founded upon the belief that the meteoric advancement of science made socialism attainable and therefore led to the prioritization of the forces of production. Science would heighten the productive forces to such an extent that it would be possible to satisfy all needs.

Workers would perform their functions on the basis of habit. The productive forces would continue to function not because of any civil administration, but rather because citizens had been habituated to the performance of the necessary functions.

Engelsian Leninism rested upon de-politicization, which meant the fusion of industrial technology and social behavior. Activity in mature communism was to be conducted on the basis of mechanistic behavioralism. Activity in realized communism was to be conducted on the conditioning of habitual routinization.

Engelsian Leninism was a materialist expression of anarchism. When Engels and Lenin spoke of the total de-politicization of realized communism they embraced anarchism. Engelsian Leninism was thus made possible due to Lenin's black hole.

Lenin's approach to anarchism consisted of two parts: strategy and politics. On the strategic level, Marx, Engels and Lenin were all anti-anarchist. They opposed Bakunin and Blanqui on the basis that the state could not be "smashed," but rather must "wither away," or dissolve slowly.

Throughout his writings, Lenin frequently asserted that Marx and Engels spoke with one voice; this was the doorway into the Engelsian entrapment. On the political level, Engels and Lenin, but not Marx, ended as anarchists. Engels and Lenin saw no need for the political in the "higher phase of communist society." Lenin fell into the Engelsian co-option because of the black hole, which consisted of his almost complete ignorance of the early works of Marx, most importantly *The Manuscripts*. Without Marx, Lenin had no defense against the Engelsian co-option.

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## Author Biography

**Norman Levine** is an independent scholar who has published six books on Marxist thought, three of which have been translated into Chinese. The recipient of two Fulbright senior research scholarships, he is the author of 40 scholarly articles on Marxism and has spent two years studying in Germany. An annual invitee to lecture at Beijing University, China, he has also lectured at the University of Havana, Cuba.

# 6

## Luxemburg and Lenin

Peter Hudis

### Introduction

Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin have come to be viewed as offering radically divergent approaches to the effort of developing a viable alternative to capitalism. Luxemburg has been heralded for the way her criticisms of organizational centralism, bureaucracy and the suppression of revolutionary democracy in the name of “socialism” anticipate many of the concerns of the social movements of the twenty-first century, while Lenin is often condemned for the way his reliance on authoritarian organizational and political approaches point instead to the tragic failures of a past that is best left to the dustbin of history. There is a great deal of truth to these claims, as this chapter will seek to document. Nevertheless, the presumption that they were opposites on all issues is historically inaccurate as well as theoretically otiose. In fact, the tendency to overlook their many points of convergence actually helps to *conceal* what separates them. Monochromatic portrayals that present them as opposites on virtually all issues flatten the historic record to the point that actual points of division become trivialized and treated superficially. I will here argue that the great divide between Luxemburg and Lenin truly comes into focus only when we grasp the extent to which they emerged

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from a common tradition, shared many political assumptions and agreed on many issues. It is against this background of shared interests and commitments that it becomes possible to truly appreciate the extent to which their respective legacies point in two different directions.

It is also important not to read the relationship between Luxemburg and Lenin in light of the political narrative that prevailed in the decades after their death. It is not only that terms such as “Luxemburgism” and “Leninism” were contrived after their deaths, which probably neither of them anticipated. I am also referring to the tendency to read Luxemburg (as well as many other radical figures) in light of Lenin, as if he were the arbiter and measure of Marxist probity (or perfidy). This is understandable, given Lenin’s stature in leading the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent global emergence of “Marxist–Leninist” ideology, but it makes little sense for the period in which they lived, since, before 1914, Luxemburg was far better known (and more highly regarded) in the international socialist movement than Lenin. So why do we not measure Lenin against Luxemburg? Given the gender-based assumptions that may well be implicit in many evaluations of their respective contributions, it seems fitting to explore their similarities and differences in relation in the actual contours of the times in which they lived.

I will here focus on four moments of the Luxemburg–Lenin relationship with these considerations in mind: (1) Luxemburg’s 1904 criticism of Lenin’s organizational conceptions; (2) her writings on the 1905–1906 Russian Revolution; (3) her work within the Polish Social Democratic movement from 1908 to 1914 and its relation to debates with Lenin on the national question; and (4) her 1918 criticism (as well as defense) of the Bolshevik Revolution in her booklet *The Russian Revolution*.

## The Critique of Organizational Centralism

Luxemburg and Lenin were radically different personalities, but they were very much products of a common tradition. Both were born and raised in the Russian Empire—then a developing society. Both lived considerable parts of their lives as revolutionary exiles. And both were products of the Second International; it was the cauldron from which most of their ideas were drawn. But as was true of many in the Second International, where open debate and discussion was a norm, they had major differences.

Luxemburg’s 1904 critique of Lenin in “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy” is often viewed as offering a distinctive concept

of organization from that of “Leninism,” but (as with so much in Marxist polemics) the matter is not so straightforward. It surely criticizes Lenin’s *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* for failing to grasp the need for Marxists to develop “a complete reappraisal of our organizational concepts, a completely new concept of centralism, a completely new notion of the mutual relationship between organization and struggle.”<sup>1</sup> However, did Luxemburg actually get to articulate a *complete* revision of the concept of organization that is *fundamentally distinct* from Lenin’s?

Luxemburg’s essay was written not long after the famous split between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks at the 1903 Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). It was published in the *German* Social Democratic press (in *Die Neue Zeit*)—*not* the Russian. Luxemburg was not at the 1903 conference, though a number of her adherents in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) were (the two parties were involved in unity negotiations at the time). On Luxemburg’s firm instructions, the SDKPiL members walked out of the conference—*not* over the organization question but rather the RSDLP’s support of the right of the various nationalities of the Russian empire to self-determination. Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches, the leaders of the Polish party, made the decision to break off the unity negotiations with the RSDLP on their own, *without consulting their membership*. This led to a bitter feud within the SDKPiL, in which Luxemburg sidelined Cezaryna Wojnarowska—a founder of the party who advocated closer relations with the Russian party. This was one of many signs to come of the extent to which Luxemburg exerted centralized control over the SKDPiL.

In the 1904 essay, differences over the national question play little or no part (at least explicitly). It instead consists of a spirited critique of Lenin for reducing Marxism to “rigid formulas” through his insistence on an “ultra-centralist” (Luxemburg’s phrase) party structure in which “the Central Committee emerges as the real active nucleus of the party; all the remaining organizations are merely its executive instruments.” This constitutes, she contends, a reversion to a Blanquist form of organization in which the party becomes defined by “the blind submission of all organizations” to a “central authority that alone thinks, acts and decides for everyone.”<sup>2</sup> Luxemburg argues that Lenin’s conception of organization is “imbued, not with a positive creative spirit, but with the sterile spirit of the night-watchman state,”<sup>3</sup> which reduces the rank-and-file to docile, unthinking recipients of commands from above. But her objection is not limited to the deleterious impact of ultra-centralism on life *within* the party; even worse, she argues, is that it threatens the party’s receptivity to impulses from without, from ongoing working class struggles.

Luxemburg admitted, “There is no doubt that a strong inclination toward centralism is inherent in social democracy as a whole.”<sup>4</sup> She fully understood that the idea of a “single party” that acts as the vanguard of the working class was no invention of Lenin but rather a staple of the Second International from its formation. Of this she raised no objection. Nor did she object to Lenin’s concern with the need to directly combat reformism and opportunism. What she objected to is that Lenin did so in the wrong way, by seeking to shield the party from opportunism through the benighted leadership of a centralized apparatus that imposed bureaucratic control at the expense of democratic deliberation. She castigated his comment that “bureaucratism versus democratism is the organizational principle of revolutionary social democracy versus the organizational principle of the opportunist.”<sup>5</sup> Here we see a critical point that will carry through much of Luxemburg’s critiques of Lenin—an insistence that the revolutionary movement cannot afford to downplay democracy but must on the contrary develop a new and deeper conception of it that is adequate for proletarian revolution.

It is not hard to see why Lenin was puzzled by Luxemburg’s critique (Kautsky refused to publish his reply in *Die Neue Zeit* and it is not clear that Luxemburg ever saw it). Was it not the Mensheviks, he asked, who acted undemocratically by refusing to accept the majority’s decision to uphold the statute of what constituted membership in the Russian party (the need to be disciplined by a local branch)? Luxemburg, he argued, was dealing in generalities instead of the specific issues in dispute at the 1903 Congress.<sup>6</sup> He also denied having advocated that the Central Committee serve as the party’s only active nucleus.

Luxemburg and Lenin certainly seem to have been talking past one another when it came to what was specifically the issue in question. Luxemburg does not directly tackle the much more famous document that many (falsely) presume was at issue in the debate—Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* In addition to it going unmentioned in her piece, she does not take issue with its founding premise—that workers are spontaneously capable of only trade union consciousness and that socialist consciousness must be brought to them “from without” by radical intellectuals. Nor would there be any reason to, since by Lenin’s admission he was simply adopting that premise from “orthodox” Marxists like Karl Kautsky—*whom Luxemburg was at the time allied with, both theoretically and politically*. Although Luxemburg placed much greater emphasis on the revolutionary character of spontaneous class-consciousness—especially during and after the 1905 Russian Revolution<sup>7</sup>—she never explicitly broke with the concept of organization that defined the Second International (a concept that was itself derived from

the work of Ferdinand Lassalle).<sup>8</sup> As she wrote in “Organizational Principles of Russian Social Democracy,” “For the social democratic movement even *organization*, as distinct from the earlier utopian experiments of socialism, is viewed not as an artificial creation of propaganda, but as a historical product of the class struggle, to which social democracy merely *brings* political consciousness.”<sup>9</sup>

This brings us to the critical issue. Contrary to the claims of his later followers and detractors, Lenin was *not* an original on the organization question. He was merely applying Kautsky’s—and Lassalle’s—concept of organization to specific Russian conditions (an underground organization operating under absolutism prior to the emergence of a bourgeois revolution, etc.). Luxemburg neither questioned the underlying concept of organization that derived from Lassalle and Kautsky, nor did she ask if Marx had a distinctively different one—nor did anyone else in the Second (and later the Third) International. The notion that Marx was the founder on *theoretical* matters whereas Lassalle (whom Marx once denounced as “a future worker’s dictator”<sup>10</sup>) was the authority on *organizational* matters went unquestioned by everyone of Luxemburg’s generation (indeed, that remains the case for many to this day). Nor did Luxemburg oppose Lenin’s effort to “apply” Marxism to Russian conditions; throughout her work, she was oppressively aware of the gulf that distinguished conditions in Russia from those in Western Europe. What she questioned was Lenin’s *specific application* of Marxian concepts, which in her view made a virtue out of necessity by raising centralism to the level of a hardened principle.

In what sense then, can we speak of Luxemburg’s 1904 essay as constituting a *complete* revision of the concept of organization that is *fundamentally distinct* from Lenin’s? She did not question the need for a vanguard party, which Lenin advocated (though he did not originate the concept). She held that a vanguard party is needed in order to provide spontaneous struggles with intellectual enlightenment and clarification about the nature of capitalism and its alternative. And she did not oppose centralization *tout court*, which was integral to the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and SDKPiL, in which she was a leading figure. Nevertheless, while Luxemburg and Lenin were hardly absolute opposites on matters of organization, this does not mean that her critique of him is any less important. Lenin did, after all, formulate a rigid application of organizational principles to Russian conditions that, at certain junctures, proved highly problematic—*especially* after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. And while Lenin may not have intended to promote the ideas in *What Is To Be Done* and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* as a universal theory of organization applicable everywhere (he did not even authorize

translations of the former into foreign languages until after the 1917 Revolution), that is how it was taken by most of his followers. Over the course of the next century, innumerable radicals in Western democracies that were defined by a completely different set of realities than those that prevailed in Russia during Lenin's time took his organizational theories as *the* model to follow—with pitiful results to show for it. In the developing world, where conditions of bourgeois democracy were generally absent, Lenin's organizational precepts appeared more cogent—with the result that the centralizing tendencies critiqued by Luxemburg became exaggerated to the point that they paved the way for numerous totalitarian single-party states. Lenin's centralism, taken to its logical extreme—even if, arguably, in contradiction to his intentions—has proven to be truly disastrous.

Regardless of whether Luxemburg's criticisms of Lenin in 1904 were fair to his aims and intent, her insistence on the need for revolutionary organizations to avoid the temptation of ultra-centralism and be open to spontaneous impulses from below speaks powerfully to the realities facing us today, when the radical movement faces the urgent task of bidding adieu to traditional approaches to political organization. It does not suffice to declare that one's political affiliation has “nothing to do” with the excesses of Stalinism. So long as one's underlying organizational concepts lend themselves to the kind of problems criticized by Luxemburg, one cannot claim to be projecting a viable *alternative* to it. And any variant of “Marxism” in the twenty-first century that does not *demonstrate* its *construction* of such an alternative is hardly worth its salt.

## Luxemburg and Lenin During and After the 1905 Revolution

That Luxemburg's critique of Lenin's organizational concepts did *not* prove to be the pivotal determination in her relation to him is seen from her response to the 1905 Russian Revolution. The experience of the revolution, as well as its aftermath, brought her much closer to Lenin. Indeed, at no time in Luxemburg's life was she closer to Lenin politically and theoretically than from 1905 to 1907—even though the ink of her 1904 critique was by then barely dry.

The 1905 Revolution was of decisive importance, since it marked the first time that the working class emerged as the leading force in a nationwide revolution. No longer did the proletariat trail behind the liberal bourgeoisie

in the battle against absolutism; unlike the 1848 Revolutions, the industrial working class emerged as the vanguard force from its inception. That this occurred in “backward” Russia, where the working class constituted little more than 20% of the population, was all the more remarkable. The 1905 Revolution thereby raised the specter of a *direct* transition to socialism by a working class that had just *begun* to experience capitalist industrialization. The notion that socialism can only arise as a result of an extended period of capitalism was called into question by an assortment of Marxist individuals and tendencies—from Luxemburg and Trotsky to Lenin’s Bolsheviks and even rightwing Mensheviks such as Martynov—all of whom suddenly began speaking of “permanent revolution.”<sup>11</sup>

In a series of articles in 1905, Luxemburg argued, “Above all...it would be totally wrong for the Social Democracy of Western Europe to see in the Russian upheaval merely a historical imitation of what has long since ‘come into existence’ in Germany and France.”<sup>12</sup> This is because “Today’s revolution in Russia is not only a purely political struggle against the autocracy but also at the same time...a more or less class-conscious struggle against the rule of capital.”<sup>13</sup> In February 1905, she contended that “the true task of Social Democracy is *beginning*: to keep the revolutionary situation going *in permanence*.”<sup>14</sup> This was one of the first public references to “permanent revolution” by any commentator on or participant in the 1905 Revolution. Leon Trotsky later stated that it was “in the interval between January 9 [1905] and the October strike of 1905 that those views which came to be called the theory of “permanent revolution” were formed in the author’s mind.” His use of the term “permanent revolution,” by his own admission, followed rather than preceded the initial use of the term by Luxemburg.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, she contended that “at the present moment the people [in Russia] are not in a position to take political power and carry out a socialist transformation.”<sup>16</sup> Citing “permanent revolution” did not mean that she—like many others who used the term—denied that a bourgeois-democratic stage of some sort or duration was still needed:

Today’s Russian revolution contains within itself a greater contradiction than any of the preceding revolutions ... In Russia the proletariat does not now have as its goal the establishment of socialism—it wants only to establish the capitalist-bourgeois preconditions for socialism. But at the same time, the workers have left their distinctive mark on bourgeois society, because this society took its moment of origin directly from the hands of the class-conscious proletariat. In truth the working class has not set itself the task of the immediate introduction of socialism, but even farther from its thoughts is the

establishment of an inviolable and untroubled rule by capital of the kind that emerged from the bourgeois revolutions of the past century in the West.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, “the proletariat in Russia is waging a battle simultaneously against absolutism and against capitalism; it is demanding the forms of bourgeois democracy, but it wants them *for itself*, for the purposes of the proletarian class struggle.”<sup>18</sup>

This concept that the *form* of the revolution is bourgeois while its *content* is proletarian was precisely the position taken by Lenin’s Bolsheviks. It is therefore no accident that she became close to Lenin in this period, especially when she journeyed to Russian-occupied Poland to directly take part in the revolution in December 1905. At the same time, she became increasingly critical of the Mensheviks, who continued to emphasize the need for compromises and collaboration with liberalism in order to advance the revolution.

The extent of Luxemburg and Lenin’s political alignment became clear several months later, when Luxemburg led the SDKPiL into unity with the RSDLP—even though the latter declined to alter or remove paragraph seven of its statutes supporting the right of self-determination. In 1903, the matter was important enough for Luxemburg to break off relations with the Russian party. So why did she agree to the unity in April 1906, even though the dreaded (in her view) support for national self-determination remained? It is difficult to come to any answer other than that the concept and actuality of revolution was always foremost for Luxemburg—and since she was largely in accord with Lenin’s view of the 1905 Revolution, she felt the time was right for organizational unity.<sup>19</sup>

After it became clear that the momentum of the Revolution had crested by the spring of 1906, Luxemburg traveled with Lenin to Finland, where she engaged in prolonged discussions with him in Kuokkala. This was the first time she really got to know him (their first and only other personal encounter, in 1901, was rather fleeting). It was during her stay that she completed one of her most important political works—*The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions*.

In direct contrast to many Marxists and anarchists, she argued that political parties do not “make” mass strikes, let alone revolutions. They instead arise *spontaneously*, in response to specific historical and material conditions. The task of revolutionaries is to grasp, comprehend and *generalize* such acts and give them *direction* for uprooting class society—not to pretend that they can be created or prevented by an act of revolutionary will.

Her pamphlet sought to convince the German labor movement—which was weighted down by organized party structures, trade unions and parliamentarism—to learn from the Russian example. Her effort to reorient the SPD towards grassroots action via the mass strike—the central theme of her work from 1906 to 1914—brought her into direct conflict, *not* with Lenin, but rather the German trade unions (and later much of the SPD leadership). It should never be forgotten that Luxemburg always reserved her most pointed barbs for the reformist and parliamentarian tendencies within the Second International, not with the revolutionary ones.

Nevertheless, in neither the *Mass Strike* pamphlet nor in her other writings of 1905–1906 does Luxemburg make a category out of the new form of workers’ self-organization that emerged from the 1905 revolution—the *soviets*. She only refers to them in passing.<sup>20</sup> And at the end of 1905, when the Polish Socialist Party-Proletariat<sup>21</sup> offered to form workers’ councils with the SDKPiL,<sup>22</sup> she rebuffed their offer for any such united front.

Why this lack of emphasis on the soviets, given her emphasis on spontaneity?

The question becomes even more pointed when we compare her to Lenin on this, who is often portrayed as solely interested in party forms of organization. In 1905, Lenin wrote an article entitled “Our Tasks and the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies” which was sent to the journal *Novaya Zhizn*, though it never arrived.<sup>23</sup> He wrote,

I think it inadvisable to demand that the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies should accept the Social-Democratic program and join the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. It seems to me that to lead the political struggle, *both* the soviets (*reorganized* in the direction described below) *and* the Party are, to an equal degree, absolutely necessary... I may be wrong, but I believe that politically the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies should be regarded as the embryo of a *provisional revolutionary government*. I think the Soviet should proclaim itself the provisional revolutionary government of the whole of Russia as early as possible, or should *set up* a provisional revolutionary government (which would amount to the same thing, only in another form).<sup>24</sup>

As far as I am aware, no such formulation concerning the need for revolutionaries to call upon the soviets to form a provisional government is contained in Luxemburg’s writings of 1905–1906.<sup>25</sup> What is the explanation for this? It may be a result of her effort to apply the lessons of the 1905 Revolution to Germany. Unlike in Russia, where the trade unions and socialist parties were weak, in Germany they were highly organized and strong.

Luxemburg wanted to bring the revolutionary energy and initiative emanating from Russia to the West—but, given the highly developed organizational forms already in existence in Germany, she saw little need for the movement to invent new ones *sui generis*. She hoped that she could convince the SPD and the trade unions to adopt the mass strike on the basis of their existing organizational apparatus. If so, her tendency to emphasize the mass strike instead of the organizational form of the soviet is somewhat understandable. It is also not hard to see why she would view the matter differently by 1917–1918, when the cooptation of the German trade unions and SPD into the state apparatus during World War I led her to adopt the Bolshevik slogan of “All power to the soviets!”

There is, however, a less charitable explanation—that she was reluctant to place a high priority upon a form of organization that was largely independent of the Social Democratic parties. Luxemburg never questioned the central organizational motif of the Second International—the need for a single, *unified* party to lead. She wrote in 1905:

We are dealing with, not a spontaneous, blind revolt of downtrodden slaves, but with a genuine political movement of the class-conscious urban workers ... Here the Social Democrats are already standing at the head of the uprising. And this [leadership position] is in keeping with the natural role of a revolutionary party at the outbreak of an open *political mass struggle* ... [the revolution depends] on how widely Social Democracy has known how to make its influence felt among the masses in the *prerevolutionary* period, the extent to which it was already successful in putting together a solid central core [*Keimtruppe*] of politically well-trained worker activists with clear goals, how large the sum total of all its educational and organizational work has been.<sup>26</sup>

Luxemburg’s effort to project the lessons of the 1905 Revolution for the future was most fully developed at the 1907 Congress of the RSDLP, held in London. She there explicitly supported the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks, arguing:

Once we conclude that the bourgeoisie in our revolution is not playing and cannot play the role of leader of the proletarian movement, then, in its very essence, it follows that their politics is counter-revolutionary, whereas we, in accordance with this, declare that the proletariat must look to itself not as an assistant of bourgeois liberalism [as the Mensheviks held] but as vanguard to the revolutionary movement, which defines its politics independent of all other classes...<sup>27</sup>

The debates between her and Plekhanov at the conference—the latter disliked her intensely from their initial encounter a decade earlier—were nothing short of vitriolic. At the same time, she was not uncritical of the Bolsheviks. She wrote:

True genuine Marxism is very far from a one-sided overestimation of parliamentarism as well as from a mechanistic view of revolution and over-estimation of the so-called armed uprising. On this point my Polish comrades and I differ from the views of the Bolshevik comrades.

Though she and Lenin tended to view this issue—at least in 1907—as a tactical difference, it actually had more fundamental implications. Luxemburg’s commitment to democracy as central to a viable revolutionary process was unstinting, and she was aware that an overemphasis on armed insurrection—which she took issue with when it came to the Polish Socialist Party (PPS)<sup>28</sup> as well as the Bolsheviks—tended to bypass the democratic input from the masses needed to advance a revolutionary transformation.

Luxemburg’s relatively friendly relations with Lenin in the years following 1905 does not mean that she either dropped her earlier criticisms or was unaware of perceived defects on his part. In a letter of 1909, she referred to his “Tartar-Mongolian savagery”—while affirming, at the same time, that the SDKPiL’s support for the Bolsheviks was “firm and a matter of principle.”<sup>29</sup> This further undermines any claim that the great divide between her and Lenin centered on the question of organization. Raya Dunayevskaya is largely on target in arguing, “Towering above all her criticism [of Lenin], as well as her approval, was not the question of organization but the concept of revolution...the organizational question took a subordinate place throughout the next decade.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Luxemburg’s Work in Polish Social Democracy from 1908 to 1914 and its Relation to Debates on the National Question**

Luxemburg was unwavering in her opposition to calls for national self-determination, especially for Poland. This did not mean that she was insensitive to national oppression. Nor did she deny the need for *cultural* autonomy for subjugated nationalities. But she viewed any demand for national *independence* as a diversion from the class struggle and a capitulation to

bourgeois interests. This underlined her relentless opposition to the PPS, which contended for domination over the Polish movement with her political party, the SDPK (the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland) and its successor, the SDPKiL. As she wrote of the PPS during the 1905 Revolution:

For years they tried with all their strength to shut the Polish labor movement off from the Russian one with the nationalist causeway of separateness, but finally they had to join the mad rush when the Polish labor movement followed—like a frothy mountain stream joining a larger watercourse—in the common flow of the workers revolution in all of Russia. In short, the social-patriots were forced to run panting to keep pace with the mass of the Polish proletariat, trampling mercilessly on all of their flowerbeds of nationalism, which they had manicured for years...<sup>31</sup>

It would be a serious mistake to judge the politics of the PPS solely by Luxemburg's polemics, since for years before 1905 many of its leading figures argued for collaboration with the Russian labor movement and promoted class struggle along with calls for national independence. Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, its main theoretician until 1905, was a principled revolutionary who sharply criticized nationalist exclusiveness while upholding the integrity of national self-determination and proletarian internationalism. In doing so he was following Marx and Engels's position on Poland.<sup>32</sup>

Luxemburg was undeterred; for her, Marx and Engels's position on Poland (and national self-determination in general) was no longer valid. Her fullest statement on the issue appeared in 1908, in a series entitled "The National Question and Autonomy."<sup>33</sup>

While Lenin had opposed her position for years, his defense of Polish self-determination was by no means as rigid as her rejection of it. He wrote, "The right of self-determination is an exception to our general policy of centralism. This exception is absolutely necessary in view of the great Russian arch-reactionary nationalism."<sup>34</sup> But he also argued, "No Russian Marxist ever thought of blaming the Polish Social Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland"; he simply rejected any insistence that the Russian party be prevented from supporting self-determination.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Luxemburg's 1908 writings on the national question did not, at first, elicit a negative response from Lenin. He chose to attack her on this only after 1911 (and especially in 1914) in response to an organizational dispute within the RSDLP as well as in Luxemburg's SKDPiL. The organizational dispute was not over basic principles; instead, Lenin's motivation in sharply attacking her writings on the national question in 1913–1914 was part of his effort to bring her down to size over *tactical* differences on organization.

The organizational polemics between Luxemburg and Lenin between 1911 and 1914 are far too labyrinthine to fully unravel here. It suffices to say there was never greater hostility between the two than during this period. In part, their falling out was due to Lenin's sudden (and rather impulsive) effort in 1911–1912 to drive the right-wing Mensheviks out of the RSDLP as part of establishing the Bolsheviks as an independent party. In larger part, it was due to a split within the SDKPiL between the circle around Luxemburg and those who sought greater cooperation with the PPS-left (which split from the PPS in 1906) and a toning-down of the party's single-minded campaign against self-determination. When Lenin took the side of Luxemburg's critics in the SDPKiL, Luxemburg hit back sharply and broke off all relations with his party—to the consternation of many in the SDKPiL, who were not democratically consulted. Accusations flew back and forth regarding the “centralist” and “authoritarian” suppression of dissent in the SDKPiL from those being marginalized or expelled by Luxemburg and Jogiches. Luxemburg's opponents in the SDKPiL (which included Karl Radek) were mainly based in Warsaw and Cracow. When they formed an organized faction, Luxemburg moved to have them expelled on the grounds that they were “splitters” (*roslamowcy*). Her actions led to the formation of two separate SDKPiLs, a rift that was not healed until 1916. This was hardly the first time that it became evident that she ran the Polish organization with an iron fist.

How does one explain Luxemburg's searing critique of Lenin's organizational centralism in light of her centralist approach to disputes in the Polish party? For all of her love of spontaneity, Luxemburg was painfully aware that it is not free of what Marx once called “the muck of the ages.”<sup>36</sup> And for her, the most nefarious muck of all was national consciousness. The masses therefore needed a party to insulate them from such influences. Any concession to nationalism—whether by toning down the party's position for the sake of working with the PPS or remaining part of the Russian party when it spoke out loudly for national self-determination—had to be fought at all costs. And that of course required running a tight ship. In sum, centralism became expedient when faced with actual or potential threats to her stubborn opposition to national self-determination.<sup>37</sup>

Lenin's insistence on breaking up the united RSDLP in 1911–1912, however, was no less centralist; indeed, it manifested many of the worst features of his organizational approach that Luxemburg had criticized a decade earlier.<sup>38</sup> She hit back with a powerful critique in 1911, which stated, “Already in 1903...we felt obliged to stand up decisively against the organizational centralism of Lenin and his friends, because they wanted to secure

a revolutionary direction for the proletarian movement by swaddling the party, in a purely mechanistic fashion, with an intellectual dictator from the central party Executive.”<sup>39</sup> Ever-more bitter polemics were hurled between Lenin and Luxemburg for the next three years. Yet even at the height of their acrimony, they maintained cordial personal relations. Lenin traveled to Berlin in February 1912 where he spent several days at Luxemburg’s flat engaged in intense conversation. The notion that their sharp differences precluded personal (and even political) collaboration between them is a myth.

## Luxemburg’s Critical Response to the 1917 Russian Revolution

Only months after the height of Lenin’s attack on Luxemburg’s writings on the national question, a radically transformed objective situation drove them closer together—the Second International’s capitulation to the First World War. The events were clearly a shock to both, even though Luxemburg had already broken from Kautsky (in 1910) over what she viewed as his refusal to take a firm stand against imperialism and parliamentarism. The events were no less of a shock to Lenin, who (like Leon Trotsky) had opposed Luxemburg for breaking from Kautsky in 1910.<sup>40</sup> Lenin’s failure in 1910 to grasp the significance of her break calls into question a standard Leninist critique of Luxemburg—namely, that unlike Lenin, she was unprepared for the great betrayal of 1914 because of her neglect of organization. No one could accuse Lenin of neglecting organization, but that did not prevent him from continuing to follow Kautsky from 1910 to 1914—and from failing to see the seeds of the great betrayal in such actions as the SPD’s refusal to take a strong stand against imperialism during the 1911 Morocco incident.<sup>41</sup>

There were also major differences in their response to the Second International’s capitulation to the war. Whereas Lenin turned to a serious study of Hegel’s thought in 1914–1915 as part of re-organizing his thinking, Luxemburg engaged in no such philosophic re-examination. Despite her many evocations of “the dialectic,” there is no evidence that she studied Hegel directly or was much interested in those who did. This lack of philosophic self-examination may have also impacted their somewhat different political responses to the crisis of Social Democracy.<sup>42</sup> Whereas Lenin sought to appropriate such concepts as “transformation into opposite” to explain the betrayal of 1914 and argue for a complete break from the Second International and formation of a new Third International, Luxemburg refrained from doing so, even after forming the Spartakusbund.

Luxemburg's reluctance to totally sever ties with German Social Democracy can be explained by two related considerations. One was her view that "the worst working-class party is better than none."<sup>43</sup> Sects were anathema to her because they tend to isolate revolutionary militants from the mass of workers. And in 1914–1917, most German workers were still in the SPD (and USPD). Second was her belief that any seizure of power had to be based on the democratic consent of the *majority* of the working class. She never wavered from this position, including when she co-founded the German Communist Party at the end of 1918. She stated, "The Spartacus League is not a party that wants to rise to power over the mass of workers or through them ... [it] will never take over government power except in response to the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass of all of Germany..."<sup>44</sup>

The greatest expression of Luxemburg's conception of the integrality of democracy and revolutionary transformation—the issue that most of all separates her from Lenin—is found in her 1918 booklet *The Russian Revolution*.

Despite the claim (made by Lenin's followers as well as some of her former associates) that Luxemburg lacked direct knowledge of events in Russia when she wrote the work (in the late summer and early fall of 1918) and, upon realizing this, chose not to pursue its publication (it was first published by Paul Levi in 1921, after he had been expelled from the German Communist Party), she expressed her determination to publish her book as late as December 1918. Clara Zetkin famously argued after Luxemburg's death (in 1921) that after her release from prison in November 1918 she had "changed her mind" about her critique of Lenin and decided not to publish *The Russian Revolution*. But there is no way she would have known this, since Zetkin was living in Bremen at the time and had no personal contact with Luxemburg. Moreover, no expression by Luxemburg along these lines appears in her correspondence from the period. Though it is possible that she would have modified or refined some of her criticisms, there is no evidence that she took back the *fundamentals* of her critique of Bolshevik policies in 1917–1918.

She composed *The Russian Revolution* only a year after the Bolsheviks had seized power, at a time when the very existence of the revolution hung by the thinnest of threads. Given the historical context, one might think that Luxemburg would consider it wise not to openly issue a critique of Soviet policies, even when she seriously disagreed with them. Could criticism not give aid and comfort to the imperialist enemy? That Luxemburg did not shy away from writing it—and letting others know of her critique—testifies to

the fact that she believed that the greatest aid one can give a revolution is to criticize its shortcomings.

In *The Russian Revolution* she strongly supports the Bolshevik seizure of power and credits them with daring to make a revolution against enormous odds. Yet she does not expect the revolution to accomplish the impossible. She writes that “the social order of socialism” is “a huge work which cannot be completed in the twinkling of an eye by a few decrees from above; it can be born only of the conscious action of the mass of workers.” Although revolution may be *initiated* by the seizure of state power, it by no means stops with it. That is but the first step toward a revolutionary transformation of a series of social relations—which can only be accomplished through the *fullest* participation of the masses. She writes, “The path of the revolution follows clearly from its ends, its method follow from its task.” If the task is to achieve workers’ power, then the workers themselves must be the subjective force driving the revolution—otherwise, the means and the end prove to be incompatible. On this basis, she called for “All power in the hands of the workers’ and soldiers’ councils.”<sup>45</sup>

Luxemburg recognized that a fundamental contradiction was eating away at the Russian Revolution: the proclamation of “all power to the soviets,” on the one hand, while concentrating actual political power in the hands of the Bolshevik Party on the other. The two could remain compatible only so long as the Bolsheviks retained majority support of the leading body of soviets—something that *was* the case in the opening months of the Revolution (though Luxemburg appeared to think, perhaps erroneously, that the Bolshevik majorities resulted from the support given them by the peasantry). But already by the end of 1918, a different situation was emerging. Faced with growing internal opposition, *including from many workers in the soviets*, Lenin and Trotsky moved towards a much firmer imposition of single-party rule.

This prompted her to attack the Bolsheviks for imposing “a dictatorship of the *party*,” which, she insisted, was not the same thing as Marx’s concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Luxemburg was an astute enough reader of Marx to know that in the few cases in which he uses the term ‘dictatorship’ of the proletariat, he meant not the imposition of draconian rule by a minority but rather the rule of the vast majority—the working class itself. Marx and Engels had, of course, pointed to the Paris Commune of 1871 as the instantiation of what they meant by the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” As Marx wrote, it placed “the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the State ... into the hands of the Commune. It compelled the ‘old centralized government’ to ‘give way to the self-government of the producers.’”<sup>46</sup>

All of this was achieved without a single party or political tendency monopolizing power. Whereas earlier revolutions were “forced to develop... the centralization and organization of state power, and to expand the circumference and the attributes of the state power;”<sup>47</sup> the Paris Commune sought to *dismantle* the state through decentralized, democratic control of society by the freely associated populace; it imposed the will of society upon the state rather than vice versa.

This was markedly different from what was happening in post-revolutionary Russia. Society was no more imposing its will on the state than the soviets were imposing their will on the Bolshevik Party. The very opposite was increasingly the case. Hence, in one of the most cogent passages, Luxemburg stated: “The basic error of the Lenin–Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy ... [we need to] exercise a dictatorship of the *class*, not of a party or of a clique—dictatorship of the class, that means in the broadest public forum on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy.”<sup>48</sup> Kautsky opposed the Bolsheviks because he held the view that proletarian dictatorship and democracy were opposites, and he favored the latter. Lenin and Trotsky also thought that proletarian dictatorship and democracy were opposites, but favored the former. Though their positions were opposites, they were not *absolute* opposites, since both took it for granted that “unlimited democracy” and the dictatorship of the proletariat were incompatible.

Luxemburg found it “an incomprehensible measure” that the Bolsheviks rejected the demand for universal suffrage. She repeatedly insisted that socialism could not be introduced either behind the backs of the workers or by a political party that had the support of only a minority of the working class: “Socialism will not and cannot be created by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created.”<sup>49</sup> Most of all, she attacked Lenin and Trotsky for treating democracy as (in their words) a “cumbersome mechanism” that could be discarded at will. She sharply opposed the shutting down of opposition newspapers, the banning of leftist political parties, and the formation of the secret police, the Cheka—the institution that turned out to become the training ground for so many of Stalin’s later functionaries.<sup>50</sup> Most famously of all, she declared that freedom by its very nature could not be restricted to those with which one agrees; if one is for freedom, one must be for the freedom of those who *disagree*.

Luxemburg was by no means unaware of the dangers facing the revolution—although it could be argued that it would have been difficult

for the Bolsheviks to adopt her approach even if they faced more favorable circumstances. She insisted, nonetheless, that when it came to the realities facing Russia in 1917–1918, “the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of people, of *unlimited democracy*”<sup>51</sup> was needed to advance the revolution. Clearly, she was calling for more than inner-party democracy.

Her insistence upon the inseparability of democracy and socialism—not as a distant goal, but as the very means by which to reach the goal—was the most important contribution of her critique of the Russian Revolution.

This was surely an idealist perspective. But was it an idealist *illusion*? The Bolsheviks were facing tremendous obstacles, and it is to be expected that they would make many compromises given the political and economic realities facing them. But it seems to me that Luxemburg was most of all critical of the Bolsheviks, not simply for what they *did*, but for making a *principle* of what they did. It is one thing to temporarily resort to unpleasant and even repressive measures when the counter-revolution is knocking on your door. It is quite another to defend that on the basis of some unshakable principle. The latter is very dangerous, because it transforms the (hopefully) temporary limitations of the revolution into the very parameters by which to think of revolution itself—including the form to be assumed by future revolutions. In a word, as in 1904, Luxemburg was deeply troubled at the way Lenin was making a virtue out of a temporary necessity. Instead of admitting that his policies were necessary for the moment, even if they violated basic principles of Marxism, he redefined Marxian principles on the basis of the limits of the political situation.

It is worth emphasizing that the integrality of democracy and socialism is not just a political issue. It also addresses the *economic* content of socialism.<sup>52</sup> Capital is not simply an instrument of production, but rather (according to Marx) the congealment or objectification of abstract, undifferentiated labor. Capital becomes the all-dominating power once concrete labor becomes subsumed by abstract labor through the dominance of socially necessary labor time. Since capital’s roots extend into the fabric of everyday life—into politics, economics, culture, even the most intimate human relations—it cannot be uprooted from above. The more the initiative and energy—and indeed, the *reason*—of those struggling for freedom are shackled, the less likely it is that the capital relation can be uprooted, even if the most enlightened individuals are “leading” the revolutionary process.

Moreover, Luxemburg suggested that spontaneous revolt and activity was not merely a means to “make” the revolution, only to cease upon the seizure of state power. Instead, spontaneous self-development must continue long after it—only such a process of permanent contestation of class domination

could lead to a socialist society. She understood this from as far back as 1905, as seen in her writings on the mass strike and the 1905 Revolution. But in her work of 1918, they gained a clarity and depth that is unsurpassed.

Luxemburg's critique also speaks to what is involved in achieving common ownership of the means of production. It may seem sufficient to simply abolish private property and transfer the ownership of the means of production to the state. But what happens if this state is not democratic? What happens if the workers and peasants are not in *actual* control of the means of production? Property forms, after all, are *juridical* relations. The fundamental issue for any Marxist is the nature of *production* relations. If a bureaucratic clique controls the latter, it is hard to see how collective ownership of the means of production *in the Marxian sense* can be said to exist. And if the democratic rights of the workers are circumscribed—whether their right to freedom of speech, thought, conscience or expression—how could they possibly manage to freely control the economic structures of a post-capitalist society?

Luxemburg's book nevertheless contains some major limitations. One is her criticism of the Bolshevik's policy of granting land to the peasants. She correctly understood that their policy of allowing the peasants to obtain land ownership contained a potential threat—the seeds of a private-property-holding class that could eventually turn against the revolution. But it is hard to see how the Bolsheviks—or anyone for that matter—could have come to power in 1917 if they did not provide the peasants with ownership rights. The peasants were desperate to obtain the land owned by the nobility, and no revolutionary regime would have been able to maintain itself in power for long without their support. Furthermore, were the only options open to the Bolsheviks (as Luxemburg suggested) either to grant the peasants *private* ownership of land or to *nationalize* it in the hands of the state? They would *seem* to be the only options—if it were the case that the communal relations of working the land, such as the *obshchina* and *mir*, were long dead and gone by the time of the 1917 Revolution. But we now know that this was not the case. Luxemburg—like most Russian Marxists—overstated the extent to which traditional communal relations of working and owning land had disappeared by 1917.<sup>53</sup>

Another limitation is her attack on the Bolsheviks for granting national self-determination to the subject peoples of the former Tsarist Empire. This was consistent with the position she had held on the national question throughout her career. However, her opposition to Lenin's stated acceptance of the right of Ukraine, the Baltic States, and other areas to obtain independence from Russia not only flew in the face of the powerful movements

in those countries to achieve independence; it also failed to project an effective means of combatting Russian national chauvinism, which has long marred Russian history—including after the Bolsheviks seized power (their denial of *actual* self-determination to areas like Ukraine after the civil war is a case in point).

These defects directly impinge on the strongest part of Luxemburg's argument—her advocacy of revolutionary democracy. How can a democratic standpoint be made integral to a revolutionary process if 80% of the population (in Russia's case) consists of peasants who are considered “incapable of an independent political role” and written off as “pro-capitalist”?<sup>54</sup> Luxemburg's position on the peasantry was not very different from that of Trotsky; they both viewed their hunger for land ownership as amenable to a bourgeois phase of development but not *proletarian* rule.<sup>55</sup> Both objected to Lenin's slogan for a “democratic dictatorship of the working class *and* the peasantry”; the best that could be hoped for, Luxemburg suggested, would be proletarian rule *supported* by a section of the *disenfranchised* peasantry. But how can “the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of people, of *unlimited democracy*” be actualized on such a narrow basis?

Moreover, how can thoroughgoing democracy be made real while denying masses of people the right to national self-determination? Luxemburg's writings on the Polish question often make the argument that the working class had outgrown any “nationalist” sentiments and that they were increasingly restricted to the parasitic petty-bourgeoisie and landowning aristocracy.<sup>56</sup> It does not take a great deal of insight to see that she was quite mistaken about this. As Frantz Fanon was later to argue in a different context, anti-colonial struggles in developing countries cannot afford to ignore the mass of the population—which are peasants—if any effective form of democracy is to be actualized in a post-revolutionary society.<sup>57</sup>

These limitations do not negate the significance of Luxemburg's conception of revolutionary democracy. On the contrary, her insights on the inseparability of socialism and democracy—central to her work from as far back as the revisionism controversy of 1898–1899 and her critique of Lenin's organizational centralism in 1904—cast a shadow on her writings on the national question and the peasantry that she never appears to have confronted or recognized. Just as she lived a sort of double life in the German and Polish revolutionary movements—extolling openness, democracy and a critique of bureaucracy in the former while often not living up to these principles in the latter—so she appears to have managed to keep opposing determinations at bay when it came to her central theoretical principles

(such as espousing “unlimited democracy” while dismissing the democratic aspirations of national minorities for self-determination).

Lenin may have therefore been onto something with his criticism of her 1915 *The Crisis in German Social Democracy* (he was not aware at the time that she was the author), regarding her statement, “In the era of rampaging imperialism there can be no more national wars. National interests can only serve as a means of deception of betraying the working masses of the people to their deadly enemy, imperialism.”<sup>58</sup>

In saying that the class struggle is the best means of defense against invasion, Junius applied Marxist dialectics only halfway, taking one step on the right road and immediately deviating from it. Marxist analysis calls for a concrete analysis of each specific historical situation.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps only someone who had taken the trouble to directly study Hegel’s *Science of Logic*—his study was completed shortly before penning the above lines—would have been as alert to Luxemburg’s tendency to allow “contradictory terms [to be] held apart in spatial and temporal juxtaposition and thus come before consciousness without being in contact.”<sup>60</sup> Holding onto fixed particulars (such as an unbending rejection of national self-determination) is, after all, the surest way of holding contradictory terms apart and blocking one’s access to the universal.

Though we have no way of knowing if Luxemburg would have resolved these internal tensions and contradictions in her thought had she lived to further reflect on the state of Marxism after 1919, it does no service to her to deny their existence.

## Conclusion

Taken as a whole, Luxemburg’s and Lenin’s legacies point in radically different directions. This becomes difficult to see if it is presumed that their differences on organization represent *the* fundamental point of divide between them. Though their dispute on this issue was important, their similarities on “the organization question” were hardly insignificant. Far more germane, for our day as well as hers, is Luxemburg’s concept of revolutionary democracy that is articulated most powerfully in *The Russian Revolution*. That is because it so directly speaks to the most important question facing radical thought in the contemporary world—what constitutes a viable

alternative to both existing capitalism and what has called itself ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ over the past 100 years. Since she developed the most profound and prescient understanding of what must *happen after the revolution* if it is to avoid the kinds of failures and dead-ends that became legion throughout the twentieth century, she speaks to our present predicament in a way that is unequaled by any other post-Marx Marxist.

On this issue, Lenin cannot help us; he was too invested in statist, hierarchical and undemocratic approaches to socialist transformation that have so clearly run their course, with disastrous results. In many respects, the endless debates over whether or not Lenin paved the way for Stalin only obscures and distorts the issue. Even leaving Stalin and Stalinism aside, it is hard to see in Lenin’s work an anticipation of the concerns that drive many of those involved in efforts at social transformation today—decentralization, horizontal forms of organization, new forms of grassroots democracy, and alternatives to abstract forms of domination such as value production.

Luxemburg offers no easy answers or blueprints concerning these matters, but she does provide us with indispensable insights that can move us forward—even with the limitations and contradictions that attach to her legacy. There is something irreducibly *humanist* about Luxemburg’s work<sup>61</sup> that gives it a power and resonance that will doubtless continue to inspire fresh thinking about socialist transformation for many years to come. Or at least we hope so, given the serious perils that we now face.

## Notes

1. “Organizational Principles of Russian Social-Democracy,” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Books, 2004), p. 251.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
6. For Lenin’s “Reply to Luxemburg on One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” see V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961, pp. 464–485).
7. It can be argued that the differences between Luxemburg and Lenin on this issue likewise revolved less around matters of principle than differences in their respective national environments. In 1904–1905, the radical movement in Poland had a much more directly proletarian character than in Russia, leading Luxemburg to place far more emphasis on proletarian

- spontaneity than Lenin (he later he modified his position as the workers' movement in Russia became more powerful). For more on this, see Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja: Russian Poland, 1904–1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).
8. For a discussion of the radical distinction between Lassalle's concept of organization and Marx's—an issue that was completely overlooked by the Marxists of the Second International—see Peter Hudis, “Dialectics, ‘the Party,’ and the Problem of the New Society,” *Historical Materialism*, No. 3 (Winter 1998), pp. 95–118.
  9. “Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy,” p. 249. My emphasis.
  10. See Marx's letter to Engels of April 9, 1863: “He gives himself the airs of a future workers' dictator.” *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 41 (New York: International Publishers, 1985), p. 467.
  11. For Lenin and Martynov's comments on “continuous” and “permanent revolution,” see the Minutes of 1907 Fifth Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, *Pyati Londskii S'esd RSDRP, April'-mai 1907 goda, Protokoly* (Moscow: Marx-Engels Institute, 1963), p. 49. A translation of sections of Luxemburg's comments at the congress appear in Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1983), pp. 199–206 and Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (eds.), *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), pp. 543–567.
  12. “Die Revolution in Rußland” [January 1905], *Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke*, Band 1.2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2000), p. 479.
  13. “Eine Probe aufs Exempel” [March 1905], *Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke*, Band 1.2, p. 530.
  14. “Nach dem ersten Akt” [Feb. 4, 1905], *Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke*, Band 1.2, p. 489. For an English translation of this piece, see “After the First Act,” in *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution*, p. 370.
  15. See Leon Trotsky, *1905* (New York and London: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. vi–vii. Trotsky's statement is from the Preface to the book, written in 1922. That there were differences between Trotsky's and Luxemburg's *conceptions* of permanent revolution goes without saying.
  16. “Eine Probe aufs Exempel” [March 1905], p. 531.
  17. “Die russische Revolution” [December 20, 1905], *Rosa Luxemburg, Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2004), p. 7. The article originally appeared in Polish under the title “Rewolucja w Rosji” in *Trybyuna Ludowa*.
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
  19. This is not to suggest that the SDKPiL decided to accommodate itself to the RSDLP's support for self-determination, since the former claimed—at least

- in its internal documents—that the Russian party’s acceptance of ‘autonomy’ for Poland meant that it had moved away from that position (which Lenin denied). For more on this, see Robert E. Blobaum, *Feliks Dzierzynski and the SDKPiL: A Study of the Origins of Polish Communism* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984).
20. See “Die Revolution in Rußland” [November 29, 1905], “Die Revolution in Rußland” [November 30, 1905], and “Die Revolution in Rußland” [December 1, 1905], in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 6 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2014), pp. 742, 745, and 802.
  21. The PPS-Proletariat Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna “Proletariat”) was a split-off from the PPS and existed from 1900–1909. Led by Ludwik Kulczycki, it favored an autonomous Poland in a democratic-federated Russia.
  22. I wish to thank Eric Blanc for bringing this point to my attention in personal correspondence.
  23. For a detailed discussion of this article and the circumstances in which it was finally published, see Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Workers’ Movement and the Formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 189–191.
  24. “Our Tasks and the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies,” in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 19.
  25. J.P. Nettel errs on this issue in writing, “Luxemburg did not allocate any governmental role to Soviets (nor did anyone else).” See his *Rosa Luxemburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 340.
  26. “Die Revolution in Rußland” [Feb. 9–20, 1905], in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 1.2, p. 501.
  27. Quoted in Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, p. 11.
  28. It would be wrong to confuse the putschist position of Józef Pilsudski with that of the PPS as a whole, since he was expelled from the PPS in 1906 for promoting such views.
  29. See Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, August 19, 1909, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, Band 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1984), p. 65. The use of such ungenerous phrases to refer to Lenin and other Russians was not uncommon in Luxemburg’s correspondence.
  30. Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation, and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution*, p. 58.
  31. “Obrachunek Polityczny” (A Political Settling of the Score), *Czerwony Sztandar*, No. 25 (April 1905), p. 3. My thanks to George Shriver for the translation from the Polish.
  32. For a fuller discussion of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, see Wiktor Marzec, “Reading Polish Peripheral Marxism Politically,” *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 6, No. 117 (2013), pp. 5–19.

33. See Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Horace Davis (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976). A more complete collection of Luxemburg's 1908 articles is found in Rosa Luxemburg, *Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie*, ed. Holger Politt (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2012).
34. Quoted in J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 855.
35. See Lenin's "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" [1914], in <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/ch06.htm>.
36. *The German Ideology*, in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 53.
37. Most of the secondary literature on Luxemburg suffers from not considering her work within the Polish Marxist movement—a task made all the more difficult by the fact that her *Gesammelte Werke* includes only a handful of her Polish-language writings. The multi-volume *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* (Verso Books) will make all 3,000 pages of her Polish writings available for the first time.
38. This also informed Lenin's early 'philosophic' polemics—such as his 1911 *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Far from representing a sudden departure into the abstract realm of pure thought, the work was motivated by Lenin's effort to bring Bogdanov down to size over their differences concerning the organizational dispute inside the RSDLP.
39. See "Credo: On the State of Russian Social Democracy" [September 1911], in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 271. This lengthy manuscript—which outlines the reasons for Luxemburg's rupture with Lenin's party—was discovered only in 1991.
40. The proof of Lenin's (somewhat belated) realization in 1914 that Kautsky had led the movement astray is seen in his effort to re-think his own earlier conceptions (before 1914 he had defined himself as a Kautskyian) by plunging into a study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. For a discussion of how this represented a break from the vulgar materialism of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, see Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution, from Hegel to Marx and from Marx to Mao* (New Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 95–122.
41. For a recent restatement of the Leninist position, see John Rose, "Luxemburg, Müller and the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils," *International Socialism*, No. 147 (July 2015).
42. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).
43. See Luxemburg's letter to Henrietta Roland-Holst of September 24, 1907, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, Band 2, pp. 307–308.
44. "What Does the Spartacus League Want?" in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, pp. 354–355.

45. See “The Beginning” [November 18, 1918], in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 343.
46. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* Vol. 23 (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 332.
47. Karl Marx, “Drafts of the *Civil War in France*,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* Vol. 22 (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 484.
48. *The Russian Revolution*, in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 307.
49. “Our Program and the Political Situation” in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 368.
50. To give but one of many examples, Vasili Mikhailovich Blokhin, Stalin’s preferred executioner who personally shot and killed at least 7,000 Polish officers at the Katyn Massacre in 1940, and who is often referred to as the most prolific executioner in history, began his “career” in the Cheka, in 1921.
51. *The Russian Revolution*, in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 308.
52. Although this cannot be dealt with here, no serious account of Luxemburg’s contribution can ignore her crucial writings on economics. See especially her *Introduction to Political Economy*, in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. 1: Economic Writings 1*, ed. Peter Hudis (London and New York: Verso Books, 2013), pp. 899–1300, and *The Accumulation of Capital*, in *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg, Vol. 2: Economic Writings 2*, ed. Peter Hudis and Paul Le Blanc (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015), pp. 7–344.
53. For more on this, see Pierre Pascal, *Civilisation paysanne en Russie* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1969).
54. See *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, p. 564.
55. Despite Luxemburg’s affinity with various positions of Trotsky, she never held him in high regard and rarely says anything positive about him. She is searing in her critique of him in both ‘Credo’ and *The Russian Revolution*. Though she shared his underestimation of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, she came to that position on her own.
56. As early as 1895, Luxemburg proclaimed, “Polish nationalism has already lost all signs of influence in the workers’ movement.” See her “Sozialdemokratische Bewegung in den litauischen Gouvernements Rußlands,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 6, p. 112.
57. For more on this, see Peter Hudis, *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), pp. 122–129.
58. *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy*, in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, p. 325.
59. See “On The Junius Pamphlet,” in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 316.
60. G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans, Johnston and Struthers (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 477.

61. To be sure, the same cannot be said of Lenin. There is something deeply *non-humanist* about his dismissal of those (like Luxemburg) who gave free expression to their disgust with capitalism's destruction of the human personality. See his comment on her *Accumulation of Capital*: "The description of the torture of the Negroes in South Africa is noisy, colorful, and meaningless. Above all it is 'non-Marxist.'" Quoted in Nettle, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 533.

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# 7

## Lenin and Trotsky

Michael Löwy and Paul Le Blanc

Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin were widely seen as the two leading figures in Russia's Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as well as in the first years of the rising world communist movement. In earlier years, however, they were fierce adversaries in the Russian socialist movement. Nonetheless, they came to a substantial agreement in 1917 and joined forces in leading the October Revolution and the subsequent Bolshevik revolutionary regime. After his expulsion from the Soviet Union at the onset of the Stalin dictatorship, Trotsky remained faithful to Leninism until his assassination in 1940.

### Trotsky's Critique of Lenin's Jacobinism (1903–1904)

After escaping from prison in Siberia, Lev Davidovich Bronstein—then using the pseudonym “Trotsky”—arrived in London in 1902. In her memoirs, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's companion, recalls how the newly arrived exile came to their apartment. She reports that Lenin was positively

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impressed, and that afterwards Lenin “talked with him a great deal and went on walks with him.” Lenin proposed placing him on the editorial board of *Iskra*, the paper of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP)—a move that was vetoed by the imperious George Plekhanov. Soon after, a deep fissure opened up that would divide Lenin and Trotsky for many years.

Trotsky was elected delegate by the Siberian socialists to the 1903 Congress of the RSDLP held in London. Siding with the minority (“Mensheviks”), he strongly criticized Lenin’s organizational views. In his *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, published soon after the Congress, he made reference to the French Revolution of 1789–1794, comparing Lenin to the Jacobin leader Robespierre and his dictatorial “Committee of Public Safety.” Lenin’s ultra-centralist views, he argued, would sooner or later compromise the idea of centralism in general, and even the idea of a single combat organization, consequently opening the gates for the “Thermidorians” of socialist opportunism.

A year later, he published a larger pamphlet, *Our Political Tasks* (1904), which included a sharp polemic against Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done* (1903) and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904). As in the previous document, his criticism was aimed at Lenin’s “Jacobinism.” In *One Step Forward...* Lenin stated that, “the Jacobin indissolubly linked to the *organization* of the proletariat *now conscious* of its class interests, is precisely the *social democratic revolutionary*.” Trotsky insisted instead that (bourgeois-democratic) Jacobinism and proletarian revolutionary democracy represented “two worlds, two doctrines, two tactics, and two outlooks, separated by an abyss.”

His main argument opposes the self-activity of the proletariat to what he calls *substitutionism*. In his view, Lenin’s position leads to the party substituting the class, and then, in the internal politics of the party “to the party organization ‘substituting’ itself for the party, the Central Committee substituting itself for the party organization, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the Central Committee.”

One can consider this criticism to be unfair towards Lenin’s actual standpoint and intentions, but it can be seen, nevertheless, as an astonishing forecast of the Stalinist future of the Soviet Union.

Trotsky’s harshest comments were, in fact, not addressed to Lenin himself, but to disturbing ideas expressed by certain Bolshevik committees within the RSDLP, such as the one from the Urals, which argued, in a document published by the underground paper *Iskra*, for the need to create a “powerful organization” able to impose a “dictatorship on the proletariat,” and thus lead society towards socialism.

Against this “Ural Manifesto,” which he considered to be the symptom of a serious danger threatening the party, and whose conclusions “give the

shivers even to those who are not particularly fearful,” Trotsky insisted on the need for democratic pluralism in the revolutionary process: the dictatorship of the proletariat requires the competition and even the struggle between different socialist currents. Trotsky, following Marx, considered the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as the process through which “the working class, by its autonomous action, takes in its hands the destiny of society.” For him, this was totally contradictory with the dictatorship, i.e. the monopoly of power, of a “strong organization” that substitutes itself for the class—or, even worse, of a personal dictator taking all power for himself. His conclusion was that a proletariat exercising its dictatorship—that is, *its own political rule as a class*—would never tolerate a dictatorship *over itself*.

This may have been too optimistic, but the “prophetic” nature of Trotsky’s argument is striking, foreseeing the dangerous—authoritarian and anti-democratic and “giving the shiver”—tendencies of certain currents of the Bolshevik movement.

After joining the Bolshevik Party in 1917, Trotsky disavowed his early critiques of Lenin. But in his last years, reflecting on the issues on the light of the historical experience of Stalinism, he wrote the following in his uncompleted biography of Stalin (1940):

The negative aspect of Bolshevism’s centripetal tendencies first became apparent at the Third Congress of the Russian Social Democracy. The habits peculiar to a political machine were already forming in the underground. The young revolutionary bureaucrat was already emerging as a type. [...]

In the pamphlet, *Our Political Problems*, written by me in 1904, which contains not a little that is immature and erroneous in my criticism of Lenin, there are, however, pages which present a fairly accurate characterization of the cast of thought of the “committeemen” of those days, who “have foregone the need to rely upon the workers after they had found support in the ‘principles’ of centralism.” The fight Lenin was obliged to wage the following year at the Congress against the high and mighty “committeemen” completely confirmed the justice of my criticism.

## Trotsky and Lenin on the Russian Revolution of 1905

Another substantial difference between Lenin and Trotsky in the pre-1917 period had to do with the nature of the Russian revolution, despite a certain degree of common ground.

The presupposition that the Russian revolution must necessarily be bourgeois-democratic in content was shared before 1917 by virtually every sector of Russian and international Marxism. Where Lenin and the Bolsheviks differed from Georgi Plekhanov and the Mensheviks was over which class would play the leading role in carrying out these bourgeois tasks. For the latter, the hegemonic class had to be the bourgeoisie itself; while for the former, it would be an alliance of workers and peasants.

A close reading of Lenin's most important political text of this period, *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905), reveals with extraordinary clarity the *tension* in Lenin's thought between his profound revolutionary realism and the limitations imposed by the strait-jacket of Second International "orthodox Marxism." On the one hand, this work contains an illuminating and penetrating analysis of the incapacity of the Russian bourgeoisie to successfully lead a democratic revolution, which, in fact, could be accomplished only by a worker-peasant front. On the other hand, there are innumerable passages in the pamphlet that categorically insist on the exclusively bourgeois character of the revolution and condemn as "reactionary" the idea of "seeking salvation for the working class in anything save the further development of capitalism." Lenin supported this latter thesis by appealing to the classical leitmotiv of a mechanistic conception of Marxism: "The degree of Russia's economic development (the objective condition) and the degree of class consciousness and organization of the broad masses of the proletariat (the subjective condition, inseparably bound up with the objective condition) make immediate and complete emancipation of the working class impossible. Only the most ignorant people can close their eyes to the bourgeois nature of the democratic revolution which is now taking place." The objective determines the subjective; the economy is the condition of consciousness. In two phrases, this was the quintessence of the 'materialist' gospel that was predominant within the Second International, whose dead weight overlay Lenin's rich and powerful political intuitions.

Another theme in the *Two Tactics* that testifies to the methodological obstacles created by the *analytical* (pre-dialectical) character of the main currents of Russian Marxism was the explicit rejection of the Paris Commune as a model for the Russian revolution. According to Lenin, the Commune failed because it was "unable to distinguish between the elements of democratic revolution and socialist revolution," and because it "confused the tasks of fighting for a republic with those of fighting for socialism. Consequently, it was a government such as *ours* [the future provisional revolutionary government in Russia] should not be." The return to the model of the Paris

Commune was to be one of the decisive steps in Lenin's drastic revision of the "old Bolshevism" in April 1917.

It would not be fair to leave Lenin's writings on the revolution of 1905 without noting that there are some passages that seem to hint at the idea of an uninterrupted revolutionary development towards socialism. Particularly intriguing is an article on the peasantry written in September 1905 where Lenin asserts: "From the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organized proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way." (*Social-Democracy's Attitude Towards the Peasant Movement*). Yet this is an exceptional formulation that does not correspond to the orientation present in the overwhelming bulk of his writings in this period.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, as sketched for the first time in his essay *Results and Prospects* (1906), was one of the most astonishing political breakthroughs in Marxist thinking at the beginning of the twentieth century. By rejecting the idea of two separate historical stages in the future Russian revolution (the first being "bourgeois democratic," the second being "proletarian socialist"), and raising instead the possibility of transforming the democratic into a proletarian/socialist revolution in a "permanent" (i.e. uninterrupted) process, Trotsky's analysis not only predicted the general strategy of the October revolution, but also provided key insights into the other revolutionary processes that would take place later on, in China, Indochina, Cuba, and so on. Of course, it is not without its problems and shortcomings, but it was incomparably more relevant to the real revolutionary processes in the periphery of the capitalist system than anything produced by "orthodox Marxism" from the death of Engels until 1917.

It was during 1905, in the fire of the revolution, that Trotsky actually made that "great leap forward" which, by formulating the first elements of his theory of permanent revolution, placed him in the ideological and political vanguard of European Marxism.

While Lenin refused to take the Paris Commune as a model because it "confused" the democratic revolution with the socialist, Trotsky (in December 1905) made the Commune an exemplary reference precisely for this reason. In his preface to a Russian edition of Marx's writings on the Commune, he prophesied that the future workers' government in Russia would be forced, like the Communards in 1871, by the very logic of its situation, to take socialist measures.

*Results and Prospects*, a pamphlet written by Trotsky in jail in 1906, was the first systematic exposition of the theory of permanent revolution.

It begins with an analysis of the genesis of the Russian social formation and its peculiarities—an analysis that Trotsky would continue to develop and enrich in his subsequent works between 1906 and 1908 (a number of essays from this period are included in the volume *1905*). Trotsky contrasts the differential character of the urban economy in Russian and Western history: heavy industry in Russia did not develop, as in the West, “organically” from small crafts and manufacturing, but was to a large extent directly implanted by foreign (German, French, Belgian and English) capital. This foreign and very modern origin of the dominant sections of Russian industrial capital was one of the main causes of both the weakness of the native Russian bourgeoisie and of the relative socio-political weight of the young Russian working class. “The proletariat immediately found itself concentrated in tremendous masses, while between these masses and the autocracy there stood a capitalist bourgeoisie, very small in numbers, isolated from the ‘people,’ half-foreign, without historical traditions, and inspired only by the greed for gain.”

Trotsky showed also how the concentration of workers in Russian industry had attained truly gigantic proportions, even by the standards of the advanced capitalist countries. Indeed, he would later demonstrate that the percentage of the labor force employed in very large factories was much higher in Russia than in Germany. In this analysis, it is possible to see the emergence of the first sketch of the *theory of uneven and combined development*. Later, in his book *1905*, he filled in this sketch with more elaborate concepts; for example, stressing that Russian society comprised an articulation of all stages of civilization, from the most primitive and archaic agriculture to the most modern large-scale industry.

Trotsky’s interpretation of Russian social reality was intertwined with a broad and original conception of the world-historical movement. Comparing 1789, 1848 and 1905, he divided the modern class struggle into three important phases: *first*, when the revolutionary bourgeoisie leads the rebellion of the plebeian masses against despotism; *second*, when the bourgeoisie is no longer revolutionary, but the proletariat is still too weak; and *third*, when the proletariat becomes the leading force in the struggle against autocracy. The practical conclusion of this socio-historical analysis, at the level of political action, was the famous formula that Trotsky advanced after 1905: “the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.” This slogan, of course, was considered heretical by most Russian Marxists, especially the Mensheviks, for whom the role of the proletariat could not but be the direct expression of the level of industrial development; it implied, therefore, Trotsky’s rejection of a mechanistic “economism” and his comprehension of the relative autonomy of the political sphere.

A careful study of the roots of Trotsky's political boldness, and of the whole theory of permanent revolution, reveals that his views were informed by a specific understanding of Marxism, an interpretation of the dialectical materialist method distinct from the dominant orthodoxy of the Second International and of Russian Marxism. The young Trotsky did not read Hegel, but his understanding of Marxist theory owes much to his first readings in historical materialism, namely the works of Antonio Labriola. Formed in the Hegelian school, Labriola fought relentlessly against the neo-positivist and vulgar materialist trends that proliferated in Italian Marxism—for example, Turati. He was one of the first to reject the economic interpretations of Marxism by attempting to restore the dialectical concepts of *totality* and *historical process*.

Trotsky's starting point, therefore, was the critical, dialectical and anti-dogmatic understanding that Labriola had inspired. Let us focus on three of the most important and distinctive features of the methodology that underlies Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, in distinction from the other Russian Marxists, from Plekhanov to Lenin and from the Mensheviks to the Bolsheviks (before 1917):

1. From the vantage point of the dialectical comprehension of the unity of opposites, Trotsky criticized the Bolsheviks' rigid division between the socialist power of the proletariat and the "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants," as a "logical, purely formal operation." This abstract logic is even more sharply attacked in his polemic against Plekhanov, whose whole reasoning can be reduced to an "empty syllogism": our revolution is bourgeois, therefore, we should support the Cadets, the constitutionalist bourgeois party. Moreover, in an astonishing passage from a critique against the Menshevik F.A. Cherevanin, he explicitly condemned the *analytical*—i.e. abstract-formal, pre-dialectical—character of Menshevik politics: "Cherevanin constructs his tactics as Spinoza did his ethics, that is to say, geometrically." Of course, Trotsky was not a philosopher and almost never wrote specifically philosophical texts, but this makes his clear-sighted grasp of the methodological dimension of his controversy with stagist conceptions all the more remarkable.
2. In *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), George Lukács insisted that the dialectical category of totality was the essence of Marx's method, indeed, the very principle of revolution within the domain of knowledge. Trotsky's theory, written twenty years earlier, is an exceptionally significant illustration of this Lukácsian thesis. Indeed, one of the essential sources of the superiority of Trotsky's revolutionary thought is the fact

that he adopted *the viewpoint of totality*, perceiving capitalism and the class struggle as a world process. In the preface to a 1905 Russian edition of Lassalle's articles about the revolution of 1848, he argues:

Binding all countries together with its mode of production and its commerce, capitalism has converted the whole world into a single economic and political organism [...] This immediately gives the events now unfolding an international character, and opens up a wide horizon. The political emancipation of Russia led by the working class [...] will make it the initiator of the liquidation of world capitalism, for which history has created the objective condition.

Only by posing the problem in these terms—at the level of “maturity” of the capitalist system in its *totality*—was it possible to transcend the traditional perspective of the Russian Marxists, who defined the socialist revolutionary “unripeness” of Russia exclusively in terms of a *national* economic determinism.

3. Trotsky explicitly rejected the undialectical economism—the tendency to reduce, in a non-mediated and one-sided way, all social, political and ideological contradictions to the economic infrastructure—which was one of the hallmarks of Plekhanov's vulgar materialist interpretation of Marxism. Indeed, Trotsky's break with such economism was one of the decisive steps towards the theory of permanent revolution. A key paragraph in *Results and Prospects* defined with precision the political stakes implied in this rupture: “To imagine that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in some way automatically dependent on the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of ‘economic’ materialism simplified to absurdity. This point of view has nothing in common with Marxism.”

It was the combination of all these methodological innovations that made *Results and Prospects* so unique in the landscape of Russian Marxism before 1917; dialectics was at the heart of the theory of permanent revolution.

What were the principal divergences between the views of Trotsky and Lenin on the social nature of the Russian revolution? Trotsky agreed with Lenin that the revolutionary power to be established in Russia must be some sort of coalition between the proletariat and the peasantry, but he insisted that the proletariat should necessarily be the *hegemonic* force in this alliance. In support of this thesis, he advanced three different arguments: (1) the inevitable subordination of the country to the town as a result of industrialization; (2) the peasantry's incapacity to play an independent

political role and its necessary dependence upon the leadership of one of the urban classes; and (3) that since Russia lacked an authentic revolutionary bourgeoisie, the peasantry would, therefore, be forced to support the power of workers' democracy: "it will not matter much even if the peasantry does this with a degree of consciousness not larger than that with which it usually rallies to the bourgeois regimes." Lenin polemicized vigorously against this last thesis, stressing, not without reason, that "the proletariat cannot count on the ignorance and prejudices of the peasantry as the powers that be under a bourgeois regime, count and depend on them, nor can it assume that in time of revolution the peasantry will remain in their usual state of political ignorance and passivity." But in the last analysis, his disagreement with Trotsky was not so deep, since he too believed in the need for proletarian hegemony in the revolutionary movement. For example at the 1908/1909 conference of the RSDLP, Lenin, after some hesitation, rallied to the motto advanced by Trotsky and Luxemburg: "the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry."

As a matter of fact, Trotsky's perspective of a workers' government in Russia was shared by Parvus (Alexander Helphand), Rosa Luxemburg and, more intermittently, by Lenin as well. *The radical novelty of the theory of permanent revolution was located less in its view of the class nature of the future revolutionary power than in its conception of its historical tasks.* Trotsky's decisive contribution was the idea that the Russian revolution could transcend the limits of an extensive democratic transformation and begin to take anti-capitalist measures with a distinctively socialist content. How did Trotsky justify this iconoclastic hypothesis? The linchpin of his argument was the belief that "the political domination of the proletariat is incompatible with its economic enslavement." Why, Trotsky asked, would the proletariat in power, although controlling the means of coercion, continue to tolerate capitalist exploitation? And even if the working class attempted to restrict itself to an implementation of the demands of its minimum, democratic program, would not the very logic of its position compel it to pass over to collectivistic measures? For example, if the state gave aid to strikers, it would probably provoke a reaction by the employers in the form of widespread lock-outs. Confronted by the challenge of a "strike by capital," the proletarian power would be obliged to take over factories and organize production. To put it in a nutshell, "the barrier between the 'minimum' and the 'maximum' program disappears immediately [when] the proletariat comes to power."

Trotsky's viewpoint, then, follows logically from an extrapolation of the dynamics of class struggle in a revolutionary process. Moreover, it is rooted in a deep understanding of how, in the conjuncture of revolutionary

transition, the political sphere becomes dominant: the political power of the proletariat immediately becomes a social and economic power, a direct threat to bourgeois domination in the factories. Under such conditions, lockouts and various forms of economic sabotage (curtailment of investment, flight of capital, hoarding, etc.) are the logical and almost inevitable response of a bourgeoisie confronted with the break-down of institutional (state) guarantees of private property and the great danger of working-class power. In other words, the contradiction between the political domination of the proletariat and the economic power of the bourgeoisie is unbearable for both classes; such a highly unstable and ephemeral situation must rapidly be resolved in favor of one antagonist or the other.

*Results and Prospects* remained for a long time a forgotten book. It seems that Lenin did not read it—at least before 1917—and its influence over contemporary Russian Marxism was desultory at best. Like all forerunners, Trotsky was ahead of his time, and his ideas were too novel and heterodox to be accepted, or even studied, by his party comrades. However, as we shall see, once adopted and reformulated by Lenin, they were at the heart of the Bolshevik strategy in 1917.

## The Prominence of the Political

Trotsky's Marxism dovetailed with that of Lenin in significant ways. As Marxists, both men saw economic development and socio-economic relationships (classes and class struggle) as shaping and conditioning the contexts and consciousness from which politics evolves. But each also—as Marxists—saw a dialectical interplay of the economic, the social and the political. And in this, the Marxism of each proved to be different from the more mechanistic and deterministic interpretations prevalent within European social democracy, particularly within the Menshevik wing of the Russian socialist movement.

In his classic blend of narrative and theorization, in *1905*, Trotsky emphasized the essential role of “parties, unions, the army, the bureaucracy, the press and, placed above these, the ministers of state, the political leaders, the demagogues, and the hangmen,” adding: “Whoever is unable to admit initiative, talent, energy and heroism into the framework of historical necessity, has not grasped the philosophical secret of Marxism.” At the same time, he insisted, that “we must be capable of seeing, behind the motley parties and programs, behind the perfidy and greed of some and the courage and idealism of others, the proper outlines of the social classes whose roots lie

deep within the relations of production and whose flowers bloom in the highest spheres of ideology.” Yet Trotsky refused to subordinate the politics of class to any presumably inexorable economic forces. “To imagine that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in some way automatically dependent on the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of ‘economic’ materialism simplified to absurdity,” he insisted in *Results and Prospects*, emphasizing that “there is no direct relationship between the political power of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the level of capitalist development on the other.”

A similar non-economistic emphasis on the political can be seen at the very heart of Lenin’s orientation, premised as it was on the notion of Marxism as “a guide to action.” His highly political Marxism shines through in his insistence on the centrality of “the organization question” as the element that would ensure the hegemony of the working class in the democratic revolution. The same is true of his insistence on the political alliance of the workers and the peasantry as essential in advancing such a revolution. It can also be seen in Lenin’s stress on the party actively developing working class consciousness through multiple means, including election campaigns and the functioning of workers’ representatives in the parliament (Duma). This shared prominence of the political in the orientation of each revolutionary would contribute to the possibility of a future convergence.

The immense impact of the First World War brought about precisely such a convergence of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s perspectives. As his companion Nadezhda Krupskaya later demonstrated in her *Reminiscences*, in Lenin’s thinking while in his final Swiss exile in 1914–1916, two powerful currents had merged together. The global consequences of imperialism and war intensified the dynamics of revolutionary internationalism. In addition, democratic struggles not only were central to, but necessarily culminated in, proletarian socialist revolution. For Lenin, this meant socialist revolution was now on the agenda for Russia and the rest of Europe. A month before the overthrow of tsarism, addressing a youth meeting in Zurich, he emphasized: “Without a doubt, this coming revolution can only be a proletarian revolution, and in an even more profound sense of the word: a proletarian, socialist revolution in its content.” He continued to make the same point throughout 1917. Consistent with his theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky was making similar analytical points, concluding: “A permanent revolution or a permanent slaughter: that is the struggle, in which the stake is the future of humanity.”

## Russian Revolutions of 1917

Lenin had a different philosophical background to that of Trotsky. He was a great admirer of Plekhanov's materialism, and a political rapprochement took place in 1908–1909, when Lenin and Plekhanov both opposed what was called “liquidationism,” a tendency in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party that argued for eliminating all the non-legal, underground activities. In this period, Lenin wrote the essay *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, a work in which the philosophical influence of the “Father of Russian Marxism” can be seen and read. Lenin's road to a dialectical understanding of Marxism led him, through the discovery of Hegel, to political conclusions in April 1917 that were not so different from those of Trotsky, even without any direct influence.

The capitulation of German Social Democracy (and Plekhanov!) in August 1914 to the imperialist war was probably the reason that led Lenin to search for a new conception of Marxism. Just one month later, he started reading Hegel's *Science of Logic*, a work that deeply transformed his philosophical outlook. If one reads his *Philosophical Notebooks* (1914–1915), one can perceive the main aspects of his new approach to dialectics, in direct opposition to Plekhanov, whom he criticizes for having written nothing on Hegel's *Logic*, “that is to say, basically on the dialectic as philosophical knowledge.”

The isolation, separation and abstract opposition of different moments of reality—characteristic of Plekhanov's “materialism”—are dissolved through the category of totality; in Lenin's words in the *Philosophical Notebooks*: “the dialectic is the theory which shows...why human understanding should not take contraries as dead and petrified but as living, conditioned, mobile, interpenetrating each other.”

It is not difficult to find the red thread leading from the dialectical category of totality to the theory of the weakest link of the imperialist chain; from the interpenetration of opposites to the transformation of the democratic into a socialist revolution, from the critique of vulgar evolutionism that ignores the “break in continuity” (*Philosophical Notebooks*) to the revolutionary politics of 1917.

When Lenin arrived at the Finland Station of Petrograd in April 1917, he gave an impressive speech calling for “All power to the Soviets.” Both the Menshevik and Bolshevik (Kamenev, and others) leaders reacted with surprise and dismay. Years later, the Menshevik historian N.N. Sukhanov wrote in his memoirs (published in 1922) that Lenin's call “echoed like a thunder-clap from a clear blue sky” and “stunned and confused even the most faithful of his disciples”: against Lenin's heresy, “there could be only agreement

between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.” It seemed, he argued, “that the mass of the party was in revolt against Lenin to defend the elementary principles of scientific socialism of the past; alas, we were mistaken.” Indeed, Lenin in 1917 had broken with the predominant pre-dialectical conception of “the elementary principles” of Marxism, and with the “scientific socialism of the past,” as understood by most Russian Marxists. Lenin’s reply to Sukhanov appeared in January 1923: “Everyone calls himself a Marxist understanding Marxism in the most pedantic way possible. They haven’t at all understood the essential of Marxism, namely, its revolutionary dialectic.”

From that moment on—March–April 1917—Lenin and Trotsky shared the same revolutionary strategy.

Both Lenin and Trotsky believed that the democratic revolution overthrowing tsarism, initiated by a spontaneous working-class upsurge in February/March 1917, could only be secured and completed by a working-class socialist revolution. This had the possibility of initiating (and could itself be completed by) a wave of working-class socialist revolutions in other countries in the wake of the imperialist slaughter and devastation of the First World War. In Russia, the democratic councils—*soviets*—of workers and soldiers (the latter mostly peasants in uniform), the forces essential to the overthrow of tsarism, must now sweep aside the Provisional Government made up of pro-capitalist liberals, conservative landowners and moderate socialists. The overthrow of the tsar was sparked by a desire for “peace, bread, land”—an exit from the devastating First World War, plus distribution of land from the aristocratic elite to the peasant majority. Both Lenin and Trotsky called for “all power to the soviets” to attain these goals and also as the inauguration of a socialist revolution.

More than this, there was an organizational convergence. Returning to Russia in May 1917, Trotsky became centrally involved in the non-factional Interdistrict Group of Russian Social Democrats, initially seeking to draw together Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. He quickly perceived that the disunited and largely politically disoriented Mensheviks had little to offer, while the Bolsheviks now constituted a powerfully dynamic revolutionary force without equal. This reality—largely the result of Lenin’s organizational efforts over many years—not only caused the Interdistrict Group to merge into the Bolshevik Party, but resulted in a profound theoretical and political reorientation on Trotsky’s part. He embraced and internalized Lenin’s organizational perspectives to such an extent that Lenin was moved to state to his comrades that since Trotsky joined their party, “there has been no better Bolshevik.”

Trotsky's authority in the larger revolutionary movement (causing him to become a leading force in the soviets), combined with his immense theoretical and organizational skills, resulted in his being drawn immediately into the central leadership of the Bolshevik Party. Within that tight-knit collective, Trotsky was among Lenin's most resolute and effective allies in mobilizing the Bolsheviks to lead the October/November revolution to overthrow the Provisional Government. At the same time, he played an essential role in shaping the Bolsheviks' tactical approach. At one point, despairing of winning sufficient support in the soviets for a revolutionary socialist seizure of power (despite clear indications that a working-class majority favored this course), Lenin strongly pressed for the Bolshevik Party itself—independently of the soviets—to take power. Trotsky helped to block that course, insistent that a solid majority within the soviets was imminent and that the authority of the soviets was crucial for the legitimacy of the seizure of power. The rapid success of Trotsky's course won Lenin to its obvious wisdom and desirability.

The night before the seizure of power, Lenin and Trotsky lay side by side on the floor of the Bolshevik headquarters in Smolny Institute, talking before snatching a few bits of sleep. In the morning, Lenin—softly, almost shyly—commented to his comrade: “You know, from persecution and a life underground, to come so suddenly into power...” Then, in German: “*Es schwindelt!*” (it's dizzying) and he circled his hand around his head. “We look at each other and laugh a little,” Trotsky later remembered in his memoirs.

In the wake of the Bolshevik victory, in the early days of Soviet power, “Lenin-and-Trotsky” would often be seen as a single entity by supporters and enemies alike throughout Russia and the world.

## Civil War and Dictatorship

Withdrawal from World War I was high on the agenda of the new Soviet Republic—but neither the regime of Germany's Kaiser nor the reactionary German military would make that easy. Trotsky, as Commissar of Foreign Affairs, headed a substantial delegation to negotiate an end to hostilities at Brest-Litovsk, but found that outrageous demands were being put forward for considerable Russian territory and resources to be handed over to Germany.

Bolshevik coalition partners in the Soviet regime from the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party were absolutely opposed to this, as was a very substantial section of the Bolshevik leadership. Lenin was insistent that the

severe conditions must be accepted and the peace treaty signed, noting that the old tsarist army was disintegrating and peace was a necessity. The opponents of the treaty argued that a revolutionary war should be waged against German imperialism, while Trotsky took a mid-way position: the Soviet delegation should simply walk out of the negotiations and declare “peace,” playing for time in hope that a popular uprising would be generated in Germany. Lenin and a majority supported this compromise, but this time, Trotsky’s “tactical adjustment” did not work. A massive and successful German military offensive caused a majority of the Bolshevik leadership—Trotsky included—to accept Lenin’s position, although this time the German demands were even more severe.

In the wake of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Trotsky stepped down from the position of Commissar of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed as Commissar of War and set about organizing a new and increasingly powerful Red Army, crucial for defending the Revolution from foreign invasions and from desperate, well-financed efforts from within to bring down the Soviet regime. By all accounts, he was a brilliant military organizer and military commander, and his efforts were decisive in the preservation of the embattled and fragile Soviet Republic. Trotsky’s formidable efforts drew upon his capacity to inspire masses of people around the core aspirations and ideals of the Revolution, but also the ability to utilize effectively, yet also ruthlessly, the authoritarian methods often associated with organized violence and modern warfare. Such methods now characterized the entire Soviet regime in the midst of innumerable and violent assaults both of internal and international origin, plus an economic collapse prepared by the First World War and ensured by the conditions of civil war.

Monarchists, landlords and capitalists fought and were repressed in what came to be known as the “Red Terror” (devised to counteract the no less ruthlessly violent “White Terror” of the counter-revolutionaries). Similarly repressed were those on the left who for one reason or another took up arms against the Bolsheviks. As circumstances grew more dire in the brutal civil war, even socialist organizations openly critical of the Bolsheviks (who had changed their name to the *Russian Communist Party*) became targets of repression. The democratic councils—the soviets—quickly lost their democratic quality as the Communist Party became not simply the ruling party but the only legal party. Advanced as an emergency measure in the midst of terrible crisis, the leaders of the new regime increasingly offered more sweeping theorizations. Marxists had seen the term “dictatorship of proletariat” as simply emphasizing the notion of *political rule by the working class* (some would term it “workers” democracy”), but for Lenin and Trotsky it now

meant political rule by a Communist Party committed to the wellbeing of the working class.

One of the most eloquent critics of this development was Polish–German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg. “Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure,” Luxemburg wrote. But when “Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favor of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby, in favor of the dictatorship of a handful of persons,” they were embracing an approach “far removed from a genuine socialist policy.” As Lenin and Trotsky themselves had asserted in earlier years, Luxemburg argued that democracy must be at the heart of the struggle for socialism, warning that, “socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators.” Despite such warnings, the Soviet state implemented increasingly repressive political policies as well as increasing state-controlled centralization of the economy, which was tagged “war communism.”

Also arising in this period were tensions and controversies that generated various dissident groupings among Russian Communists—the Left Communists, Democratic Centralists, Workers’ Opposition, Workers’ Truth, and others—in some cases arguing that Soviet Russia must move more rapidly toward socialism, in others that principles of workers’ democracy were being unnecessarily compromised, or that trade unions controlled by the workers should take control of the economy. Lenin and Trotsky were united in opposing all of these, and in working to undercut the ability of these groups to win comrades to their perspectives. In addition, when even more influential challenges to Trotsky’s policies and leadership in the Red Army were vociferously advanced—particularly by the “military opposition” around Joseph Stalin—Lenin tactfully but decisively backed Trotsky.

Lenin and Trotsky were united in the conviction that the socialist revolution initiated by the 1917 seizure of power could not be successful unless there was a triumph, in the near future, of socialist workers’ revolutions in an increasing number of other countries. Global capitalism could only be replaced, they believed, by socialism on a global scale. So they both worked conscientiously and eloquently to help build a worldwide network of revolutionary Communist parties in each country to bring that about—the Communist International (Comintern, or Third International). At the first four congresses of the Comintern—1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922—they took

similar positions, laboring to persuade less experienced revolutionaries: (1) that successful revolutions could not be won simply by a small-group *putsch* but must have majority support from the working class; (2) that helping to advance reform struggles for improvements within capitalist countries must be an integral part of building up revolutionary parties capable of leading revolutions; and (3) that united fronts between revolutionary and reformist organizations were essential for advancing the struggles of workers and the oppressed, and for helping to build the revolutionary party.

There remained a certain formality in the way Lenin and Trotsky addressed each other, “using the polite pronoun *vy* for ‘you’ rather than the familiar *ty*,” according to Russian historian Oleg Khlevniuk, but he added that “as much as Lenin and Trotsky may have argued, they were also drawn to one another,” and when “Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks ... Lenin immediately recognized him as a strong partner.” For some of Lenin’s old Bolshevik comrades, newcomer Trotsky’s ascent in Bolshevik ranks generated tensions—Khlevniuk noted seeds of an anti-Trotsky alliance, involving Stalin, Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, early on. Yet the working relationship of the two leaders was quite close. “In most cases, the decisions that Lenin and I arrived at independently of each other were identical in all essentials,” according to Trotsky. “A few words would bring about a mutual understanding.” He added: “Many a time Stalin, Zinoviev, or Kamenev disagreed with me on some question of great importance, but as soon as they learned that Lenin shared my opinion they lapsed into silence.” Trotsky emphasized “that when I disagreed with Lenin, I mentioned it aloud, and, when I thought it necessary, even appealed to the party.” By contrast, when Stalin, Zinoviev or Kamenev disagreed with Lenin, “they usually kept silent about it, or, like Stalin, sulked and hid away for a few days.”

Trotsky acknowledged, “a fevered discussion not only could but sometimes did develop” between himself and Lenin. The most dramatic instance of this involved the 1920 debate on the role of trade unions in the new Soviet Republic, which according to Trotsky “clouded our relationship for some time.” Various factions were engaged in the heated debate. Concerned about bringing order out of economic chaos, Trotsky proposed authoritarian measures, which included eliminating the organizational independence of the trade unions and making them subordinate to the Soviet state. He reasoned it made no sense for workers to go on strike, for example, against their own government. The Workers’ Opposition called not only for worker-controlled trade unions to remain independent of the Soviet state, but also for them to be placed in charge of running the economy. Lenin took the middle ground. He denounced the “syndicalism” of the Workers’ Opposition

comrades, but also argued against Trotsky that what existed was not simply a workers' state, but a workers' state with serious "bureaucratic deformations," requiring that the workers be able to defend themselves from its bureaucratic excesses through their own independent trade unions.

With this partial break in the Lenin–Trotsky partnership, Zinoviev and Stalin were closely aligned with Lenin. Their anti-Trotsky resentments found an outlet as they helped Lenin undercut the newcomer's authority in the Communist Party. At the same time, Lenin went out of his way to quote and agree with Trotsky's comment that "ideological struggle in the Party does not mean mutual ostracism but mutual influence."

The division between Lenin and Trotsky quickly ended when Lenin proposed a different way of dealing with the economic chaos by initiating the New Economic Policy (NEP)—shifting away from the civil war-inspired over-centralized state-control of the economy though encouraging the development of market mechanisms that would allow the economy to breathe and begin growing again. Trotsky had proposed this a year earlier, turning to his controversial proposals only when this now-accepted pathway had been rejected. The economic and political crises of "war communism" had also generated a peasant uprising in Tambov and an uprising at the Kronstadt naval base—both of which were denounced as threatening the survival of the Soviet regime and were violently repressed. Kronstadt was a fratricidal conflict between revolutionaries, causing sharp criticisms among supporters of the Revolution who believed mediation was a possible and preferable course. Other authoritarian "emergency measures" included the final and definitive repression of all opposition parties in the soviets, and also the banning of factions within the Communist Party. Lenin and Trotsky held essentially identical positions on all of these issues.

In 1922, Stalin assumed what turned out to be a very powerful position within the Communist Party, General Secretary. This new position oversaw the organization of leadership discussions within the party, ensuring the smooth functioning of the party, as well as coordinating assignments of party comrades—particularly assignments to the governmental apparatus. Lenin wanted to enhance the *collective* nature of power in the regime by establishing positions (with the title of "Vice-Premier") for Trotsky, Alexei Rykov, and perhaps Kamenev, which he believed would be co-equal in power to Stalin's position. To Lenin's great exasperation, Trotsky did not believe this move made sense, and he declined the position.

At the same time, however, he was increasingly persuaded that Lenin's concern about "bureaucratic deformations" was on-target. Lenin was now fighting against incapacitation by a series of strokes that would result in his becoming

completely inactive by 1923, with death following at the beginning of 1924. But within a brief slice of time in 1922, Trotsky acceded to Lenin's request for collaboration in struggling against bureaucratic-authoritarian tendencies endangering the revolutionary fiber of both the Communist Party and Soviet state. Lenin was also painstakingly composing an analysis of the party leadership (often called his *Testament*) in which he analyzed strengths and weaknesses of various top figures and emphasized the need for a collective leadership. He saw the two most capable leaders as being Trotsky and Stalin, warning that conflict between them could tear the party apart. After becoming aware of certain of Stalin's negative actions, he strongly criticized him and urged that Stalin be immediately removed from the position of General Secretary.

With Lenin's death, however, Trotsky felt compelled to compromise with Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, who gave him comradely assurances that all would function according to the collective leadership formula proposed by Lenin, and that a campaign would be launched to push back the evils of bureaucracy.

## Trotsky After Lenin's Death

Trotsky's concern regarding a growing bureaucratization and disorientation within the Soviet State, the Russian Communist Party, and the Communist International (of which Zinoviev was the central leader)—a powerful drift away from what he perceived as the most positive qualities of Lenin's orientation—caused him to openly raise criticisms. These were reflected in his articles in *The New Course*, challenging bureaucratic and authoritarian modes of operation in the party and state, and *Lessons of October*, comparing problematical developments in the Comintern with political weaknesses that had caused Kamenev and Zinoviev to oppose the decision of Lenin and the Bolshevik majority to carry out the October/November 1917 revolution. A grouping of prominent and like-minded comrades began to gather around him, dubbed the Left Opposition.

Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin launched a fierce counter-attack, accusing Trotsky of representing an alien force in Communist ranks, documenting in detail the pre-1917 differences between Lenin and Trotsky, negatively contrasting Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution with Lenin's views of 1905–1914. The Central Committee of the Communist Party, which they controlled, condemned Trotsky's presumably "anti-Leninist" attacks, and an entire book, with essays by prominent Communists, was published on *The Errors of Trotskyism*.

By 1926, however, a very sizeable group including Zinoviev, Kamenev, Krupskaya and others would join with Trotsky and his co-thinkers in a United Opposition. They opposed a worsening of negative developments that had concerned Lenin before his death. Their political platform focused on the growing gap between the Soviet state and the working class, the growing bureaucracy and authoritarianism within the state and party apparatus, the need for a democratic revitalization within the Communist Party and the soviets, and the need to defend the Bolsheviks' traditional revolutionary internationalism from what they saw as a reactionary orientation, advanced by Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin, of achieving "socialism in one country."

The massive state and party apparatus overseen by Stalin brutally retaliated in 1927, overwhelmingly defeating the oppositionists in formal meetings and demanding that the latter recant or be expelled from the party. The expellees, if they persisted in their opposition, would be arrested and exiled to locations in or near Siberia. In contrast to Zinoviev and Kamenev, Trotsky and those around him refused to comply and suffered the consequences. The intransigent Trotsky was finally expelled from the Soviet Union.

From his exile in 1929 to 1940, Trotsky sought to draw together networks of revolutionaries. They referred to themselves as Bolshevik-Leninists, as had the Left Oppositionists in the Soviet Union. At first, they hoped to reform the parties of the Communist International, believing the Communist Party of the Soviet Union also might still be reformed. By 1933, Trotsky concluded that such reform would have to be in the form of new revolutionary parties being built (drawn together into a world revolutionary network, the Fourth International), and that a political revolution would be necessary in the Soviet Union to replace the bureaucratic dictatorship with the democratic power of the working class.

In writings of this period—the most substantial being *My Life*, *History of the Russian Revolution*, *The Revolution Betrayed*, and *Stalin*—Trotsky re-elaborated the "Bolshevik-Leninist" heritage. While he further developed his theory of permanent revolution, which he insisted had converged with Lenin's own later perspectives, he consistently sided with Lenin's views on the organizational question. He argued, against Stalinists as well as anti-Communists, that Leninism and Stalinism were opposites. By the mid-1930s Trotsky noted negative potentialities (reflected by the rise of Stalin) and problematical turns (particularly the banning of all parties except the Communist Party and the 1921 banning of factions within the party). But he saw these as problems to be overcome *within* a Leninist framework.

To the end of his life, Trotsky insisted no pathway to revolution existed except the Bolshevik-Leninist approach, but he now insisted, more than in the early 1920s, on the need for socialist democracy. In 1940, Trotsky was assassinated by an agent of Stalin in his final place of exile, Mexico.

## Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin

In the final decade of his life, Trotsky seemed intent on emphasizing his own special relationship and affinity with Lenin. This comes through very clearly in his autobiography *My Life*, and in his 1930s commentary on Lenin's *Testament*, and his line of argument in *Lessons of October* (castigating Lev Kamenev and Gregory Zinoviev, who must be set straight by Lenin). All of this could be interpreted as meaning that it was Trotsky, not Stalin, who was Lenin's rightful heir.

Yet this distorts a more complex reality. The actual words in Lenin's *Testament* (in contrast to any "reading between the lines" speculation) indicate that each of the leading personalities in the leadership of the Communist Party have various strengths and weaknesses, and that the leadership must be (as Lenin sought to make it in his own time) *collective*, not simply in the hands of one or another individual. Lenin's outlook is suggested in the critique of Trotsky's *Lessons of October* by Lenin's lifelong companion, Nadezhda Krupskaya, who emphasized that the Bolshevik Party "was a living organism, in which the C.C. [Central Committee] ('the staff') was not cut off from the party, in which members of the lowest party organizations were in daily contact with the members of the C.C." Trotsky's focus on the deficiencies of Kamenev and Zinoviev distorted the more complex realities. "Where the Party is so organized, where the staff knows the will of the collective organization—and not merely from the resolutions—and works in harmony with this will, the vacillations or errors of individual members of the staff do not possess the decisive significance ascribed to them by Comrade Trotsky." It is interesting that Krupskaya's vision (seeming to mirror that of Lenin) implies the necessity of democratic debate: "When history confronts the Party with an entirely new and hitherto unexampled emergency, it is only natural that the situation is not uniformly estimated by everyone, and then it is the task of the organization to find the right common line." Something approximating this conception can be found in Trotsky's own *History of the Russian Revolution*, composed several years later.

A question remains regarding the source of Trotsky's belief that a special bond existed between Lenin and himself. Some of this may have to do

with the make-up of Trotsky himself, as well as certain qualities in Lenin. Reflecting on the personalities and temperaments of the two, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Education in the early Soviet regime, was able to offer an insightful comparison in 1919, when the two were at the pinnacle of Soviet power, as Lunacharsky put it, “the strongest of the strong, totally identified with their roles.” He wrote of Trotsky’s “handsome, sweeping gestures, the powerful rhythm of his speech, his loud but never fatiguing voice, the remarkable coherence and literary skill of his phrasing, the richness of imagery, scalding irony, his soaring pathos, his rigid logic, clear as polished steel.” But he also noted a weakness, contrasting with Lenin’s own strengths. Trotsky “was clumsy and ill-suited to the small-scale of party work,” and while “there is not a drop of vanity in him,” Lunacharsky noted “his colossal arrogance,” concluding: “the absence of that charm which always surrounded Lenin, condemned Trotsky to a certain loneliness.”

Trotsky’s conclusion that Lenin had been right, and he had been wrong, on the organization question, and the belief—emphasized in his *History of the Russian Revolution* and sharpened in his 1935 diary—that Lenin (not Trotsky himself) was indispensable for the making of the October/November revolution of 1917, gave the Bolshevik leader an elevated position in Trotsky’s own outlook. This, combined with Lenin’s ability to turn his great store of charm on Trotsky himself, obviously created the special bond between the two in Trotsky’s mind.

On the other hand, there are also clear indications that the appreciation and respect between the two revolutionaries was *mutual*. According to Nadezhda Krupskaya, after first meeting Trotsky during his 1902 exile in London, Lenin paid “particular attention” to the newcomer, “talked with him a great deal and went [on] walks with him.” He was “pleased with the definite manner” with which Trotsky expressed himself and “liked the way Trotsky was able immediately to grasp the very substance of the differences” among Russia’s revolutionary currents at the time. Lenin’s desire to have Trotsky work closely with him on *Iskra* was blocked by the imperious George Plekhanov, and the two were soon on divergent paths—engaging in fierce polemics on the organization question and on democratic revolution versus permanent revolution. But after 1917, Lenin was quite willing to say, in conversation with other Bolsheviks (such as Adolf Joffe) regarding permanent revolution: “Yes, Trotsky happened to be right.” After Lenin’s death, Krupskaya wrote in a personal note to Trotsky (himself then ill): “And here is another thing I want to tell you. The attitude of V. I. toward you at the time when you came to us in London from Siberia has not changed until his death. I wish you ... strength and health, and

I embrace you warmly.” Even when she felt pressure to join in an early critical symposium of Trotsky’s “errors” in response to his *Lessons of October*, her criticisms were incredibly mild compared with those of Stalin—who in same symposium thundered against “Trotskyism as a singular ideology which is quite irreconcilable with Leninism.” In the conclusion of her more measured critique, Krupskaya wrote: “Comrade Trotsky devoted the whole of his powers to the fight for the Soviet power during the decisive years of the revolution. He held out heroically in his difficult and responsible position. He worked with unexampled energy and accomplished wonders in the interests of the safeguarding of the victory of the revolution. The party will not forget this.” Such views, according to all indications, were also those of Lenin.

In fact, a key to understanding the matter of the Lenin–Trotsky–Stalin question would seem to be Krupskaya herself. A comparison of the Stalinist *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Short Course* with her own *Reminiscences of Lenin* demonstrates qualitatively different conceptions and divergent historical accounts. Stalin’s co-thinker V.M. Molotov later explained:

Krupskaya followed Lenin all her life, before and after the Revolution. But she understood nothing about politics. Nothing. ... Stalin regarded her unfavorably. She turned out to be a bad communist. ... What Lenin wrote about Stalin’s rudeness [when he proposed Stalin’s removal as the Communist Party’s General Secretary] was not without Krupskaya’s influence. ... Stalin was irritated: “Why should I get up on my hind legs for her? To sleep with Lenin does not necessarily mean to understand Leninism!” ... In the last analysis, no one understood Leninism better than Stalin.

In opposition to Stalin’s version of “Leninism,” Trotsky, Krupskaya, Zinoviev, Kamenev and others joined together in the United Opposition of 1926–1927, explaining in their political platform not only opposition to Stalin’s conception of building “socialism in one country,” but also pointing to dangers posed by bureaucratic dictatorship: “The immediate cause of the increasingly severe crises in the party is bureaucratism, which has grown appallingly in the period since Lenin’s death and continues to grow. ... Bureaucratism strikes heavily at the worker in all spheres—in the party, economy, domestic life, and culture. ... The question of excesses of those on top is totally bound up with the suppression of criticism. ... Only on the basis of party democracy is healthy collective leadership possible.”

A number of scholars have demonstrated that this approach was consistent with Lenin’s own. Under severe pressure from the Stalinist bureaucratic

apparatus, however, Krupskaya, Zinoviev and Kamenev felt compelled to recant. Trotsky, on the other hand, refused to renounce these views, and he continued to give voice to this orientation for the rest of his life.

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# 8

## Lenin and Stalin, Theory and Politics

Wladislaw Hedeler

In April 1917, twenty years after he first went into exile, Lenin arrived at the Finland Station in St. Petersburg. Soon after the news of the Russian Revolution had reached Switzerland, Lenin, along with 31 other émigrés, had elected to return swiftly to Russia via Germany, without awaiting permission from the leadership of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) or the Russian government. The plan was for them to travel through enemy territory.

Two wings of the party operated under the RSDLP banner—the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks—and both were subdivided into various groups. The divisions between the Bolsheviks (who were in the majority) and the Mensheviks (the minority) developed as a result of the vote on the party program that took place in 1903. This debate had originally started in 1902, when disagreements were voiced over whether voting within the RSDLP adequately reflected the deep divisions within the party.

Julius Martov was one of the leaders of the Mensheviks, and, like Lenin, was a member of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. Martov was to meet Lenin in their homeland. But it was clear to Martov, despite the ongoing debate over the division between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, how much time had been wasted and how difficult it would be to overcome Lenin's decisive influence

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in the party. Under Lenin's leadership, the concept of the "party of a new type" was developed. This was set out in his book *What Is To Be Done?* written while he was in Munich, which pointed out the weaknesses of Russian social democracy.

The names of over 400 exiles who re-entered Russia in 1917 are known. Since biographical information is often incomplete, one can only speculate about party affiliation, exile status, and the dates when they returned. With 61 Bolsheviks and 31 Mensheviks, the RSDLP was the largest faction. However, we know that 50 people were members of the Bund, or Social Revolutionaries. There were also 34 anarchists of various persuasions among the returnees, as well as dozens of émigrés who belonged to Polish and Latvian parties.

Due to the Provisional Government's order to release political prisoners, there was also an additional stream of returnees from prisons in Russia and Siberian émigrés. Stalin belonged to the latter category, and, with Muranov and Kamenev, he had already returned to St. Petersburg by March 1917. Until the arrival of Lenin and Zinoviev, these three Central Committee members were the highest-ranking Bolshevik functionaries in the capital. Unlike Lenin, who had explained what he thought should happen with regard to the conduct of the First World War to the incumbent Provisional Government, the troika from Siberia had no plan of action that was comparable to that proposed in Lenin's 'April Theses'. Until the October Revolution later that year, these three were in opposition to Lenin, although Stalin agitated in the background and allowed the more gifted speaker and publicist Kamenev to dominate the stage.

After the October Revolution, Lenin became the leader of Russia's revolutionary government and, until 1922, determined most of the political principles of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin maintained that orthodox Marxism was engaged in a struggle against the revisionist version of Karl Kautsky and the Second International. In making this ideological claim, Lenin both developed and superseded Marx's arguments. He added three original theoretical positions to those proposed by Marx:

1. On the influence of organized political force on history, and the concept of a "party of a new type".
2. On imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism; according to his conception, the final stage.
3. On the conditions for socialism in a land where capitalism was not fully developed.

While in power, Lenin established and organized the systematic use of political power to suppress internal as well as external enemies, surviving two assassination attempts in 1918. After his first stroke in 1922, he withdrew from active politics. Stalin recognized that his time had come, but was aware that a display of reticence and avoidance of overt ambition would prove to be advantageous after Lenin's death. Zinoviev and Kamenev had won praise for their opposition to the October Revolution, causing Lenin to castigate them as traitors. In addition, it was also recognized that Trotsky wanted to be Lenin's successor, a desire that was not contested in the party. In this situation, Stalin, the General Secretary of the Central Committee, took pains to appear to be a faithful student and advocate of his teacher, Lenin. In his speech to the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets, "On the Death of Lenin," Stalin presented his credo in the following manner:

But our Party stood firm as a rock, repelling the countless blows of its enemies and leading the working class forward, to victory. In fierce battles our Party forged the unity and solidarity of its ranks. And by unity and solidarity it achieved victory over the enemies of the working class.<sup>1</sup>

Like his predecessor, Stalin had no intention of sharing power. Step by step he built the party apparatus according to his own design. He led discussions not only as a means to establish his domination, which quickly became the foundation of his power, but also to assert his leadership in the formulation of theory. In conjunction with Marxism, Stalin postulated a new theory: Leninism.

After the death of Engels, Karl Kautsky had presented Marx's thinking in such a clear and systematic manner that his version was accepted by most European leftists in the twentieth century. One reader who received Kautsky's theory with particular conviction—and who radicalized it in order to support his goal, which was revolution in Russia—was Lenin. Within the Bolshevik Party, Lenin was seen as a brilliant intellectual, and, through his genius and tactical finesse, he succeeded in shaping the party in accordance with his own conceptions.

Following Lenin's death, many Bolshevik politicians tried to propagate their own viewpoints. Stalin, due to his weakness in terms of theory, and also because of the deficiencies in his understanding of the international situation, chose a different path. He followed the simplest course of action: he declared himself to be a faithful student of Lenin, whose work he would propagate. In April and May 1924, Stalin held a

series of lectures at Sverdlov University in Moscow under the title ‘The Foundations of Leninism.’ This first systemization of Lenin’s thought was also presented at the 1924 Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) under the title ‘Thesis on the Bolshevization of Communist Parties.’ In this way, Leninism came to be defined as a school of thought.

The “Leninist model” of succeeding generations was shaped by the work of Stalin, although no definitive answer has been reached as to whether Stalin was an original thinker or simply a Marxist who followed in the trajectory of Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Today, Stalin is viewed as having distorted the general principles of Marxism. However, his work on Leninism, beginning with his lectures and writings of 1924 and 1926, was taken as dogma. The bible of Stalinism became the collection *Concerning Questions of Leninism* (1926). This ideological volume possessed a single function, to legitimize Stalin’s interpretation of Lenin. It was intended to become the globally accepted canon.

Stalin’s earlier work contained an interpretation of Marx that was a model for the description of dialectical and historical materialism found in the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, published in 1938. It is no accident that this section, which is included in the chapter on the history of the party from 1908 to 1912, was intended to become the credo of the Communist Party. Stalin intended that it would constitute the final word on the discussion between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The formation of the Bolsheviks as an independent party—a goal that took precedence over theory—ran parallel to the importance of crushing all forms of deviation. Lenin broke with revisionism in his book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1909. It later became an obligatory text studied in all institutions of higher learning in the Soviet Union. Stalin noted in his synopsis of this book: “(1) Weakness; (2) Falseness; (3) Stupidity is the particular which can be designated as a sin. Everything else, in so far as the above lacks a name, is justified.”<sup>2</sup> The use of force in the promotion of party-sanctioned politics was justified, while every expression of weakness was seen as counter-revolutionary.

On theoretical grounds, Stalin could implement very little that had not been previously formulated by Lenin at the Eighth Party Congress, when the following principles were enunciated:

1. The inevitable development of communism under the dictatorship of the proletariat.
2. The destruction of capitalist markets, commodity fetishism and money.

### 3. The fight against international opportunism and social chauvinism.

As a rule, socialists who had opposed the party during Lenin's lifetime were expelled from Russia. Over 20 émigrés who had travelled to Russia either with Lenin or shortly afterwards were swiftly forced to pack their bags and leave. As defenders of more representative constitutional conventions, they were barriers to the Stalinist reformulation of the program of the Communist Party. It was only under Nikita Khrushchev at the Twenty-second Congress that more representative constitutional conventions were adopted to replace the Stalinist, authoritarian aspects of the party.

Anyone who aspired to revise Lenin's honored program, or even question its validity, was considered a danger by Stalin. In 1936, both Kamenev and Zinoviev, who had returned with him from forced exile, were condemned to death at the Moscow show trials. And the fate of over 70 of the returned Russian political émigrés from 1917 was to be imprisoned, killed or condemned to forced labor in the Gulag during the years of the "Great Terror".

The following passages present three episodes from the biographies of Lenin and Stalin. They form the background to both the agreements and disagreements of these two party leaders over their practical and political conceptions of the party.

#### (1) "A marvellous Georgian"

Here has a marvellous Georgian engaged in the work of the party and written for *Prosveshcheniye* an outstanding article for which he assembled Austrian and additional materials.<sup>3</sup>

In 1912 Lenin encouraged Stalin, in exile at the time, to attend the Prague Conference of the Central Committee. Unlike Nikolai Bukharin, Stalin demonstrated no interest in or talent for theory. In September 1912 he escaped from exile. The language and the cultural milieu in which he now needed to function were strange to him. In January 1913 he traveled to Vienna only reluctantly and under pressure from the foreign leadership of the party. He left the city after six weeks, thus ending the longest foreign sojourn of his entire life. "What happened in this short time was of the greatest influence for his future," wrote Isaac Deutscher.<sup>4</sup> However, Stalin asserted that this visit was no more than an episode, hardly worth discussing. Again, Lenin influenced him in this, strongly urging that he participate in the Vienna meeting. When Stalin went to Cracow for a short visit with Lenin in November 1912, the latter was working on an article arguing against the change from social

democracy to nationalism, and against the transformation of the party to “a form of Austrian Federation.” Stalin concurred with Lenin on this, referring to the organizational structure of the RSDLP in the Caucasus. Stalin had already criticized the tendency toward decentralization and had advocated for a monolithic party. He saw the party not as a “guest-friendly patriarchal family, but as a fortress whose doors were only open to the tried and tested.”<sup>5</sup> Later, he compared it to an elite military brigade. In this way, he was a perfect compatriot for Lenin, who invited his ally, the “marvellous Georgian,” to Cracow. Lenin needed many allies in his fight against Trotsky, who was struggling to gain control of *Pravda* in Vienna. “We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire,” Lenin had written in *What Is To Be Done*.<sup>6</sup> At that time, Trotsky stood on the side of the enemies in the “neighboring marsh.” It is unsurprising that Lenin continued to speak of “burning questions” in the party both in 1902 and in 1912.

Lenin sought to advance Stalin in the party. On December 30, 1912 (January 12, 1913 according to the Julian calendar, which was adhered to in Russia until 1918) during the Cracow Conference Stalin appeared under his pseudonym for the first time as the author of ‘On the Road to Nationalism’.<sup>7</sup> The article was a polemic against the “Liquidators,” of whom Trotsky, who initiated the August bloc of 1912, was a member.

Lenin had closely followed Stalin’s speech at the discussion in Cracow<sup>8</sup> and Trotsky erred when he wrote that “Koba had himself remained silent.”<sup>9</sup> Lenin wanted to connect Stalin, as a publicist, as closely as possible to *Pravda* (which had previously been edited by Trotsky in Vienna but which had relocated to St. Petersburg in 1912). In relation to the Cracow discussion, on January 14, 1913, a closed session of the Central Committee took place to debate the future of *Pravda*; during this session Lenin succeeded in having Stalin rewrite the article<sup>10</sup> and in winning for him a place on the editorial board.<sup>11</sup>

It is traditionally believed that Trotsky and Stalin first met in Vienna in Matvey Skobelev’s house in the Kolschitzkygasse. Skobelev, who came from Baku, was on the editorial board of *Pravda*. From this beginning, Stalin obtained for himself his own “study room” in the house of Troyanovsky in the Schönbrunner Schloßstrasse. Yelena Rozmirovich, who was a member of the Central Committee and secretary of the Duma faction, also lived there. Bukharin was an almost daily visitor

to Troyanovsky's house and was very well informed about the commissioned work that Stalin was soliciting. In agreement with Lenin, Troyanovsky had telegraphed the editors of the newspaper *Prosveshcheniye* in St. Petersburg and confirmed that Stalin's article would not be printed immediately, but that he would be given time to revise it before sending it. On January 23, 1913 the article was finally sent to Vienna and publication confirmed the next day.<sup>12</sup>

Stalin's rewriting took two to three weeks. Bukharin was at that time bedridden with influenza<sup>13</sup> and so his help was limited, but on April 14 he wrote to Lenin to say that Stalin "was uninformed about the national question."<sup>14</sup> Stalin then left Vienna, reaching St. Petersburg on February 16.

When Stalin arrived in St. Petersburg, he was again in his element. Sverdlov, the editor-in-chief of *Pravda*, and Stalin agreed to share the leadership of the Russian office.<sup>15</sup> His lack of interest in theoretical studies was again shown when he withdrew from writing political articles for *Prosveshcheniye*.<sup>16</sup>

Before leaving Vienna Stalin had, on February 2, written to the *agent provocateur* Roman Malinovsky: "For the moment I sit here and write complete nonsense."<sup>17</sup> Malinovsky was intelligent enough to grasp the meaning of this message. Koba, who was important not only for *Pravda*, was suffering from the fatigue experienced by other members of the leadership—not least Lenin himself. Malinovsky betrayed Sverdlov first and then Stalin. Both Malinovsky and Stalin were arrested shortly after their arrival in St. Petersburg, tried, found guilty and exiled.

After Stalin's arrest, Lenin warned Bukharin and Troyanovsky repeatedly about Malinovsky, visiting his subordinate in Vienna in June. Lenin later praised Bukharin for his lack of interest in gossip, but he also recognized the latter's weakness in having no interest in practical politics—the complete opposite of Stalin.<sup>18</sup>

However, Lenin and Bukharin had more important differences regarding the interpretation of Marxist philosophy. Bukharin supported the theoretical position of Alexander Bogdanov (a co-founder of the RSDLP) and also worked with the theorist and labor union activist David Riazanov; he therefore belonged to a different Marxist tradition from Lenin. Unlike Stalin, Bukharin did not see the fight against any deviation as a simple practical process. In addition, he had rejected Lenin's political agreement with Plekhanov and was concerned about the latter's attacks on Bogdanov, whose student he had been. In his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin had

settled accounts with Bogdanov. In his commentary on Bukharin's *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, Lenin portrayed Bukharin as being close to Bogdanov and criticized the resulting theoretical confusion. In his *Testament*, Lenin pointed out and objected to Bukharin's inclination to scholasticism and claimed that Bukharin had never studied the dialectic.<sup>19</sup> Lenin was a student of Plekhanov's interpretation of Marx's dialectic.

Stalin knew of these significant differences of opinion, and, when he was General Secretary, steadily led the fight against Bukharin. Lenin's comments on Bukharin's *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period* were publicized in 1929. Following the period of war communism, Stalin succeeded in extending the policy of forced collectivization. Bukharin, however, used the fifth anniversary of the death of Lenin to interpret the latter's concept of the counter-revolution as an instrument to halt the policy of forced collectivization, a tactic he used in an attempt to stop the expansion of Stalin's dictatorship.

It is important to compare Lenin's and Stalin's concepts for the future character of the RSDLP because both wanted to outline a "party of a new type" and both were driven to solve this critical question regarding the structure and goals of the party.<sup>20</sup> This included the enunciation of a Marxist program on the national question. However, after Stalin's death, little mention was made of any contribution by the "marvellous Georgian."<sup>21</sup>

The basic theoretical model of the "Iron Cohort" was attacked by Bukharin. He had cast doubt on it during his Vienna exile, in discussions with his German and Austrian friends and other Social Democrats. Decades later, Mikhail Gorbachev was aware of this and, in his attempts to reform the party, repeatedly referred to Bukharin. Gorbachev's proposals were thus merely a resurrection of ideas originally espoused by Bukharin.

For Stalin, Bukharin was and remained a theorist under the influence of the liberal bourgeoisie. Stalin knew that Lenin was in agreement with him on this; Lenin had continually drawn attention to the difference between a democratic Germany and a half-Asiatic Russia. Above all, this point illustrated the parallel between Stalin's ideological world and Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* In the section "'Conspiratorial' organisations and democratism" he stated:

Everyone will probably agree that "the broad democratic principle" presupposes the two following conditions: first, full publicity, and secondly, election to all offices.<sup>22</sup>

For Stalin, this principle was unimpeachable:

The type of organization influences not only practical work. It stamps an indelible impress on the whole mental life of the worker. The worker lives the life of his organization, which stimulates his intellectual growth and educates him.<sup>23</sup>

Everyone is subordinated to the victory of this principle.

After the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, party historians began to erase from its history anything considered as supporting the standpoint of a “cult of personality.” The most important change in relation to *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which had been overseen by Stalin, concerned the dating of the foundation of the “party of a new type.” From now on, it would be seen as having occurred during, or shortly after, the Second Party Congress of 1903 rather than the Prague Conference of 1912. In fact the Bolshevik Party had indeed, as Lenin had affirmed, come into existence in 1903.

An analysis of recently available material shows that, due to the influence of the “cult of personality” on party history, the role of Stalin in the preparation and execution of the Prague Conference was not described accurately. The *Short Course* indicated that the Conference had elected Stalin to membership of the Central Committee, when in reality he had been prevented from joining the Central Committee Plenum at the time.<sup>24</sup>

It is also necessary to correct a central thesis of the *Short Course* that it was impossible to reach specific definitions for a unified party and that only the general principles were formulated.<sup>25</sup> Still, meaningful discussions took place regarding the correct structure of an organic party. In general, the Stalinist revisions were not in accord with the historical facts, but, despite this, the *Short Course* did offer a generally correct narrative of events. The revisions were removed in 1970; this later edition was accepted as offering a correct guide to the structure of the party.<sup>26</sup>

Many Western political concepts were judged as not being applicable to Russia because of the country’s historical conditions. The exclusion of Western democratic principles—primarily the “inclusive democratic principle” that lay at the foundation of Western European social democratic parties—was elevated by Stalin to an unchangeable law. Democratic principles had helped the Western bourgeois revolution succeed, but they were useless in Bolshevik Russia, where the proletariat had learned to organize and govern itself.

(2) “Can You Not Remember Your Family Name, Koba?”<sup>27</sup>

Treatises and bombs were—and are—often named in the same breath when one is talking about the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Russia. For, both within Russia and when in exile, the revolutionaries resorted to both (bombs were used in bank robberies). Their contemporaries in Western Europe considered bomb throwing and assassination to be outmoded. But they were only a means to an end and were related to the specific conditions of tsarist Russia. These traditional strategies were initially idealized and defended by the RSDLP and its allies, but later they were condemned following the conquest of power in October 1917 by the Bolsheviks. This can be attributed to the extensive opposition to these activities within the party. It was advantageous to the Bolsheviks that the populist reactionary tradition of terror was considered to be a tactic of their rivals, the Social Revolutionaries. Bank robberies in particular were justified by anarchists and SRs as a method of acquiring the means to bribe the top echelons of the tsarist secret police and to strengthen their revolutionary image. By foregoing these terrorist activities, the Bolsheviks sought to gain international respect and recognition.

However, the Bolsheviks had been responsible for the spectacular bank robbery in Tbilisi in June 1907, when a group of 12 revolutionaries stole 341,000 rubles; 40 people were killed and over 50 injured. Because the tsarist police circulated some of the serial numbers throughout Europe, at first glance the action appeared to be a failure. Bolshevik officials were unable to offload the registered gold in Berlin, Geneva, Munich, Paris or Stockholm. When attempting to exchange it in Paris in January 1908, Maxim Litvinov, who later became Foreign Minister and who at that time was leader of the Bolshevik Center, was arrested, as was the bank robber Jakub Zhitomirsky.

The historical record indicates that Stalin took part in the Tbilisi action, but the precise degree of his participation remains unknown. According to his own testimony, he threw a bomb from the roof of Prince Sumbatov’s palace. According to other accounts, he brought the sacks containing the gold to the Meteorological Observatory. The legend that he organized the action on his own can be discounted.

In the official 1939 *Short Biography* it was stated that Comrade Stalin was a firm defender of the “Leninist position”, which in this context signified the transference of revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat. Assuming equal status with other classical Marxists, Stalin wanted to portray himself as acting not with bombs but with tactics, thus abandoning the anarchist and Social Revolutionary position and embracing Leninism. It is therefore

unsurprising that when he was imprisoned in 1908 in Baku, Stalin is described as representing a mirror image of Lenin:

Koba presented himself as an educated Marxist. He always carried a book with him. Koba began to engage the other inmates in formal discussions, he concerned himself with agrarian problems, revolutionary tactics and philosophical questions. Marxism was his life's breath.<sup>28</sup>

When Lenin was in exile, he was actively searching for dedicated party workers. His studies on imperialism always returned to the national question and he never forgot the above-mentioned meeting with Stalin in Vienna. But the meeting did not produce collaborative results.

(3) "...cannot be trusted with the function of General Secretary"

The Eleventh Party Congress, which took place in March–April 1922, was the last in which Lenin was able to participate. He agreed with the appointment of Stalin as General Secretary. On April 9 he debated with himself whether to travel to the Caucasus. He decided against this trip, although this was not related to his health. The true reason was the power struggle in the Kremlin that had been raging for a long time.

"Lenin clearly recognized," Wolfgang Ruge wrote, "that a real danger threatened his country and his life's work. From Lenin's perspective the real danger arose from the rivalry of Stalin–Trotsky which threatened a split in the Party. Lenin hoped that he could prevent a split in the Party, which in fact did come to fruition after his death."<sup>29</sup> Ruge, like Arnold Reisberg a survivor of the Gulag, recognized the dangers of a split, but at the end of his life he assessed the party situation as being due to "Lenin's impotence," or "Lenin's fiasco."<sup>30</sup> He described Lenin as a ball being bounced between the two warring factions. Today, it is possible to reconstruct the impact on Lenin of these experiences, which were the subject of his last work, during the short period between the writing of the "Letter to the Party" and the *Testament* and his death.

According to his secretary Maria Volodicheva, on December 23, 1922 Lenin called the doctor just five minutes before dictating the first part of the 'Letter to the Party.'<sup>31</sup> She went to Lydia Fotieva (another secretary who subsequently replaced her) and asked for advice on what to do with this written material. Fotieva answered that she should present it to Stalin, who had been assigned the role of supervising Lenin's convalescence on December 18, 1922 by the plenum of the Central Committee.<sup>32</sup> Volodicheva brought it to Stalin's

room, where Bukharin and Sergo Ordzhonikidze were present. After they had read the letters, he expressed his opinion that the copies should be burned.

### **Letter to the Party**

I would urge strongly that at this Congress a number of changes be made in our political structure.

I want to tell you of the considerations to which I attach most importance.

At the head of the list I set an increase in the number of Central Committee members to a few dozen or even a hundred. It is my opinion that without this reform our Central Committee would be in great danger if the course of events were not quite favourable for us (and that is something we cannot count on).

Then, I intend to propose that the Congress should on certain conditions invest the decisions of the State Planning Commission with legislative force, meeting, in this respect, the wishes of Comrade Trotsky—to a certain extent and on certain conditions.

As for the first point, i.e., increasing the number of C.C. members, I think it must be done in order to raise the prestige of the Central Committee, to do a thorough job of improving our administrative machinery and to prevent conflicts between small sections of the C.C. from acquiring excessive importance for the future of the Party.

It seems to me that our Party has every right to demand from the working class 50 to 100 C.C. members, and that it could get them from it without unduly taxing the resources of that class.

Such a reform would considerably increase the stability of our Party and ease its struggle in the encirclement of hostile states, which, in my opinion, is likely to, and must, become much more acute in the next few years. I think that the stability of our Party would gain a thousand-fold by such measure.

Lenin

December 23, 1922

Taken down by M.V.<sup>33</sup>

The next day, according to the dictated record, Lenin instructed Volodicheva to treat the document as strictly secret, even from the members of the Central Committee.

### **Continuation of the letter, December 24, 1922**

By stability of the Central Committee, of which I spoke above, I mean measure against a split, as far as such measures can at all be taken. For, of course, the whiteguard in *Russkaya Mysl* (it seems to have been S.S. Oldenburg) was right when, first, in the whiteguards' game against Soviet Russia he banked on a split in our Party, and when, secondly, he banked on grave differences in our Party to cause that split.

Our Party relies on two classes and therefore its instability would be possible and its downfall inevitable if there were no agreement between those two classes. In that event this or that measure, and generally all talk about the stability of our C.C., would be futile. No measure of any kind could prevent a split in such a case. But I hope that this is too remote a future and too improbable an event to talk about.

I have in mind stability as a guarantee against a split in the immediate future, and I intend to deal here with a few ideas concerning personal qualities.

I think that from this standpoint the prime factors in the question of stability are such members of the C.C. as Stalin and Trotsky. I think relations between them make up the greater part of the danger of a split, which could be avoided, and this purpose, in my opinion, would be served, among other things, by increasing the number of C.C. members to 50 or 100.

Comrade Stalin, having become Secretary-General, has unlimited authority concentrated in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution. Comrade Trotsky, on the other hand, as his struggle against the C.C. on the question of the People's Commissariat of Communications has already proved, is distinguished not only by outstanding ability. He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present C.C., but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work.

These two qualities of the two outstanding leaders of the present C.C. can inadvertently lead to a split, and if our Party does not take steps to avert this, the split may come unexpectedly.

I shall not give any further appraisals of the personal qualities of other members of the C.C. I shall just recall that the October episode with Zinoviev and Kamenev was, of course, no accident, but neither can the blame for it be laid upon them personally, any more than non-Bolshevism can upon Trotsky.

Speaking of the young C.C. members, I wish to say a few words about Bukharin and Pyatakov. They are, in my opinion, the most outstanding figures (among the youngest ones), and the following must be borne in mind about them: Bukharin is not only a most valuable and major theorist of the Party; he is also rightly considered the favourite of the whole Party, but his theoretical views can be classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve, for there is something scholastic about him (he has never made a study of the dialectics, and, I think, never fully understood it).

December 25. As for Pyatakov, he is unquestionably a man of outstanding will and outstanding ability, but shows too much zeal for administering and the administrative side of the work to be relied upon in a serious political matter.

Both of these remarks, of course, are made only for the present, on the assumption that both these outstanding and devoted Party workers fail to find an occasion to enhance their knowledge and amend their one-sidedness.

Lenin

December 25, 1922

Taken down by M.V.<sup>34</sup>

But it was already too late. The letters Lenin intended for the upcoming Congress had fallen into the hands of Stalin, Kamenev and, Bukharin, who had their own ideas about what to do with them. During a discussion with Lenin's attending doctor, they set limits on the length of time Lenin was allowed to dictate to his secretary and forbade the dissemination of all information concerning Lenin's condition.

Fotieva replaced Volodicheva as stenographer on December 26 and remained in that position until the conclusion of Lenin's dictation, which was as follows:

Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I think that from the standpoint of safeguards against a split and from the standpoint of what I wrote above about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky it is not a [minor] detail, but it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.

Lenin

Taken down by L.F.<sup>35</sup>

Fotieva sent her first copy of the dictation to members of the Politburo, specifically to Kamenev, on December 29.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the last part was immediately sent to Stalin.

In August 1923, 9 months before Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya gave the papers to the Central Committee, Stalin had already seen all 15 pages of the *Testament*. Krupskaya forwarded it on May 18, 1924, five days prior to the opening of the Thirteenth Party Congress of the Central Committee. This packet, too, reached Stalin, who opened it in the presence of Lev Mekhlis and Sergei Syrtsov.

Lenin had hoped that the contents of these vital letters to the Congress would be made known to the delegates while he was still alive. He had

promised Yemelyan Yaroslavsky that he would supply him with news concerning his barrage of letters and information, in order to ensure its preservation. On December 16, 1923, Krupskaya had, under the instructions of Fotieva, called Yaroslavsky and offered him the speeches of Bukharin and Pyatakov, the two authors of the plan on the foreign trade monopoly.<sup>37</sup> Bukharin, Kamenev and Stalin spent three months preparing a response.

None of the top officers, for a variety of reasons, wanted a struggle within the party.<sup>38</sup> In his last letter to Viktor Shklovsky, Lenin expressed his own isolation and concern about the increase of intrigue among the party leadership. Party solidarity and harmony could not survive another struggle. A visible expansion of the core leadership would persuade all the functionaries at the top to worship before a monolithic concentration of power. According to Robert Daniels, "These men lacked Lenin's strength to reach a decision without vacillation, which to them would be practiced if they were uncertain. They lacked Lenin's ability to overcome these hesitations and to fight against oppositional positions. The party was now a bureaucratic hierarchy that was instructed by the highest command center."<sup>39</sup>

Thus the concept of collective leadership was shattered. Party discipline was merely formal. It had hitherto been believed that every member could make a vital contribution in theoretical, political or organizational domains. With the decline of collective leadership, the members were persuaded that they could hardly solve even a simple arithmetical problem. The bureaucratic hierarchy destroyed individual creativity.

Bukharin, editor-in-chief of *Pravda*, where Lenin's sister Maria was active, agreed to the publication of the last works of Lenin only if the Politburo came to a proper decision. The Politburo and Orgburo agreed upon the publication of Lenin's article "How We Should Reorganize the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate," after a guarantee that the subordinate party leaders would be instructed on the correct interpretation of the published article.<sup>40</sup> Valerian Kuybyshev even proposed that *Pravda*, in order to support Lenin's rehabilitation, print a single issue and give this to Lenin. In the accompanying comments, the Politburo specified that Lenin's remarks about the divisions in the party should not be published, claiming that he lacked sufficient information in this area and that his judgments did not accurately reflect the real situation.

Only after Krupskaya intervened with Kamenev and Trotsky did the article "Better Fewer, But Better"<sup>41</sup> appear on March 4, 1923. The suppression of Lenin had started.

This did not remain an isolated occurrence. On March 5, prior to his third heart attack five days later, Lenin wrote a letter to Stalin that contained

a demand that Stalin apologize to Krupskaya. Stalin commented: "Comrade Lenin does not speak in these words, but the illness." Lenin did not read Stalin's written reply, which was known only to the leadership.

Also, Lenin had no influence on the style or manner in which Stalin proceeded over the national and Georgian questions. Lenin had nothing to say when, on March 6 the Georgians announced preparations for Georgia to be ruled by the Mensheviks.<sup>42</sup> In 1922, the Bolsheviks had brutally suppressed a Georgian autonomy movement, so in 1923 the Georgians turned to the Mensheviks. However, the two goals that Lenin wanted to accomplish had satisfied the troika—Stalin, Kamenev, and Bukharin—and motivated them to hectic activity. The encrypted telegram to all national central committees, government committees and district leadership that Stalin sent on March 11 was an expression of this frenzied activity. The telegram carried the message that Lenin was no longer capable of creative thought. This indicated who was in control of the party.

On April 18 the Presidium of the Twelfth Party Congress reached the decision that Lenin's proposals regarding the national and Georgian issues should be made known only to the separate leaders of each delegation on the last day of the conference. This act of suppression was extended to Lenin's *Testament*. No member of any delegation was informed about this and the *Testament* was made public only after Lenin's death.

Stalin presented two research papers at this Congress, which contributed to increasing his profile as a party leader. He advanced step by step and tested the terrain. Again and again he put to the test the devotion of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin. In the summer of 1923, Stalin prevented the proposed destruction of the Orgburo and the Secretariat. Intervention in the deliberations of *Pravda's* editorial board became common practice. Finally, the triumvirate ceased to exist and there remained only the dictatorship of Stalin. Zinoviev, full of anger, wrote on July 30, 1923 to Kamenev that Lenin had been proved absolutely correct. "One must seek an escape, or inter-party warfare is unavoidable."<sup>43</sup> Stalin heard about this letter, and he never showed Zinoviev the views contained in the *Testament*.

There were numerous attempts to exclude Trotsky from the Military Council. Trotsky had visited Lenin during the last days of his life, although every activity of the chair of the Military Council was subject to surveillance by an official from Stalin's inner circle. The frontal attack on Trotsky began in September 1923 with the expansion of the Military Council. When the United Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission merged in October, Krupskaya immediately warned about the conspiracy being carried out behind the backs of the masses—and behind Trotsky's back—to brand him as "suspicious."<sup>44</sup> Her warnings were in vain.

Stalin had the “strikebreakers” Zinoviev and Kamenev on his side in the struggle against Trotsky and against the “46,”<sup>45</sup> who in October demanded a revision of the decision of the Tenth Party Congress over the prohibition against workers owning their own factories without the need for state control. Public awareness of the real hardships suffered by these workers was never achieved; this information was withheld.

The real situation of the party was far more dangerous than was publicly acknowledged and the repeatedly promised unity only existed on paper. When Trotsky advocated at the beginning of October 1923 for the establishment of a political police force (GPU) and the use of the Central Control Commission in order to establish order in the ranks of the party, he was immediately criticized for calling for an excess of police action that threatened to circumvent the democracy movement within the party.

The tense atmosphere in the party was already experienced as normality, and consequently the confrontation between irreconcilable factions increased. Things could not continue, Trotsky asserted, with one faction, which claimed to represent the spirit of Lenin, condemning the other. Bukharin’s attempt at mediation was shattered.<sup>46</sup> In preparation for his defense at the Third Moscow Show Trial in 1938, Bukharin returned to this episode:

In my memorandum, which was directed at my students, I proceeded from the thesis that after the death of Lenin a crisis would break out amid the top positions of the party and a part of the leadership would be cast out. Then the crisis would deepen and further dismissals would take place. Inside the leadership a group would arise who were chosen by the leader, similar to thieves of the White Army who never formed a unity. Is it inconceivable to us that in a system of the proletarian dictatorship two parties could exist, which mutually rotate as the Republicans and Democrats in the USA, where these parties, who in essence are parties of a single social class, periodically exchange the ruling position? Or, is it not conceivable to us to organize the Communist Party on the model of the English Labor Party with a broad membership?

Bukharin wrote this memorandum when Trotsky appeared before the Central Committee after the death of Lenin.

Already by December, Stalin had won the support of the majority of party functionaries. In Kiev, it was announced that the press was under Stalin’s control, and that political discussions had no potential significance. In Moscow, the debate turned more on personalities than on content, and in Petrograd the attack against Trotsky was intensified. Lenin, who received

*Pravda* on a daily basis, sought to contain the agitation. On December 21, 1923, he sent Krupskaya and Maria Ulyanova to the Central Committee with a request. He wanted any articles on the party divisions to be published exclusively in the supplement *Diskussionyi Listok*, which had limited circulation. Lenin did not want newspapers with mass circulation to make the party fissures known.<sup>47</sup>

Trotsky had fulfilled Lenin's last wish in relation to the preparation of the autonomy question. In addition, Trotsky, in discussions with Kamenev, stressed that it was unwise at the time to put the question of party unity up for debate. However, both Trotsky and Kamenev were suddenly condemned as conspirators. Lenin's article, which Fotieva later reported to Stalin, was written on December 31, 1922, and together with other materials was handed over to Trotsky on March 5. Stalin responded immediately to this opportunity and claimed that Trotsky had arbitrarily withheld important work by Lenin for a month. These attacks were part of his campaign to slander the *Testament*. Based on these falsifications, Stalin gave Dzerzhinsky the authority to forbid its circulation.

The differences in the leadership of the party were again displayed in the disagreements over when party members had arrived in Gorki at the time of Lenin's death. According to one of the first announcements in *Pravda*, Bukharin was present when Lenin died. Zinoviev had confirmed this, but the newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* printed a different story. Its report omitted the information that Bukharin, together with Tomsky, Kalinin, Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, sent from Gorki after the announcement of the news of Lenin's death. None of the party leaders was permitted to approach Lenin's deathbed before any of the others. Within the party, the presence of Bukharin in Gorki was interpreted as accidental. The day after Lenin's death, Bukharin corrected Zinoviev's error.

A revised account was circulated shortly afterwards. The fact that Lenin's sister called Zinoviev and shared with him the news of Lenin's death was deleted by Stalin. In Stalin's version, it was asserted that Stalin and Zinoviev were the first to receive the news and that these two had shared the information with other members of the leadership. Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich undertook the task of representing Stalin as the head of the mourning comrades. The scene of departure at the deathbed showed the Master as the first among the lesser party members saying farewell.

On February 3, 1924, Krupskaya wrote her account of the last six months of Lenin's life. She sent copies to Kamenev and Bukharin so that they could familiarize themselves with the content.<sup>48</sup>

The *Testament* was read at the plenary meeting on May 21, immediately before the Thirteenth Party Congress. Between May 18 and May 23, the warfare within the Party reached its peak.

Kamenev read the “Testament”. Painful sentiments engulfed the entire gathering ... Every word, declared Zinoviev “was valued in our own eyes as law. We unanimously praised what the dead Ilyich had recommended we should do ... On one point, however, we did not confirm the fears of Lenin. On the issue of General Secretary ... Kamenev on his side swore to the assembly Stalin should hold Lenin’s office.<sup>49</sup>

Krupskaya and Grigori Sokolnikov demanded that the delegates should be informed about the *Testament*, proposing to present it at the approaching Party Congress. When Krupskaya reappeared in the Politburo on April 15, 1926, Stalin and Bukharin offered Lenin’s sister, Maria Ulyanova, a position paper on the relationship between Lenin and Stalin during the last months of Lenin’s life, which bore Bukharin’s signature. Zinoviev and Kamenev aligned themselves with her. Krupskaya’s attempt to reveal Lenin’s fear of Stalin failed to gain traction. Bukharin, Kamenev and Zinoviev became allies of Stalin, and the man Lenin thought unqualified and unfit to be party leader was awarded a decisive victory in his trajectory toward achieving dictatorship.

In this way the falsified picture that Lenin was a proponent of Stalin’s succession in the last days of his life was accepted throughout communist Russia.

## Conclusion

In the last years of his life, Lenin undertook a desperate attempt to persuade his comrades to accept both his vision of a new social model and a solution to the conflict within the leadership of the party. A contradiction existed between the vision of a new social model and his “party of a new type.” This conflict—which, after the victory of the October Revolution in 1917, had been postponed and avoided—proved to be insoluble. Key insights into these historical considerations can be found in Stalin’s speech at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927. In the “Final Considerations” section he wrote:

If one reviews the history of the Party it becomes clear that every time a turning point is reached in our Party a certain part of the old leadership is clipped off from the wagon of the Bolshevik Party and a place made for new people. A

turning point is a profound occasion, Comrades. A turning point is dangerous for people and no one in the Party wagon can assume they enjoy a permanent position. A turning point prevents anyone from assuming that all are of equal importance. When the wagon makes a turning point it is inevitable that someone will be clipped off.<sup>50</sup>

The list of contemporaries who were removed at these turning points is long. Shortly following the publication of the *Short Course*, the last members of the Leninist Central Committee were thrown off the wagon. Lenin, in a more charitable view, is seen as holding the reins firmly in his hands, directing the wagon around the next curve, driving to end the contradiction between the party structure and the vision of a new social model.

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# 9

## Lukács as Leninist

Tom Rockmore

Marxism takes many forms. Classical (or original) Marxism, which is anti-Hegelian, was invented by Engels and later prolonged in various forms of philosophical and politically institutionalized Marxism. Engels also invented the myth that Marx followed Feuerbach from philosophy to science, from idealism to materialism, and from ideology to truth. György (or Georg) Lukács and Karl Korsch—Lukács more than Korsch—invented anti-Marxist Hegelian Marxism, which later became the basis of what is now routinely called Western Marxism.<sup>1</sup> In this way, though this was perhaps not his intention, Lukács restored Marx to his place among the main German idealists.

This chapter briefly considers the relationship between Lukács, the outstanding Marxist philosopher, and Lenin, the outstanding Marxist political figure. Classical Marxism, which was invented by Engels, is anti-Hegelian. From this perspective, Lukács' Hegelian Marxism is anti-Marxist. After his brilliant breakthrough to Marxist Hegelianism, Lukács rallied to political

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<sup>1</sup>See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: Verso, 1987.

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Leninism. Yet he continued to maintain his Hegelian anti-classical Marxist perspective in all his later writings.

Not surprisingly, views of the relationship between Lukács and Lenin differ. There is a basic difference between Marxist philosophy and Marxist politics. I will be suggesting that a deep tension exists between Lukács' philosophical Hegelian Marx interpretation and Lenin's political version of Marxist orthodoxy. This tension is later partially covered up by Lenin's philosophical turn to Hegel, hence to a Hegelian view of Marx he never worked out, as well as by Lukács' turn, after the invention of Hegelian Marxism, to Marxist political orthodoxy.

## Lukács as a Revolutionary Marxist

Like everyone else, Lukács (1885–1971) was a child of his times, influenced by the surroundings into which he was born, in which he received his intellectual formation, and against which he reacted. Lukács' importance in the Marxist debates in which he played an abundant role is well known. Yet since he left the scene in 1971, times have changed in a way that raises significant questions about the importance of his contributions to Marx and Marxism. The interest of these debates for us today is diminished by the irrevocable decline of institutional Marxism in the West in events culminating in the unexpected break up and disappearance of the Soviet Union.

When he composed the *Phenomenology* soon after the French Revolution, Hegel thought he was writing in a time of change. But, following political consolidation a little later, though still early in the nineteenth century, he changed his mind about what was politically possible. Lukács wrote *History and Class Consciousness*<sup>2</sup> in the difficult economic and politically confused situation prevailing after the First World War when the future of revolutionary Marxism seemed brighter than it seems today.

Others are more aware than I am of non-Western Marxism, which at the time of this writing continues to exert political hegemony in East Asia. For this reason, I will limit these remarks to Western Marxism. Yet suffice it to say that revolutionary Marxism as it existed when Lukács was writing cannot now be recovered. As a political movement, Western Marxism, or the Hegelian reply to classical Marxism, to which he devoted the better part of

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<sup>2</sup>Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. Hereafter cited in the text as HCC, followed by page number.

his very long intellectual career, is definitively over. Yet it does not follow that Lukács' contribution to Marxism has been altered or diminished by the turn of the historical wheel. We should not overlook and certainly not deny Lukács' identification with Stalinism. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce his intellectual contribution, or indeed that of anyone else, merely to the political role he played in the events of his life.

Revolutionary Marxism was always characterized by an attitude, exemplified by various forms of religion as well, that the end justified the means, a view arguably most clearly formulated in Western Marxist circles by Trotsky.<sup>3</sup> It would be hasty to suppose that those willing to subordinate the ends to the means have somehow ceased to exist. But it is becoming less interesting, except in a few third- and fourth-world countries, to continue to sacrifice the often precarious present to a murky but supposedly radiant future. Except for those with a nostalgic interest in the meanders of Marxist orthodoxy, Lukács is less significant today for his concern with revolution, for his conceptually brilliant but ultimately failed effort to unite classical German philosophy and political Marxism, which now appears dated, than for his philosophical, aesthetic and literary contributions. Politics, which is directed towards tangible results, and philosophy, whose results are only more discussion and endless further debate, are only partly compatible. Like other political movements, in its political form Marxism is perhaps rightly impatient with detailed intellectual discussion, which, if the history of the tradition is our guide, never arrives at a final resolution. It is more interested in immediate political results than in patient study of the issues and endless debate.

Among the revolutionaries concerned with results, and often willing to sacrifice intellectual rigor to achieve them, Lukács cuts a curious figure. Though he was as devoted as anyone to realizing Marxist political ideals, unlike Heidegger he was typically unwilling to sacrifice reason for politics. Whereas Heidegger identified with National Socialism,<sup>4</sup> Lukács, despite his desire to remain politically orthodox, criticized Engels throughout his long Marxist career. Lukács represents an extreme and extremely interesting example of a sustained, always intelligent—on occasion brilliant—effort not merely to assert but also to argue in detail in favor of and with the Marxist philosophical point of view. His permanent philosophical contribution,

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<sup>3</sup>See Leon Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours: The Class Foundations of Morality*, College Park, GA: Pathfinder Press, 1973.

<sup>4</sup>See Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

which reaches an early, later unequalled peak in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), lies in the innovative effort to understand classical German idealism as a unitary movement steadily concerned with aspects of the epistemic problem as it is inherited from the modern philosophical tradition.

The numerous books centering on what is somewhat imprecisely called the young Lukács are more often concerned with the genesis of his position than with the novelty or enduring interest of his philosophical insights. For Lukács, as for Kant, the modern philosophical tradition divides into two approaches to cognition: the view that in knowing we know the mind-independent external world as it is, in short that we know what we find or discover, in Lukács' case in a Marxist form of metaphysical realism, which has been the main epistemic strategy in the tradition at least since Parmenides; and the incompatible but more promising German idealist view that identified with the Kantian Copernican revolution that we know only what we, in some sense, "construct."

For classical German philosophy, this problem is posed in Kant's vexed concept of the thing in itself. In different ways, the difficulty posed by this concept runs throughout classical German philosophy where, according to Lukács, it receives no more than a "mythological" solution in Hegel's absolute. Following the Marxist insistence on the watershed distinction between idealism and materialism, Lukács believes that Marx responds to the problem of knowledge through the materialist inversion of Hegelian idealism suggested in the second Afterword to *Capital* in rethinking the absolute as the proletariat, or identical subject-object of history.

Lukács emerged as a kind of neo-Kantian before later becoming interested in revolutionary Marxism. Unlike many others, throughout his long Marxist phase, in following his argument wherever it led, Lukács consistently sought to combine philosophical infidelity with political fidelity in adapting to the twists and turns of Marxist political orthodoxy. He remained a philosophically unfaithful but politically faithful Marxist from his turn to Marxism in 1918 until his death in 1971. His writings throughout his entire Marxist period are marked by an almost schizophrenic struggle between heart and mind, between politics and philosophy. His texts during this period betray a deep existential conflict between an unwavering political identification with a dogmatic movement he steadily regarded as representing the future of mankind and his contrary desire, typical of the best kind of intellectual commitment, to follow his thought in any direction it might lead—if necessary, in opposing the very political movement he was striving to promote.

Lukács' concern with political orthodoxy led him to identify—as the price to continue his philosophical research—with views that were questionable at best. His identification with Leninism, then with Stalinism is not the result of his inability to understand the events of his time. It is rather due to his desire to remain within the Marxist political movement, in which, in the final analysis, the end justifies the means. This bifurcated approach consistently undermines the texts of this gifted writer. He is not the illustration of the betrayal of reason Kolakowski makes him out to be. But he is also not faithful, or not sufficiently faithful, to the many, often startling insights in his writings that are frequently submerged in Marxist cant. I would argue that Lukács is weakest when he is striving hardest to be politically orthodox, but he is most interesting when his efforts at orthodoxy fray at the edges to reveal ideas unrelated to and often completely incompatible with Marxist writ.

We see this tension in Lukács' complex depiction of the relation of Marx to Marxism and to the great figures of classical German philosophy. Lukács' analysis of this relation can be read in two ways. One way lies in the frequent claim for an absolute alternative in which Marx takes up a problem his predecessors could only state but not in any way handle, but which he supposedly overcomes. The other way lies in suggesting there is a problem to which his predecessors contribute and to which Marx also contributes. The first reading, which is repeatedly stressed in the texts, is simply unrealistic. In HCC, Lukács seeks to solve the supposedly unsolved cognitive problem of classical German philosophy. If, as Lukács suggests in HCC, Marx should be understood philosophically, then he cannot somehow evade the notorious philosophical inability running throughout the long Western tradition to offer a definitive answer to the cognitive problem. The idea that the problem of knowledge somehow ceased, is in the process of ceasing, or will later cease to exist after Marx, makes no more sense than Marx's equally extreme suggestion that after the advent of communism philosophy itself will cease to exist. There seems no more reason to believe that one thinker or another has finally solved (or resolved) all the philosophical issues than there is to think that by some conceptual masterstroke we can bring the debate to a successful close. Philosophical discussion, like the work of all cognitive disciplines, is not terminable but interminable. Any proposed solution of whatever kind always brings forth further debate, hence renewing the very discussion it is intended to bring to an end.

The contrary suggestion, implicit in Lukács' writings, that Marx does not somehow enable us to escape from history in ending any possible

further discussion, but rather moves the debate forward, provides a more interesting, more realistic view of one of his accomplishments. When Lukács was active, political Marxism was an important part of the intellectual scene that in the meantime has, for the most part, turned its back on Marxist political debate. The nearly total demise of Western political Marxism at present makes it easier to see Marx not as strongly and irrevocably opposed to idealism of any kind—and by extension to philosophy in all its forms—but rather, in Hegelian fashion, as building on and developing themes sounded by earlier philosophers, particularly Hegel, but also Fichte, Vico and others. Lukács features this more perspicuous way of considering Marx in *The Ontology of Social Being*, an important but unfinished work he left at his death.<sup>5</sup> As Lukács depicts Marx in this enormous study, the latter no longer can be said to bring philosophy to an end, a claim Kant strongly but unconvincingly suggests about the critical philosophy, but rather makes an important but often unsuspected contribution to the ongoing debate.

This suggestion is further useful for considering additions after HCC to Lukács' writings. We should not now read Lukács for the way in which he contributes to and defends political Marxism, a movement that has in the meantime mainly ceased to exist in the West. We should rather read him for his politically unorthodox philosophical contributions in often difficult circumstances to understanding Marx.

## Lukács on Marx's Contribution to Epistemology

We must be careful with respect to Lukács' judgment on Marx's contribution to epistemology. Unquestionably, Marx makes an important philosophical contribution. Yet it is important to avoid the kind of binary thinking that for Lukács and other Marxists consists in counterposing, if not Marxism, at least Marx's views to everything else as an alleged conceptual vademecum, or all-purpose solution, adequate for any and all problems. Lukács' evident desire on political grounds to subscribe to Marxism, to find, as he put it, the solution for all problems in historical materialism, hence in

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<sup>5</sup>See Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*, trans. David Fernbach, London: Merlin Press, (1) Hegel, (2) Marx, and (3) Labour. Hereafter cited in the text as OSB followed by the volume and the page number.

Marx, is too narrow and unacceptable. Yet it should not blind us to Marx's genuine contribution in this respect, nor to Lukács' contribution in understanding Marx.

I think we should applaud Lukács when he distinguishes between Marx and Engels while calling attention to the former's genuine philosophical importance as well as the latter's basic philosophical mistakes. But we should resist him when he exaggerates that importance to take up all the space. One way to make this point is with respect to the difference between Marx and Hegel. In *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*,<sup>6</sup> which belongs to his *Nachlass*, as in HCC, Lukács mainly insists on the difference in kind between these two thinkers. Yet his analysis shows in detail not the supposed rupture but rather the deep, sustained continuity between two centrally important thinkers concerned in Kant's wake, not with knowledge of the mind-independent, real as it is, but only as it appears in conscious experience. In developing a theory of cognition as a historical process, Marx, as Lukács depicts him, is finally not breaking with but only further elaborating Hegel's own view of knowledge as necessarily dependent on its time and place, as indexed to the historical moment. In calling attention to the legitimate interest of Marx's often-unsuspected contribution to the problem of knowledge by philosophically separating Marx and Engels, or Marx and classical Marxism, Lukács is also reintegrating Marx—against the best judgment of classical Marxism—into classical German philosophy, into German idealism. In making possible a very different Hegelian reading of Marx in spite of his adherence to orthodox Marxism, Lukács opens the way to a post-Marxist appreciation of Marx's importance for our understanding of our world and ourselves.

## Lukács on Marx in HCC

The critique of Engels, hence of orthodox Marxism, is developed in HCC and restated in TD in an epistemological context. In criticizing Engels, Lukács never doubts the political importance of Marxism, since his

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<sup>6</sup>Georg Lukács, *A Defense of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic*, London: Verso, 2000. Hereafter cited as TD followed by the page number.

messianic faith about the Marxian theory of practice remained unshakable, impervious to practice. At stake is a distinctive Marxian approach to cognition as concerns modern industrial society. According to Lukács, the Marxian identification of the proletariat as the identical subject–object in place of the mythical Hegelian absolute finally overcomes the problem of the thing in itself running from Kant throughout classical German philosophy.

In HCC, Lukács suggests that the unresolved problem of the thing in itself is central to the cognitive problem. He correctly believes that in different ways this problem runs through classical German philosophy from Kant through Fichte and Schelling to Hegel. If the problem of the relation of cognition to mind-independent reality is central to classical German philosophy, then it is obviously central for Marxism as well. In HCC, Lukács points out the inadequacy of Engels' understanding of Kant's thing in itself. Lukács' critique undermines the adequacy of Engels' understanding of Kant. Since Marxism is based on Engels, it further undermines any version of the orthodox Marxist approach to philosophy.

Lukács depicts Engels, and by extension Marxism, as unable to offer a solution to the epistemological problem Engels did not understand. In failing to comprehend Kant's concept of the thing in itself, Engels proposes at best an illusory solution to knowledge of the thing in itself, or the mind-independent world, through so-called praxis and industry. With respect to classical Marxism, Lukács makes two points. He suggests that Engels fails to grasp Marx's response to a problem originating in Kant. He further implies that Marxism is very different from and incompatible with Marx's position, with which it claims to be identical and on which it claims to build.

The implicit suggestion that Marxism presents itself as overcoming a philosophical tradition it mainly does not understand is a point well taken. Engels' grasp of philosophical issues is limited in numerous ways. He is insensitive to important distinctions and often unaware of the wider discussion as a result of his lack of formal philosophical training. Some Marxists, for instance Plekhanov, Lenin's teacher, have a better philosophical background. But as his writings amply demonstrate, Lenin knew exceedingly little about either philosophy or even Marx. Recent efforts to depict Lenin as a deep reader of Hegel fail to convince while indicating his inadequate knowledge of the great German philosopher.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

## Lukács on Engels and the Thing in Itself in HCC

Observers agree that Marx's reaction to Hegel is crucial to understanding Marx, but differ widely about how to interpret Hegel and his relation to Marx. Classical Marxism is anti-Hegelian but Lukács' post-classical approach to Marx and Marxism is also Hegelian. Engels formulates an influential anti-Hegelian interpretation of Marx that Lukács rejects in formulating his Hegelian interpretation of Marx. It would be inconsistent to accept an anti-Hegelian form of Marxism and to argue for a Hegelian reading of Marx. Lukács' critique of Engels, which runs throughout his entire Marxist period ending only with his death, belongs to the defense of his anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Hegel. It is already present in HCC, then restated in TD, where Lukács defends HCC, and it is reaffirmed in OSB, his last, unfinished major work.

In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels invented classical anti-Hegelian Marxism shortly after Marx died. His formulation of Marxism rests on a reinterpretation of the difference between materialism and idealism. "Materialism," which emerges as a philosophical approach in early Greek philosophy of nature, takes different forms in later thought. In the German idealist debate, attention is drawn, for instance by Fichte, to a distinction between idealism and materialism as two main types of philosophy. Engels, who does not seem to be aware of the philosophical career of materialism, revises this distinction as a difference between philosophy that, from his Young Hegelian perspective, comes to a high point and an end in Hegel<sup>8</sup> on the one hand, and post-philosophical science on the other.

Feuerbach is central to Engels' understanding of the relation of Marx and Hegel. He influenced the young Marx, who praised him in the *Paris Manuscripts* but criticized him several years later in the "Theses on Feuerbach." Feuerbach, who was influenced by Fichte, was a Young Hegelian, a minor critic of Hegel, and an important Protestant thinker. According to Engels, who vastly overestimated Feuerbach's importance, the latter was, after Hegel's death, at a time when the young Marx was formulating his initial position, supposedly the only contemporary philosophical genius.

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<sup>8</sup>Heine, for instance, a contemporary observer, thought that after Hegel the only new development was in philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*). See Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, trans. John Snodgrass, Albany: SUNY Press, 1986.

Engels thinks Marx followed Feuerbach out of idealism, classical German philosophy and philosophy to materialism.

Engels' claim for Marx is in part undermined by his view of materialism. He either overlooks or at least neglects the fact that, over some two and a half millennia, observers have continually understood materialism not as science but rather as a form of philosophy. When Engels was active, materialism was actively discussed, above all in Lange's *History of Materialism*.<sup>9</sup> Engels apparently knew little about philosophy as well as materialism as a philosophical approach. In adopting the young Hegelian view that philosophy comes to a high point and to an end in Hegel, Engels claims that Marx leaves philosophy for science in overcoming the problems of classical German philosophy, which cannot be solved through philosophy, but are supposedly solved through Marxian science.

Marx's critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in 1843, in which he focuses on the practical or concrete, as opposed to the theoretical or abstract, is controversial. As a look at Hegel's approach to cognition will show that, like Marx, Hegel begins in experience. But this distinction is useful to identify Marx's life-long insistence on the practical, as distinguished from the theoretical, which he later clarifies in the "Theses on Feuerbach," especially the last thesis, and so on. It is this idea that, other than the name, has nothing to do with ancient Greek materialism, that later becomes "materialism" in Marx's non-standard account.

Marxism beginning with Engels attributes a different, but still non-standard view of materialism to Marx that supposedly builds on ancient materialism, understood as science opposed to idealism, or philosophy. This approach to Marx as a materialist begins in Engels' misreading of Kant's thing in itself, which is later restated by Lenin and others.

In Soviet Marxism materialism is linked to historical materialism and dialectical materialism. The so-called Marxist "sciences" of histomat and diamat presuppose the distinction between Hegelian idealism and Marxian materialism. In Engels' wake, Marxian or, if there is a difference, Marxist materialism, which supposedly refers to a way Marx and his epigones leave philosophy behind, arises in the wake of the complex debate concerning Kant's vexed view of the thing in itself. Plato distinguishes between objects in the world in which we live, or appearances, and forms (or ideas). Plato suggests that if there is knowledge, forms either are or at least in principle

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<sup>9</sup>See F.A. Lange, *The History of Materialism and Criticism of Its Present Importance*, trans. E.C. Thomas, London: Kegan Paul, 1925.

could be given through intellectual intuition. Kant denies intellectual intuition in limiting knowledge to experience. He reformulates the Platonic distinction between forms and appearances in his view of the thing in itself that is, he says, “intelligible in its action as a thing in itself and as sensible in the effects of that action as an appearance in the world of sense.”<sup>10</sup>

Plato argues for the notorious theory of ideas in claiming that, on grounds of nature and nurture, some among us can directly intuit the forms. Kant’s view of the thing in itself, in which he reformulates the Platonic view of forms, is confusing and confused. Kant’s formulation suggests the same concept can be understood as both the limit of knowledge and as well as the ontological cause of which experience and knowledge is the effect. This simplistic statement should not be understood as adequately describing Kant’s complex view. Suffice it to say here that, as Salomon Maimon points out, Kant is best understood as a moderate epistemic sceptic. The latter holds that all knowledge begins in experience, but that we do not and cannot experience the thing in itself, or, if this term takes a plural, things in themselves.

Lukács’ approach to Marx is based on his Hegelian reading of classical German philosophy. In the little book on the *difference*,<sup>11</sup> his initial philosophical publication, and throughout his later writings, Hegel links contemporary philosophy to Kant’s speculative philosophy. Kant and his successors prolong the ancient effort, beginning as early as Parmenides, to grasp the relation of thought and being. According to Lukács, who conflates the Kantian concept of the thing in itself with modern industrial society, this problem runs throughout Kant and such post-Kantian idealists as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, before being finally solved by Marx.

If the central problem is the Kantian thing in itself, then its interpretation obviously becomes crucial. Lukács had a deep philosophical background, especially in Kant and neo-Kantianism, before turning to Marxism. He studied in Germany where he was a close friend of Emil Lask, the important neo-Kantian, and a member of the circle around Max Weber in Germany before returning to Budapest. Engels, on the contrary, who left high school to work in his family’s business before graduation, never formally studied philosophy. He was also less philosophically talented than either Marx or Lukács. It is then not a surprise if Engels misunderstood this notoriously difficult Kantian concept.

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<sup>10</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, New York: Cambridge University Press, B 566, p. 535.

<sup>11</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, Albany: SUNY Press, 1977.

Kant regards the concept of the thing in itself as central to the critical philosophy. Yet this concept was rejected by most of his contemporaries, above all by Fichte, who loudly and insistently claimed to be the only one to really understand the critical philosophy. Observers react to Kant's view of the thing in itself in at least three main ways: in claiming that Kant's argument in favor of this concept is unconvincing; in further claiming against Kant that the critical philosophy supports a claim for knowledge of the thing in itself; and in finally claiming against Kant that we can and do know the mind-independent world as it is.

The first point was pressed by Fichte, who thought that the thing in itself contradicted the critical philosophy, which Kant based on mere appearance only. The second interpretation attributes to Kant a view sometimes called the double-aspect theory, and for which there is textual evidence, that appearances are appearances of the mind-independent real. This view, which is inconsistent with the thing in itself as Kant understood it, remains popular. It was later adopted by Husserl, who implied we can make out the anti-Platonic inference from effect to cause. Allison is the main representative of this approach at present, which is frequently encountered, but has never been demonstrated.<sup>12</sup> The third view is argued by those who think, in denying Plato's rejection of the backward inference from effect to cause, that we can and do know the mind-independent world, not merely as it appears, but as it is. This latter approach, which goes back in the tradition at least to Parmenides, is central to Plato, to Descartes and to other modern thinkers, and also to Marxism, which, from this perspective is very much in phase with the modern interest in what is often called metaphysical realism.

Engels' (mis)reading of the thing in itself occurs in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. His small but hugely influential book, scarcely longer than a brochure, has long functioned as the central Marxist philosophical text. According to Engels, through the thing in itself, Kant refers to the essence of capitalist society that classical German philosophy can only think but cannot know. Engels believes that the uncognizable thing in itself, constituting the supposedly unsurpassable limit of classical German philosophy, is only surpassed in Marxism, which, for the first time, achieves knowledge of modern society. Marxism knows modern industrial society as it is, not merely as it appears, namely as a thing in itself. Engels wrote: "The most telling refutation of this as of all other philosophical

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<sup>12</sup>See Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: an Interpretation and Defense*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

fancies is practice, *viz.*, experiment and industry.”<sup>13</sup> If this is true, then on behalf of Marxism, Engels must show that, unlike Kant, for whom the thing in itself is uncognizable, Marxism knows the thing in itself, or the essence of modern society.

Like Engels, but with an infinitely better understanding of Kant and the surrounding philosophical tradition, Lukács, in the famous central essay of HCC, considers the thing in itself as an unsolved problem running through classical German philosophy, a problem that is resolved by Marx.<sup>14</sup> In Lukács’ sophisticated interpretation of Kant, the thing in itself has two distinct functions as an epistemological limit and as an ontological source of content. “[W]e see, on the one hand, that the two quite distinct delimiting functions of the thing-in-itself (*viz.* the impossibility of apprehending the whole with the aid of the conceptual framework of the rational partial systems and the irrationality of the contents of the individual concepts) are but two sides of the one problem” (HCC 116).

In criticizing Engels, Lukács notes a series of confusions. These include Engels’ mistaken claim that the thing in itself is or could be a barrier to the expansion of knowledge, an idea explicitly rejected by Kant; and the erroneous view that science and industry constitute practice as understood in philosophy. Engels’ reading of the thing in itself rests on a false opposition between philosophy, which sets up a barrier to knowledge, and science, which knows no barriers and which resolves problems that were often thought to be unsolvable. It is, then, a crude philosophical mistake to maintain that we do in fact, or in principle ever could, overcome this distinction through modern science.

## Lukács’ View in *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*<sup>15</sup>

Lukács’ little book on Lenin emerged in a situation that was doubly difficult. On the one hand, there was the turmoil provoked by Lenin’s death without a clear line of succession. On the other hand, there was the nearly

<sup>13</sup>See Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, translated by C.P. Dutt, New York: International Publishers, 1941, pp. 22–23.

<sup>14</sup>For discussion, see Tom Rockmore, *Irrationalism: Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, Chaps. 4–6, pp. 79–152.

<sup>15</sup>Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. Hereafter cited in the text as L followed by the page number.

simultaneous flood of philosophical criticism greeting the publication of HCC. The confused philosophical situation that ensued after the publication of Lukács' brilliant anti-Marxist Hegelian reinterpretation of Marx was compounded by the political difficulty when, in early 1924, Lenin died.

Lukács was frequently criticized on political grounds in often-dangerous times. The complexity of the political and philosophical situation became clear when Lukács and Korsch were famously criticized by name by Zinoviev in 1924 at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern. Grigorii Zinoviev, a colleague of Lenin, was at the time in competition with Stalin, but was later executed in 1936 after a Moscow show trial. In part, Zinoviev said in his speech: "If a few more of the professors come and dish out their Marxist theories, our cause will be in bad shape. We cannot in our Communist International allow theoretical revisionism of this kind to go unpunished."<sup>16</sup> Lukács, who did not want to be a martyr for his ideas, immediately took defensive measures. Not surprisingly, at least publicly, he immediately abandoned HCC. Yet he continued to defend it privately. He also publicly indicated his political orthodoxy in writing a small book on Lenin, in which he praised the unity of the latter's thought.

In turning after HCC to Lenin, Lukács was obviously seeking political cover for his unorthodox anti-Marxist Hegelian interpretation of Marx. He was also expressing his agreement with a political movement that had recently been victorious in the Russian Revolution. In the study of Lenin, Lukács does not seek to repair the philosophical damage he provoked in HCC. Here, and in later writings, he consistently develops and defends his Hegelian approach to Marx, whose practical point he rather immediately blunts in arguing for the preeminence of politics over philosophy.

Lukács' decision to subordinate philosophy to politics illustrates his acceptance of the Leninist approach to philosophy through so-called party-ness. According to the OED, the term "party-ness" (from Russian *partiinost*) originated in *Mind* in the early 1950s.<sup>17</sup> Though this may be correct for the English term, in fact the concept originated earlier in Russian thought. According to Joravsky, "party-ness" is generally understood to mean "the ideological control of philosophy (and of art and scholarship generally)," that is all aspects of the superstructure, including philosophy, "by the Communist

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<sup>16</sup>Cited in Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*, New York: Seabury, 1979, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup>"It is, of course, a principle of Marxism–Leninism that philosophy should be written in a 'party spirit', with 'party-ness'." *Mind* LXI (1952), 120.

Party's Central Committee."<sup>18</sup> Joravsky points out that the 25 year-old Lenin invented the term "partyiness" in his initial publication to refer in general to Marxist sociology.<sup>19</sup> He goes on to claim that Lenin later continued to understand "philosophical partyiness" as entailing a commitment, if not to the party, at least to the proletarian point of view.<sup>20</sup> In subordinating philosophy to politics, Lukács subordinates his anti-Marxist Hegel interpretation of Marx to Marxist politics.

In the context of Leninist partyiness, Lukács' decision to accept Leninist political hegemony in subordinating his philosophy to the authority of the party was important in two ways. In accepting the Marxist view of partyiness, Lukács at least publicly abandoned any form of the typical view of philosophy as neutral or independent for a very different conception of philosophy as "instrumentalized," even controlled, by the Communist Party. Philosophy in this way turns away from the ancient claim for truth in resurrecting the view of rhetoric that Plato, for instance, already rejects in attacking the Sophists. Second, Lenin sought to realize Marxism through politics while Luxemburg counted on economics. Lukács at this point and presumably later accepted the Leninist view that Marxism could not be realized through the decline and fall of modern industrial capitalism, but could only be realized through the political institution of the Communist Party. In short, in turning from Luxemburg to Lenin, Lukács is clearly substituting politics for economics. This is a view that he never later revised. Yet since in moving toward Lenin, Lukács neither here nor later either abandons or even weakens his anti-Marxist Hegelian approach to Marx, it follows that he is a political but never a philosophical Leninist. I come back to this point below.

In turning to Lenin, Lukács typically presents this development not as a tactical move but rather as dictated by the former's outstanding Marxist contribution. Lenin's main contribution is arguably his role in the Bolshevik Revolution. Yet Lukács never stops to ask whether the Russian Revolution is successful in terms of criteria that Marx could have accepted. Everyone knows that Lenin installed a dictatorship over the party, and a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat. It is doubtful that Marx would have

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<sup>18</sup>See David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science, 1917–1932*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, p. 24. For discussion, see Chap. 2, "Lenin and the Partyiness of Philosophy", pp. 24–47.

<sup>19</sup>"Materialism includes, so to speak, partyiness, enjoining one in any judgment of an event to take directly and openly the standpoint of a definite social group." V.I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, I, 169–170 *et passim*, pp. 380–381.

<sup>20</sup>See *ibid.*, p. 26.

accepted the reality of a dictatorship as the price of freedom in a social stage beyond capitalism.

According to Lukács, the little Lenin book is intended to show the relationship of theory and practice of Lenin. Lukács puts this point in different ways, for instance in stating that “The actuality of the revolution: this is the core of Lenin’s thought” (L 11) and that “Lenin’s concept of party organization presupposes the fact—the actuality—of the revolution.” (L 11) He immediately links Lenin to historical materialism.

The turn to historical materialism requires a remark. Stalin is credited with writing an influential brochure on “Historical and Dialectical Materialism.” Neither Marx nor Engels ever used either term to designate their views. “Dialectical materialism” was apparently used by Joseph Dietzgen in 1887 several years after Marx died. In HCC, Lukács uses both “historical materialism” and “dialectical materialism” to refer to Marxism. Marx, who never said that his position was “historical materialism,” at least employed this term. In HCC, Lukács indiscriminately relies on both “historical materialism” and “dialectical materialism” to refer to Marx’s position. In the little book on Lenin, Lukács relies on “historical materialism.” According to Lukács, historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution. In the little Lenin book, he employs “historical materialism,” which he defines, following Lenin, as “the theory of the proletarian revolution”<sup>21</sup> (L 9).

According to Lukács, the importance of a proletarian thinker is measured by the depths of his or her grasp of the problem. He suggested that, by this criterion, Lenin was the greatest thinker produced by the revolutionary working-class movement since Marx. He went on to compare Lenin to Marx within the context of revolutionary Marxism. Lukács believed that Marx’s genius lies in his grasp of capitalism as a whole, including the whole of modern Russia as “*the onset of the last phase of capitalism*” in reaching—now employing religious language—“*human salvation.*” (L 11).

In HCC, Lukács has an ambiguous view about realizing Marx’s theory in practice. He hesitates between economic grounds associated with Luxemburg or organizational grounds linked to Lenin. In HCC, he develops an original extension of the Hegelian analysis of master and slave to suggest a theory of revolution that in practice is unrelated or at least not clearly related to tensions in capitalism, but is clearly related to the Hegelian theory

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<sup>21</sup>Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, p. 9.

of self-consciousness. In the study of Lenin, Lukács resolves this tension as well as his relation to Marxist political orthodoxy in favor of a view of historical materialism that, like Lenin, turns away from the economic dimension.

Lukács' resolution of his earlier hesitation has two results. First, the Leninist organizational question becomes more important than Luxemburg's penchant for spontaneity and, second, Lenin, whose strictly philosophical credentials are weak at best, now appears not as a philosopher but rather as a genius of practice. In anticipating the cult of personality that later surrounded Stalin, Lukács abjectly extols Lenin without qualification of any kind. The result is fulsome, embarrassing praise, which repeatedly makes different versions of the point that in the practical arena Lenin could do no wrong without, for instance, ever addressing possible weaknesses in his thought.

Lukács believed "*The actuality of the revolution*" is what he called "*the core of Lenin's thought* and his decisive link with Marx." (L 11). He added that "Even at that time it was necessary to have the undaunted insight of genius to be able to see the actuality of the proletarian revolution," (L 11) but goes a step too far in claiming that, "The theory of historical materialism therefore presupposes the universal actuality of the proletarian revolution." (L 11) It is not difficult to see in retrospect that, like the authors of the *Communist Manifesto*, who thought they were on the verge of European revolution, Lukács overestimated the revolutionary potential of the situation when he composed his little Lenin book.

Lukács, not content with praising Lenin's organizational talents, further attributed to him remarkable philosophical insight. A suggestion that Lenin was remarkably talented as a politician is consistent with his accomplishments, but exaggerated in the field of philosophy. According to Lukács, Lenin's greatness as a dialectician consisted in his ability to clearly see the basic principles of the dialectic, the development of the productive forces and the class struggle always in their innermost essence, concretely, without abstract prejudices, but also without being fetishistically confused by superficialities. Lukács further then found in Lenin his own Cartesian view that Marxism is nothing more than an appropriate method centering on a grasp of the whole: "Thus the analysis of Lenin's policy always leads us back to the basic question of dialectical method. His whole life-work is the consistent application of the Marxist dialectic to the ever-changing, perpetually new phenomena of an immense period of transition" (87).

At this point, Lukács' praise of Lenin knew no limits. Lenin, though not a specialist in economics, surpasses Luxemburg and Hilferding: "This

superiority—and this is an unparalleled achievement—consists in his concrete articulation of the economic theory of imperialism with every political problem of the present epoch, thereby making the economics of the new phase a guideline for all concrete action in the resultant decisive conjuncture” (TD 1).

## TD and Lukács’ Defense of HCC

Lukács’ breakthrough to Hegelian Marxism in HCC has both philosophical and political components. He defended these two components separately. In TD, he argues for his anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Marx, and in *Lenin: The Unity of His Thought*, he subordinates his philosophical interpretation of Marx to Leninist politics in seeking, despite his anti-Marxist Hegelian interpretation of Marx, to remain politically orthodox. Since he was concerned with remaining philosophically unorthodox but politically orthodox, it is perhaps fitting that his philosophical defense of his anti-Marxist breakthrough to Marxist Hegelianism was not published during his lifetime.

Lukács’ enormous bibliography, one of the most important of the twentieth century, is apparently still increasing years after his death. TD is a complex, unfinished book that simultaneously defends his anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Marx against his critics, especially the Hungarian Bolshevik Rudas and the Russian Menshevik Deborin. The former belongs to a debate that is now little known. The latter is now mainly known for his participation on the side of the dialecticians in the debate opposing the mechanists of the Second International, representatives of what are sometimes called vulgar Marxism, and the dialecticians such as Deborin and others whom Stalin eventually supported.

In now turning to TD, we do well to start with the title, which specifically refers to two contemporary critics of HCC, Rudas and Deborin. The former, a Hungarian communist well known to Lukács, was, in the latter’s opinion, someone who held back and did not act. Lukács refers to him through the unusual term “tailism.” This term, which was originally used by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?*, refers to a so-called “double injunction” about either commanding or, on the contrary “tailism,” from “khvost,” the Russian word for tail—in short, following, or bringing up the rear, instead of showing leadership. We can note in passing that this term was later

imported through Mao into Chinese Marxism as “weiba zhuyi,” or literally tail ideology.<sup>22</sup>

Until the emergence of TD, it was thought that, for reasons of party discipline, Lukács had renounced his brilliant early work, HCC, which disappeared without even a conceptual whimper on his part and with little or no trace in the later Marxist debate. The book quickly became an underground classic. But, since it was out of print for about half a century, it never exerted the degree of influence it otherwise would have exerted in the Marxist debate. In HCC, Lukács called attention to what later became known as Marx’s humanism. The relative ease with which Althusser elaborated the idea of Marxist anti-humanism in drawing a tendentious, politically motivated Marxist distinction between Marx’s so-called early philosophical and later scientific writings only proves the extent to which the force of Lukács’ insights was not felt.

Lukács himself did little or even nothing to help those interested in HCC to grasp its importance. There is unfortunately not the slightest hint in his published writings until the recent appearance of TD that he did not immediately give up his brilliant breakthrough to Marxism in HCC in giving up his own ideas, and his freedom of thought, for Marxist orthodoxy as early as the appearance of his important study of Lenin in 1924. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin determined Marxist political orthodoxy. When Lenin passed from the scene, the political role of determining Marxist orthodoxy was assumed by Stalin. Whatever he may personally have thought of Stalin’s philosophical views or political acts, this did not keep Lukács, whose political commitment to Marxism never flagged after his sudden conversion in 1918, from remaining among the faithful. The fact that many of his criticisms of Engels were later weakened or abandoned in his long Stalinist period, for instance in the unfinished study entitled *Ontology of Social Being* (OSB) only contributed to occult his insights. The new book should do nothing to weaken and may well strengthen Lukács’ philosophical

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<sup>22</sup>Mao, who apparently picked up this term from Lenin, used this word in a non-specific way in various texts and speeches. For instance, in the last paragraph of his speech entitled “On Coalition Government” (24 April 1945), Mao said: “Another hallmark distinguishing our Party from all other political parties is that we have very close ties with the broadest masses of the people. Our point of departure is to serve the people whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses ... Our comrades must not assume that everything they themselves understand is understood by the masses .... Tailism in any type of work is also wrong, because in falling below the level of political consciousness of the masses and violating the principle of leading the masses forward it reflects the disease of dilatoriness.” Mao’s point is that the party depends on but also leads the masses. Yet one must say, in thinking about the situation, that the latter is more in evidence than the former. That is exactly the point about which Lenin and Luxemburg disagreed.

reputation in defending some of the more interesting aspects of HCC against contemporary attacks launched by the Bolshevik Rudas and the Menshevik Deborin. Lukács mainly defends his view in a series of remarks on dialectic, remarks whose importance in casting additional light on the views of theory of knowledge sketched in HCC far surpasses the concern to come to grips with his immediate critics in the Marxist debate.

The trick is to understand what Lukács is saying without assimilating it to orthodox or classical Marxism, which he is publicly supporting, at least politically, but also strongly opposing in his philosophical analysis. It is then significant that Lukács' students do not seem aware of the anti-Marxist thrust of his remarks on knowledge. One of the problems, if HCC is to be given its proper place in Lukács' canon, is to keep it from being swallowed up in the Marxist view of Marx. Those interested in Lukács often have a Marxist axe to grind, one of whose main facets is to demonstrate the presupposed direct continuity between Marx and Marxism, understood, as Lenin influentially claimed, as the science of Marx's view.<sup>23</sup>

The supposed need to read Lukács as a Marxist, more precisely as a Leninist, is made clear in the presentation and even the translation of the book. László Illés suggests that TD represents no change from *History and Class Consciousness* (TD 40). John Rees claims that the view in HCC is Leninist (TD 26). The supposed link to Leninism is reinforced in the translation through the occasional use of the plural term "dialectics," an obvious Marxist–Leninist code word for the singular, politically neutral "*Dialektik*." In a detailed Postface, Slavoj Žižek praises Lukács as a Leninist.<sup>24</sup> This is only possibly correct in a political but not in a philosophical sense. We recall that Lenin was a Marxist anti-Hegelian until his *Philosophical Notebooks*, but Lukács was a Marxist Hegelian. Žižek's claim shows how little he knows about Lukács. Though very influential philosophically because of his political position, Lenin's version of Marxism was almost wholly based on Engels with almost no direct knowledge of Marx's texts at all. As anyone who has read Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* knows, in this work, Lenin cites Engels more than 300 times but cites Marx only once. This makes it all the more painful to see that Lukács, who clearly knew better, later insisted that after Marx's death that Lenin was responsible for "a real Marx Renaissance" (OSB 2.22). I come back to this point below. In fact, throughout

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<sup>23</sup>Lenin defines "Marxism ... [as] the system of the views and teachings of Karl Marx." V.I. Lenin, *The Teachings of Karl Marx*, New York: International Publishers, 1930, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>See Slavoj Žižek, "Postface: Georg Lukács as the philosopher of Leninism," in *Tailism and Dialectic*, pp. 151–182.

his Marxist period, Lukács resisted not only classical Marxism but also Marxism–Leninism. On the contrary, it seems to me that the philosophical interest of TDD and HCC is that it is both politically Leninist as well as philosophically anti-Leninist since Lukács here, as before, goes to great lengths to distance himself from Marxism–Leninism and orthodox Marxism in general.

Lukács makes a strong effort in HCC to proclaim his adherence to Marxist orthodoxy, the theme of the initial chapter of the book. In TD, he stresses his orthodoxy in remarks on the so-called fundamental thesis of historical materialism. According to this thesis, social existence determines consciousness (TD 100), social being, if there is a difference, determines consciousness (TD 106) and only historical materialism can provide consciousness (TD 130, 131). Lukács, who bases his claim for historical materialism solely on Marx, attributes the thesis he defends to Marx and not to Marxism.

Lukács was careful to defend his political claim to Marxist orthodoxy. However, HCC was immediately criticized on grounds that it was either non-Marxist or insufficiently Marxist—in any case, revisionist—by a number of Marxists concerned by his lack of Marxist orthodoxy. In seizing on the occasion presented by contemporary Marxist criticism of his book, in TD, Lukács clarifies and deepens his view of the supposed Marxian solution to the epistemological problem in once again discussing Engels and Kant. His task here, as in HCC, is two-fold: to show that Engels, hence by implication Marxism in general, does not and cannot go beyond Kant, and to show that only historical materialism, the theory he here attributes to Marx, can understand consciousness as resulting from the dialectical process (TD 130, 131).

In making his argument, once again Lukács contrasts Marx's method, as described in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*,<sup>25</sup> to Engels' view of the thing in itself. According to Lukács, who follows Hegel, knowledge is only reached through a dialectical process. This process is mediated by categories dialectically interrelated to other categories with the aim of reproducing the so-called real historical process (TD 113). This process, which cannot be known directly, can only be known through its construction (or reconstruction) on the level of consciousness. Since the knowing process is part of and belongs to life, it cannot be isolated from the social surroundings,

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<sup>25</sup>See part 3: "The Method of Political Economy" in the Introduction to Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, translated with a foreword by Martin Nicolaus, London: Penguin, 1973.

which Lukács, as a politically obedient Marxist, designates as the theater of class struggle (TD 117). Beyond the rhetoric, his point is that, as he explains in a reference to prior political economy (Steuart), philosophy (Hegel) and history (French historians like Michelet), and so on, only Marx understands knowledge as intrinsically historical and dialectical (TD 117). Yet this is difficult to square with what we know of Hegel, but I will not argue the point here.

Lukács has so far been restating the case, already made in HCC, for Marx's approach to knowledge. In his account, the precise status of Marx's position, a matter of continuing controversy, remains unspecified. Lukács repeats the Marxist view of the opposition between Marx's supposed materialism and idealism of any kind. But he carefully avoids the standard Marxist implication stemming from Engels for the scientific character of Marx's theory. Unlike Marxist orthodoxy, Lukács never asserts that Marx leaves philosophy behind. It is then no accident that unlike Engels he does not depict Marx as following Feuerbach out of classical German philosophy, and even beyond philosophy. Lukács goes no further—although it is already too far—than claiming that Marx solves (or resolves) the epistemological problem as it comes to us from classical German philosophy and as it further arises in such allied disciplines as political economy and history.

## **Lenin on the Thing in Itself in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy***

It will be useful to say a further word about the thing in itself. Above I have suggested that thing in itself is central to Kant as well as to post-Kantian German idealism. It is also central to Engels, and, as we will see, to Lenin as well, whose initial and most influential form of Marxism closely follows Engels' view.

In *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, his single most influential venture into philosophy, Lenin is concerned with defending materialism against the contemporary challenge of empiriocriticism. The latter is a scientifically oriented phenomenistic form of empiricism that endeavors to reduce cognitive claims to a description of pure experience and eliminate all aspects of apriorism, metaphysics and dualism. We can note in passing that empiriocriticism is very similar to Carnap's original version of the protocol theory, which was successfully refuted by Neurath. At the time Lenin was

writing, the most prominent representative was Mach. In acknowledging things in themselves, the materialists were, perhaps unwittingly, Kantian. Lenin, whose philosophical baggage was slight, but who staunchly opposed idealism, also perhaps unwittingly followed Berkeley in understanding materialism as recognition of objects in themselves or outside the mind, hence as the opposite of idealism.

Materialism is the recognition of “objects in themselves,” or outside the mind; ideas and sensations are copies or images of those objects. The opposite doctrine (idealism) claims that objects do not exist “without the mind”; objects are “combinations of sensations.” Mach, who formulated an influential phenomenistic approach to philosophy of science, thought that scientific laws described sensations rather than reality.<sup>26</sup> Mach’s view influenced a number of Russian Marxists, including Bogdanov, Valentinov, Bazarov, Chernov, Berman and Yushkevich. The Machians, especially Chernov, attacked Engels’ view that, despite the Kantian doctrine of the thing in itself, we can and do know reality.

Lenin is not well versed in philosophy, and in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* his main concern is Marxist polemics intended to support Marxist orthodoxy. Yet, compared with Engels, he is closer to understanding Kant’s vexed concept of the thing in itself. In his book, he defended Engels against Chernov and Plekhanov, with whom he studied philosophy, against the accusation of unwittingly straying into Kantianism.

The first chapter of Lenin’s study is clumsily entitled “The theory of knowledge of empirio-criticism and of dialectical materialism, (1) The ‘thing-in-itself,’ or V. Chernov refutes Frederick Engels.” Lenin singles out Chernov, a Russian revolutionary and a founder of the Russian socialist-revolutionary party, for attention because of his attack on Engels’ view of the concept of the thing in itself. According to Lenin, Chernov criticizes but fails to understand Engels, whom he mistakenly charges with claiming to refute the Kantian concept. Lenin goes on to draw three conclusions: things exist outside our minds. Further, there is no difference between the phenomenon and the thing in itself. Finally, in theory of knowledge we must think dialectically in explaining how knowledge emerges from ignorance.

All three claims are indemonstrable articles of philosophical faith. Since Parmenides’ formulation of the view of the identity of thought and being,

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<sup>26</sup>For discussion of the positivist views of Mach and Avenarius, see Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, translated by Norbert Güterman, New York: Doubleday, 1968.

efforts over more than two and a half millennia to prove knowledge about or even the existence of the mind-independent external world have continually failed. This is a main motivation in Kant's Copernican revolution, which precisely concedes that we do not and cannot know the relation between phenomena and things in themselves. Lenin, who is more sophisticated politically than philosophically, like Engels, seems not to understand what is philosophically at stake. He limits himself to dogmatic assertions but neither demonstrates nor argues in favor of his conclusion that, on the basis of the reflection theory of knowledge, all materialism asserts the knowability of things in themselves.

## Lukács' Critique of Engels in TD

In TD, Lukács' praise of Lenin is combined with a return to criticism of Engels in HCC. This passage, the most developed and in my view most interesting part of a volume that is mainly devoted to counterpolemics against Lukács' contemporary Marxist detractors, restates his earlier critique of Engels while clarifying Marx's epistemological contribution. Once again, Lukács' reaction to Engels turns on the latter's understanding of Kant's thing in itself.

In returning to his critique of Engels, Lukács embeds the earlier analysis of Engels' reading of Kant's thing in itself in a rich, nuanced account of the history of philosophy centered on Engels' infamous remark about praxis and industry. In implicitly acknowledging Engels' role in the creation of Marxism, Lukács claims Engels' mistakes are those of a particular anti-dialectical form of Marxism (TD 137). The suggestion is clear that orthodox Marxism, at least as practiced up to that time, was mainly or even wholly incapable of grasping the main philosophical concerns of classical German philosophy. It was also untrue to Marx's insights. In other words, Marxist orthodoxy was faithful to a mere false appearance, a mere ideological fancy, and failed to get at the essential issues as well as their supposed solutions.

Although couched in more careful language, Lukács' critique here of Engels is, if anything, even more devastating than before. In once again citing the incriminating remark on praxis and industry, Lukács conceded that it is correct as far as it goes but that it leaves the nature of Kant's epistemological scepticism and the extent to which Engels refutes it completely undetermined (TD 120). In noting that, for Kant, appearances are objective, Lukács claims it is crucial to know how far they are objective and how far they are subjective (TD 121). To take the thing in itself as a mere

epistemological limit is, he says, simply to screen out the problem, to make it inaccessible (TD 122). According to Lukács, the correct refutation of Kant's concept is already given by Hegel, who holds that the thing in itself is not objective but wholly subjective, the result of abstraction (TD 123). We recall that Hegel famously refers to the thing in itself as a *caput mortuum*, an alchemical term meaning "worthless remains." In grasping that knowledge emerges within the particular stage of human understanding of the world, Hegel provides a purely logical dialectical analysis, which, since—in Lukács' view—it lacks a real historical dimension, remains abstract (TD 124). In rethinking Hegel's logic of essence as a historical process, Marx successfully demythologizes its real core (TD 137).

Lukács differs from Engels in his proposed solution to the problem of knowledge. Engels believes this problem can be solved (or resolved) on practical grounds. On the contrary, Lukács insists on the need for a theoretical solution. The problem posed by Kant's thing in itself cannot be overcome by pointing to practice in general or even specific forms of social practice, but only by rethinking it within the context of the problem of knowledge as it emerged in classical German philosophy. It is only if we give up the hopeless positivistic conceit that we can somehow grasp the mind-independent external world as it is that we can understand that it can only be known at all through a very different, dialectically interrelated categorical structure. For it is only in this way that what is supposed to exist as an independent historical process can be produced (or reproduced), and hence known on the level of conscious experience.

## Lukács on Lenin in *The Ontology of Social Being*

Lukács' argument in OSB silently relies on an insight borrowed from the later Schelling. In his Munich lectures delivered after Hegel died, Schelling claimed Hegel's logical approach could not grasp existence, hence could not grasp the social world.<sup>27</sup> Lukács applies a version of this view to reread the relation of Marx to Hegel. According to Lukács, Hegel had two related major themes, including a logical theory in the *Science of Logic* that fails to grasp existence and a form of social ontology that grasps existence and that

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<sup>27</sup>See F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Marx further develops in his own social ontology. OSB consists of the development of this dualistic reading of Hegel in criticizing the logical Hegelian approach that Marx presumably rejects, which is mainly stated in the *Paris Manuscripts*, and in building on the social ontology that is presumably also contained in this and in succeeding Marxian texts.

This gigantic treatise covers a vast multitude of themes running from the ontology of Nikolai Hartmann to a book on ethics that Lukács did not live to write.<sup>28</sup> In OSB, Lukács simultaneously resolves his earlier hesitancy about the status of Marx's position in adopting the anti-Marxist view that it is philosophy while simultaneously emphasizing Lenin's political and philosophical preeminence in Marxism. He continues to criticize Engels, though perhaps less harshly than before, but in criticizing Stalin, Lukács underlines the philosophical importance of Lenin for Marxism. Here, Lukács further develops his Hegelian approach to Marx in distinguishing between Hegelian historical ontology, which he accepts, and Hegelian logic, which he rejects as hopelessly abstract.

OSB, which was left unfinished when Lukács died, builds on the view of the little Lenin book. We recall that Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* show Lenin's turn from classical Marxist anti-Hegelianism to his later Hegelianism. By inference, Lukács' statement that Lenin is key to renewing Marxism refers, on the one hand, to the narrowing of the philosophical differences between Lenin and himself, and on the other hand to the newly apparent difference between Lenin, Engels and classical Marxism

Lukács' approach to Hegel takes different forms. In HCC, he criticizes Hegel in suggesting that Marx replaces the latter's absolute by the real identical subject-object, or the proletariat as the historical subject. In *The Young Hegel*, he points to Hegel's concern with the relation of philosophy to political economy. In the *Destruction of Reason*, he contrasts Hegel's rationalism with Schelling's irrationalism supposedly leading on to National Socialism. In OSB, he extols Hegel in silently forgetting the supposedly abstract character of Hegelianism, which he himself rejects, in achieving the dubious feat of rereading Lenin, whose grasp of Hegel is clearly limited, as an authentic scholar of Hegel and Marx. The equally dubious result is an approach that, for the first time, is both politically as well

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<sup>28</sup>See, for discussion, Tom Rockmore, *Irrationalism: Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason*, Chap. 6, pp. 215–243.

as philosophically orthodox. Lukács here interprets Lenin, whose link to Marx lies through Plekhanov and Engels, through the sparse comments of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, hence inconsistently as both anti-Hegelian, dependent on Engels, and also as Hegelian.

In the section of OSB devoted to Marx, Lukács claims that the clear misunderstanding of Marx even by Marxists who contributed to Marxism was simply swept aside by Lenin, who was, according to Lukács, the real founder of the Marx renaissance, and who was the only one to understand the need to reject the philosophical preeminence of logic and epistemology, as well as Lenin's supposedly decisive development of a materialist form of reflection of materialist ontology. The justification of this claim rests on a series of interrelated points, which must be discussed together in order to understand Lukács' later view of Lenin (see OSB 2.22–2.24). These points together show that, even at this late date, Lukács was striving for political orthodoxy in ways often straining credulity.

In the *Paris Manuscripts*, the young Marx seeks to come to grips with Hegel through the latter's *Logic*. Marx consistently suggests, for instance in the early "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction" and in the second Afterword to *Capital*, that his "materialism" inverts Hegel's idealism. In HCC, Lukács repeats this point, which he alters in OSB to follow Lenin's famous claim that it is necessary to grasp the whole of Hegel's *Logic* in order to understand *Capital*. This point is plausible in that in the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx comes to grips with Hegel through the latter's *Science of Logic*. Yet no one who reads the *Philosophical Notebooks* could come away with the impression that Lenin has, in the meantime, mastered Hegel's *Logic*. In passing, Lukács simply overlooks the obvious contradiction that exists between making mastery of *Logic* a precondition to understanding Marx and taking Lenin as his philosophical guide. Lukács argues that Engels is more superficial than Marx and that Engels accepts certain Hegelian ideas at face value. One instance might be his Hegelian claim that the relation of thought and being is the basic philosophical problem. Yet since Engels is basically anti-Hegelian and since in his later years Lenin was at least in principle Hegelian, it is inexact to say that with respect to Hegel, Lenin, any more than Lukács, follows and deepens Engels' view.

Lukács goes on to say that the young Marx "overcame the fundamentals of the entire Hegelian philosophy..." (OSB 2.22) Since he does not specify what he has in mind, it is difficult to evaluate the claim. If, as seems likely, he has in mind the traditional Marxist preference for materialism instead of idealism, then he needs to define his terms. He continues on to suggest that Lenin's epistemology is subordinated to a materialist ontology. This suggests,

since Lukács' OSB is ostensibly a materialist ontology, that Marx, Lenin and Lukács have similar ontological views. Yet that must be shown to be plausible. In fact, the evidence seems to count against this crucial claim. Lenin, distantly following Engels, seems committed to the view that we reflect the world as it is—a view that goes back at least to Socrates. Yet Lukács is committed to the incompatible view that is based on Hegel and distantly originates in Heraclitus that we do not know static objects. We rather know a process, since the world, including the social world, is not static but in flux. Lukács goes on to claim, in obviously overlooking the dictatorial character of Marxism–Leninism, that Lenin presents the path to socialism in complete agreement with Marx (OSB 2.163). He has in mind what, in accordance with his treatise on ontology, he regards as “the general socio-historical ontology of Marx” (OSB 2.162–2.163).

We detect here the limits of Lukács' pioneer formulation of Hegelian Marxism. Marx was centrally interested in the conditions of real human freedom. He addressed the ancient problem of human flourishing in the modern form it assumed in Rousseau. Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx offer different suggestions for realizing human freedom that, according to Marx, require a transition from modern industrial capitalism to postmodern communism. In HCC, Lukács is less interested in human freedom than in the breakthrough to an anti-Marxist Hegelian interpretation of Marx. In later writings, starting with TD and the little book on Lenin, Lukács is concerned with preserving and developing Hegelian Marxism while subordinating his philosophical views to political orthodoxy. The result is a tension, even an outright contradiction between Lukács' Hegelian Marxism, which in his approach to social ontology emphasizes the way in which human beings construct a society in which they recognize themselves, so to speak, and a political approach based on the dictatorship of the proletariat and, as Luxemburg brilliantly saw, the dictatorship of one man over the party and the proletariat.

The Leninist reliance on political organization is not a complement, but rather an alternative to the Marxian view of the economic self-destruction of capitalism. The two views of the realization of the Marxian dream of human flourishing in communism are incompatible. In turning, after HCC, to Lenin, Lukács abandoned the idea of the self-liberation of human beings through their activity—an idea he himself brilliantly formulated in his breakthrough to Hegelian Marxism, in entrusting the human future to a party whose main interest had always been itself.

## Conclusion: Lukács and Lenin

This chapter has described aspects of the complex relation between Lukács and Lenin, or Marxism–Leninism. This relation is described in different ways. According to Žižek, Lukács is the leading philosopher of Leninism. He suggests, in a passage referred to above, that after HCC, Lukács did what he could to treat this book as possessing historical interest only, while breaking with it in other texts of this period. According to Le Blanc, who restricts his account to the period 1919–1929, Lukács’ main writings in this period exhibit a sophisticated form of Leninism consistent with the views of Lenin and Trotsky, but which are neither ultra-leftist nor proto-Stalinist.<sup>29</sup>

Marxism has both philosophical and political dimensions. Classical Marxism is philosophically based on an anti-Hegelian reading of Marx invented by Engels and defended by a long series of later Marxists. Lukács made his breakthrough to an anti-Marxist Hegelian reading of Marx in HCC. Lukács’ Hegelian interpretation of Marx led him to criticize Engels in that book and throughout his later writings. After HCC, he remained faithful to his most important philosophical insights in continuing to defend and to develop Marxian Hegelianism. Yet beginning in his little book on Lenin, he accepted the political hegemony of Leninism suggested in the Leninist political concept of partyness. From a political angle of vision, in virtue of his acceptance of Marxist political hegemony, Lukács is a political but not a philosophical Leninist. However, he is certainly not a Leninist in an unqualified sense. Under the influence of Engels and Plekhanov, Lenin initially adopted an anti-Hegelian approach before his later conversion to Hegelianism in the “Philosophical Notebooks.” Suffice it to say that as a philosopher Lukács is neither a Leninist nor an anti-Leninist. He is rather the single most important Marxist philosopher, who, in formulating Hegelian Marxism, simultaneously refuted classical anti-Hegelian Marxism while inventing Western Marxism.

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<sup>29</sup>See Paul Le Blanc, “Spider and Fly,” in *Historical Materialism*, 2013, vol. 21, issue 2, pp. 47–75.

## Author Biography

**Tom Rockmore** is an American philosopher, now living in Avignon, France. He studied in the USA and Germany. He has held regular or visiting appointments in Yale, Nice, Fordham, Vanderbilt, Laval, Duquesne, Temple, and Peking. He is currently Distinguished Professor of Humanities, Professor of Philosophy and Member of the Institute of Foreign Philosophy in Peking University, China. His area of research encompasses all of modern philosophy, with special attention to aspects of German idealism. He has published many books on various philosophical themes, most recently on German idealism and epistemic constructivism.

# Part III

## Lenin and Problems

# 10

## Lenin on Socialism and the Party in the Long Revolution

Neil Harding

This chapter examines Lenin's changing views on the role of the party and the nature of socialism in the period from April 1917 to March 1921. For the purposes of this chapter, we consider this a continuous revolutionary process that has a clear beginning and end. It was a process in which two incommensurable accounts of socialism were acted out, with their widely differing implications for the position of the party. The first was all society and no state and the second all state and no society.

The first account locates socialism as a mode of being, of the conscious self-directed activity of equals in all aspects of productive and social life. It exists as universal participation in all the agencies striving to recover for society the powers arrogated to the state, and is, therefore, inseparable from the vitality of those institutions. It sets out immediately to eliminate the relations of domination and subordination within society. It expresses itself as a relation of people to people.

The second account sees socialism as a condition of things; as the planned organisation of production and distribution by the state, and the promise of an end to material need. It recognises the error and cost of attempting the immediate introduction of socialism and foresees a prolonged transitional period in which the industrial and class base of the regime is rebuilt. Socialism as the transformation of all power relations is postponed to an

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indefinite future. The relationship of people to people is displaced by the relationship of people to things. This socialism is agnostic with regard to the institutions that are adopted to maximize productive outputs.

In the first account, the party has a role limited to the promotion of mass organisations and proletarian activity; in the second, the party assumes control of state and economy in order to recast both industry and the proletariat so as to facilitate the expanded reproduction of both and, therewith, to assure the reproduction of its own power. The first account is deeply indebted to Rousseau and the second to Saint-Simon, both as transmitted through Marx's writings. Together they express the irresolvable tension between the libertarian activist, and the technocratic statist tendencies, present in Marx, Lenin and the whole socialist tradition of thought.

What follows is a tragedy in two acts. The first is jubilation and the delirium of a revolution for freedom through self-activity. Perversely locked within it however, are the seeds of the dictatorship of the second, issuing in the revolution devouring its own children.

## Prelude

It was not until April 1917 that Lenin returned to Russia to impose his stamp on a revolution that had been in progress since the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy in February. This was a revolution in which neither he nor the Bolshevik Party (nor any political party for that matter) played any substantial role. His programme was of such extreme radicalness that it went far beyond the grammar and discourse of politics as practiced and theorized since the French revolution. It remains the most luminously radical programme ever to enjoy the support of tens of millions of people. This was a highly theorized politics—in many ways an anti-politics, for a new time, a new era, a new humanity. Its vision was global. Its programme was a hymn to immediate participatory democracy that would be a beacon to the unfolding world revolution. It was the time of jubilee in which there would be neither rulers nor ruled. The state and its politics, as hitherto understood, would be no more. The prehistory of mankind as successive restructurings of domination and subordination had reached its term. Lenin was, as Goldenberg noted, reviving the anarchist soul of socialism, and this not for some point in the future, but in the here and now. This was the place where all—literally all—would participate in deciding, implementing and policing public policy. And this was the time of its coming. The spatial and temporal loci of the revolutionary process had fixed themselves in contemporary

Russia, whose duty it was to initiate the global revolution against monopoly capitalism and war.

Lenin's sharpest invective was therefore directed against all those who would postpone the socialist revolution to a more propitious moment. These were the people who "promise to be Marxist in another epoch, not now ... not in this epoch! Marxism on credit, Marxism in promises, Marxism tomorrow."<sup>1</sup> They had become the worst enemies of socialism. Following Bernstein, they had jettisoned the whole of Marx's methodology enshrined in the dialectic, and this was the root of their apostasy. The dialectical counterposing of thesis and antithesis was fundamental to Lenin's mindset. His politics were the politics of confrontation, of teasing out the irreconcilable interests of opposing forces. Similarly, in his dialectical formulations, the essential forces always reduced themselves to two: thesis and antithesis. From this confrontation, a synthesis of the progressive characteristics of both ideally emerged. Too often, however, this third element is ignored. In the confrontational politics of the clash of classes, Lenin typically resorts to the binary formulation of "either/or." His whole concern is to exclude the possibility of a third way. That way lies the deceptions of radicals and philanthropists, and the evolutionary conciliatory politics of social democracy. These were not simply methodological points, they went to the heart of Lenin's break with the Second International, his denunciation of all those so-called socialists who had voted war credits and "suspended the class struggle" in the interests of national unity. Included in these ranks were virtually all the socialists of Europe, including their Russian comrades in the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties. Even Lenin's own party leaders in Russia joined the loyal opposition to the patriotic Provisional Government. That Lenin was virtually alone in his stance did not trouble him. He was driven by an absolute conviction that adequate theory would disclose the nature of the present conjuncture and reveal the policies to dissolve its contradictions. This unshakeable self-belief was the source of both his strength and his fallibility. Both were revealed in the truth content of the projections out of theory upon which the whole revolutionary project was based.

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<sup>1</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works* in 45 vols., Moscow, 1960–1970, vol. 21, p. 107. Hereafter references to this edition will be rendered LCW, 21/107.

## Theoretical Starting Points

Lenin was a thoroughgoing Marxist, insisting that the limits of the politically possible were given by the constraints imposed by the level of development of the productive base of society. A satisfactory account of Lenin's views on the party must, therefore begin with a summary of his economic analysis. The crucial propositions of the economic foundations of Lenin's politics in April were:

### 1. *Capitalism as Monopolistic*

Unlike most contemporary socialist theorists, Marx was not straightforwardly anti-capitalist. On the contrary, sections of the Manifesto are paeans of praise to the vibrant, innovative, and life-changing possibilities capitalism had created. It had produced wonders far surpassing those of the ancient world<sup>2</sup> and immeasurably increased the productive powers available to mankind, without which socialism would not be possible. "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without revolutionising the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production."<sup>3</sup> Failure to advance or at least keep pace with technologies of production meant failure and absorption by those that did. So long as capitalism retained this competitive dynamic, it remained a vital historical force. But the inherent tendency for larger, more efficient producers to absorb the smaller carried with it a tendency towards monopoly. Capitalism, in short, justified itself in terms of competition but tended and aspired towards monopoly. A succession of Marxist theorists had concluded that, by the end of the nineteenth century, capitalism had indeed become monopolistic. But insofar as capitalism became monopolistic, it also became retrogressive and forfeited its place in history. At this time, capitalism strove to restrict technical innovation rather than being compelled to embrace it. Techniques of monopolization gave the barons of finance capital control over key industries and huge powers over government and indeed within it. This power was vastly expanded with the First World War when it suited finance capital to have monopoly control over strategic industries including armaments, military materiel and the heights of the economy. Having secured direct or indirect dominance over the wartime governments, they secured the legislation needed to direct and discipline labour, set wages,

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<sup>2</sup>K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* 2 vols., Moscow 1960, hereafter MESW, 1/37.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. cit.

and ration all scarce resources including food. Only by controlling wages, prices, taxes and tariffs, and exacting monopoly price for the ever-expanding military needs of the government, could they guarantee their profits and ensure their survival. State and capitalism were now indissolubly fused. More to the point, they threatened to ensure the continuous reproduction of their economic and political dominance *ad infinitum*.

This led Bukharin to write his incisive and provocative article *Towards a Theory of the Imperialist State* in which he portrayed it as a monstrous all-pervasive power “which envelops the living body of society with its tenacious and grasping claws. It is the New Leviathan beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes seems but a child’s plaything.”<sup>4</sup> It was in the process of absorbing all hitherto independent bodies and associations into its totalising power. The time had come to smash this militarist parasitic power that had reduced the world to the madness of global war.

Lenin’s principal contribution to this debate was to highlight the important transition from monopoly to *state-monopoly* capitalism, which had proceeded apace since 1914. For Lenin, this constituted a crucial turning point in the preparation for socialism:

The dialectics of history is such that the war, by extraordinarily expediting the transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism, has *thereby* extraordinarily advanced mankind towards socialism. State-monopoly capitalism is a complete *material* preparation for socialism, the *threshold* of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism *there are no intermediary rungs*.<sup>5</sup>

The terminus of capitalism signalled and prepared the advent of socialism. Socialism, Lenin declared, “is now gazing at us through all the windows of modern Capitalism.”<sup>6</sup> Huge trusts, cartels and global corporations had massively rationalized production and combined the processes of extraction, transportation and distribution on a national and international scale. Combined with the big banks that controlled access to investment funds and their allocation on a nationwide basis, they had largely overcome the planlessness of capitalism. They could, under social management, become ready-made instruments for the management of the economy. They had

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<sup>4</sup>N. I. Bukharin, *k teorii imperialistichsogo gosudarstva* in *Revoliutsia Prava, Sbornik pervyi*, no. 25, Moscow, 1925, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup>LCW, 25/363.

<sup>6</sup>Loc. cit.

created, in embryo, nationwide systems of book keeping and accountancy that had simplified the business of administering the economy to the extent that it was it accessible to any literate worker:

A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine tenths of the *socialist* apparatus. This will be a country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something of the nature of the skeleton of socialist society. We can “lay hold of” and “set in motion” this state apparatus...at one stroke, by a single decree.<sup>7</sup>

All this was possible because, Lenin insisted, these sorts of tasks were already carried out by employees who led a proletarian or semi-proletarian existence.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. *Capitalism had Become Global and Parasitic*

The second prong of the Imperialist analysis was the finding that *capitalism had become a global phenomenon*. As Marx predicted, its search for raw materials, cheap labour and markets, for super-abundant goods and excess capital, had led it to nestle and settle everywhere.<sup>9</sup> It colonized and annexed territory so as to ensure the flow of superprofits that sustained the metropolitan economy. Therefore, the analysis of contemporary capitalism had to be made on an international, global scale for this was its nature. It only survived on global exploitation and would therefore only be defeated on a global basis. It had bought time with space and had finally become the world historical phenomenon that Marx had anticipated as the necessary condition for the global triumph of communism.

Monopoly capitalism had also become parasitic, surviving on the tribute forcibly extracted from its colonial dependencies and semi-colonies. Monopoly capitalism used part of the bounty to corrupt sections of the metropolitan workers with increased wages and modest welfare benefits. An aristocracy of labor had been created, and this formed the social basis of European reformism. Entire countries had become participants in exploitation. It was no longer particular classes that profited but all the citizens

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<sup>7</sup>LCW, 26/106.

<sup>8</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>MESW, 1/37.

of rentier states. However, the available territory of the world was finite and the competition for it intense. Defending or obtaining economic territory required battleships and armies. Competition for scarce territory could only be resolved by force of arms. Contemporary capitalism was irreducibly and necessarily militarist. The fratricidal war that was ravaging Europe and the world, was but the prelude to an epoch of militarized barbarism in which the production of the means of production and consumption yielded place to production of the means of destruction. Far from revolutionizing the forces of production for the creation of useful things (capitalism's unique claim to being progressive), the industrialised killing machines that were modern armies had reduced Europe to a bloody morass. Millions of working people had been gratuitously slaughtered, farms and factories destroyed, and civilians reduced to starvation and homelessness. This was the barbarism produced by imperialist war. Capitalism had forfeited its historical right to exist.

We should not underestimate the moral force of Lenin's analysis nor doubt that he was convinced that capitalism had long ceased to be a progressive force in history. This cogent analysis of the war as a war of imperialist plunder was perhaps the most potent, simplified and resonant message in Lenin's ideological armoury.

*Act One:* April 1917, an Apolitical Programme for the Party in the Days of Jubilee

Lenin was, at first, scandalized by what he took to be Bukharin's lapse into anarchism in his talk of immediately smashing the state. Bukharin did, however, set Lenin on a lengthy quest to uncover what Marx's real position was on the matter and this was to issue in the writing of *The State and Revolution*.<sup>10</sup> Was there a positive alternative to the rather nihilistic void that Bukharin's state smashing suggested? Lenin found it in Marx's writings on the Paris Commune of 1871. The Commune became the pivotal point, not only of his writings but of his revolutionary practice in 1917. The Commune was "a revolution against the state *itself*, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people, for the people of its own social life ... A Revolution to break down this horrid machinery of class domination itself."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>LCW, 25, pp. 385–497.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, Peking, 1970, pp. 165–166.

Marx's three *Addresses on the Civil War in France* were rediscovered by Lenin and formed the basis of his initial programme for the revolution. The Commune now expressed the very soul of socialism, which was indistinguishable from anarchism. The spirit of the Commune, according to Lenin, had been perfectly captured in the institutions spontaneously created by the workers of Russia. The soviets; the plethora of autonomous organizations; factory, regimental and street committees; Red Guard militias and peasant communes, all embodied its message of immediate participatory democracy. The Russian working people had themselves found the way to dispense with the pretensions and jurisdictions of separate bodies of legislators and politicians, bureaucrats, judges and all sorts of bosses. Their soviets were daily dissolving the state.

At this time, Lenin absorbed and highlighted the idea that was so central to Marx's own conception of socialism—the proposition that state and society stand in inverse relation one to the other. The two are locked in a zero sum game in which the growth of one is accomplished only at the cost of the other. The summation of this process of attrition of society by the capitalist state was the militarist–bureaucratic machine of Louis Bonaparte—namely, that the state had swallowed society. It followed, according to binary dialectical logic, that the socialist antithesis would see society swallowing the state. This became Lenin's utopian *idée fixe* in the months leading up to October, particularly with the uncovering of Marx's own accounts of the social structures that replaced the bloated and parasitic state.

The Commune, Marx declared, was a revolution “not against this or that form of the state but a revolution against the state *itself*, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life...a Revolution to break down this whole horrid machinery of the state itself.”<sup>12</sup> This was, he affirmed “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of the working class.”<sup>13</sup>

The first article that Lenin published following his return to Russia, his *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution*, more commonly known as the *April Theses*, clearly displays his recent reading of Marx. Its first demand was “Abolition of the police, the army and bureaucracy.” In the Marxist lexicon, it was precisely these separate bodies claiming exclusive jurisdictions that constituted and defined the state. They were the agencies

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., loc cit.

<sup>13</sup>MESW, 1/522.

standing between the people and their empowerment as free beings enacting their own destinies. These agencies had been forever and anon the *loci* of class power. They were to be replaced by the direct and immediate organs of popular sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

There was a further and immediate imperative that Lenin insisted upon—that the party must do its utmost to deny military and coercive power to the government. The current situation of unresolved dual power could not last. One or the other class-based force would have to prevail, their prolonged co-existence was impossible. The party had to support and extend the Red Guard movement and weld it into a universal militia. It had to broaden and extend all the spontaneous bodies of proletarian action and self-assertion thrown up by the February revolution. The soviets, the factory committees, Red Guard councils, regimental committees and the mushrooming *ad hoc* collegial bodies—these were the only bodies that Lenin was prepared to recognise as legitimate. These bodies breathed the spirit of direct democracy that was the essence of the Commune. As they grew in scope and authority, the state commensurately diminished. Lenin, in the months leading up to October, had an extraordinarily elastic view of what he rather carelessly called the state. At various times, he referred to the factory committees, the Red Guards, universal militia, regimental committees, cooperatives, post office, banks, *artels* (cooperatives), peasant communes, trade unions, street, housing, and ration committees and the ubiquitous soviets, as diverse forms both of the proletarian state and of socialism.

The empowerment of society entailed not only the promotion of the prerogatives and powers of the bodies spontaneously created by the ongoing revolution but, alongside that, the decisive promotion of a movement for *universal* participation in the business of managing public affairs. This was the mass transformation of *individual* mentalities, or consciousness. It was the appropriation of the lost dignity and humanity of every man and woman. Lenin exhorted the workers to get off their knees and straighten their backs: “it is time cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen.”<sup>15</sup>

It quite soon became clear that this programme was at one with the extraordinarily radical mood of vast numbers of Russians nurturing profound resentment against almost all authority figures, the aristocratic remnants, the factory managers, land captains, army officers and bureaucrats, and anyone with glasses or a refined accent. All these groups were often

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<sup>14</sup>LCW, 24/23.

<sup>15</sup>LCW, 24/88.

indiscriminately lumped together as the hated *burzhui*.<sup>16</sup> These were the people who for decades—indeed, centuries—had held the masses in contempt and assailed their dignity daily. The revolution, for huge numbers of Russians, was the longed-for moment when they could, for the first time, walk tall and, through their interlocking self-governing soviets, put themselves in the forefront of public affairs. This was not a movement in pursuit of higher wages or material improvements but an elemental and unstoppable demand to be counted and respected. And this was socialism as an end to bossing.

We must note here that, as was the case with Marx in 1871, Lenin in 1917 consciously avoided defining the socialism he was striving to realise in terms of an economic programme. The limits of Marx's economic programme had been the abolition of night work for bakers and encouragement of the activities of associated cooperatives. This was a slender basis upon which to establish the management of production and distribution. By contrast Lenin was, at least superficially, more exacting and thorough about the structures bequeathed by state monopoly capitalism for the fulfilment of these tasks. Lenin clung to the utopian belief that monopoly capitalism had created the simplified mechanisms through which the essential functions of production, investment and distribution could be managed by ordinary working men and women in a non-coercive way. He consoled all the doubters and fainthearted with the positive message that the objective conditions had been thoroughly prepared—to have courage, that it can and must be done. On the eve of the October Revolution he declared: "For the administration of the state in *this* (revolutionary) spirit we can *at once set in motion* a state of ten if not twenty million people, an apparatus such as no capitalist state has ever known."<sup>17</sup> Only such a state could save Russia from ruination, only such a state could train the whole people for socialism.<sup>18</sup>

Lenin did, however, repeatedly counsel against the transference of capital resources into the hands either of the state, or directly into the hands of the workers. The revolution was not about property or capital transfer. Confusingly, he many times insisted that it was not the business of the revolution to introduce socialism in this way: "In reality, however, nationalisation of the banks, which would not deprive any owner of a single kopek,

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<sup>16</sup>See S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917–1918*, Cambridge, 1983, and M. Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917–1921*, London, 1975.

<sup>17</sup>LCW, 26/114.

<sup>18</sup>LCW, 26/113.

presents absolutely no technical or cultural difficulties.”<sup>19</sup> Even the creation of a single state bank would not involve the expropriation of any capital resources. Lenin repeatedly counselled against such moves and tried desperately to restrain the widespread nationalization from below that swept through the industrial areas in the months after October. Control, he always insisted, must not be confused with ownership. It involved access to the books, vigilance to ensure that enterprises did not swindle the regime or its clients, and attention to the terms and conditions of work and procedures for the hiring and firing of staff. It did not mean appropriation of the factories, nor the ousting of existing management, engineers and specialists. Socialism, at this point, did not entail a wholesale transfer of capital resources as proposed by some Mensheviks. The fruitless talk of “introducing socialism” and “permanent revolution” and similar “nonsense” was, in Lenin’s view “ridiculously stupid, for what makes socialism objectively impossible is the small-scale economy which we by no means presume to expropriate, or even regulate or control.”<sup>20</sup> The wholesale peasant seizure of the land merely exacerbated the difficulty. The revolution, at which Lenin aimed in the run up to October, was the furthest possible extension of the bourgeois democratic revolution in the context of state-monopoly capitalism. Insofar as the proletariat and poor peasantry inserted their agencies of class power to usurp the imperialist state, the revolution was socialist. Insofar as it utilized the ready-made instruments of accounting and control to ensure distribution in the interests of the labouring poor, the revolution was socialist—“for socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly, *which is made to serve the interests of the whole people...*”<sup>21</sup> Insofar as it provided the stimulus for a global revolution for properly socialist revolutions in advanced industrial countries, it obviously qualified. But insofar as its economic base was relatively under-developed in terms of large-scale industrial and agricultural production, the Russian revolution could not yet be wholly socialist. “Nowhere in the world,” Lenin told the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, “is there pure capitalism developing into pure socialism, but there is something in between, something new and unprecedented.”<sup>22</sup> This was a complex hybrid form of power reflecting the hybrid economic base of contemporary Russia combining some of the largest, most

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<sup>19</sup>LCW, 25/334.

<sup>20</sup>LCW, 25/44–45.

<sup>21</sup>LCW, 26/362.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., loc. cit.

advanced consolidated industrial plants in the world with artisan production and peasant agriculture. Its most radical political superstructure would be restrained by these objective limitations and sit halfway between socialism and capitalism: “Universal labour conscription, introduced, regulated and directed by the Soviets... will still not be socialism but it will no longer be capitalism.”<sup>23</sup>

The appeal of socialism in Lenin’s accounts of 1917 was not the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey. It was not enhanced consumption that was on offer, but the dignity of free activity and absence of dependence. As with the Marx of 1844,<sup>24</sup> this was the Rousseau integument of socialism, the immersion of every individual in the deliberation and execution of public business. Only in and through this activity could the people ascend to their own self-governance and the realization of their properly human existence. It was a re-run of what Rousseau insisted was the activity of suspending individual or group preferences in the consideration of the common good as the sole route to the General Will—take away the activity and you take away the possibility of entering the moral economy of the society of equals. It also closely mirrored his contempt for luxury as a mortgage on freedom, and the need for equality so that no citizen would be dependent on another. This was, again redolent of Marx’s 1844 manuscripts where free creative activity was said to define the species essence of man and the essence of the project for socialism—take away the activity and you take away the possibility of being human.

The role of the party in this phase of revolutionary transformation was, above all, to stimulate and extend the mass movements for self-organization, to create an authentically militant class culture of defiance. It must neither teach nor preach; it had to discard the grubby grey books of theory and learn from and with the movement of the masses. The party had to do its utmost to separate the workers from all collaboration with the government, the temporizing radicals, and the Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary parties who were constantly urging caution and restraint.

First of all, Lenin had the large task of fighting for his programme against the almost unanimous opposition of his own party. Such was his standing,

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<sup>23</sup>LCW, 25/364. I have explored this ambiguity further in “Lenin, socialism and the State” in E.R. and J. Frankel and B. Knei Paz, eds. *Revolution in Russia, Reassessments of 1917*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 287–305.

<sup>24</sup>*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow, 1961. Marx too inveighed against those who portrayed socialism as the land of lotus eaters breeding excess and intemperance, where every need becomes “a weakness which will lead the fly to the gluepot” P116. Marx’s contempt for commercial society is profoundly Rousseauian.

persistence and intellectual dominance that this was accomplished in a matter of weeks. This speaks volumes for his towering status vis-à-vis his party colleagues. It says a good deal, too, about the role of exceptional persons in history. Lenin had considerable drive and persistence as a publicist and organizer. Above all, his predictions on the course that the revolution would take seemed uncannily accurate, even to non-Bolshevik observers. He was in his element in these months before October. He was—following Marx—making reality strive towards thought. An aura of invincibility came to surround him. As Trotsky was later to assert, without Lenin, there would have been no second Russian revolution in 1917. He single-handedly took the party by the scruff, both in April, and again in October—no-one else could have achieved this. In doing so, Lenin dramatically changed the course of history.

In the months leading up to October, it became increasingly clear that the tide was running in his favour. Above all, Russia was suffering grievously. The wartime loss of life had been prodigious and the military situation continued to deteriorate. There were revolts in the army and widespread unrest at the appalling food and fuel shortages in towns and cities. Lenin tapped into a profound war-weariness that increasingly turned to anger and bitterness against governmental and military incompetence. Meanwhile the Petrograd Soviet was beginning to flex its muscles against the self-appointed Provisional Government. Its Order number one effectively challenged the government's control of the army. Power was shifting down new channels and Lenin was helping to dig them.

In the countryside, peasant occupation of the land proceeded unchecked, workers were taking over the factories and the Bolshevik control of major soviets and military and naval units grew rapidly. The food and fuel situation became ever more acute as the railways imploded from lack of maintenance and overloading. Trade with the countryside collapsed as the peasants freed themselves of debt and hence the compulsion to produce for the market. Food and fuel stopped flowing to the towns. In the face of this concatenation of crises, the Provisional Government, now headed by Alexander Kerensky,<sup>25</sup> proved itself to be wholly overwhelmed. The situation in the urban centres became desperate.

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<sup>25</sup>By a strange quirk of history, the man whom Lenin was to overthrow and replace as the master of Russia was the son of his headmaster who had bravely written the glowing reference that enabled Lenin to enter Petersburg law school despite being the brother of a self-confessed regicide.

To all of this, Lenin's response remained constant. The government exposed its impotence, the capitalists sabotaged production and swindled the people on a daily basis, and the generals were delivering Russia up to the jackbooted tyranny of Prussia. All the remedies available within the limits of bourgeois democracy had been tried, new coalitions of parties and combinations of personnel followed the old, and the crises deepened. The existential situation of the masses, and of the country, grew more and more acute. Neither politicians nor generals—bureaucrats nor capitalists—could redeem the situation. They had tried, and catastrophically failed. The only salvation available to Russia, and the world at large, was to unleash the vital energy and unstoppable forces of the popular masses. The revolution would teach and steel them. Let them build their own local and national structures of governance. The Russian workers had already shown the way, they had proved their capacities for self-administration and had emerged with energy, experience and creativity that was the promise of a people suited to build socialism.<sup>26</sup> Russia was a beacon to light up the world revolution.

The process of revolution would, of itself, enormously accelerate the development of proletarian consciousness. It was, Lenin reminded the party, not the tired grey book of socialism that would bring home the truths of Marxism, but rather the lived experience of revolutionary activism. Here the poverty of vision of the trimmers would be exposed, the prejudices and ineptitude of the powerful and the impossibility of partial or gradual change would become obvious. In the starkness of political postures, the underlying economic interests of all social groupings were made manifest. Finally, everyone was confronted with the unavoidable choice: the choice for or against the socialist revolution. The mission of the party was to agitate and propagandize, to reveal and deepen these polarities. Above all, Lenin exhorted the party to open its doors wide and admit active workers, soldiers and sailors who sympathized with its programme—to admit them in their thousands and to have no fear of their lack of bookish theory. Revolution itself is an infinitely more effective teacher than books or study circles. It is the great accelerator of proletarian consciousness, the locomotive of history. The truths of theory are witnessed for all to see in the actions and inactions of the parties then clearly illuminated as vehicles of class interests. Politics reveals itself as concentrated economics. Events themselves compel choices and action—they oblige the taking of sides. These were the crucial

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<sup>26</sup>LCW, 26, p. 114.

accelerants of socialist consciousness that rapidly eliminated the gap between the real and the actual consciousness of the proletarian masses. This was the moment that Marx had predicted when “These millions of proletarians or communists...bring their ‘being’ into harmony with their ‘essence’ in a practical way, by means of revolution.”<sup>27</sup>

For Lenin, these five months of revolutionary activity had taught the masses more about power, who wields it and how to acquire it than decades of peaceful slumber. These months before October witnessed a transformation of mentalities on a scale unparalleled in modern history. By October 1917, it seemed that Lenin’s projections about the incompetence and irrelevance of the Provisional Government and all the parties supporting it, had spectacularly materialized. The radicals, the socialist revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, all of whom had supported the war and the provisional Government, had been increasingly marginalized. They had vehemently counseled against land redistribution, factory takeovers and peace without annexations, and they had been ignored. The peasants had swept away the old landlords and, with surprising ease and efficiency, had repartitioned the land. The industrial workers had taken over their factories, and the soviets had, for some time before the October Revolution, become the effective government of Russia. Millions of people had been radicalized, prompted both by their own leaders and organizations, as well as by the Bolshevik Party. They engaged wholeheartedly in the dismemberment of the old structures of power, and participation in their own new ones.

By September 1917, the Bolshevik Party had won majorities in most of the major cities; not only Moscow and Petrograd, but along the principal railway lines and in most of the garrisons and naval bases. The theoretical projections that Lenin had made the bedrock of his strategy appeared now to be brilliantly vindicated: “So far, the revolution has justified all the basic theoretical projections of Marxism, all the revolutionary slogans of Social Democracy. And the revolution has justified our hope and faith in the truly revolutionary spirit of the proletariat.”<sup>28</sup>

This was the high point of the synthesis of Lenin’s theory and practice, and we might say, of his utopian optimism. As Lenin put it in the Preface to his pamphlet “Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?” which set out the programme for the October seizure of power, “The 25 October Revolution

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<sup>27</sup>MECW, 5, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup>LCW, 27/32.

has transferred the question raised in this pamphlet from the sphere of theory to the sphere of practice. This question must now be answered by deeds not words.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, to those who still doubted the outcome, Lenin reassured them: “That the socialist revolution in Europe must come, and will come, is beyond doubt. All our hopes for the final victory of socialism are founded on this certainty and on this scientific prognosis.”<sup>30</sup>

*Act Two:* March 1921, Disenchantment and Dictatorship

In March 1921 came the news that the last desperate throw of European revolutionary turbulence had fizzled out in the abortive March Action of the German Communist Party. The lynchpin of Lenin’s whole project for socialism in Russia was broken. The “scientific prognosis” had proved to be mistaken. He had repeatedly said that without a revolution in Germany, Russia was doomed. He now had to face the bitter fact that Russia was thrown upon its own ruined resources. Since the fundamental and indispensable premise upon which the revolution had been launched was now shown to be mistaken, its whole theory and practice had to be re-appraised. Against all Lenin’s predictions, capitalism had managed the transition back to a peacetime economy and had stabilized the world economic system, at least for the foreseeable future. It had entered what was now called the temporary stabilization of capitalism. Lenin had to acknowledge that “some sort of temporary, unstable equilibrium”<sup>31</sup> had been established.

The regime was, by 1921, in desperate straits. It had to face up to the prospect of a prolonged holding operation in a land ravaged by war and civil war, whose class composition was wholly unsuited to its cause. It was isolated from the people. Both the peasants, who formed the huge majority, and the urban workers were either resentful or in insurrection against the regime. The peasants were, in many provinces—Tambov in particular—in open rebellion. In the Ukraine, thousands were dying of hunger. Resentment against the cities and the Bolshevik requisition squads was widespread. The unpaid confiscation by Bolshevik militias of what were termed “the peasant surpluses” had the most disastrous consequences. The peasants responded by a wholesale slaughter of their livestock and draught

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<sup>29</sup>LCW, 26/89.

<sup>30</sup>LCW, 26/443.

<sup>31</sup>LCW, 32, p. 436.

animals that was to have a profound impact on the viability of the agrarian economy for many years. It soured relations between town and country for much longer. More immediately, trade between town and country ground to a virtual standstill and the food and fuel shortages became so severe as to threaten the very survival of large-scale industry and urban life. It also effectively torpedoed Lenin's grand plan to create "Poor Peasant Committees" in the villages, to bring class war and Bolshevik influence to the countryside.

The idea of a class alliance between the agricultural day labourers, or rural semi-proletariat, and the urban workers stemmed from Lenin's earlier economic analysis of Russian capitalism.<sup>32</sup> It formed the background to his strategy during the 1905 revolution in which the proletariat was to assume the role of vanguard of all Russia's exploited. The theory might have been impressive but its realization, post 1917, was undermined from the outset. Armed requisitions and their repercussions left the regime with only the most tenuous influence in the villages. Lenin above all should have grasped the central issue of town/country relations, especially as they impacted upon trade. He had, in 1899, produced what remains his most impressive contribution to the literature of Marxism. In it he traced the evolution of capitalism out of feudalism. The intrusion of capitalist economic relations into the old system of natural economy, or self-sufficient non-commodity production, arose from two sources. In the first place, the peasants had to service the debts they had all incurred in redeeming their land from the landlords. Second, they needed cash for tools and machinery as well as for personal and household goods. They were therefore obliged to trade, to become commodity producers, to market their produce. Lenin should have realized that the peasant revolution that swept through Russia in 1917 had effectively destroyed peasant debt. The peasants literally made bonfires of legal records, of redemption payments and mortgages. They not only annulled their debts to the landlords but seized and repartitioned their remaining lands.

As to trade, what did cities have to offer? Industry was in a state of collapse. What remained had to be focused on the needs of the Red Army in war and then civil war. Even the most basic goods—kerosene, ploughshares, hoes and buckets, clothes and shoes—were unobtainable. What little there was, was dispensed by ration and access was restricted to urban workers. With nothing to buy, there was neither compulsion nor incentive to trade. Lenin's rather fanciful offer of promissory notes, to be redeemed in an

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<sup>32</sup>*The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, LECW, 3/607.

indefinite future, merely added insult to the injury of expropriations. Nor was this a situation of passive abstention; by 1921, it had become one of active revolt. In the spring of 1921, there were more than 50 sites of peasant rebellion and unrest in Russia.

The economy became stuck in what seemed to be a series of vicious circles. The transport of millions of soldiers and millions of tons of materiel had brought much of the railway system to a standstill even before the revolution. Much the same applied to industry. Plants had been destroyed, machinery run down and unrepaired, raw materials and fuel unobtainable, workers maimed or killed or driven by hunger or cold back to their villages. Industrial production in 1921 was but a fraction of what it had been in 1914.<sup>33</sup> With no goods available to purchase and no debts to service, the peasants retreated into natural economy (or self-sufficiency). As a consequence, the towns were left to starve for want of grain, and to freeze for want of firewood.

Meanwhile, the situation among the workers in the towns was critical. The remnants of the urban working class were demoralized, hungry and cold. They survived on the most meagre rations and lived and worked in unheated premises. They had become increasingly restive with the communist monopoly of power, the “commisarocracy.” They had, in the interests of unity against the foreign invaders and White Guard insurgents, tolerated the “temporary” suspension of virtually all their elective bodies, including factory committees, Red Guards, soviets, and trade unions, which Lenin had so ardently promoted as the core agencies for the promotion of socialist consciousness. These were the vehicles of their self-activity through which the urban working class began to learn how to administer their own affairs and this was nothing less, Lenin had earlier insisted, than the real implementation of socialism.

The regimental committees that had displaced the officers were the first to go. The first step was to bring the mutinous regiments of the army and the disparate Red Guard militias under a single authoritative command directly responsible to the party. And so Trotsky was put in charge of the Red Army and he almost immediately re-introduced officers, many from the old regime, with their own uniforms and privileges. Regimental committees were disbanded, Bolshevik commissars replaced them and enforced the rule of the centre. Strict discipline was brought back, as was the death penalty for desertion. Labor armies under the same military discipline were put under

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<sup>33</sup>A. Nove, *The Economic History of the USSR*, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 68.

the jurisdiction of the army. By 1920, Trotsky became an ardent spokesman for the militarization of the entire economy.<sup>34</sup> The first incursions into the anti-authoritarian, egalitarian and collegial ethos of the revolution had been made. Large tracts of the country and the railways were, for some years, placed under martial law and the control of the imperious Trotsky. All this might have been necessary to defeat internal and external enemies, but there was no doubting that it directly flouted the ethos and principle for which the revolution had been made. It was also to have an enduring impact. Officers, commissars, soldiers and party members alike became habituated to diktats from the centre, administrative ruthlessness, summary justice and the egregious brutality of the times.<sup>35</sup>

Simultaneously, if a little more stealthily, the regime turned its attention to the factory committees, which, along with the soviets, had been the principal agencies of working-class mobilization in the crucial months leading to the seizure of power. They had been the militant focus of working-class life ever since the February Revolution, which they had largely led and coordinated. Suspicious of contamination by intellectuals or any non-workers, they had fiercely guarded their independence and took workers' control very seriously. Workers' control of industry was, for many industrial workers, the sum and substance of both the revolution and of socialism, a sentiment that Lenin had repeatedly endorsed. The policy of workers' control of industry, hitherto most closely associated with syndicalism and anarchism, and therefore beyond the pale for orthodox Marxists, was enthusiastically embraced by the Bolsheviks in the lead up to October and endorsed in the 1918 Constitution.<sup>36</sup> It was one of the crucial slogans that made October possible because it enabled the party to win over the burgeoning factory committees and, through them, the Red Guards.<sup>37</sup> It was moreover a convenient vehicle to undermine the generally more conservative (and Menshevik-influenced) trade unions. The movement for workers' control harmonized perfectly with the anarchistic Bolshevik slogans about an end to bossing and bureaucracy. It resonated strongly with the masses, who were actually taking control of the management of their own lives. For workers, this was the most tangible

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<sup>34</sup>He wrote in 1920 and 1921 a series of articles and pamphlets of increasingly authoritarian tone, which were condensed into his book *Terrorism and Communism*, Ann Arbor, 1961.

<sup>35</sup>In his *Testament*, his last message to the party and appraisal of the qualities of its leading personnel, Lenin warned the comrades about Trotsky's high-handed tendency to settle matters in a purely administrative way. LCW, 36/595.

<sup>36</sup>A.L. Unger, *Constitutional Development in the USSR*, London, 1981, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup>Smith, *Red Petrograd*.

and meaningful of policies. It emancipated workers from arbitrary fines or summary dismissal for the most innocuous infractions of factory discipline. It gave workers a dignity and self-respect they had never dreamed of. It gave them also a stake in the most important sphere of their lives—an assurance that they would never again be treated like industrial serfs. Workers' control summarized the practice of their empowerment, which was, and remains (on this scale at least) unique in industrial history.

The Bolsheviks committed extensive resources to persuading the workers that, exceptionally, for the duration of the war and civil war, the most effective form of securing workers' control was to institute collegial management in each factory consisting of a five-man team of two specialists and three worker representatives. It quickly became clear whose voice was the more authoritative. Thus began the rapid emasculation of perhaps the most potent working-class force of the revolution. And, with it, the content of the socialist project remorselessly changed. One-man management swiftly followed. Elections, and the convocation of the committees themselves, ceased to take place.

The factory committees yielded place to the more malleable trades unions who suffered the same fate of the installation of Communist Party nominees to key positions and the postponement, then abandonment, of elections. At the national level, the unions were marginalized by the Supreme Council on the National Economy (VSNKha), which then assumed the role (constitutionally promised to the unions) of the organization and administration of the national economy. The actual roles now allotted to the unions, were to act as the organizers of labor discipline, socialist competition, and the fulfilment of production targets. They were to be conduits, or transmission belts, of the party's industrial policies and the nurturing ground of future party members.

The soviets too fell into silence and underwent the same processes of attrition and infiltration of party placemen replacing elected representatives. The first constitution of the RSFR stipulated that "Power must belong wholly and exclusively to the toiling masses and their authorised representatives—the soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies."<sup>38</sup> The Council of People's Commissars, or Sovnarkom (Lenin's exclusively communist government) was, under article 46, expressly made "responsible in all matters to the all-Russian Congress of Soviets..."<sup>39</sup> It "shall have the right to annul or

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<sup>38</sup>London, 1971, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

suspend any order or decision of the Council of People's Commissars."<sup>40</sup> As was the case with subsequent Soviet Constitutions, what was given in one clause was immediately qualified in the next: "Measures requiring immediate implementation may be put into effect directly by the Council of People's Commissars."<sup>41</sup> In fact, the post-revolutionary powers of the Supreme Soviet existed only on paper.

At the local level, in the smaller towns and the villages the soviets were, from the outset, pre-empted by the numerous national and local agencies of Sovnarkom, directed by Lenin. Elections were not held, soviets did not meet, and they transacted no significant business.<sup>42</sup> Sovnarkom tolerated no challenge to its prerogatives or limits to its powers.

By early 1921, however, Lenin could not help being aware of worker disenchantment with the privileges, corruption and arrogance of many of his comrades. He began to express deep doubts about the efficacy of both the state and the party machines. These doubts increased to the point of despair in his last writings.<sup>43</sup> It was the leader of the Trade Union Federation, Tomsky, who impressed upon him the depth of worker alienation from the regime and the dangers of endorsing Trotsky's plan to bring labor under military discipline and fusing the unions with the state. He made clear the complaints about growing inequalities, differential rations and bonuses, dictatorial management, piece work, and the dead weight of bureaucracy that hung over every aspect of political and social life. Some of these themes had earlier been taken up by the Democratic Centralists. They were now articulated most fully in the widely circulated programme of the Workers' Opposition group<sup>44</sup> written by the only two prominent Bolsheviks to have supported Lenin's *April Theses* in 1917: Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shlyapnikov. They called for a restitution of the original values and practices of the revolution for which so many workers had given their lives and for which they had tolerated years of deprivation and the temporary suspension

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<sup>40</sup>Unger, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>42</sup>O. Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, NY 1974, pp. 234–236.

<sup>43</sup>See, in particular, M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London, 1969. See also the final three chapters of vol. 2 of my *Lenin's Political Thought*, London, 1978.

<sup>44</sup>The Workers' Opposition was perhaps the last remaining voice of the libertarian and workerphile tendency within the Communist Party. Its spokespersons were Alexandra Kollontai and Alexander Shlyapnikov. It had persistently protested against the marginalization of the workers' own organisations and the unstoppable rise of a bureaucratic centralism that paralyzed the initial goals of the revolution. Support for the group was strong among the industrial workers and, for that reason no doubt, it was shortly to be banned.

of their cherished organs of self-rule. But now the civil war was over. The pretext for the “temporary” suspension of democratic rights in the workers’ organizations no longer applied. The party should now fulfil its part of the implied contract. It had a fundamental choice to make: either increase its isolation from its class base by building up the dictatorial powers of commissars in industry and every aspect of public life; or recover the support of the workers by re-invigorating their trade unions, reinstating workers’ control, and ending communist exclusivism in the soviets. The party had lapsed into reliance on expertise and administrative efficiency overseen by a distant and irresponsible bureaucratic machine. Within the factories, the unchallengeable authority of the manager had been imposed early in the civil war. The workers had been exiled from any significant role in the management of their life’s work. That was the cause of the decline both of productive output, as well as of proletarian and socialist consciousness. If, as Lenin now argued, the proletariat had been declassed, the responsibility, according to the Workers’ Opposition, lay firmly with the party.

In brief, the regime had to choose between suffocating state bureaucracy or the resumption of working-class initiative. “Bureaucracy,” Kollontai concluded, “is a direct negation of mass self-activity.”<sup>45</sup> By the same token, mass self-activity was its only antidote: “It is impossible to decree communism. It can be created only in the process of practical research, through mistakes, perhaps, but only in the creative powers of the working class itself.”<sup>46</sup> Bureaucracy was, she insisted, the greatest threat to the socialist project in Russia. Unless it was quickly dealt with in its inner redoubt—the Party-state itself—there was little hope.

Lenin must have painfully recognized how closely this assessment conformed to Marx’s critique of Louis Bonaparte’s imperial regime, as well as to his own penetrating account of the state form of monopoly capitalism: a swollen and parasitic bureaucracy, in tandem with a dictatorial state machine, standing over a cowed and emasculated society. In four years, the wheel had turned full circle.

There might have been the possibility of some movement from Lenin on some of these deep concerns had it not been for the Kronstadt rebellion which broke out on the very day that the Tenth Party Congress convened. This rebellion, he immediately realised, posed an existential threat to the regime greater than that of all the White Guard armies. Behind it lay not

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

only the military power of the Kronstadt naval base in its citadel in the Gulf of Finland, but, more potently, the legendary revolutionary prowess of the Kronstadt sailors. In September 1917 Lenin had threatened the Bolshevik Central Committee that if they would not go with him, he would bring the Kronstadt sailors to them. Now the situation was reversed. He asked the delegates to the Tenth Congress to go to the Kronstadters to crush them. And why? Because they were calling for what he had called for in 1917.

The rebellion was a threat because it was so perilously close to Petrograd, hitherto a principal citadel of Bolshevik support, and the sailors had cemented close relations with its now disaffected industrial workers. So bad was the situation in Petrograd that a state of siege was declared in February and, on March 20, at Lenin's instruction, it was put under martial law.

The sailors' message was clear and persuasive. They could invoke all Lenin's writings of 1917 as the yardsticks by which to assess the true content of socialism and how it had withered away under communist domination. This was the socialism by which they had been interpellated<sup>47</sup> by the Bolsheviks, and then called to fight and to give their lives. In their manifesto they called for free soviets, recognition of all left socialist groups, including the anarchists, election of all officials, restitution of workers' control of industry, real equality within society, and an end to the domination of commissars and placemen, the freeing of socialist political prisoners and concessions to the peasants to stimulate resumption of trade.<sup>48</sup> No one could question the impeccable credentials of the sailors as the repository of the heroic values of the revolution. Kronstadt was the hero city. Its forces had been the first to the fray in the revolutions of both 1905 and 1917. In all the crises of the civil war, when situations seemed desperate, the Kronstadters had been summoned and never found wanting. And now, on behalf of all those who had fought for the socialism of 1917, they sent their call to all of Russia: "All power to the Soviets and not the parties."<sup>49</sup>

This, Lenin recognized, was the gravest threat of all, greater than that of all the counter-revolutionaries and monarchists put together. It impugned the very legitimacy of the regime that had been built. It threatened, unless immediately dealt with, to sweep away his fragile government. To grant the

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<sup>47</sup>L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London, 1979. I have examined the implications of the processes of interpellation and attribution of characteristics to the proletariat in my essay "Making and breaking the proletariat" in A. Kemp-Welch and J. Jennings, eds., *Intellectuals in Politics*, London, 1997, pp. 195–222.

<sup>48</sup>The Petropavlovsk Resolution is in I. Mett, *The Kronstadt Commune*, London, n.d.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

sailors' demands would result in powerful soviets of predominantly non-Bolshevik complexion. The communists, he acknowledged, were "but a drop in the ocean of the people." The whole administration of Russia was conducted by just a few thousand communists. They would be swept away in popular elections.

Lenin's instant response was to heap calumny on what he called the counter-revolutionary rebellion of Kronstadt. It was, he alleged, fomented and directed by White generals. For the first time, he resorted to black propaganda and the big lie. He was later to recant and admit that, "There they do not want either the White Guard or our government—and there is no other."<sup>50</sup>

Frantic preparations were set in train to attack the fortress town before the ice melted. To his gunners, Tukhachevsky, the ex-tsarist general, gave the order of the day: "Shoot them down like partridges." At the Tenth Party Congress then convening, a levy of 300 delegates was ordered to the front. From far and wide, troops were drafted in with machine gunners at their rear to stiffen their faltering resolve. They began the assault on the famous naval base. For eleven days, the Kronstadters held out; the expected rising of the Petrograd workers was stymied by Zinoviev's concessions and their fate was sealed. The retribution was savage; thousands died and thousands more escaped across the ice to Finland. And so, almost fifty years to the day after the Parisian communards were slaughtered at the *mur des fédérés*,<sup>51</sup> the anarchist soul of socialism in Russia was definitively crushed. This was the first great breach of blood of the Russian revolution, a lesson to all rebels from a ruthless and vengeful state.

The bloody repression of Kronstadt was quickly followed first by the banning of the Workers' Opposition,<sup>52</sup> and then of all platforms and factions within the party. To streamline business, the unwieldy Central Committee of the party was stripped of its real powers, which were now to be exercised by Sovnarkom, a secretariat was instituted to prepare agendas and supervise the placement of party personnel, an Orgburo was created, and, finally, the Central Control Commission was to see to the disciplining of party members and to ensure that they were free of corruption.

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<sup>50</sup>LCW, 32/228.

<sup>51</sup>At Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

<sup>52</sup>The group was led by Alexandra Kollontai and Mikhail Shlyapnikov. It is unsurprising that these were virtually the only Bolsheviks who, in 1917, had supported Lenin's *April Theses*, and that Shlyapnikov was almost the only prominent Bolshevik leader with a genuinely proletarian background.

Lenin gave notice to the Tenth Party Congress that the era of debates was over. It had, he insisted, been an act of folly to engage in the luxury of the trade union debate. No more factions, no more debates. He looked forward to “that very happy time when politics will recede into the background ... discussed less often and a shorter length and engineers and agronomists will do most of the talking... Henceforth less politics will be the best politics.”<sup>53</sup> Lenin now poured scorn on all those who would make a fetish of democratic procedures, “We do not believe in ‘absolutes.’ We laugh at ‘pure’ democracy.”<sup>54</sup> In a more pithy formulation, Lenin insisted that “Industry is indispensable, democracy is not.”<sup>55</sup> All of this was an almost exact reprise of the productivist themes of Saint-Simon a century earlier, who could perceive of no other purpose for society than the production of useful things. He too looked forward to the time “When politics has risen to the ranks of the sciences of observation...the cultivation of politics will be entrusted exclusively to a special class of scientists who will impose silence on all twaddle.”<sup>56</sup> The same logic now informed Lenin’s deep distaste for broad-based discussion of policies and priorities. He now believed they could serve no useful purpose since the crucial matters of production and distribution were amenable to statistical compilation and resolvable only by those with appropriate expertise and experience. Public, or even party-wide discussion, could only lead to fruitless disputation, “speechifying,” and fatal divisions. If there had to be discussion, it should be restricted to “the briefest discussion of only the most important questions in the narrowest collegial bodies, while the *practical management* of institutions, enterprises, undertakings or tasks, should be entrusted to one comrade.”<sup>57</sup> As a general rule, “Collegial methods must not exceed an absolute indispensable minimum...”<sup>58</sup> Democracy, he now maintained, was simply one of many state forms available to the regime but was, in the current situation, unsuited to the primary task of ensuring the most efficient allocation of scarce capital to guarantee maximal productive output. Socialism now defined itself in substantive rather than, as in the past, procedural terms: “...the form of democracy is one thing, and the class content

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<sup>53</sup>LCW, 39/34.

<sup>54</sup>32/504.

<sup>55</sup>32/27.

<sup>56</sup>H. Saint-Simon, *Selected Writings on Science, Industry and Social Organisation*, trans. and ed. K Taylor, London, 1975. p. 230.

<sup>57</sup>29/437.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., loc. cit.

of the given institution is another.”<sup>59</sup> The apotheosis of Lenin’s institutional relativism was the fateful conclusion that the institutional structures and constitutional character of the regime were of no importance whatsoever: “the *form of government* has absolutely nothing to do with it.”<sup>60</sup> All that mattered, he naively insisted, was the class content of the policies pursued. And here he has to presume that there can be no dispute as to what shall comprise the class interests of the vanished proletariat, or rather, that the ever more narrowly based leadership of the party is its infallible voice.

Lenin’s crude institutional relativism was, of course, a brutal repudiation of the whole ethos of the commune, which stood precisely for the sanctity of participatory democracy. It was a renunciation of the factory committees and Red Guard units, the soviets and the host of other institutions in and through which the workers had come to feel their dignity and realize their proletarian consciousness. These institutions constituted the sphere of activity that had once defined the socialist project. They were now displaced by universal labor mobilization ordained by the state, and by iron discipline and one-man management. Within the plants and factories, management was entrusted to technical experts overlooked by commissars responsible to their Sovnarkom departments. It all smacked very much of Marx’s account of crude communism.<sup>61</sup>

By March 1921, Lenin had to admit that the communist regime in Russia existed in a double vacuum of external political support and internal socio-economic base. Crucially, what remained of the industrial proletariat was demoralized and disaffected. Even its Petrograd *avant garde* was in open revolt. The Russian working class, he lamented, had “suffered, distress, want, starvation and the worsening of its economic positions such as no other class in history has suffered. It is not surprising that it is uncommonly weary, exhausted and strained.”<sup>62</sup> The workers, “have simply abandoned their factories; they have had to settle down in the country and have ceased to be workers ... that is the economic source of their declassing and the inevitable rise of petty-bourgeois, anarchist trends.”<sup>63</sup>

Lenin repeatedly attributed the widespread popularity of syndicalism and anarchism to the declassing of the proletariat. The Makhnovist insurrection

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<sup>59</sup>28/268.

<sup>60</sup>28/238.

<sup>61</sup>See the remarks on crude communism in *Economic and Philosophic Mss*, op cit. pp. 99–102.

<sup>62</sup>32/274.

<sup>63</sup>32/199.

in the Ukraine, the Workers' Opposition group within the party, the continuing Petrograd strikes, and the Kronstadt rebellion were all parts of a continuum of vacillating petty-bourgeois mentalities that weariness and privation had fostered. This spread of anarchist and syndicalist ideas was symptomatic, indeed definitive, of the declassing of the proletariat: "It is syndicalism because—consider this carefully—our proletariat has been largely declassed."<sup>64</sup>

Under the strains of war, desperate poverty and ruin, "the proletariat has become declassed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove, and ceased to be a proletariat ... since large-scale capitalist industry has been destroyed, the proletariat has disappeared."<sup>65</sup>

To his critics in the Workers' Opposition who demanded that rank and file workers be recruited into the administration, Lenin asked where they were to be found. Competent workers with the requisite training and expertise simply did not exist in Russia. Like it or not, this was a function of the appalling cultural lag afflicting every aspect of Russian life. The workers, Lenin lamented, were attempting to build a new society without themselves becoming new people. They were still standing up to their knees in the filth of the old society.<sup>66</sup>

It was in these desperate circumstances that the dictatorship of the proletariat was theorized and implemented in and through the Communist Party and the state it commanded.

Lenin now had to admit that the social base of the regime had withered away. It was in the same position as the dictatorships of the state monopoly capitalists. It could do nothing else but replicate many of the features of these regimes in order to reproduce its own power and await the coming of a new revolutionary wave. Like them, it would have to centralize resources in its own hands. It would have to insist upon the utmost unity of will, which meant a clamp down on all opposition and deviation. Democracy and debate could no longer be tolerated in a situation where the regime was increasingly isolated internally and encircled by hostile imperialist states. Dissent and deviation would be seized upon by enemies with potentially disastrous results. They were luxuries that, Lenin told the Tenth Party Congress, the party had been unwise to allow and could no longer tolerate. Again and again, he repeated the mantra: one dictatorship or the other.

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<sup>64</sup>32/199.

<sup>65</sup>33/23–24.

<sup>66</sup>28/424–425.

In the modern world, nothing else was on offer “Either the dictatorship (i.e. the iron rule) of the landowners and capitalists, or the dictatorship of the working class... There is no middle course... There is no middle course anywhere in the world nor can there be.”<sup>67</sup> There is, within the binary structure of this formulation, an elision of differing degrees of freedom and unfreedom that was to have disastrous consequences for the history of the twentieth century. In one part of the Marxist tradition that Lenin inherited, there was embedded, as we have seen, a determinist essentialism that made light of the forms, structures, balances, forbearances and culture of institutions that might have a bearing upon their worth. This was amply demonstrated in the theorization of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It could, Lenin and Bukharin argued, be exercised by the representatives of the whole class, or by a body that had “absorbed the revolutionary energy” of the class (the political party). Nor did it matter if the party leaders happened to be from a different social background from the class they governed. Dictatorship could even, as in the case of some bourgeois dictatorships, be exercised by one man. It was, they argued, the class substance of policies pursued that was decisive, and not at all the institutions, procedures, or personnel through which they were delivered. And thus, law and due process could be trumped by concerns for the integrity of the revolution: *salus revolutsia suprema lex*. Critics were identified as counter-revolutionaries, as later were social democrats and fascists. The Tenth Party Congress saw the formal confirmation of this process: no more democracy, no more debate and no more platforms. Criticism, however justified, especially *if* justified, was tantamount to counter-revolution. Such was the fate of the leaders of Workers’ Opposition, whose critique of endemic bureaucracy Lenin took up immediately after threatening them with what he called the vehicle of party criticism: the gun.

The Workers’ Opposition also broached some basic questions about Marxist accounts of the generation of socialist consciousness. They argued that to marginalize the participation of workers in the management of production, or of society more generally, would necessarily lead to the atrophying of their consciousness, and thus to their declassing. The workers’ path to consciousness could only be via their immediate felt experience of organization and active struggle; sensuous experience is the motor of consciousness, being and acting its source and limitation. The more universal and developed consciousness of those Marx calls the renegade bourgeois intellectuals is generated indirectly through study

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<sup>67</sup>29/559.

and reflection. This we may call exogenous in that it derives from mental and or moral imperatives that are external to social situation. The first is endogenous and has no other driver than experience of the severities of the workers' social existence.

It is clear from the *Manifesto* that the renegade bourgeois intellectuals, who are the prescient bearers of adequate consciousness, are able to develop, through study and reflection, an understanding that transcends both the determinations of their own social situation as well as those of the proletariat-in-process: "they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."<sup>68</sup> They have, and must have, this prescient understanding before the proletariat can exist as a class. This is because what *defines* the class is precisely the consciousness that only the renegade bourgeois ideologists possess. Their task is to so organize the nascent proletariat that, through their experience of guided struggle, they finally arrive at the consciousness and organization that define their class existence.<sup>69</sup> This is made clear in the very next paragraph of the *Manifesto*, where the "immediate aim" of the communists is defined as "formation of the proletariat into a class."<sup>70</sup> It is of course the communists who interpellate the workers and attach to them all the necessary characteristics to achieve the goals that theory set them. In brief, Marx inserts himself into the very constitution of proletarian being. The proletariat becomes Marx writ large as a corporate body bestriding the historical fate of all humanity.

The "portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole"<sup>71</sup> clearly have a huge advantage over educationally limited working men and women. This advantage is given by superior access to leisure and education. The party ideologists somehow escape the determined constraints of their own class background, to articulate the goal—and path to its realization—of a class that is not their own. It is their discourse that must be privileged in the political party, which alone can guide and constitute the emergent proletariat. It is a privileged discourse because it not only grasps the intricate totality of any historical conjuncture, but, more importantly,

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<sup>68</sup>MESW, 1/46.

<sup>69</sup>In the *Manifesto*, Marx attributes the failings of the utopian socialists to the infancy of the proletariat, presenting a spectacle of "a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement." *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>71</sup>MESW, 1/43.

can apprehend its future configuration. It is an indispensable prescient awareness that cannot be derived from immersion in the turbulence of the present. It is clear that the mode of knowing of the intellectuals cannot be given by the determinations of their social being, as prescribed by the general Marxian sociology of consciousness.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, the workers, *en route* to becoming proletarians, through enduring the grim realities of their social being, can only painfully learn from bitter struggle. They only purge themselves of utopian hopes, illusions and false friends by learning from their own mistakes. As Lenin pointed out many times, the proletariat comes to consciousness not through manuals or socialist Sunday schools, but through their own determined activity heightened in class war and revolution. The more they engage and participate, the more universal and fast-developing their activity becomes, the faster they learn. Revolution teaches; revolutions are the locomotives of history. Revolution as the activity of invading, appropriating and managing all the powers and prerogatives of the bourgeoisie, is the summation of this process. At this point, the working class emerged with properly proletarian consciousness. What was previously immanent in their being became actualized. Historical experience brought the working class closer to the level that the intellectuals of the party, from study and books, had arrived at earlier. In the process of escalating proletarian activity, from strikes to street demonstrations, to full engagement in their own counter-state organizations, their consciousness deepened and broadened out from the local to the national and international. In this revolutionary praxis of draining the state of its powers, the projections of Marxist theory were, Lenin exulted, brilliantly confirmed. The development of the consciousness of the proletariat was, therefore, inseparable from the activity in which it participated. The scale and depth of that activity, its quantity and quality, was also the measure of socialism attained. This is an abstract way of describing the history of Russia from April to October 1917.

It follows that, as the scale and depth of this activity diminished *after* October, so too must mass consciousness. As the agencies of active and continuous participation were emasculated, so, too, was the potency of proletarian will. There came a point when it ceased to be proletarian at all. In this analysis, the causal factor in declassing is the arrogation to the party-state of the powers and prerogatives previously exercised by the non- or anti-state,

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<sup>72</sup>Marx (like many political theorists beginning with Plato) has to posit the existence of escapees from the egregious determinations of daily existence.

organizations of the revolutionary proletariat. Their *social* grounding and efficacy, was scooped out by the hypertrophied statism of the developing Bolshevik regime.

Within a year of banning the Workers' Opposition group and crushing Kronstadt, decrying them both as syndicalist/anarchist deviationists, Lenin was taking up many of their points of criticism. The party, he increasingly found, was not up to the tasks of administering, managing enterprises, trading, or simply checking that things had been done. He maintained that 99% of communists were "unable to perform their duties."<sup>73</sup> Decrees followed decrees and were left to moulder in archives. Nobody checked whether they were ever implemented. Too often, party and state officials displayed the same arrogance and highhandedness as their tsarist predecessors and, like them, were too easily susceptible to bribes. Bureaucratic practices were rife within both the party and the state administrations, which had expanded at a dizzying speed, whilst the economic base they were supposed to manage had considerably shrunk. The administrative machinery had become parasitic—it was, Lenin ruefully noted, "out of all proportion to the scale of industry."<sup>74</sup> The nationalization of all social life, the absorption of all hitherto independent bodies into the state, was precisely what the revolution was meant to reverse. Nine-tenths of the machinery of state, Lenin now concluded, was not merely useless but harmful. He asked: do we have a state apparatus "worthy to be called socialist or soviet? No, we are ridiculously deficient of such an apparatus, and even of the elements of it."<sup>75</sup> The most important task confronting the implementation of the New Economic Policy was "to reorganise our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, and which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch."<sup>76</sup>

After censuring Kollontai for her "syndicalist" assaults on the party-state bureaucracy, banning her faction and expelling or exiling its leading members, Lenin almost immediately turned his attention to the bloated apparatus of the state and emerged with a critique far more thorough and coruscatingly savage than Kollontai's. After crushing Kronstadt, partly for its "petty-bourgeois" demands for concessions to the peasants so that the urban workers be fed, Lenin presented the Tenth Party Congress with his pamphlet *The Tax in Kind*, which did exactly that. On the crucial matter of the con-

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<sup>73</sup>LCW, 33/39.

<sup>74</sup>LCW, 32/38.

<sup>75</sup>LCW, 33/488.

<sup>76</sup>LECW, 32/31.

tinued monopoly of the Communist Party, he would not, however, give an inch. On the contrary, he strengthened, centralized and gave the monopoly a more powerful, less responsible organizational hierarchy.

Future survival of any sort dictated that trade between town and country be restored even at the cost of reviving a thriving capitalist milieu of rich peasants, middlemen and merchants. Taxes would be modified and prohibitions lifted so that the towns could be fed and industry restored.<sup>77</sup> It was, Lenin admitted, the capitalists who would profit from the New Economic Policy. It was their task to revive industry and thereby the proletariat.

“The capitalists will gain from our policy and will create an industrial proletariat, which in our country, owing to the war and desperate poverty and ruin, has become declassed, i.e. dislodged from its class groove and has ceased to exist as a proletariat... Since large-scale capitalist industry has been destroyed ... the proletariat has disappeared.”<sup>78</sup> It was not only native Russian capitalists who were involved. Great hopes were held out for the participation of the state trusts of capitalist countries in joint ventures and concessions within the framework of state control.<sup>79</sup> They would bring the latest technologies and industrial processes, without which a future advance to socialism would be impossible.<sup>80</sup> More immediately, they had the resources to feed large numbers of workers. State capitalism was, Lenin now conceded, as much as the regime could aim at. It was indeed “immeasurably superior to our present economic system.” The capitalists would, of course, all engage in swindling and huge profiteering, but that was the price to be paid for restoring trade and industry, for saving urban life and the prospects of the regime; “The rule of the proletariat cannot be maintained in a country laid waste as no country has ever been before ... without the help of capital.”<sup>81</sup>

The party now risked the encirclement of what remained of its urban industrial base by a bourgeois and petty bourgeois periphery. The class situation of the regime threatened to become ever more unstable. Counterweights would have to be found. There were only two possible sources of support: a strengthened, absolutely monolithic and ruthless state machine on the one hand, and the peasants, “personal incentives”<sup>82</sup> on the

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<sup>77</sup>This was the burden of Lenin's pamphlet *The Tax in Kind*, 32/214–228.

<sup>78</sup>LCW, 33/65.

<sup>79</sup>32/420, cf. 182.

<sup>80</sup>32/334.

<sup>81</sup>32/224.

<sup>82</sup>33/68.

other. This was, Lenin now reminded his party, not a workers' state, but a workers' and peasants' state with a bureaucratic twist.

We must, at this point, note a very curious and theoretically difficult point: the dictatorship of the proletariat was theorized at the time when the proletariat was held to be declassed and the regime was changing its proximate goal to the attainment of state capitalism rather than socialism. But if this were the case, what sense could be made of the idea of the dictatorship of a non-existent class? Lenin's response to this conundrum was that a dictatorship can never be exercised by the whole class, "It can only be exercised by a vanguard that has absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class."<sup>83</sup> It was not proletarian membership that made a proletarian party. If that were the case, the British Labour Party would be pre-eminent. Of more importance were "the men that lead it and the content of its actions and its political tactics."<sup>84</sup> As we saw above, this was quite consistent with Marx's views on the role of the communists as the bearers of advanced consciousness. They had a clearer view of the aims and historical mission of the proletariat for the good reason that they (or rather Marx) had given the proletariat their characteristics, the destination they were to arrive at, as well as their manner of getting there. The proletariat in the Marxian scheme was a historiosophical construction that "puts world-historical, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones."<sup>85</sup>

This was a theoretical and not an empirical category. To discover the real being of the proletariat, it was, therefore, otiose to take a census of their opinions: "It is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the whole proletariat *considers* its interest to be but what the proletariat *is* and what *consequent on that being*, it is compelled to do."<sup>86</sup> This is, once again, a difficult position for the general Marxist sociology of consciousness, which insists that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,"<sup>87</sup> except, it would seem, in the crucial cases of the renegade bourgeois intellectuals and the proletariat, for whom a double exclusionary

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<sup>83</sup>32/21. In *Statism and Anarchy*, Bakunin had poured scorn on the idea of a class dictatorship, pointing to the impossibility of, for instance, gathering together 40 million Germans. What this dictatorship really meant was the "despotic rule... of genuine or sham scientists... No dictatorship can have any other aim than that of self-perpetuation." Quoted in G.P. Maximoff, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, London, 1953, pp. 287–278.

<sup>84</sup>LCW, 31/258.

<sup>85</sup>MECW, 5/49.

<sup>86</sup>MECW, 4/37.

<sup>87</sup>MECW, 16/469.

dispensation has to be granted. In neither case does social being determine consciousness.

It was always the discourse of the intellectuals that was privileged. This was the more so with the prominence Lenin gave to the dialectic. The dialectic became, as we have already seen, the methodological basis of all politics and all social, historical and philosophical study and criticism. It was grandiose in its pretensions and complex in its linguistic formulations. It presumed a polymath's range of knowledge and articulation. It was a universal explanatory system, capable of grasping phenomena in their contradictory inner construction, complex interaction, change and metamorphosis. It alone grasped the totality of the natural and human worlds. It presumed, therefore, a prolonged period of study and considerable intellectual ability. It was indeed so testing that Lenin confided in his *Testament* that not even Bukharin, the outstanding theoretician of the party, had grasped its import.<sup>88</sup> The other side of this coin was that the comrade most versed in its methodology, and experienced in its application, should assume direction of social and political affairs.<sup>89</sup> It is not accidental that subsequent unchallengeable leaders of communist parties, from Stalin to Mao,<sup>90</sup> insisted upon recognition of their unique competence in this science of sciences.

The dialectic, scrupulously and exhaustively applied, would yield the optimum resolution of all questions about the nature of the current epoch and the policies appropriate to it. It followed that the person with greatest facility and experience in its usage should assume leadership of the party and/or regime. Since the dialectic had to speak with one voice (its status as science would be impugned if more than one voice was heard), it followed that the party leader has to set the programmatic and strategic goals of the party. It is further axiomatic that the proletariat also has to speak with a single voice since it cannot be the epochal vehicle of change if it is divided against itself. Unanimity is characteristic of its discourse. There is a single discoverable proletarian will. Neither Marx nor Lenin was prepared to concede that there might be legitimate alternative specifications of socialism and

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<sup>88</sup>Lenin's so-called *Testament* (Letter to the Congress) LCW, 36/ 593–597 contained his assessments of the leadership suitability of all the prominent contenders.

<sup>89</sup>This is Plato's argument from *techné*; those best versed, through arduous study and reflection in the arts of governing, should assume the leadership of the *polis*. See *The Republic*, passim.

<sup>90</sup>Stalin insisted on authoring the chapter on dialectics in the compulsory textbook on the *History of the CPSU*. Not to be outdone, Mao wrote his obligatory text, *On Contradiction*.

proletarian purpose. On the contrary, they both remorselessly criticized all rival formulations in the name of the *real* movement of the class.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion: Disenchantment and Despair

We should be properly cautious about relating psychological traits to ideological positions but there is ample evidence to support the contention that Lenin was never disposed to seek the middle ground. Negotiated compromise was no more part of his methodology than it was of Marx's. They were both vehement opponents of the *juste milieu*. They had unshakeable faith in the rectitude of their worldviews and the policies that stemmed from them. All other formulations were not simply mistaken, but mischievous, in that they gave succour to the enemy and threatened the essential unity of thought and action of the proletariat. Without that unity the proletariat would be unable to fulfil the global liberatory struggle to realize a world fit for humans under socialism. Central to both men was the insistence that the modern world comprised two essential economic and political forces, capitalism/bourgeoisie and socialism/proletariat. All else was socially and politically marginal and indecisive. Everything else would eventually be absorbed by one or the other. The dichotomy became daily more apparent and inescapable: one side or the other. History itself destroys the middle. Either—or. Choose! This is a sort of Manichean determinism, the irresolvable contest between darkness and light, spirit and matter.

Lenin was honest enough to admit that his earlier actions and exhortations had substantially contributed to the desperate situation in which Russia found itself. The biggest mistake, he now conceded, was to have based the whole project on an immediate advance to Communism that is, on the programme of the Commune. This, both he and Bukharin now admitted, had greatly increased the costs of the revolution.<sup>92</sup> He voiced the predominant communist view of the time maintaining that the costs of the revolution were “determined by the depth of the Communist

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<sup>91</sup>A large proportion of Marx's literary output is devoted to painstaking and painful critique of all rival socialist theorists, with the possible exceptions of Blanqui and Saint-Simon. See also Marx's account of the factions which he, as leader of the General Council, had to contend with in the First International. It was, he confided to Engels, “*a continual struggle ... against the sects and amateur experiments that attempted to assert themselves... against the genuine movement of the working class.*” *Marx-Engels, Correspondence*, ed. D. Torr, London, 1936, p. 316. He concluded that “The development of the system of Socialist sects and that of the real workers' movement always stand in inverse ratio to each other.” *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>92</sup>Bukharin, *Economics*, pp. 95–96.

revolution.” In other words, the costs were proportionate to the radicalness of its programme. It followed that “the proletarian revolution is inevitably accompanied by a strong decline of productive powers.”<sup>93</sup> This, again, was an inversion of what Lenin and the Bolsheviks had predicted and counted upon. It was, Lenin had earlier insisted, only the most radical dismemberment of existing structures through the unrestrained initiatives of the popular masses that would save Russia from the accumulation of crises she faced. Along with Bukharin, he now had to admit that it was precisely these movements that had exacerbated the crises: “we made the mistake of deciding to go over directly to communist production and distribution.”<sup>94</sup> Worst of all in this respect was the decision on the grain monopoly and the mobilization of armed requisition squads to appropriate grain from the peasants.

The excesses of workers’ control and the unregulated spate of factory nationalizations from below, together with the expulsion of technical and managerial staff, had resulted in catastrophic fracturing of the fragile economy, and rapid decline in output. The onset of virtual war on the peasantry, with the resultant cessation of trade between town and country, had enormously exacerbated the collapse of industry, the mass exodus of workers, and the consequent declassing of the proletariat.

The programme for the Commune, based upon the immediate advance to communism, an end to bossing and all structures of domination and subordination, had, in the radical practice of the revolution, dissolved all discipline and order. It certainly contributed to the catastrophic collapse of industrial production and created severe tensions between the workers and the technical intelligentsia that arguably festered for decades. It was abundantly clear that the projections about the ease of initiating a state of 10 or 20 million people utilizing the “readily available” organizational structures bequeathed by state-monopoly capitalism, were hopelessly utopian and naïve. It was a highly theorized programme that took its whole inspiration from Marx’s own highly theorized accounts of the short-lived Paris Commune. These accounts were in turn derived from Rousseau’s vision of the moral economy of a face-to-face, small-scale community of equals, all of whom were to be engaged in all the business of their self-administration. It was, for Rousseau at least, a form of non-state administration that fitted well the avowedly pre-capitalist economy he sought to preserve. In this

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>94</sup>LCW, 33/62 This was exactly the judgement that Saint-Simon had come to with regard to the French Revolution. It had radically destroyed the old order, but the costs had been enormous, and it had bequeathed no positive principles for building a new organic order for industry and society.

conspectus of small-scale production for immediate need, there was no call for extensive trade or even large towns. The volume of public business would therefore be limited in volume and complexity, making it genuinely accessible to all. It was a pre-modern dream of universal participation, and absence of dependence, in an economy of principled frugality. Lenin naively believed that these pre-modern forms of popular administration could not only be combined with the demands of the ages of steam and electricity, but were, in fact, the only administrative forms that could unleash their potential.

By 1920, the triumvirate of Lenin,<sup>95</sup> Bukharin<sup>96</sup> and Trotsky<sup>97</sup> were agreed that the revolution had been enormously successful in breaking down the ancestral relations of domination in all sectors of society. In this it had been radical indeed. But it had signally failed to create a positive alternative to capitalist disciplines<sup>98</sup>; it had tragically broken down the crucial technical and managerial linkages in the processes of production and distribution.

The programme for the Commune had excited unrealizable expectations that further contributed to disillusion and resentment. None of its promises had been realized in the four years since the revolution. There was to be no more talk of the Commune. As early as June 1919, Lenin advised his colleagues that it would “be a good thing to eliminate the word ‘commune’ from common use.”<sup>99</sup> From 1920, it had almost vanished from Lenin’s vocabulary. It had become toxic as an immanent critique of all that had happened since the revolution; a painful reminder of promises not kept, hopes unfulfilled and dignity lost. After 1921, it ironically featured in soviet historiography only as the failed Parisian rising of 1871 and as a reminder of the brutal reprisals visited by the bourgeoisie upon working men.

Over the period of the Long Revolution, we have two differing economic analyses that yielded very different prospectuses for socialism, differing modes of consciousness and very different prescriptions for the organization and membership characteristics of the party. We have glimpsed the complex tensions of Marxism in action in its moments of greatest salience to the world. In his efforts to comprehend and mould this tumultuous world,

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<sup>95</sup>Lenin, “*Left wing*” *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, LCW, 31/21–118.

<sup>96</sup>N. Bukharin, *Economics and Politics of the Transformation Period*, New York, 1971.

<sup>97</sup>L. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, Ann Arbor, 1961.

<sup>98</sup>This had been Saint-Simon’s conclusion about the French Revolution of 1789–1791. His positive programme for redressing the damage done was integrated into Marx’s accounts of the dictatorship of the proletariat and now into the soviet communist version of socialism that was to predominate until 1991. See the introductory chapter of my *The State in Socialist Society*, London, 1984.

<sup>99</sup>29/431.

Lenin ran the gamut of the possibilities that Marxism had on offer and ended, finally, in despair.

Having narrowed the parameters of self-activity from the whole mass of the Russian people to the class of proletarians, and thence to its vanguard the party, which absorbed its revolutionary energy, Lenin was finally forced to concede that the party itself was not up to its tasks. He despairingly sought refuge in concentrating the tiny number of competent, loyal and trustworthy personnel in an exemplary body with plenipotentiary powers over both party and state—the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate. So tiny was their number that he feared that personality flaws might have dire consequences. Too late, he responded to concerns that Stalin had concentrated too much power in his hands. Too late, he advised his comrades to remove Stalin from his post as General Secretary of the party; his rudeness, lack of tolerance and loyalty was not a capricious detail but could assume "decisive importance."<sup>100</sup> But Lenin was, by this time, trapped in the web he had created.

He had been the principal architect of the dictatorship that brooked no opposition, that boasted about its unrestrained power and derided liberal notions of legal or moral restraints upon state power. He had proudly formulated the infamous definition of dictatorship as "rule based upon force and unrestricted by any laws."<sup>101</sup> It was a form of rule present in successive epochs of history since it was "necessary to all ascendant classes." And for the proletariat it was "an inevitable, essential and absolutely indispensable means of emerging from the capitalist system."<sup>102</sup> As ever, Lenin made a virtue out of necessity and, as ever, he had to gloss it in grandiose theoretical terminology to insist that causal determination permits no alternative. He distilled the formulations that would warrant the untimely demise of almost all his close party colleagues, and, far more tragically, huge numbers of people innocent of any complicity in their formulation.

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<sup>100</sup>Letter to the Congress, 29/506.

<sup>101</sup>28/236.

<sup>102</sup>29/373.

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## Author Biography

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## Lenin's Conception of the Party

Natasha Gómez Velázquez

### Before Lenin

In the history of Marxist thought, two periods of interpretation have arisen regarding the nature of the proletarian party. The first period was twentieth century socialism and the second period was twenty-first century socialism. Within twentieth century socialism, two general models of the proletarian party evolved: the social democratic formula of Western Europe and the Leninist vanguard formula within pre- and post-revolutionary Russia. This chapter analyzes the difference between the Leninist, social democratic and Latin American models.

The theory of the proletarian party did not appear in Marxist thought until the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup> in Lenin's writings because Marx and Engels did not develop a conception of a party which could act as the vehicle for the realization of the political demands of the working class.

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Mandel, for example, asserted: "It's well known that Marx never completed a uniform concept of the Party..." *La teoría leninista de la organización*. [http://ernestmandel.org/es/escritos/pdf/form\\_teoría-leninista-organización.pdf](http://ernestmandel.org/es/escritos/pdf/form_teoría-leninista-organización.pdf), p. 33. Slavoj Žižek states Lenin "formalized" Marx's theory because he "defined" the party as a "Political form" of "historical intervention". *Repetir Lenin*. Editorial Akal, Madrid, 2004, p. 34.

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There is a difference between politics and a party. The political relates to the goals, or the ends, of the proletarian movement. The party relates to the instruments, or the organizational tools by which the proletariat could reach these political goals. In other words, the political refers to the ultimate purpose while the party refers to the concrete praxis.

It was Lenin who initially advanced the principles of a specifically proletarian party. The circumstances that prevailed in Russia and the ideas of a circle of revolutionary Marxists served as the breeding ground out of which a concept of a “party of a new type” emerged. In addition, debates within Western European social democratic parties about organizational structure were another source stimulating controversy over the nature of the Russian party structure. Lenin’s approach was enriched not only by the debates inside of Russia, but also by the clash of ideas within European social democracy with which he was familiar.

It cannot be said that Marx and Engels were oblivious to the problems of party organization. They took part in the foundation of the Communist League (1847) and they wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, which embodied an explicitly practical and revolutionary ethos. Nonetheless, they “did not proclaim special principles by which the proletariat movement would want to adjust itself.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, they were oriented towards the shaping of the political objective, the struggle against the international bourgeoisie.

In any case, the experience of the League provided the idea of an international communist entity based on theoretical presuppositions, which later on was supported by Marx’s works on economics, that the class contradictions of the bourgeoisie and proletariat superseded national frontiers. This party entity fell under the leadership of the Central Committee. Towards 1850, in responding to the revolutionary conditions of Western Europe, Marx and Engels declared themselves in favor of an international workers organization that was based on a centralized structure.<sup>3</sup> This plan was finally realized in 1864 with the founding of the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), also known as the First International. Its statutes, which were originally written by Marx, espoused the idea of forming centralized national parties to be directed by an annually elected General Council.

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<sup>2</sup>Marx, C.; Engels, F. *Manifiesto Comunista*. Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 1979, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>Marx, C.; Engels, F. *Mensaje del Comité Central a la Liga de los Comunistas*. Selected Works in two volumes, Editions in Foreign Languages, Moscow, vol. 1, p. 108.

The Congress of the IWA in 1872 proposed that every national proletariat should direct its activities toward “forming ... a political Party.”<sup>4</sup>

At approximately the same time, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, most West European countries developed democratic systems. Voting rights were expanded and these developments witnessed the origination of multi-party systems. These circumstances made it possible within most of the nations of Western Europe for working class parties to arise that gradually embraced Marxism. These parties generally assumed the name of “social democrats.” After the Russian revolution of 1917, small “left wing” parties sprang up throughout Western Europe, rejected “social democracy” as incapable of overthrowing capitalism and, in following Lenin, adopted the name of the Communist Party. In so doing, they rescued the true theoretical and political meaning of Marxism.

Marxism initially identified itself with “communism” so as to distinguish itself from “socialist utopians” and the “social healers,” as Engels recalled. Later, in 1851–1852, Marx also distinguished himself from social democratic ideology because it compromised the interests of the workers. He suggested that the political term “social democrat” was born during the June Days of the Revolution of 1848. Within the Revolution of 1848, a coalition of petit bourgeois and workers was formed and became a social democratic party, which entailed losing the political independence of the workers and surrendering the anti-capitalist revolution.<sup>5</sup> In 1875, in building upon the work of Ferdinand Lassalle, the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany was formed. The party of Lassalle described itself as “social democratic,” a descriptive term that had already been used by two predecessors. In his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx attacked Lassalle’s party as not being socialist. According to Karl Korsch, these parties were never truly Marxist and their contact with the “true” revolutionary message of Marx was only superficial.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the term “social democrat” spread among the workers’ parties that were eager to spread Marxism during the second half of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>4</sup>Marx, C; Engels, F. *Estatutos de la Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores*. Idem., pp. 400–401. Marx ratifies in 1875 that the First International was a “first attempt to give ... a central organ...” to the international activity of the proletariat. *Crítica al Programa de Gotha*, Idem., vol. 2, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>Engels, F. Preface to the German edition of 1890 of the *Communist Manifesto*. *Manifiesto comunista*, Op.cit., pp. 13–14. Marx, C. *El 18 brumario de Luis Bonaparte*. Selected works in 2 volumes, Op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 256; 278–279.

<sup>6</sup>Korsch, K. “The present state of the problem of Marxism and philosophy.” In *Marxismo y filosofía*, Editions Era, Mexico, 1971, p. 63.

## Lenin's Theory of the Party and Bolshevism

The organizational model for the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) was fully outlined by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902). Although it was initially proposed in *Where To Begin?* (1901), *What Is To Be Done?* was later presented to the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903. Its presentation created a debate of historical significance. Twentieth century socialism found a birthplace. This debate, which turned on item one of the statutes, resulted in dividing the party into Bolsheviks (majority) and Mensheviks (minority). Irrespective of its name, Bolshevism became a minority approach under the leadership of one man: Lenin. However, the essential difference between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks did not arise from disagreements over the party organization. Rather, the differences between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks emerged over their respective interpretations of the concept of revolution.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Bolshevism can be defined as representing the truly revolutionary tendency, while Menshevism can be defined as representing reformism.

Nevertheless, Bolshevik Party militants showed a great deal of flexibility regarding these ideological disputes. Opposed to Lenin, these Bolsheviks did not think that agreements with the Mensheviks over strategic issues would harm or compromise their revolutionary aspirations. Therefore, in the strict sense and from a theoretical point of view, Bolshevism was not a rigid and uncompromising ideology. Rather, it was both a "school of thought and a political party."<sup>8</sup> At different party debates, Bolshevik militants expressed their opposition and disapproval, compelling Lenin to ratify the revolutionary principle of Bolshevism.<sup>9</sup> Throughout all these historical events of

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<sup>7</sup>See: 1) Lukács, G. *Lenin. La coherencia de su pensamiento*. In <http://www.insumisos.com/lecturainsu-misa/El%20pensamiento%20de%20Lenin.pdf>, pág. 33. 2) Pannekoek, A. "Lenin as philosopher. A critical examination of the foundations of Marxism." In *La izquierda germano-holandesa contra Lenin*. Edition Espartaco Internacional, 2004, p. 257.

<sup>8</sup>Lenin, V.I. *La enfermedad infantil del "izquierdismo" en el comunismo*. Selected Works in 12 volumes, Editorial Progreso, Moscow, 1973, volume XI, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>For example: 1) the refusal of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* to publish, in the name of the party, Lenin's speech of April 3rd, 1917 (*April Theses*). It described a revolutionary and potentially socialist situation, while other Bolshevik leaders held the criterion of Menshevik reformism. 2) Zinoviev and Kamenev revealed the agreement to insurrection of the Bolshevik Central Committee, in which they were involved, maintaining the Mensheviks' same arguments. See: Trotsky, L. *Historia de la revolución rusa*. Editorial Quimantú, Santiago de Chile, 1972, volume 1, pp. 364; 378; 535. Grant, T. and A. Woods, *Lenin y Trotsky, qué defendieron realmente*. Fundación Federico Engels, 2000, pp. 80; 94; 194–202.

pre-1917 Europe, Bolshevism was the tribune, the revolutionary messenger within twentieth century socialism.<sup>10</sup>

## Lenin's Theory of the Party

The RSDLP was founded in a socio-political context very different from that of Western European socialist parties. Consequently, the experience of the latter did not provide the RSDLP with any useful models to copy. The Russian experience called for a hitherto unknown type of political praxis, a new model that could only be satisfied by a "party of a new type."

The party organizational formula invented by Lenin was designed for the specific Russian conditions of the early twentieth century. Lenin's party institutional model was a combination of two features. First, it contained features of universal applicability; second, it was designed for the unique conditions of Russia's socio-political history. Regarding the second point, Lenin, in the prologue of *What Is To Be Done?* mentioned his intention to "create ... a fighting organization destined for all of Russia." He specified that *What Is To Be Done?* was directed at forming "the organization we need," as distinguished, for example, from the German Social Democratic Workers' Party.

The German Party was composed of a large political following because the laws of the German Empire legalized the existence of a social democratic party. The party enjoyed significant representation in the Reichstag. It further controlled trade union activity. It also benefited from great political and theoretical experience. And, finally, it was trained in strategies to be used in bourgeois democracy. Conversely, the "darkness of autocracy" within the Russian Empire did not provide the RSDLP with a similar democratic environment. Therefore, Lenin was compelled to promote the idea of party centralization as an institutional principle for the Bolshevik Party structure.

The thesis of party centralism corresponded to the imperative of forming a single social democratic party within the Russian Empire, that is to say a unified center of gravity for all anti-tsarist, or oppositional agencies, which remained fragmented and decentralized even after the founding of the

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<sup>10</sup>Only the *full* history of the life period of Bolshevism could suitably explain why it was able to forge and keep, under the toughest conditions, the strict discipline required for the victory of the proletariat". Lenin, V.I. *La enfermedad infantil del "izquierdismo" en el comunismo*. Op.cit., p. 4.

RSDLP. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were still localized cells of a social democratic nature spread across the enormous extent of the Russian Empire, which, however, remained politically impotent because of the localization.<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, the necessary centralization espoused by Lenin not only pointed toward structural unification, but also toward a kind of “monolithic functionality.” Lenin understood that the unique political conditions of tsarist Russia demanded an organization led by about ten “professional revolutionaries” with the authority to make decisions affecting the party at any level and on any issue: “we need this confidence because it cannot be held against us in Russia to substitute party leadership for general democratic control.”<sup>12</sup>

Tsarism compelled the Bolsheviks to assume unlawful activities, as well as to protect its most important figures, including those working clandestinely, in exile or in emigration. Yet the number of Bolshevik leaders had to be limited. This would guarantee the “continuity” and “stability” of the party’s political work, because “in the country of autocracy” it was necessary to master “the art of fighting against the political police.” On the other hand, Lenin asserted that this “concentration of all functions in the hands of the least possible number of revolutionary professionals” did not mean “that they will do the thinking for everyone,” and that the mass of the people will not take an active part in the movement.<sup>13</sup>

This functional centralism was also conditioned by additional factors specific to Russian Marxism. These included: limitations inherent to a newly founded party with no historical experience; a low level of theoretical thought, political consciousness and education; and its corruption by “economist” tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

The centralized design, which stressed the leadership of the party in terms of politics, theory and consciousness, brought the model of the party closer to the position of revolutionary Russian populism, which Lenin recognized as a part of his political “inheritance.”<sup>15</sup> Georg Lukács pointed out the

<sup>11</sup>Lenin, V.I. *¿Qué hacer?*, Selected Works in 3 Volumes, Foreign Languages Edition, Moscow, 1960, volume 1, pp. 125; 127; 243–244; 246.

<sup>12</sup>Idem., pp. 209; 231–232; 242; 246.

<sup>13</sup>Idem., pp. 231–232.

<sup>14</sup>Idem., pp. 143–144; 168.

<sup>15</sup>Lenin sees himself as a “pupil” of this populism, which he admits to having “inherited”. *¿Qué hacer?*, Op.cit., pp. 144–145; 147. *¿A qué herencia renunciamos?* Selected Works in 3 volumes, Op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 110; 116–117. On the other hand, he is not aware of the harmful consequences of the populist component in Marxism. Towards 1921, for example, even after the Menshevik turn of Plekhanov, whose background was in populism, Lenin suggests that young people study Marxism

relationship between Russian populism and Lenin. Michael Löwy also stated that Lenin “had inherited from the nineteenth century Russian revolutionary movement the conviction of the omniscience of party leaders.”<sup>16</sup>

The monopoly of the party leadership in terms of political education was most clearly expressed in Lenin's polemical statement, *What Is To Be Done?* In reiterating Kautsky's view, Lenin asserted and reasserted countless times that Marxist consciousness should come from outside the working class. This formulation supposed that the so-called proletarian masses inherently possessed a predisposition for the economic reformist type of struggle. *What Is To Be Done?* also affirmed that only the vanguard sector of party intellectuals recognized the need for the centrality of organization and revolutionary activity. It was the mission of the vanguard wing of the party to introduce from the outside this conviction to the working masses.<sup>17</sup>

The concrete institutional principles of the Leninist conception of the party were contentiously debated. But Lenin's political principles of the party were generally accepted. Lenin's position was based on the belief that a centrally organized party was necessary to reach the political goals of Marxism—that is, a revolution. Lenin's thesis, which assumed the actuality, hence the real possibility of a revolutionary transformation, had no relevance to the Western European context of reformist social democracy. Reformist social democracy postponed the revolution in transferring it to a belief in historical inevitability. Corresponding to this belief in historical inevitability, Western European social democratic reformism adapted pacifist political policies in the face of capitalism.<sup>18</sup> In opposition to reformist pacifism,

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from the writings of the “masters.” He then proposes to publish the complete works of Plekhanov and its arrangement as “obligatory manuals”. V.I. Lenin. *Una vez más acerca de los sindicatos y los errores de Trotsky y Bujarin* (1921). Selected Works in 12 volumes, Editorial Progreso, Moscow, 1973, vol. XI, p. 159.

<sup>16</sup>Lukács admits the populist “heritage” in the theory of the workers-peasants' alliance. *Lenin. La coherencia de su pensamiento*. In <http://www.insumisos.com/lecturainsumisa/El%20pensamiento%20de%20Lenin.pdf>, p. 28. Löwy, M. *Class consciousness and revolutionary Party. Pensamiento crítico*, Havana, No. 4, 1967, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup>Although Lenin admits the possibility of some workers becoming theorists (Weitling and Proudhon), this could only take place through the action of a learned vanguard sector. *¿Qué hacer?*, Op.cit., pp. 149; 156–157; 192. Mandel and Korsch recall that the concept “from outside” was introduced in social democracy by the Hainfeld Programme (1888–1889) of the Austrian Party. Mandel, E. *La teoría leninista de la organización*, Op.cit., Note 1, p. 33. Korsch, K. *The present state of the problem of Marxism and philosophy. Marxismo y Filosofía*, Op.cit., Note 92, pp. 63–64.

<sup>18</sup>Lukács, G. *Lenin, la coherencia de su pensamiento*, Op.cit. pp. 17–19; 25; 36. Also see the Prologue of N. Kohan, named *Philosophy and fire (Lukacs before Lenin)*, p. 5. On Marxism as a “global and unitary theory of the social revolution” and the reformist revisionism of the Second International, see: Korsch, K. *Marxismo y filosofía*. Op.cit., pp. 33–35. Ernest Mandel states that the “proven old tactic” of German social democracy did not think about the revolution's imminence. *Rosa Luxemburgo y la*

and in further contrast to trade union conciliation, Lenin identified revolutionary struggle as the essential strategy of the party. He further established party “avant-gardism,” as opposed to Western European mass party compromise. He was a powerful advocate in favor of the discipline and the political consciousness of his vanguard party.<sup>19</sup>

## Luxemburg’s Critique

The organizational formula presented in *What Is To Be Done?* and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* acquired the historical significance of a model of the party within twentieth century socialism. For the first time in the history of Marxism, and brought about by the unique conditions of Tsarist Russia, a systematic portrait of the party was expounded. But this Leninist theory of the party was not universally accepted. The split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks gave rise to an impassioned debate concerning these Leninist principles. The revolution of 1917 and the founding of the Third International created new conditions that provided the impetus for the continuation of the debate on the Leninist theory of the party.

Rosa Luxemburg was one of the first to criticize Lenin’s theory of the party, which became a major topic of debate. In later years, many other Marxists joined this controversy. A list of contributors includes the names of Lukács, Karl Korsch, Louis Althusser, Löwy and Ernest Mandel.<sup>20</sup> The critiques were aimed at what was considered as an excessively centralized, hierarchical design of the party, which at best was only valid for Russia. The most relevant issue in these critiques was that Lenin’s theory of the party diminished democratic activity within the party and underestimated the

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*Socialdemocracia Alemana*. Edition from Marxists Internet Archive, August, 2009. [http://www.marxists.org/espanol/mandel/1971/marzo/rosa\\_l\\_y\\_la\\_socdem\\_alemana.html](http://www.marxists.org/espanol/mandel/1971/marzo/rosa_l_y_la_socdem_alemana.html).

<sup>19</sup>Lenin, V.I. *¿Qué hacer?*, Op.cit., pp. 127; 168, 172, 183, 186, 198, 233; 242; 246. *Un paso adelante, dos pasos atrás*. Selected works in 3 volumes, Op.cit., vol. 1, pp. 232–233.

<sup>20</sup>The original critique came from Luxemburg; the other authors have gradually defined their position. See the works cited in the present work, as well as:

- 1) Lukács, G. *Historia y conciencia de clases*, Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 1970, p. 72 and the essays “Critical considerations on Rosa Luxemburg’s critique of the Russian revolution” and “Methodological considerations on the organization matter”;
- 2) Gramsci, A. *Espontaneidad y dirección consciente*. Marxist Internet Archive, 2002;
- 3) Althusser, L. *Por Marx*, Edición Revolucionaria, Havana, 1966, p. 12.

competence of the proletarian classes to perform as historical subjects, or—perhaps better—to act as revolutionary agents.

The most radical and systematic critique was made in 1904 by Luxemburg. Her critique reflected the fact that she came from a different political context. Luxemburg, who remained unshakably committed to her own beliefs, consistently pointed to the dangers of excessive centralism in Lenin's version of the party. But she always rejected all reformist and Menshevik positions regarding the party<sup>21</sup> and accepted the political maxims that underlie the vanguard character of the party. Though she opposed excessive centralization, she generally ascribed to revolutionary and Marxist claims for the legitimacy of Bolshevism. Furthermore, her diverse polemics with the Bolshevik leader served as the fertile soil out of which “Western Marxism” evolved. Her expansive political and theoretical work, encouraged by her revolutionary convictions validate her role as the other great figure of revolutionary Marxism during the first two decades of twentieth century socialism.<sup>22</sup>

Luxemburg aimed her critique against “ultra-centralism,” which she believed threatened the success of the revolution.<sup>23</sup> There were five points in her critique of ultra-centralism:

1. It would contribute to the establishment of a leading bureaucratic wing of the party that would become conservative in politics and would “favor personal ambition”;<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>She was the first Marxist—in the Stuttgart Congress (1898) and the Hanover Congress (1899) of the German Party—to criticize the revisionist and also the orthodox reformism, which reached a crisis on August 4th 1914 in the vote for the war credits in the German parliament. See: *Reform or Revolution* (1900).

<sup>22</sup>Mandel argues that Luxemburg developed the Theory of the Revolution for the West and Lenin for the East. *Rosa Luxemburgo y la Socialdemocracia Alemana*, Op.cit. The influence was such that, in the 1920s, Korsch considered the “Leninist” and the “Luxemburgist” tendencies were both present in the Third International. See: *The Present State of the Problem of Marxism and Philosophy. Marxismo y Filosofía*, Op.cit., Notes 97 and 98, pp. 66–67; and Korsch, K. *Lenin and the Comintern. Marxismo y Filosofía*, pp. 110–111.

<sup>23</sup>Luxemburgo, R. *Problemas de organización de la socialdemocracia rusa*, Selected Works in 2 volumes, Editorial Pluma, Bogota, 1976, vol. 1, pp. 149–150.

<sup>24</sup>He states that, when absolute powers are given to the centre, “we dangerously strengthen the conservatism inherent to such organisms...” He adds: “nothing will contribute as much to the submission of a young workers’ movement by an intellectual elite eager for power, as this bureaucratic straitjacket, that will paralyze the Party and turn it into an automaton operated by a Central Committee...” The “most effective guarantee against the opportunistic intrigue and the personal ambition” is the “independent revolutionary action of the proletariat” where the workers gain “political responsibility and self-confidence.” Idem., pp. 156; 162.

2. It would significantly reduce the democratic activity internal to, and external to, the party;
3. It would systematically delegate functions to an authoritarian center, “which would become the only core to take decisions, think and guide,” and consequently strip the working class of its responsibility as the historical subject of the revolution, turning the working class into a passive object of the revolutionary process.<sup>25</sup>
4. Centralization would reproduce the conditions of capitalist domination and subordination. An authoritarian Central Committee would only be a replacement for the bourgeoisie, the nobility or tsarism, which previously dominated the working class. Therefore, centralization would only perpetuate the domination of these classes and move further away from the revolution as the realization of freedom.<sup>26</sup>
5. Centralization would block the political education of the masses, which could only be realized through the intellectual curiosity of the masses themselves. Luxemburg’s concerns regarding the political education of the masses were proved correct in post-1917 Russia and were adopted by the “left-wing” tendency in the West and in future years were highly valued by other Marxists.<sup>27</sup>

## The Debate After 1917

An analysis of the theory and practice of the Bolshevik Party arose on an international scale immediately after 1917. The analytical positions aligned themselves into two fundamental tendencies: representing a revolutionary critique, Luxemburg, Pannekoek, Gorter and other “left-wingers” directly opposed Lenin about the powers and international strategies of the Bolshevik Party as well as the party’s praxis and interpretation of the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” democracy and socialism. These same problems were also debated by Karl Kautsky, the leading theoretician of Western social democracy.

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<sup>25</sup>With the “blind subordination ... of all organizations to the centre”, the Central Committee became the “only thinking organism in the Party. The other ones would be its executing arms”. *Idem.*, pp. 150–152.

<sup>26</sup>He ended up asserting that “the working-class demands the right to make its own mistakes and learn in the dialectics of history,” for “the errors made by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the shrewdest Central Committee.” Conclusively: “the only subject” that deserves the leader’s roll is the collective “ego” of the working-class. *Idem.*, pp. 154; 156; 162; 166.

<sup>27</sup>See for example, works mentioned in this text by H. Gorter; A. Pannekoek; as well as by E. Mandel.

## 1. Kautsky's Social Democratic Critique

The text of this German theorist, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, was published in August 1918, and received a response from Lenin in his *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Renegade Kautsky*, which was published in November 1918. The Kautsky–Lenin debate signified the schism between Western social democracy and the Leninist vanguard party, or the so-called party of the new type.<sup>28</sup>

According to Kautsky, the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was not established in Russia in 1917, but rather a “dictatorship of the Bolsheviks,” which became an authoritarian form of government. This meant that the specific methods, as well as the systematized practices of the Bolshevik Party, soon controlled the entirety of Russian society. This further meant that the old methods of class struggle, due to Auguste Blanqui and Michael Bakunin as well as cabalistic plotting, all of which were totally different from practices of the parties of Western Europe, were adopted by the Bolsheviks. The nineteenth century methods of Bakunin and Blanqui were further absorbed by Lenin. And this led to dictatorial methods and created habits that destroyed the necessary autonomy of the totality of Bolshevik Party members. The extension of Bolshevik practices at the state level explained the suppression of democracy and the limitation of political rights that were manifest in the dissolution of the Constitutional Assembly.

In Kautsky's interpretation, this dictatorial situation seemed to be an inherent disease of Bolshevism, a result of the fact that the Bolsheviks were a minority party, which seized power by violent means under the exceptional conditions of an economically backward, pre-industrial Russia. Although the Bolsheviks were the majority in the Second Congress of the RSDLP, by October 1917 they were already a minority. And they could only maintain their hegemonic position after their revolution by the suppression of democratic life and institutions. In the thought of the reformist social democracy of Kautsky, the sectarian fanaticism of the Bolsheviks was a result of the sudden and violent transformation of the bourgeois revolution of February into the socialist revolution of October.

In addition, Kautsky thought the Bolsheviks had wrongly interpreted Marx by giving theoretical and political legitimacy to the phrase

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<sup>28</sup>Kautsky, K. *The dictatorship of the proletariat*. In [www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch03.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch03.htm). Lenin. *The dictatorship of the proletariat and the renegade Kautsky. Contra el revisionismo*. Foreign Language Editions, Moscow, 1959, pp. 440–444.

“dictatorship of the proletariat.” Kautsky maintained that Marx’s concept of dictatorship originally referred to a singular and temporary phase of a political situation that arose when the proletariat violently conquered power. Therefore, when the Bolsheviks made the “dictatorship of the proletariat” into an absolute power, a permanent model of government of a universal applicability, they stepped outside of Marxism and came nearer to the primitive socialism of Wilhelm Weitling and Blanqui.

## 2. The “Left-Wing” Critique

In representing the “left-wing” perspective, Luxemburg also criticized Lenin. Even though Kautsky was the spokesperson for social democracy and Luxemburg the voice of the “left-wing,” they both agreed that Lenin’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” had eliminated democracy as such. But, contrary to Kautsky, Luxemburg also called attention to the successes of Lenin, including the immediate emergency measures specific to the situation in revolutionary Russia.<sup>29</sup> In spite of her differences with Lenin over the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” Luxemburg was enthusiastic about the Bolshevik seizure of power. On many Marxist and political principles, Luxemburg was in harmony with the Bolshevik leader. Her book, *The Russian Revolution*, displaying her characteristic theoretical brilliance, offered the most penetrating revolutionary analysis of October 1917.<sup>30</sup>

Luxemburg articulated her concern about the consequences for socialism when “public life” is limited and controlled. She did not advocate an abstract concept of democracy, as Kautsky did. Rather, she outlined some particular social structures that were absolutely necessary for the success of a working class government. For example, if a working class government were to succeed, then the political education of the masses must be a priority. If socialism encouraged the implementation of the dictatorship of a class, by which Luxemburg meant “the most possibly active and unlimited participation of the masses,” “democracy without boundaries,” then the political education of the working class was the highest goal. Luxemburg warned about the danger that partial measures—not universal measures encompassing the

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<sup>29</sup>Luxemburg, R. *La Revolución Rusa*. Selected Works in two volumes, Vol. 2, Op.cit. See items 4; 5; 6; and 8, and pp. 206; 216.

<sup>30</sup>Her enthusiasm was contained, for by 1917—like Lenin and Trotsky—she trusted the destiny of the Bolshevik Revolution to international support from the Western Revolution, especially in Germany. She had reasons for being sceptical. *Letter of Rosa Luxemburg to Mehring* (November 24th, 1917). *Marx ahora*, Havana, No. 4–5, 1997–1998.

entire working class—could result in the consolidation of a formula of government based on the dictatorship of a group of party leaders that acted in the name of a class.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to the revolution, the centralization of political decisions was a central principle of the Bolshevik Party establishment. Luxemburg's great fear was that this party principle would enlarge itself and become the universal principle of the entire government, with the party model becoming a paradigm for government. In essence, Luxemburg's insights in 1904 on the political dangers of the Leninist design of the party proved to be relevant again regarding the Bolshevik blueprint for government in general, when the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917.

The Leninist centralist vision of the party was victorious in 1917 and this vision was extended as obligatory to the internal structure and politics of the Third International and other communist parties that were members of the Third International.<sup>32</sup> The domination of the Third International by the Leninist model was the background out of which the protests of the "communists from the Dutch Councils Pannekoek and Gorter emerged."<sup>33</sup> On this issue, they had a polemic directly with Lenin, who ironically called them "left-wing communists" for demanding that the Third International pursue a more radical communist policy in the countries of Western Europe. In his written exchange, Lenin reaffirmed his conviction that the Bolshevik

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<sup>31</sup>*La Revolución Rusa*. Op.cit., pp. 212; 214–215. On the educative function for the masses of the exercise of democracy, see item 6 of the Selected Works of Luxemburg.

<sup>32</sup>The admission requirements in the Third International (item 12; 15; 16; and 18) established the obligatory fulfilment of: the decisions of the Executive Committee and the Congresses—which included an homogeneous revolutionary tactic for Western countries—spreading the International's official documents across the press of the different parties; and the constitution of the communist parties as centralized organizations, with leading sections of "broad powers" and "iron discipline." See: *Admission requirements of the Parties in the Communist International. Los cuatro primeros Congresos de la Internacional Comunista*. Digital Editions of Izquierda Revolucionaria, 2008, [www.marxismo.org](http://www.marxismo.org), pp. 129–134. Lenin, V.I. *Entry requirements for the Communist International. Contra el Revisionismo*, Op.cit., pp. 628–635.

<sup>33</sup>In *World Revolution and Communist Tactics* (1920), by A. Pannekoek and, in *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* (1920), by H. Gorter, there is a critical response to Lenin's leaflet "*Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*" (1920) and to the tactics for the revolution in the West (based on the Russian experience) endorsed in the Second Congress of the International. Pannekoek mentions in his *Postface* that the International's centralized scheme favored the leading role and imposition of Bolshevik ideology in relation to the Communist parties' leadership. Conclusively, this organizational form did not "just" correspond to the "needs of the communist agitation" in the West, but also to the "political needs of Soviet Russia." Its consequence was to design misguided tactics, which were to be "homogeneously" applied. *Revolución mundial y táctica comunista*. In [http://www.geocities.com/cica\\_web](http://www.geocities.com/cica_web). Taken from: *El marxismo de Pannekoek y Gorter*, Editorial Pluto, Londres, 1978, p. 26.

Party was pursuing a correct strategy for the fulfilment of the proletarian revolution.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to what was designated as the “leader’s politics,” “the dictatorship of the leaders,” and “the elite,” the vertical displacement of power, Pannekoek and Gorter, advocated the principles that revolutionary action in Western Europe should be located in the “politics of the masses” organized as “soviets,” or “workers councils at the base,” the “dictatorship of the base”, because the real forces of the revolution were not to be found in the elite levels of the commanders of the party. Pannekoek and Gorter argued that the traditional leadership in the West, that of the social democratic parties and its parliamentary and trade union representatives, had lost the revolutionary élan and turned into a bureaucratic and reformist bloc that was corrupting the new Communist International.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, they recognized that Western Europe required its own revolutionary tactics and organizational forms. According to Gorter, in the West there existed a “greater recognition of the importance of the majority” and a view of the lesser importance of the party elite. He regretted the fact that the Third International carried out the policies of the party elite, “validating their actions on their judgment that centralized leadership was perfectly justified in Russia.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the Leninist conception of the vertical displacement of power in the party—its hierarchy, its centralization—were seen as a conservative distortion of Marxism.

Pannekoek and Gorter, as well as Luxemburg, criticized Lenin on the issue of the party. According to them, a centralized party would reproduce the ideological dependence of the workers on the elite leadership imitating the dependency of the Western proletariat on the Western bourgeoisie. Thus, it perpetuated the subjection of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie.

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<sup>34</sup>“The experience of the triumphant dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has revealed ... that unconditional centralization and the most severe discipline of the proletariat are a fundamental condition of the victory over the bourgeoisie.” Lenin, VI. *La enfermedad infantil del “izquierdismo” en el comunismo. Selected Works in 12 Volumes, Op.cit., volume XI, p. 4.*

<sup>35</sup>Pannekoek, A. *Revolución mundial y táctica comunista*, Op.cit, pp. 9; 18; 25; 27–28. Gorter remarked: “You satirize the controversies that, in Germany, revolve around ‘the dictatorship of the bosses or the masses’, of ‘the base or the top’, etc., declaring it silly ... unfortunately! ... we are still looking for suitable leaders *that don’t aspire to dominate the masses* and don’t betray them and, as long as we don’t have them, we defend everything be done from the bottom to the top, and for the dictatorship of the masses themselves ... This is also applied to the iron discipline and centralization...” *Open letter to comrade Lenin. La izquierda comunista germano-holandesa contra Lenin*, Espartaco Internacional Edition, 2004, pp. 148–150; 165–166; 174; 176; 181–182. Pannekoek carries on with these theses in subsequent works.

<sup>36</sup>Gorter, H. *Open letter to comrade Lenin. La izquierda comunista germano-holandesa contra Lenin*. Op.cit., pp. 157–159; 177; 180; 187; 207; 226–228.

Only an authentic process of “self-emancipation” would make the working class in general as the subject, the agency of liberation.<sup>37</sup>

Karl Korsch also addressed the issue of the vertical hierarchy in the party in his book *Anti-Critique*. Korsch was a member of the German “left-wingers.” Korsch’s 1923 book *Marxism and Philosophy* was attacked by the defenders of the Third International and Korsch responded to his critics in *Anti-Critique*. In this book, he dealt with the thesis “that socialism could only be taken to the working class from the outside,” a principle upheld by Lenin. Contra Lenin, Korsch pointed out that such a thesis had emerged in the context of the political immaturity of the proletariat. Korsch emphasized that the credo that socialist consciousness could only be brought to the proletariat from the outside violated revolutionary theory, but he sadly recognized that this credo was gaining strength within Marxism during the 1920s.<sup>38</sup>

Some decades later, Herbert Marcuse asserted that Leninism produced a “displacement of the revolutionary agent from the proletariat with class consciousness to the centralized Party as vanguard.” Simultaneously, he warned that the lessons of *What Is To Be Done?* were no longer viable, and unfortunately and dangerously were in the process of being adopted at the international level as part of general strategic principle.<sup>39</sup> Although far removed temporally from the debates of the 1920s, the controversy has continued in the contemporary world. In recent years, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek refuted the thesis that the revolutionary consciousness of the working class is injected into the working class from the “outside.” Žižek sought to uncover the political reasons for the rise of such a defaming and the under-evaluation of the subjectivity of the working class.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>This is a well-known passage of Pannekoek: “if the most important element of the revolution consists in the masses taking on their own matters ... with their ... hands ... any form of organization that doesn’t allow the control and leadership of the masses ... is counterrevolutionary and ... it should ... be replaced by another form ... that prepares the workers ... to actively determine everything ... this new form of organization can only be structured in the process of the revolution, through the revolutionary intervention workers have done.” *Revolución mundial y táctica comunista*, Op.cit., pp. 9–14. See also:

1) Pannekoek, A. *Lenin as philosopher. A critical examination of the foundations of Marxism. La izquierda germano-holandesa contra Lenin*, Op.cit, pp. 376–377; 380;

2) Gorter, H. *Open letter to comrade Lenin*. Op.cit., pp. 163; 177; 181–182; 227.

<sup>38</sup>Korsch, K. *The present state of the problem of Marxism and philosophy (Anti-critique)* In *Marxismo y filosofía*, Op.cit., p. 63.

<sup>39</sup>Marcuse, H. *El marxismo soviético*. Alianza Editorial, 1969, pp. 36–38; 45. Also, Mandel restates that centralism implied the proletariat’s transformation into an object (instead of a subject) of the revolution. *La teoría leninista de la organización*, Op.cit., p. 20.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

## The Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party

An adverse economic situation preceded the convocation of the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1921. A convergence of different factors generated the need for a discussion on trade unions. The discussion covered five topics: 1) the existence of an emergency need to raise economic productivity owing to the backward state of the Russian economy under tsarism, 2) the economic crisis in Russia brought about in part because of the devastation caused by the First World War and the civil war; 3) the economic hardships of Russia being made worse because Western Europe had not experienced a proletarian revolution; 4) the presence of “bureaucratic deformation”; and 5) the partial introduction of some elements of the NEP (New Economic Policy) leading to greater centralization in the spheres of production.

From another perspective, the “discussion of the trade unions” was also a political and theoretical debate about the essence and function of different institutional structures in this first experience of victorious socialism. The comprehensive debates covered the party, the trade unions and the soviets. In a broader sense, they were reflections about social democracy and the meaning of its revolutionary representative system. The economic urgency, the bureaucratic obstacles and the nationwide stagnation caused by centralism, which came from the Bolshevik historical experience and was worsened by the NEP, made the issue of the participation of the masses an overriding concern.

The importance of the issues to be addressed brought forth heated confrontations and the formation of divergent “factions.” Each “faction” set forth a platform of principles. The newspaper *Pravda* both interpreted and disseminated the various platforms.

The “working-class opposition” was headed by the Commissioner of the People for Work, Shliapnikov, and the veteran revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai. They maintained that the trade unions were the supreme form of government in a socialist state, surpassing the soviets and the party because they represented the entire working class and they guaranteed direct democracy. Trotsky, on the contrary, proposed to make the trade unions obedient and subordinate to the Soviet state. According to Trotsky, there was no reason in socialism for an organization that protected workers when the bourgeoisie no longer existed. Nikolai Bukharin’s position, according to Lenin, was “eclectic,” and, because Bukharin combined both practical and moderate visions, his approach was conciliatory.

Although such a practice of polemics, discussion and critique regarding the issues of revolutionary practice was customary in the Russian party throughout its historical evolution, even after 1917 the discussion on the trade unions, as Lenin expressed it in 1921, turned into a “crisis within the Party.” This “crisis” was due to the extremes the debates reached with regards to dogmatism, so-called “fractionalism” and the presence of unyielding authoritarian leaders. Furthermore, Lenin, who was drawn into these rancorous discussions, on these occasions elaborated some of his most insightful Marxist pronouncements.<sup>41</sup> These discussions did not solve any of the organizational or theoretic problems, but they did display the authentically revolutionary concern of the Bolsheviks for the political fulfilment of the dream of the masses, whom they placed in the forefront of those seeking to achieve socialist democracy. However, the mission of the Bolshevik Party was interrupted because in March 1921, at the mid-point of the 1921 party congress, the Kronstadt revolt erupted, advancing the slogan, “Soviets without communists.” This incident was further evidence of the premature nature of the Bolshevik Revolution.

This difficult situation led to the approval of the resolution regarding party unity, which approved the dissolution of factions within the party organization. In the preliminary draft resolution of the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Russia on Party Unity, Lenin embraced the imperative of unity and cohesion within the party. Lenin maintained that dissension only strengthened the opposition. However, he did not seek to abolish all forms of critique regarding any faults in the party because he believed honest disagreements led to a more creative party. What was banned, as stated in point four of the preliminary resolution, was “factionalism”—disunity within the party—and therefore members of factions could be expelled from the Central Committee and even expelled from the party. Point seven was kept secret and subsequently used by Stalin in order to expel Trotsky from the party.<sup>42</sup>

The resolution on party unity implied a reformulation of democratic praxis and a historical precedent for the introduction of centralism and authoritarianism within the Communist Party. The Tenth Congress devised

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<sup>41</sup>Thesis: the trade unions as “school” and “drive belt” of the dictatorship of the proletariat; “politics is the most concentrated expression of economy”; the fact there is in Russia a “workers’ state with a bureaucratic distortion.” *Los sindicatos, el momento actual y los errores del camarada Trotsky*, Complete Works, Editorial Progreso, Moscow, 1973, vol. 11, pp. 138–139; 143.

<sup>42</sup>Lenin, V.I. *Preliminary Draft Resolution of the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of Russia on the Party Unity. Contra el revisionismo*, Op.cit., pp. 639–643.

a protocol for the application of discipline within the Central Committee, which adhered to the original principles of the Leninist design of 1902. On the other hand, Lenin's essential approach to "the discussion on the Trade Unions" also satisfied his consistent conviction that only the party and not the trade unions should be the engine of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the party was the vanguard of all the working classes.<sup>43</sup>

Approximately a year and a half later, Lenin modified his criteria. During the final years of his life, he dictated a series of documents that have been considered his political testament. In notes that date from the end of 1922 to the beginning of 1923, he insisted on a series of changes in the political structure of the party: "an increase in the number on the Central Committee, 50 or 100 workers and peasants from the base of the party." Later on, he argued that such a modification was necessary in order to "stabilize" the party, or prevent a split, and consequently to improve and increase the authority of the Central Committee.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, he also suggested the broadening of the Central Control Commission in adding between 75 and 100 workers as clarification and support of their functions on the Commission. A number of workers, rotating their positions, would attend the meetings of the Political Bureau and have free access to its documents. Lenin's *Testament* also asserted that no authority, not even the Secretary-General, could prevent the workers from asking questions.<sup>45</sup>

Lenin, recognizing that his health was deteriorating, was aware that the formation of divisive factions, including the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, would threaten the achievements of the revolution. To prevent this outcome, he formulated recommendations to "stop the conflicts among small sectors of the Central Committee from acquiring an excessive relevance in the future of the Party."<sup>46</sup> Factionalism within the party compelled Lenin to revise his conception, born at the beginning of the twentieth century in *What Is To Be Done?* about party structure and vertical hierarchical bureaucracies. Lenin's move was in fact an emergency adaptation of a quantitative and qualitative nature. The highly centralized, vanguard leadership, which developed out of the class struggle, required reconstruction with

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<sup>43</sup>Lenin, V.I. *Los sindicatos, el momento actual y los errores del camarada Trotsky*, Op.cit., vol. 11, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup>Lenin, V.I. *Letter to the Congress. La última lucha de Lenin*. Editorial Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 2011, pp. 210–216.

<sup>45</sup>Lenin, V.I. *How should we reorganise the workers' and peasants' inspection? La última lucha de Lenin*, Op.cit., pp. 263; 270.

<sup>46</sup>Lenin, V.I. *Letter to the Congress*, Op.cit., pp. 210; 212.

numerous members from the “base,” the working class. In this way, Lenin revised his own model.

However, Lenin's reformulation arose because of the new conditions that the victory of 1917 imposed on the party. These new conditions followed from the success of Bolshevism, which included the so-called vanguard. Lenin's desire was to preserve Bolshevism by means of these modifications. His awareness of the need for reformulation arose from his recognition of the harmful excesses of centralization. In actuality, he sought to preserve Bolshevism through the revision of its basic model.

## Latin America: Neither a Replica nor a Copy, but a Heroic Creation<sup>47</sup>

The debates within Classical Marxism regarding the proper form of the political apparatus were later transferred to Latin America. These debates have endured through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries because a wide variety of Marxist organizations participated in these debates, such as the traditional left, communists and socialists, and, in addition, guerrilla movements, national liberation movements and the rise of popular “left-wing” governments. This contributed to the uniqueness of twenty-first century socialism. Each of these groups articulated their own specific opinions about the organizational question as reflections of the specific historical situation in which they were located. The circumstances in which they were located determined their identity.

## Cuba: The Revolution and the Party

The Communist Party was founded in Cuba in 1925 and it changed its name afterwards to the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). Its political, theoretical and organizational horizon was inspired at first by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) because the CPSU was believed to be a correct embodiment of the principles of Marxism. Furthermore, the PSP adopted the centralist discipline of the international communist movement. This centralist model was manifested in several ways. On the theoretical

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<sup>47</sup>This is how one of the most important Latin American Marxists of all times expressed himself. José Carlos Mariátegui. *Aniversario y balance. Amauta*. Lima; No. 17; 1927.

level, it copied Soviet Marxism because it did not have the background to forge its own interpretation of Marx.<sup>48</sup> As verification of this point, the theoretical journal of the PSP, *Fundamentos*, gave preferential treatment to articles from the CPSU, from Eastern European communist parties as well as from China. In political terms, the PSP adopted the program of the Popular Front, which did not consider or adjust to the particular conditions of Cuban society. The Popular Front did not correctly evaluate the significance of armed struggle, or of illegal activities, as the most effective means for the revolutionary transformation of their own countries.

However, after Fidel Castro's insurrectional triumph in 1959, the PSP and its main authorities recognized the leadership of Castro, the Rebel Army and the 26th of July Movement. The old communist members, who were fully integrated into Castro's movement, disbanded the old PSP and joined the newly formed Communist Party of Cuba, the PCC. The self-dissolution of the PSP was the greatest act of independence in the history of the PSP in relation to the CPSU.<sup>49</sup> By this act, the old Cuban communist apparatus also admitted that, since it did not play any significant role in Castro's victory, it could not play any creative role in the socialist transformation.

The insurrectional process that culminated in the revolution of 1959 was led by the 26th of July Movement and its Rebel Army. Its nucleus was established around Castro. Though it upheld an ideology of social justice, patriotism and anti-imperialism, it exhibited a heterodoxy of political viewpoints. None of its leaders were members of the Communist Party before 1959. Because none of these authorities were exposed to traditional communist ideology and dogmatic discipline, this group was more open and receptive to the political strategies that corresponded to the historical circumstances of Cuba. Even after the socialist nature of the revolution was declared in 1961 and after the necessary rapprochement with the USSR had begun due to military, political and economic reasons, the Cuban leadership began to exercise its own judgment and policies in both internal and external areas of concern.

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<sup>48</sup>*The Fundamentals of Socialism in Cuba (Los fundamentos del Socialismo en Cuba, 1943)*, by Blas Roca (Secretary-General of the PSP), was a widely circulated text before the revolution and during the 1960s. The text tried to understand the history of Cuba from the pattern of the five forms of production, diffused by Soviet manuals. Furthermore, during the 1940s and 50s, the PSP carried out several self-criticisms for its poor focus on theoretical progress.

<sup>49</sup>There were attempts at "sectarianism" (1962) and "factionalism" (1968) on the part of some former members of the dissolved PSP, with regards to the new revolutionary leaders and citizens that joined the new PCC.

During the 1960s, the PCC, which was centrally structured and constituted by the main forces that participated in the revolution, demonstrated strong opposition to the decisions of the CPSU. Cuban political discourse criticized the CPSU, which sought to impose uniformity on all communist parties throughout the world. The PCC attacked the CPSU because the latter sought to act with “papal” authority. Castro took this line several times when he referred to the Kennedy–Khrushchev agreement, which ended the Cuban missile crisis of 1962,<sup>50</sup> the constitution of the PCC’s Central Committee in 1965,<sup>51</sup> and during the “Prague Spring” and consequent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the PCC openly defied the authority of the CPSU when it gave active and material support to the guerrilla and national liberation movements in Africa and Latin America during the 1960s. At that time, the CPSU embarked upon a new cold war policy toward the USA, which it identified as “peaceful coexistence.”<sup>53</sup> This implied the renunciation of armed struggle as a means toward overthrowing capitalism.

For this reason, a series of Latin American communist organizations obediently refrained from supporting, or participating in, actions of armed struggle, and thus wasted the real possibilities for revolutionary transformation. In the 1960s, imitating the paradigm of the Cuban insurrection, the responsibility for the revolution in Latin America rested in national liberation or guerrilla movements of a military-political nature. The national liberation movements were formed independently of their countries’ communist parties and even against the wishes of these parties. Nevertheless, in some cases, they did receive support from the Latin American communist

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<sup>50</sup>“In the course of this crisis ... some discrepancies arose [...] We must discuss it with the Soviets...” *Report of the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro to the people of Cuba. Posición de Cuba ante la crisis del Caribe*. COR; 1962; pp. 71; 73.

<sup>51</sup>“We can disagree ... with any Party.” “It is impossible [that] ... we could conceive Marxism as ... a Church ... a religious doctrine, with its Pope, its Rome and its Ecumenical Council...” *Speech delivered by Fidel, First Secretary of the PCC and Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government in the Presentation Act of the CC-PCC*. *Granma*, October 4, 1965.

<sup>52</sup>“We ask ourselves if ... the relations to the Communist Parties are based in principled stands or if they will still be presided over by the level of un-conditionality, satellitism, lackey-ism, and they will only consider as friends, those who unconditionally accept everything and are absolutely unable to disagree on anything.” *Discurso de análisis de los acontecimientos de Checoslovaquia*. COR., No. 16, 1968, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup>The Cuban–Argentinean “Che” Guevara specified the position of Cuba in this respect: “As Marxists, we have sustained that pacific coexistence ... does not encompass the coexistence between exploiters and the exploited...” Guevara, E. *In the 19th General Assembly of the United Nations*. *Ernesto Che Guevara. Obras*. Casa de las Américas, Havana, 1970, Vol. II, p. 544.

parties, or were formed by dissidents from within their own communist parties.

Meanwhile, the Cuban party demonstrated the consciousness and determination to differentiate itself from the CPSU. The tricontinental conference in 1966, and the Latin American solidarity organization in 1967 both took place in Havana. In each case, the assembled leaders and representatives from guerrilla and national liberation movements received assurances of Cuban support. In this regard, the guerrilla activity of the Argentinian–Cuban revolutionary Ernesto (Che) Guevara in Bolivia emerged as a symbolic paradigm of PCC support for national emancipation. One of the causes for the tragic death of Che Guevara was precisely the weak support he received from leaders of the Bolivian Communist Party.

In the theoretical domain, the Cuban revolution also gave birth, particularly in the second half of the 1960s, to intellectual projects as expressions of a critique of Soviet Marxism. Authors such as Gramsci, Althusser, Lukács, Sartre and Trotsky were published in Cuba. There was a public debate on the Soviet manuals for the teaching of Marxism in 1966 and about the effectiveness of the USSR's economic model in 1964.<sup>54</sup> These debates failed to give proper weight to individual economic incentives. In the cultural domain, “socialist realism,”<sup>55</sup> an aesthetic and ideological formula for works of art in the Soviet Union, was rejected.

In the late 1960s, the hope that economic growth in Cuba could develop on an autonomous basis faded and in 1972 Cuba joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or COMECON, whose aim was to integrate the economies of all socialist countries. On certain issues, this integration brought about an ideological alignment with the USSR. The beginnings of an independent Cuban reading of socialism and revolutionary processes were suppressed by the Russian doctrine of Marxism–Leninism, whose dogmatic influences, as well as the diffusion of scientific socialism, survive to the present day. However, the particular characteristic of the Cuban reality and its strong national leadership succeeded in establishing a Cuban imprint on domestic and foreign policy. Finally, the implosion of communism in the USSR left Cuba in a precarious economic situation and further emphasized the necessity for national autonomy.

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<sup>54</sup>This polemic had international significance. Among its main figures were several Cuban ministers and specialists, as well as established international Marxist theoreticians such as Charles Bettelheim.

<sup>55</sup>This statement is present in *Words for the intellectuals* (1960), by Fidel Castro. In *Revolución y cultura*, Vol. 2, February 5, 1969. Also in *Socialism and man in Cuba. Ernesto Che Guevara. Obras. 1957–1967*. Op.cit.; pp. 378–379.

On the internal side, the PCC continued to exert its hegemonic role in the national life of Cuba. The slogan employed by the PCC extolled the PCC as the “Party of unity and the vanguard” and the “superior leading force of society”.<sup>56</sup> Even the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba designated the party as the most advanced force in society.<sup>57</sup> The guiding document of the communist apparatus stipulated the structural and functional principles of centralization in accordance with “Leninist principles.”<sup>58</sup> The position of the party was strengthened by the historical successes of its past.

The party and its leaders also assumed centralized control of economic policy by proclaiming that economic development was the primary goal of the revolution. Therefore, the so-called “updating of the Cuban economic model” described in the programmatic document *Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution*, which was endorsed at the Sixth Congress of the PCC, 2011, assigned essential functions in the implementation and governance of the model to the party.<sup>59</sup> Conversely, although the “Guidelines” recognized and encouraged to a greater extent the establishment of diverse forms of property and management, they simultaneously declare that the major means of designing these processes will be carried out in a centralized way.<sup>60</sup>

In political terms, Cuban civil society is composed of a network of social, political, and labor unions in addition to a popular consultative system that would on the surface appear sufficient to ensure to every citizen had active participation in the democratic decision-making process. However, knowledgeable specialists have drawn critical attention to the problem of “extreme centralism” as well as the “narrow possibilities of participating in the decision-making of local governmental agencies.”<sup>61</sup> It is also evident that a

<sup>56</sup>*Estatutos del PCC*. Chapter I. In <http://congresopcc.cip.cu/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/estatutos.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup>The 5th Article of the *Constitution* declares: “The Communist Party of Cuba, Marxist–Leninist and follower of the ideas of Martí, organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the superior leading force of society and the State, which organizes and guides the common efforts towards the high aims of building socialism and the advance towards the communist society”.

<sup>58</sup>“The Communist Party of Cuba is organically structured and it develops its inner life on the basis of the strictest observance of the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, that combines a strict and conscious discipline with the broadest internal democracy, the exercise of collective leadership, individual responsibility and practice.” *Estatutos del PCC*, Chapter I. Op.cit.

<sup>59</sup>“Al PCC corresponde la responsabilidad de controlar, impulsar y exigir el cumplimiento de los Lineamientos” *Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución*, págs. 6; 38. In: [www.cubadebate.cu/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/folleto-lineamientos-vi-cong-pdf](http://www.cubadebate.cu/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/folleto-lineamientos-vi-cong-pdf).

<sup>60</sup>Idem., p. 9.

<sup>61</sup>Espina, M. *La política social en Cuba: nueva reforma económica*. *Revista Ciencias Sociales*, No. Especial 135–136 (I-II), 2012, p. 234. En otro texto, Espina menciona a varios investigadores cubanos que consideran la existencia de “obstáculos” a la participación ciudadana, incluso, a través de la red de

“de-bureaucratization of the state apparatus” seems to take place in accordance with the weakening of the Communist Party’s leading role in the economy and society.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, these knowledgeable specialists advocate the development and reinforcement of local autonomy counteracting the government’s deeply rooted, decades-long replacement of autonomy by centralized planning. This means the substitution of a vertical hierarchy through horizontal participation.<sup>63</sup>

In Cuba, it is likely that this antagonistic situation will evolve in the direction of regaining a participatory presence in the governmental decision-making process. Twentieth century Marxism continuously wrestled with a difficult problem concerning the proper delimitation between party and state. Throughout the twentieth century, the party proved dominant. However, this problem, which transgressed from the strictly political domain, is expressive of cultural and historical conditions. In responding to these contemporary problems, Cuba should take into account the democratizing programs instituted by recent “left-wing” governments in Latin America. These left-wing governments have experimented with policies of decentralization and democratization. Democracy and decentralization are an inherent part of Marxist theory and epitomized in the praxis of twenty-first century socialism. In short, socialism is fulfilled in democracy. A new model of the party is required by the conditions of twenty-first century socialism.

## Latin America: A Party of the New Model

The problem of the proper formula for political organization has elicited proposals and discussion in Latin America. In certain countries in the last decade, major sectors of the population have called for reform. Along with these voices of reform, new political subjects have emerged as well as new centers of struggle and opposition. These matters are generally incorporated

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organizaciones ya establecidas. *El caso cubano en diálogo de contraste. Políticas de atención a la pobreza y la desigualdad: examinando el rol del Estado en la experiencia cubana*. CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2008, pp. 143–144.

<sup>62</sup>Espina, M. *Viejas y Nuevas Desigualdades en Cuba. Ambivalencias y perspectivas de la estratificación social*. *Revista Nueva Sociedad*; No 216; 2008, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup>Delgado, C. J. *Ciencia, tecnología y ciudadanía: cambios fundamentales y desafíos éticos*. *Revista Universidad de la Habana*, No. 276, 2013, pp. 44–45.

in the recent praxis and revolutionary ideology that have been generated in the region and are usually referred to as twenty-first century socialism.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, new theoretical positions are being formulated, by Heinz Dieterich, Martha Harnecke and Isabel Raubel, among others and political positions are embodied in the actions of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa and Evo Morales.

Several factors are responsible for these theoretical reconstructions, which modernize, rectify and surpass twentieth century socialist and communist practices. Above all, they discover and develop new approaches to the questions of centralization and party authoritarianism.<sup>65</sup> One factor is the special characteristic of Latin America, which elicits its specific national forms of political struggle. The various failures of European socialism comprise another influential factor leading to critical reflections on the party. In European socialism, the vanguard feature of the party dissolved under the conditions of mass membership, corruption and personal ambition.<sup>66</sup> In separating itself from the European tradition, the Latin American “left,” which is generally organized into parties, remained loyal to the organizational convictions of vanguard identity and centralization as foundational principles. These convictions have been part of Latin American parties since their origin immediately after the successful Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

However, since each Latin American country has its own set of unique socio-political conditions, the revolutionary movements, which have come to power in these countries, have heterogeneous social and ideological forms

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<sup>64</sup>About the origin (attributed to Hugo Chávez) and the essence of this concept, see: Dieterich, H. *Hugo Chávez y el Socialismo del siglo XXI*. In <http://doc.noticias24.com/0708/dieterich24.pdf>. Dieterich, H. *El socialismo del siglo XXI*. In <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/121968.pdf> Harnecker, M. *Cinco reflexiones sobre el socialismo*. In <http://www.rebellion.org/docs/147047.pdf> Correa, R. *Conferencia Magistral sobre el “socialismo del siglo XXI”* (2008). In [http://www.presidencia.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/12-08-Conferencia\\_socialismo\\_sigloXXI\\_Iran.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/02/12-08-Conferencia_socialismo_sigloXXI_Iran.pdf) Chávez, H. *El socialismo del siglo XXI*. Colección *Cuadernos para el debate*, 2011. In <http://www.portaalba.org/biblioteca/CHAVEZ%20HUGO.%20Socialismo%20del%20Siglo%20XXI.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup>M. Harnecker; I. Rauber. *Hacia el socialismo del siglo XXI. La izquierda se renueva*. pp. 14–15. In <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/clacso/otros/20111108110655/siglo.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup>Harnecker, M. *Cinco reflexiones sobre el socialismo* (26/3/2012), Op.cit., p. 3. On the other hand, Harnecker and Rauber explain that what people in Latin America knew about was the “Stalinist departure from Lenin’s ideas and not his original conception”. *Hacia el socialismo del siglo XXI: la izquierda se renueva*. Op.cit., p. 26. At any rate, there was “an acritical copy of the Bolshevik model of the Party”. Harnecker. *Acerca del sujeto político capaz de responder a los desafíos del siglo XXI*. P. 2. In <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:8-wYbwL58gAJ:omegalfa.es/downloadfile.php%3Ffile%3Dlibros>.

reflecting the various national socio-economic formations. These movements gain visibility through activity and mobilization. Unlike the traditional vertical, hierarchical structures, they articulate their demands through horizontal forms of association. In trying to set themselves apart from past dogmas and sectarianism, these movements are more disposed toward alliances, pluralism and proposals arising from their constituents. However, these alliances have been constantly disrupted by tendencies toward fragmentation. In addition, these movements have not always been incorporated by either traditional or non-traditional “left-wing” forces. On the other hand, a link frequently manifests between the popularly elected government and some wings of its social base.

In the intellectual sphere, Dieterich supports the political praxis of the new organizational forms of twenty-first century socialism. He also claims that in the past, political functions were generally established by “self-appointment,” or by a certain “structural position within the social system”; with regards to Latin America, Dieterich relies on mass political praxis to generate the spontaneous and creative action of the masses.<sup>67</sup>

Former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa has several times called attention to the elements of continuity and discontinuity that sets twenty-first century socialism apart from “traditional,” “class-structured,” “scientific” and “utopian” paradigms. From his critical perspective, Correa states that the vanguard is not formed from preconceived paradigms, nor is it a product of “illuminists”, or “intellectuals”.<sup>68</sup> For this reason, he is emphatic about the thesis of a “citizen’s revolution.”

Although the revolutionary projects that succeeded in the conquest of power were supported by strong personal and charismatic leadership, they simultaneously created conditions for the fulfilment of the will of revolutionary subjects. The revolutionary transformation carried out by the governments of Chávez and Maduro in Venezuela, of Evo Morales in Bolivia and of Correa in Ecuador, and to some extent those of Kirchner in Argentina, Lula and Delma in Brazil, Mujica as well as Tabare in Uruguay, sought to achieve equality and social justice. These governments aim to allow historically marginalized peoples to take part in the political pro-

<sup>67</sup>Dieterich, H. *Hugo Chávez y el Socialismo del siglo XXI*. Op.cit., p. 105.

<sup>68</sup>Correa, R. *Conferencia Magistral sobre el “socialismo del siglo XXI”*. Op.cit., p. 40. Harnecker and Rauber don’t admit the identity between the Party and the vanguard. They propose (unlike Lenin) a “collective or shared vanguard”. *Hacia el siglo XXI: la izquierda se renueva*. Op.cit., p. 13; 60. On his side, Rauber asserts that “to speak nowadays about the vanguard is nonsense.” *Los dilemas del sujeto*. Op.cit.; p. 38.

cess. The purpose of these governments will come to fruition when they encourage the active participation of the masses in the legislative process. The entrance of the masses into the legislative process will be made possible through struggle, mobilization and the formation of political consciousness. Only then will the masses constitute themselves as a so-called "class for itself." Chávez, for example, advanced the conviction that "socialism must emerge from the base" and he insisted on self-management, the commune, self-government and direct democracy.<sup>69</sup>

Twenty-first century socialism embodies the Marxist thesis that it is the revolutionary subjects themselves, educated through their involvement in the struggles for hegemony, that transform themselves into agents for an autonomous and free socialism. It is actually a cultural change, as Gramsci noted, and a life transformation. It is not an educational training of the party elite "from the outside," nor a "seizing of power," that is a top-down revolution, or even the mechanical outcome of economic changes in the economy.<sup>70</sup> The traditional party organization with its vanguard wing fails to carry out its function of political enlightenment, and becomes an obstacle to the socialist transformation of the subject and society. By means of its structure, the vertically organized, vanguard party reproduces the logic of domination. The vanguard model must be replaced by the theoretical and practical self-constitution of the revolutionary subject as the socialist cell.<sup>71</sup>

But if the vanguard party remains in existence, it must be reshaped in accordance with the doctrine proposed by Chilean Marxist Marta Harnecker doctrine on behalf of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), an organization that, instead of trying to homogenize its members, respects their differences and varied opinions. It must "abandon authoritarian methods and create spaces for discussion. It must constitute a leadership that respects diverse internal opinions. It must carry out internal referendums, or plebiscites with regards to topics of general interest. It must put into practice a real pluralism."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Chávez, H. *El socialismo del siglo XXI*. Colección *Cuadernos para el debate*, 2011. pp. 80; 84–86; 98. In <http://www.portalalba.org/biblioteca/CHAVEZ%20HUGO.%20Socialismo%20del%20Siglo%20XXI.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup>Rauber, I. *Social transformation in the 21st century: a path of reforms or revolution? Pasado y Presente XXI*, June, 2014; p. 4. In [www.rebellion.org/docs/511.pdf](http://www.rebellion.org/docs/511.pdf) Rauber, I. *Hegemony, popular power and common sense. Rebelión*. (22-08-2015). Op.cit. Harnecker, M. *Cinco reflexiones sobre el socialismo* (26/3/2012), Op.cit., p. 4.

<sup>71</sup>In addition to the cited texts by Rauber and Harnecker, see: Gallardo, H. *Luchas revolucionarias e imaginario marxista de los movimientos sociales*. P. 6. In <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/cuba/iff/marx/documentos/22/Luchas%20revolucionarias%20e%20imaginario%20marxista.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup>Harnecker, M. *Acerca del sujeto político capaz de responder a los desafíos del siglo XXI*. Op.cit.; p. 28.

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# 12

## A Few Questions Concerning Lenin's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

An Qinian

In 2010, a Russian scholar said: “It is hard to find another person like Lenin in world history, one who has been extolled and criticized by so many, followed and betrayed by so many, apologized for and criticized by so many. And it is not just the case in Russia, but in the whole world. People always want to forget him, yet he always comes back. He is always in a live show. Lenin is always online.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this is the truth.

Among Lenin's ideas, those concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat are to date the most frequently discussed and, speaking generally, commentators tend to have a negative view of them. However, these ideas need further discussion. I will attempt to re-examine them in this essay in analyzing the core of the dictatorship of the proletariat, its theoretical foundations, its determinants in reality, and its historical evaluation. The fourth aspect will include both practical and moral dimensions. Yet since previous criticism has mainly focused on the moral dimension, this essay will deal with this dimension only.

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This chapter was translated by Wei Liu.

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## I

From the beginning of the last century to the time of his death, Lenin formulated numerous arguments about the dictatorship of the proletariat without ever providing a single concentrated, comprehensive and systematic account. The various arguments are scattered throughout his works of different periods, and correspond to different practical demands. Each has its own particular focus and differs from others. Until his death, Lenin's views on this question were always changing and developing, but in general, his understanding of dictatorship remained the same, as he emphasizes that it is "a government whose actions depend on violence or dictatorial strength and are not constrained by law." There are many relevant arguments. For instance: "Please note once and for all, Messrs. Kiesewetter, Struve, Izgoyev and Co., that dictatorship means unlimited power based on force, and is not based on law."<sup>2</sup> With regard to the word "proletariat" in the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the subject of the dictatorship, as well as object, Lenin's arguments keep changing. On the surface, Lenin's conception is very clear-cut: the dictatorship of the proletariat refers to the "rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws."<sup>3</sup> In fact, the proletariat as the dictating subject so to speak and the bourgeoisie as the object do not have definite meanings. This point, which is crucial to the apprehension of Lenin's view of the dictatorship of the proletariat, should be carefully examined. Because of the close relationship between subject and object, I will study them in what follows.

In Lenin's conceptualization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the dictated object firstly refers to the bourgeoisie, then to the squirearchy and its representatives, and finally to the tsar and the aristocracy that had been overthrown in the revolution. Lenin categorizes all these people as exploiters, pointing out that, "The transition from capitalism to communism takes up an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch is over, the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this *hope* turns into *attempts* at restoration. After their first serious defeat, the overthrown exploiters ... throw themselves with energy grown tenfold, with furious passion and hatred grown a hundredfold, into the battle for the recovery of the 'paradise,' of which they were deprived, on behalf of their families."<sup>4</sup> This is quite obvious: those mentioned above are the primary targets of the proletarian dictatorship, and there is no need for further elaboration. As to the dictating subject, Lenin's explanations sometimes seem quite flexible—the dictatorship of the proletariat is the "undivided power directly backed by the

armed force of the people.”<sup>5</sup> Judging from the historical circumstances, the “people” mentioned here refers not only to workers, but also to soldiers and peasants, and the dictatorship of the proletariat is equivalent to the power through which workers, peasants and soldiers act in violent ways. In these arguments, Lenin’s ideas about the subject and the object of the proletarian dictatorship seem very clear—the proletarian dictatorship is exerted over the overthrown exploiters by the people who have gained political power by military means. Yet this is not really the case. As in his arguments, so in the Bolshevik practice; the object of the dictatorship had already been expanding even before it included a larger part of the subject.

In June 1919, Lenin said, “The dictatorship of the proletariat is a specific form of class alliance between the proletariat, the vanguard of the working people, and the numerous non-proletarian strata of the working people (petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, etc.), or the majority of these strata, an alliance against capital, an alliance whose aim is the complete overthrow of capital, complete suppression of the resistance offered by the bourgeoisie as well as of attempts at restoration on its part, an alliance for the final establishment and consolidation of socialism.”<sup>6</sup> He also asserted that the power of the Soviet Union resided in the alliance of workers and peasants. Four months later, he said, “Peasant farming continues to be petty commodity production. Here we have an extremely broad and very sound, deep-rooted basis for capitalism, a basis on which capitalism persists or arises anew in a bitter struggle against communism.”<sup>7</sup> A few months later, he said that the bourgeoisie’s “resistance is increased *tenfold* by their overthrow (even if only in a single country), and [its] power lies, not only in the strength of international capital, the strength and durability of their international connections, but also in the *force of habit*, in the strength of *small-scale production*. Unfortunately, small-scale production is still widespread in the world, and small-scale production *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. All these reasons make the dictatorship of the proletariat necessary.”<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the peasantry was here categorized as the object of the dictatorship. Four years after Lenin’s death, the Soviet government launched a war to transform peasantry and agriculture—the cooperative movement. Peasants were transformed into farmers on socialist collective farms or clerks of state farms, and the government played a key role in this process.

The intelligentsia had the same fate—it was deemed necessary to “[re-educate], under the proletarian dictatorship, millions of peasants and small proprietors, hundreds of thousands of office employees, officials and bourgeois intellectuals, [subordinate] them all to the proletarian state and

to proletarian leadership [and eradicate] their bourgeois habits and traditions.”<sup>9</sup> In tsarist Russia, only those from the exploiting class could have the chance to receive education and rank among the intelligentsia. The so-called “bourgeois intelligentsia” included most of the intellectuals, especially those in humanities and social sciences. Lenin called them “educated” feudalists. In March, 1922, he wrote:

The Marxist journal will have to wage war also on these modern “educated” feudalists. Not a few of them, very likely, are in receipt of government money and are employed by our government to educate our youth, although they are no more fitted for this than notorious perverts are fitted for the post of superintendents of educational establishments for the young.

The working class of Russia proved able to win power; but it has not yet learned to utilize it. For otherwise it would have long ago very politely dispatched such teachers and members of learned societies to countries with a bourgeois “democracy.” That is the proper place for such feudalists.

But it will learn, given the will to learn.<sup>10</sup>

Not unexpectedly, these people were soon arrested or sent for, and were expatriated by the Soviet government in the autumn of 1922. This was a vivid picture of the proletarian dictatorship.

What about workers? In January 1919, Lenin said, “the workers were never separated by a Great Wall of China from the old society. And they have preserved a good deal of the traditional mentality of capitalist society. The workers are building a new society without themselves having become new people, or cleansed of the filth of the old world; they are still standing up to their knees in that filth.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, “the Communist Party as the vanguard in the struggle, should consider it their fundamental task to help enlighten and instruct the working masses, in order to cast off the old ways and habitual routine we have inherited from the old system, the habits of private property with which the masses are thoroughly imbued.”<sup>12</sup> Broadly speaking, in terms of their thoughts, workers were also the objects of the dictatorship.

If so, then who was the subject of the proletarian dictatorship? It could only be the party, and only of a few party leaders.

The mere presentation of the question—“dictatorship of the party *or* dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders, *or* dictatorship (party) of the masses?”—testifies to the most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking. These people wanted to *invent* something quite out of the ordinary, and, in their effort to be clever, they made themselves ridiculous. It is common

knowledge that the masses are divided into classes, ...[that] classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and who are called leaders. All of this is elementary.<sup>13</sup>

Lenin also said that any important decision is made by the party's political bureau and its organization bureau, each having only five people: "In this sense, it really becomes a 'hegemony.'" Lenin went farther than this to say, "in the history of revolutionary movements the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes... There is ... absolutely *no* contradiction in principle between Soviet (*that is*, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals."<sup>14</sup>

Marx early on argued about the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>15</sup> He repeats that the dictatorship is one the proletariat exerts over the bourgeoisie, and that the conception is based on the proletarian democracy exemplified by the Paris Commune. Lenin holds these views of Marx in high regard, but, judging from the arguments above, his understanding of the proletarian dictatorship is somewhat different from Marx's. For Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat is actually propelled by the few Bolshevik leaders and targeted at all social classes and strata, including the general proletariat (even including ordinary party members). Of course, this dictatorship manifests itself differently to different social classes or strata. For the proletariat and party members, it mainly exists as ideological education and remolding; for the peasants, apart from ideological remolding, the major concern is to stunt their spontaneous capitalist inclinations and to guide and, if necessary, to compel them to take the path of socialism; and for the exploiting class and the intelligentsia that served them for so long, the dictatorship is political violence in the real sense, which is expressed in constraining them and in depriving them of their powers and rights. In the final analysis, the subject of the proletarian dictatorship is the party leaders, and the object is the whole society except for them. Why is such a government called the dictatorship of the proletariat? Because the Bolshevik Party is fundamentally the party leaders, who, as the epitome of the proletariat, intellectually represent the rudimentary interests and demands of the proletariat and hence the laboring people. Of course, the execution of the dictatorship of the proletariat should and in fact must rely on the working class and it cannot separate from the union of workers and peasants. Workers, peasants and even ordinary party members are the object of the dictatorship on the one hand,

and the subject of the dictatorship on the other hand. Lenin drew no such definite conclusion, but it is logically contained and represented in his arguments in question.

## II

Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat has a profound theoretical foundation.

From the theoretical perspective, it has to do with the characteristics of the proletarian socialist revolution. Marx and Engels said, "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."<sup>16</sup> In their eyes, all catastrophes of the capitalist society—exploitation and oppression of one class by another, alienation, the antitheses or perhaps contradictions between human beings and between man and nature—stem from the private ownership of the means of production. Therefore, the socialist revolution's central task is to abolish private ownership, as this is the prerequisite for the liberation of the proletariat and humanity as a whole. Apart from that, the socialist revolution in Marx and Engels' understanding also includes the annihilation of conventional ideas and concepts: "The Communist revolution is the most radical rupture with traditional property relations; no wonder that its development involved the most radical rupture with traditional ideas."<sup>17</sup>

The two "ruptures" in question fundamentally differentiate the proletarian revolution from all other social revolutions in human history. Since human beings entered into civilization, all social revolutions have been replacements of one form of private ownership by another. Yet the central aim of the proletarian revolution is to abolish private ownership altogether and to establish an unprecedented public ownership of the means of production. Lenin said, "The difference between a socialist revolution and a bourgeois revolution is that in the latter case there are ready-made forms of capitalist relationships; Soviet power—the proletarian power—does not inherit such ready-made relationships"<sup>18</sup> The major reason for this is that one type of private ownership can spontaneously derive from the previous one. Yet no private owner would automatically share the means of production in his hand with the whole society, so public ownership cannot automatically grow from private ownership. That is to say, the role of the proletariat is to establish a socialist relationship with their own hands after they seize political power. Stalin has made an extraordinary remark on this point:

- 1) The bourgeois revolution usually begins when there already exist more or less ready-made forms belonging to the capitalist order, forms which have grown and matured within the womb of feudal society prior to the open revolution, whereas the proletarian revolution begins when ready-made forms belonging to the socialist order are either absent, or almost absent.
- 2) The main task of the bourgeois revolution consists in seizing power and making it conform to the already existing bourgeois economy, whereas the main task of the proletarian revolution consists, after seizing power, in building a new, socialist economy.
- 3) The bourgeois revolution is usually *consummated* with the seizure of power, whereas in the proletarian revolution the seizure of power is only the *beginning*, and power is used as a lever for transforming the old economy and organising the new one.<sup>19</sup>

Stalin also said that the Soviet regime must create a new socialist economic model out of the so-called "empty land." That is to say, the socialist system is to be artificially established by the proletariat after seizing power.

To artificially establish a brand-new system requires a program and a plan, both of which are suggested by Marx and Engels' speculations on socialism. According to historical materialism, the conception of a social system belongs to social consciousness, which should reflect social being and hence should come into being after the appearance and the substantial development of the social system in question. The previous alternations of social forms all happened in this way. Now, to speculate on a new social system before its real existence and to artificially realize it prioritizes social consciousness over social being and manifests the precedence of ideology. The precedence of ideology in socialist revolutions is inherent in Marx and Engels' theories, as is shown in their instructions on the procedures of establishing a new society in *The Communist Manifesto*.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the proletarian socialist revolution becomes a large-scale social experiment, in which the scheme of the experiment is Marx and Engels' speculations on socialist society, and the organizers of the experiment are the proletarian party leading the revolution. In Russia it was the Bolsheviks. Yet as we know, the most important task of the experiment's organizers is to strictly follow the scheme in creating the required conditions for the experiment and in transforming society. And anything that does not correspond to the scheme has to be modified, whatever and whomever it concerns. There is no exception for any social aspect, for otherwise the experiment should not be expected to succeed. This fundamentally determines the nature and the mission of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Lenin's conception of it comes from this.

Though it is inherent in the Marxist thesis of socialist revolution, many people fail to recognize this point.

It is also worth noticing that what Marx and Engels established was scientific socialism, which pursues not the tiny ameliorations of the worker's material life, but the liberation of humanity itself in all its many forms. This theory is founded on the apprehension of the rule of historical development, and only through historical materialism can such a theory be grasped. Who can grasp scientific socialism? Lenin wrote:

*[T]here could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.<sup>21</sup>*

If compulsory inculcation was even necessary for workers, the compulsory ideological remolding was only more indispensable to people of other classes. Scientific socialism was established by Marx and Engels. In Russia, only a very few among the wisest progressive intellectuals could understand and grasp the rule of historical development and thus accept scientific socialism, and only these few could launch the social experiment that would realize the communist ideal. To transform the Russian society, they should first transform the thoughts of everyone (including the workers), forcing them to accept the experimental plan and to regulate their own behavior according to the plan, and thus overthrow the old system and establish the new socialist system. This was a "war" that a few members of the elite launched against the whole society. Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is obviously relevant to this, as he considered the few leaders to be the real subject of the dictatorship, and included the majority of society as its object.

From the theoretical perspective, Lenin's conception of the dictatorship was also related to his understanding of socialism. Socialism, as Lenin understood it, is a huge machine operated by a small number of people that

affects all aspects of society. A single corporation must have a unifying spirit, "it must be said that large-scale machine industry—which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism—calls for the absolute and strict unity of will, which directs the joint labors of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people ... But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one."<sup>22</sup> The whole society should do this as well. Lenin said: "Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science. It is inconceivable without planned state organisation, which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard in production and distribution. We Marxists have always spoken of this."<sup>23</sup> When saying these words, he had a paradigm in mind, which was the Second German Empire, whose power was concentrated in the hands of the emperor and the chancellor. He believed that Russian socialism should be state capitalism, which was exemplified by Germany. "Here we have "the last word" in modern large-scale capitalist engineering and planned organisation, *subordinated to Junker-bourgeois imperialism*. Cross out the words in italics, and in place of the militarist, Junker, bourgeois, imperialist *state* put *also a state*, but of a different social type, of a different class content—a *Soviet* state, that is, a proletarian state, and you will have the *sum total* of the conditions necessary for socialism."<sup>24</sup> Such socialism will govern the whole country with high concentration and a good plan, and the high concentration in the economic sector requires the subordination of all other aspects of social life to a uniform spirit. Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat obviously had something to do with this understanding of socialism.

### III

Lenin's conception of the dictatorship also had its practical source. Generally speaking, it was the product of the real situation in all its many forms in Russia.

Russia is a European country, but it is located at the eastern end of Europe. Modern civilization, which boomed in England, France, Netherlands, and other parts of Western Europe, gradually expanded eastward and worldwide. Although since the eighteenth century Russia had been learning to take the path of modernization from the West, it was only eight months before the October Revolution, in February 1917, that the feudal tsar was overthrown. We should notice that the February Revolution

was not the natural outcome of the advancement of Russian capitalism; it had much to do with Russia's military setback in World War I. The military setback intensified the domestic contradictions, and with the inappropriate measures taken by the tsarist government, things underwent a drastic change and the Romanov dynasty instantly collapsed. The bourgeois provisional government, despite the political power in hand, could not control the situation, and this sufficiently manifested the immaturity and cowardliness of the Russian bourgeoisie. Feudalism was too strong in Russia, and the bourgeoisie was far from having the strength to hold up the regime. This was the basic reality in Russia when Lenin launched the Bolshevik Revolution. Lenin once said: "Capitalism is a bane compared with socialism. Capitalism is a boon compared with medievalism, small production, and the evils of bureaucracy, which spring from the dispersal of the small producers. Inasmuch as we are as yet unable to pass directly from small production to socialism, some capitalism is inevitable as the elemental product of small production and exchange."<sup>25</sup> This shows Lenin's deep knowledge of Russia as a pre-capitalist, "medieval-ish" country. The capitalist development was reasonable, and the Bolshevik proletarian dictatorship and its socialist career would be affected by capitalism, and more seriously constrained by feudalism in all forms from everywhere. This was the basic reason for the Bolsheviks to control the situation and achieve their goal through dictatorship.

Until the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia had been under the dictatorship of the feudal tsar for hundreds of years. Capitalism was not fully developed, and the general public had no idea of what capitalism was; what they were familiar with and accepted was dictatorship. It was altogether impossible to establish in such a country a proletarian regime modeled on the Paris Commune. Yet to concentrate all political power in the hands of a small number of people, or even in those of a single individual, was consistent with the Russian tradition and, hence, inevitable. Lenin was the soul of the Bolshevik Revolution, its organizer, its source of momentum, its symbol. Within the Russian Social Democratic Party, including the Bolsheviks, most people believed that it was impractical to seize political power and launch a socialist revolution. It was only Lenin who, after the February Revolution, pointed out the timely seizure of political power to be their task. After the success of the October Revolution, it was also Lenin who, with his steely perseverance and his dexterous measures, led the whole party to the triumph in domestic wars and consolidated the Soviet regime. Additionally, with the Bolsheviks' long-time and effective propagation, Lenin in his last few years obtained an absolute authority in the party and was further the idol of the whole party and of

multitudinous workers and peasants. After Lenin's death, Stalin, through cruel struggles, quickly became the unchallenged and unchallengeable leader, placing himself above the entire nation and nurturing his personality cult. He was, *de facto*, a tsar. Of course, this had to do with his personal qualities and traits. Yet the Russian tradition of dictatorship also played an important role. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, Ilya Glazunov, a highly influential artist in Russia, still claimed in a newspaper that Russia should have one father, who was the tsar, and added his title of nobility in front of his signature.<sup>26</sup> Lenin's conception and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat are undoubtedly closely connected with this tradition.

Related to this authoritarian tradition is the fact that all the significant reforms in Russian history were carried out through top-down enforcement. The Baptism in Kievan Rus' in 988 AD, the reforms of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great in the eighteenth century, Alexander II's reform in 1861, and the Stolypin agrarian reform in the early twentieth century were all of this kind. This tradition recurred in the social experiment enforced by the Bolsheviks.<sup>27</sup> The philosopher Berdyaev insightfully examines the relationship between Lenin's preliminary social experiments and the Russian historical tradition, and calls Peter the Great who pushed Russia into Westernization "the Bolshevik on the Tsar's throne".<sup>28</sup>

The influence of the authoritarian tradition only formed the background of Lenin's views and actions. The direct influence came from populism, especially from the Narodnaya Volya. Lenin's brother was a member of Narodnaya Volya and was executed for his participation in the assassination of the tsar. Lenin himself said clearly: he and others who set about launching the workers movement "had begun their revolutionary thinking as adherents of Narodnaya Volya. Nearly all had in their early youth enthusiastically worshipped the terrorist heroes."<sup>29</sup> Plekhanov criticized the Bolsheviks in claiming they "have no fundamental difference from the Russian Blanquism, i.e. the already extinct 'populism': the same 'ruse,' the same 'armed insurrection' (the populists called it revolt), the same 'seizure of power' by the revolutionists."<sup>30</sup> What would be the result? Plekhanov said: "It would result in a political deformity like Ancient China or Peru, i.e. a renewed Tsarist dictatorship with Communist embellishments."<sup>31</sup>

Plekhanov's remarks are plausible. Modern democracy could only be produced in a capitalist market economy, for only a capitalist market economy could cultivate one's subjectivity and such ideas as liberty, equality, legality and democracy. Populism could not possibly gain the people's support, as it meant to overthrow the tsar in a Russia whose subjects were primarily peasants and whose capitalism was far from sufficiently developed. In the

1870s, the populists went “to the people” to stir up peasant revolts, and some college students were soundly beaten by the peasants after they told them about the non-existence of God and stepped on the Bible. Other college students were sent to the police office for having exclaimed before the peasants, “Down with the tsar.” In 1905, the workers in St. Petersburg, together with their wives and children, demonstrated against the tsar by launching a demonstration with the his portrait in their hands, and thousands of them were shot dead. The Bolsheviks carried on the tradition of Narodnaya Volya, and seized power at the propitious historical moment. Yet at that time, over 80% of the Russian population was living in the country; even many urban workers were peasants who had only recently moved to the city; nearly 70% of the population was illiterate. This determined that the Bolsheviks would inevitably meet the same question the populists had met before. The newly empowered Bolsheviks would not be sent to the police office by the peasants, who would initially welcome them as saviors, as tsars, and genuflect to them. As Marx believed it was characteristic of peasants that they would entrust their own happiness to a being higher than themselves rather than work for it by themselves, they needed a savior. Secondly, peasants did not desire social democracy, and others could not impose democracy on them. They were illiterate; and, since they had no capacity for management, they could not enjoy democracy. They lacked such notions as self-consciousness, subjective spirit and equality, and were used to bureaucratic commands. In his late years, Lenin was especially anguished by the rapacious bureaucracy within the Soviet regime. For this reason, he kept repeating the need for a “cultural revolution,” namely the expurgation of illiteracy, which would give the people a sense of ownership and the ability to administer the country.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, he also deeply and meticulously reflected on how to help workers and peasants supervise the Soviet government and oppose bureaucracy. He proposed to “select among workers and farmers seventy-five to a hundred new members of the Central Control Commission,” who would have all the rights of a Central Committee member; they were to inspect the files of the meetings of the Political Bureau and some were to attend those meetings.<sup>33</sup> In fact, this speculation proved to be infeasible, for ordinary workers and peasants were not able to tackle complex questions or manage the country at all. Moreover, this would cause a new problem: who was to decide, when the Political Bureau of the CPC and the Central Control Commission disagreed with each other? Thirdly, peasants were full of weaknesses: they were selfish and self-serving, slack and unprincipled; and as small producers they naturally looked forward to capitalism. To transform their thoughts, or

rather to implement a kind of “dictatorship” was what the Bolsheviks must do. Due to the reasons stated above, ordinary workers and peasants could not really understand the Bolshevik cause, and would not become the subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat or that of the political life of the nation. On the contrary, they themselves should also be transformed under the dictatorship of the proletariat. As for the subject of the dictatorship, it could only be the few elites situated high above them—the party leaders. To say the least, in a country primarily consisting of peasants, violent measures are unavoidable if only to simply maintain social stability. Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the Russification of Marx's version of it.

In general terms, when Lenin appeared on the historical stage, the basic characteristic of Russia was that it was a feudal empire, or, according to Lenin, a military feudal empire. The encompassing feudalism inherently constrained and determined the Russian proletarian revolution, including Lenin's conception and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yet in order to understand the Bolshevik revolution and Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat in any depth, it is also necessary to notice the distinctions of Russian feudalism from other feudalisms. In general, there were three distinctions.

The first distinction was the peasant village community, which was the basic social organization in Russia. Peasants lived in village communities, and the community collectively used the land of the state or the landlord. There was absolute equality between peasants. The land was distributed by the *mir*, and would be redistributed every few years. Everybody had a share of land. Woodlands and grasslands were shared by all peasants. The *mir* voted for the village chief and a few other administrators, and decided on important issues of the village community. Peasants had no private property and no class divisions. They enjoyed solidarity, friendship, mutual assistance and cooperation. This was the social basis of Russian feudalism, and was also the major obstacle to the development of capitalism in Russia. The Stolypin reform in 1906 had drastically shaken the village community system. Yet until the end of the 1920s, most peasants still lived in village communities. The second distinction was the profound Orthodox religious tradition. With the baptism in Kievan Rus' in 998, the people did not accept the Catholic Church of the Western Roman Empire, but rather the Orthodox Church of the Eastern Roman Empire—in short, the Byzantine Empire. In the following centuries, the Orthodox Church was the major vehicle of Russian culture. It seeped deeply into human hearts and the entire Russian culture bore the Orthodox imprint. When the Byzantine Empire

fell in 1453, the Russians claimed that Moscow was the “Third Rome” in the queue comprised of Rome, the capital of the Western Roman Empire, and Constantinople (Second Rome), the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. It was the orthodox habitat of Christianity, which marked the superiority of Russian culture. The third distinction was its geographical location and its domination by the Mongols for more than two centuries. Located at the eastern end of Europe, Russia had been isolated from Western Europe, even Central Europe, for a long time. It had not been “baptized” by either the Renaissance or the Enlightenment, and was steeped in its “Eastern color.” The Mongolian domination from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries had brought in many elements of Asian culture, such as dictatorship, sacrifice to country, and so on and so the Eastern color of Russian culture was further intensified.

The first distinction noted above resulted in the Russians’ collectivism; the second made them instinctively reject capitalist civilization on the one hand, and cultivated their messianism on the other. Because of the existence of an intense collectivism, Russian intellectuals strongly resisted capitalist civilization and always criticized capitalism for the suffering of laborers, the severe social stratifications, the confrontation between classes, and the degeneration of morality prevalent in the early stage of capitalism. Since the 1830s, Russia had witnessed the growing intellectual tendency towards socialism. Due to the messianism in the religious sense, it became the ideal of generations of Russian intellectuals to save humanity from the tribulations of capitalism. The close combination of messianism and socialism in Russia generated populist movements, and also laid the foundation for the Bolshevik revolution led by Lenin. Because of the three characteristics discussed above, hope was entrusted to a small number of the elite in Russian socialist movements, and the function of dictatorship was accordingly magnified. Therefore, by means of violence, backward Russia was the first in the world to launch the socialist experiment. Lenin’s dictatorship of the proletariat naturally came in response to the need of the times, and the Third International established by Lenin replaced the “Third Rome.” Here lay the secret of Bolshevism as a whole.

## IV

The last question of our discussion is the evaluation of Lenin’s conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As mentioned above, the evaluation will primarily focus on the moral dimension.

In the contemporary world, Lenin is most often criticized for his theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Observers reject them both for not being democratic or humanitarian and for trampling on human rights. They enumerate multitudinous facts: the tsar's family was murdered in its entirety at the end of 1918; many members of the intellectual elite were deported in "philosophers' ships"; the compulsory measures taken in the cooperative movement led to the abnormal deaths of many peasants, especially in Ukraine, where an artificial famine occurred on a grand scale; the campaign to eliminate counterrevolutionaries was seriously expanded and ended in indiscriminate mass murder; intellectuals with original ideas were persecuted, and an excellent traditional culture was devastated. These are certainly facts, but it appears too emotional and lacking a serious scientific attitude if one, based on these facts, simply rejects Lenin and the Bolshevik conception of the theory and practice of the proletarian dictatorship and/or harshly criticizes Lenin and his inheritor, Stalin. What is a serious scientific attitude? It is nothing but a historical attitude.

Marxism contends that society develops in a certain order. Nature, human society and humanity itself exist in an endless process of interaction and inter-development, namely in the historical process. Every social phenomenon is a product of history, and can be reasonably understood only within a certain historical process. So it is with Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In discussing the development of German society, Engels once said, "the evil character of the government is justified and explained by the corresponding evil character of its subjects. The Prussians of that day had the government that they deserved."<sup>34</sup> Lenin's theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat corresponded to the social development of Russia and the level of understanding of the Russians. Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is criticized as inhuman. But it should be noted that, first of all, humanism itself is a historical product. In the West, it was only with the rise of a market economy that the Renaissance and humanism came into being. It was only along with the development and perfection of the market economy that humanism was represented and realized, through the Enlightenment, in such concepts as liberty, equality and fraternity and in bourgeois democracy. Russia had no fully developed market economy. It lacked individuals with a spirit of independence, and most people were unconscious of democracy. A "head of the family" high above—the tsar—was what they inherently needed. If Lenin's dictatorship was not humanistic enough, the tsar's was less so. The bourgeoisie were responsible for realizing the humanitarian ideal, but the Russian bourgeoisie was a prema-

ture baby, and its governing practice after the February Revolution in 1917 proved its incompetence for such a mission. The Russians could only have “a government they deserved.” But whatever it was, it would not have been a democratic government. Of course, history cannot start over again, but we can conjecture what the situation would have been like if the Bolshevik Revolution had not happened in 1917 and if the provisional bourgeois government established after the February Revolution had still held power. I believe that either this government would have been short-lived, eventually overthrown by the Bolsheviks or some other force, and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat or another similar regime. Or it would have adjusted itself to objective circumstances and transfigured itself by implementing compulsory and non-democratic policies. In general terms, the bourgeoisie advocates liberalism and will not launch social experiments. But in such a backward and savage country as Russia, where peasants who had just escaped from serfdom constituted the majority of its population, the legal system was broken and incomplete, and democracy was initiated with difficulty—in such a country a certain kind of dictatorship was indispensable if simply to maintain social stability. We can draw the above conclusion only if we look at the current situation of Russia—the Russia of a century after Lenin’s time. Two leaders, Gorbachev and Yeltsin, have both excoriated the Soviet Union for its lack of democracy and the profusion of humanitarian disasters, and have spared no effort to establish a democratic government in Russia. Yet this brought about nothing but a political revolt lasting fifteen years, accompanied by economic decline, the people’s suffering, and the endless war in Chechnya. Putin came to power in 2000, and, due to his strong-arm measures, Russian democratic politics drastically shrank and the ghost of Stalin reappeared. The country seemed to relapse into the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Yet the political turbulence quickly calmed down, the Chechen war soon ended, the economy flourished for a short while, and the strongman Putin has until now enjoyed legendary public support in Russia. This reminds us from one perspective that, in Russia, “dictatorship” to varying degrees is indispensable even today, and the Russians still have a long way to go on the path towards democracy and humanitarianism.

Secondly, according to Marx’s standard, the development of Russia was far from the level required for the realization of socialism. Yet, as discussed above, the deeply rooted collectivism and messianism made socialism more or less an ideal to most Russian intellectuals, and due to the weakness of the proletariat and the top-down tradition of Russian social reforms, the socialist revolution could only be a social experiment on a grand scale, a “war” that the small number of members of the elite launched against the whole

society. Was this humanitarian? Many people think not, but this was determined by the real situation of Russia and can only be accepted as an objective fact. In today's Russia, many people believe that the October Revolution and the subsequent socialism was imposed on Russia by a small number of intellectuals—especially intellectuals of non-Russian descent. Lenin, for instance, was only a quarter Russian, Stalin was Georgian, Trotsky and Dzerzhinsky and others were Jews, and so on. Yet these people's success itself proved that political democracy and humanitarianism still remained luxuries in Russia. On the contrary, the Russians, who had been devoted to the Orthodox Church for more than a thousand years, sincerely believed that they would enter heaven in the afterlife as long as they sacrificed everything to the Church and their religious faith. Lenin told them: follow me, follow the Bolsheviks, work for the socialist idea, and you can enter heaven—the communist society—while still alive. It was very hard for the Russian people not to accept the road Lenin thus pointed out.

Thirdly, by repeating the fact of Russia's backwardness, the Mensheviks intended to deny the possibility of carrying out any socialist revolution and establishing any socialist system in Russia. To refute this, Lenin said in *Our Revolution*: "You say that civilization is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilization in our country by the expulsion of the landowners and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving toward socialism?"<sup>35</sup> This remark that Lenin made at the very end of his life portrays the Bolshevik Revolution from a unique perspective: according to him, Russian revolution—expelling landlords and Russian capitalists—was in fact understood as developing Russian civilization, both materially and spiritually. What is this? This is actually to realize the bourgeoisie's historical responsibility in modernizing the country. Only Lenin believes that to develop civilization is to create the requisite conditions for socialism. Which country has completed its modernization on a humanist basis? Democracy and humanism are the outcome of modernization, and the modernizing process itself is brutal. Innumerable historical facts prove this.

Indeed, there are many such facts. First, the major developed capitalist countries were all accompanied by humanitarian disasters in the process of modernization. In the early stage of capitalism, workers and peasants lived in tribulation, and the "man-eating sheep" that appeared in the process of enclosure served as a vivid illustration of this situation. Besides, the processes of modernization of almost all developed countries were rife with cruel class struggles. The class struggles in the French Revolution, the exemplar of capitalist revolutions, are horrifying even today. Even England established the capitalist democratic system only after the Civil War. As for the USA, it is

no exaggeration to say that its modernization was founded on the bones of innumerable black slaves. The murder of Native Americans in the westward movement and the Civil War in the nineteenth century were so bloody as to make one's hair stand on end. We should not forget that until the 1960s, African-Americans were still shedding blood while fighting for their basic equal rights of education, taking public transport, and so on. Lastly, almost all precursors of modernization have launched vicious imperialist wars on backward countries. Was the Opium War in 1840 humanitarian? Was it humanitarian of the English and French troops to burn the Old Summer Palace in 1860? Was it humanitarian of Japan to invade China in 1937 and subsequently carry out the policy of "Burn all, kill all, loot all"? Seen from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the Bolsheviks did nothing but realize the socialist ideal of generations of Russians with measures opposite to their real situations. Brutally pushing forward modernization in Russia by brutal means, they did what they should and could do. This has no fundamental difference from the modernization in developed capitalist countries. The famous contemporary Russian philosopher B. Mezhuyev said when reviewing the history of the Soviet Union: nobody could have done better than the Bolsheviks. This remark is worth serious reflection.

No person in any country—France, England, the USA, or Russia—is born savage or civilized. Humanitarianism and democracy are products and outcomes of the movements of modernization. Those who blame Lenin's idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat as non-humanitarian have forgotten the similar brutality of their own countries in their processes of modernization. Lenin's blamers are criticizing others' yesterday by their own standards of today, as if they themselves had not come from yesterday to today but had always been as advanced and civilized as they are today. This is neither historically correct, nor just. According to Marx and Engels, communism is the true realization of humanism, the final completion of democratic politics—the dissolution of democracy itself. History has proven that to realize humanism and to establish a perfect democracy are necessary historical tendencies. But history also tells us that there is no uniform mode or procedure for realizing humanism and democracy. The direction of progress is certain, but it depends on the concrete situations of specific countries to decide on the methods and modes, on what to do first and what to do next; the experiences of others are valuable only as references.

We cannot say that Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is perfect. Nor can we say that there could not have been a more reasonable or peaceful method to replace it, let alone taking it as a universally applicable set mode. Yet it would be methodologically unscientific to

understand and evaluate Lenin's thoughts in question without allowing for the specific situations of Russia and the historical development of Russia and that of humanity as a whole.

## Notes

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5. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 25, p. 440.
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7. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 30, pp. 109–110.
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9. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 31, p. 116.
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11. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 28, p. 424.
12. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 31, p. 365.
13. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 31, p. 41.
14. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 27, p. 268.
15. See Marx in *The Civil War in France, Critique of the Gotha Program*, etc.
16. Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1970. 48
17. *ibid.* 57.
18. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 27, p. 90.
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20. See the ending of the second chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*.
21. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 5, p. 375.
22. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 27, pp. 268–269.
23. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 27, p. 329.
24. *ibid.*
25. V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 32, p. 350.
26. This tradition can also be seen in Putin as strongman.
27. Transforming the Soviet Union by the governmental power, Gorbachev's democratic and humanitarian socialist reform also manifests this tradition.
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## Author Biography

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# 13

## “Extracting the Democratic Kernel”: Lenin and the Peasants

Alan Shandro

Marxists must carefully extract the sound and valuable kernel of the sincere, resolute, militant democracy of the peasant masses from the husk of Narodnik utopias. In the old Marxist literature of the eighties one can discover systematic effort to extract this valuable democratic kernel. Some day historians will study this effort systematically and trace its connection with what in the first decade of the twentieth century came to be called “Bolshevism.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines Marxist efforts to extract the kernel of peasant democracy from the populist ideology that enclosed it and traces the connection between “Bolshevism” and the emergent Marxist engagement with peasant political agency. The process may be traced to Marx, who acknowledged enduring socialist potential in the Russian village community, while remaining enigmatically silent about revolutionary agency. It would be Plekhanov who addressed the issue of agency, assigning hegemony in Russia’s bourgeois-democratic revolution to the proletariat in contrast to the political passivity of the peasantry. Analyzing in detail the painful process of division of the peasantry (and the commune) into incipient peasant bourgeoisie and a class of poor, semi-proletarian peasants still tied to the

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<sup>1</sup>Lenin, 1912, p. 359.

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land, the young Lenin would identify a force in the countryside capable of following the political lead of the urban workers. The turn of the century saw Lenin diversify the analytical framework through which he approached the Russian countryside so as to encompass two social struggles, not only between agricultural proletariat and bourgeoisie but also between the peasantry as a whole and the landlords. This would facilitate rethinking, in light of the upheavals in the countryside of 1905–1907, the agency of the peasantry as a whole and the Marxist project of proletarian hegemony.

## Marx and the *Mir*

Russia's populist revolutionaries, impressed by critiques of capitalist development in Western Europe, nourished hope for a specifically Russian path of progress that would bypass capitalism. They appealed to the apparent vitality of the Russian village commune, the *mir*, an institution that combined collective ownership of the soil with some rudimentary elements of self-government. The durability of the *mir* was seen as an expression of the Russian peasantry's socialist propensities and Marxist themes were sometimes invoked to bolster the notion of a non-capitalist path of development for Russia but concern was expressed in populist quarters over the supposed quietist implications of historical materialism for political action.

Vera Zasulich wrote in 1881 on behalf of the populist *Chernyi peredel* (Black Repartition) to solicit Marx's views "on the possible fate of our rural commune, and on the theory that it is historically necessary for every country in the world to pass through all the phases of capitalist production." As she posed the terms of the dilemma, the inevitable demise of the *mir* would leave Russian socialists with nothing but "more or less ill-founded calculations as to how many decades it will take for the Russian peasants' land to pass into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and how many centuries it will take for capitalism in Russia to reach something like the level of development already attained in Western Europe."<sup>2</sup> Marx's reply cited a passage from the French edition of *Capital* and insisted that whatever historical inevitability might characterize the genesis of capitalist production was "*expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe*" where, through the expropriation of the agricultural producers, *one form of private property is transformed into*

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<sup>2</sup>Zasulich, 1881, p. 98.

*another form of private property.* In Russia, by contrast, what would have to be transformed into private property was the communal property of the peasants.<sup>3</sup> Summarizing his own study of the subject, Marx averred, "the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia ... [b]ut in order that it might function as such, the harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development." This development assumes the fall of the autocracy: "To save the Russian commune, there must be a Russian Revolution."<sup>4</sup>

Marx's letter, together with its preparatory drafts and, in particular, its omission of proletarian revolution in the West as a precondition for the revival of the commune, has been supposed to vouch for the revolutionary populist perspective of *Narodnaia volia* (the People's Will).<sup>5</sup> According to Marx's preparatory drafts, the vitality of the Russian agricultural or land commune stemmed from a twofold character that distinguished it from more primitive forms of community. No longer based upon the "strong yet narrow tie" of natural kinship, the agricultural commune was "more capable of adapting and expanding, and of undergoing contact with strangers."<sup>6</sup> Second, in the agricultural commune, the house and surrounding yard became private property. Finally, though it remained communal property, the arable land was periodically divided among the members of the agricultural commune, each household cultivating the fields assigned to it and appropriating the fruits. The dualism inherent in the agricultural commune endowed it with a certain stability, "for communal property and all the resulting social relations provide it with a solid foundation, while the privately owned houses, fragmented tillage of the arable land and private appropriation of its fruits all permit a development of individuality incompatible with conditions in the more primitive communities."<sup>7</sup> But this same dualism threatened the disintegration of the commune from within; consequently, in Marx's view, it marked a period of transition from communal to private property. Independent labor as a source of private appropriation, the gradual accumulation of moveable property (cattle, agricultural implements, etc.) and the increasing importance of moveable property to

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<sup>3</sup>Marx, 1881b, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Marx, 1881b, p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>See Walicki, 1969, p. 189; Wada, 1983, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 109.

agricultural production together serve “to dissolve the primitive social and economic equality, and to foster at the very heart of the commune a conflict of interests,” which saps communal ownership and subordinates it to private property.<sup>8</sup>

Considered in abstraction, the Russian land commune is consistent with two broadly different lines of development: “[E]ither the element of private property which it implies gains the upper hand over the collective element, or the reverse takes place. Everything depends upon the historical context in which it is situated.”<sup>9</sup> The triumph of the collective element depends upon a transition from individual labor to collective labor and for this Marx stipulates two conditions: first, the economic need for such a transition, which will make itself felt when the commune is “placed under normal conditions”—that is, when the demands of the state and the externally imposed restrictions upon its land-base are removed. Second, the requisite material conditions must be made available to the commune. Here, the advantage of the Russian commune over earlier examples of the same type lies in “its historical context—the contemporaneity of capitalist production—[which] provides it with ready-made material conditions for huge-scale common labor. It is therefore able to incorporate the positive achievements of the capitalist system, without having to pass under its harsh tribute.”<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that Marx speaks of incorporating the technological achievements of capitalism rather than a social formation of communes generating them independently. Nor does anything he says indicate that the communal peasantry might act as a revolutionary force, capable itself of establishing “the normal conditions for spontaneous development.” While capable of adaptation to altered circumstances, “the peasant is above all hostile to any abrupt change.”<sup>11</sup> With respect to both technology and to politics, the “historical context” remains decisive. “If Russia were isolated in the world,” wrote Marx,

it would have to develop on its own account the economic conquests which Western Europe only acquired through a long series of evolutions from its primitive communities to the present situation. There would then be no doubt

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<sup>8</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 109n.

<sup>9</sup>Marx, 1881a, pp. 109–110.

<sup>10</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 110.

whatsoever, at least in my mind, that Russia's communities are fated to perish with the development of Russian society.<sup>12</sup>

While it is true, strictly speaking, that "the previous victory of the socialist revolution in the West" did not enter as a necessary condition into the scenario of Russia's "social regeneration" as sketched by Marx,<sup>13</sup> this omission raises some crucial questions. Did Marx suppose that European capital would lightly bestow its technological conquests upon a communistic peasant Russia? Did he envisage the Russian intelligentsia alone in the role of intermediary and organizer of the material conditions of communism?

To raise these questions is to signal the limits of Marx's analysis. Marx was not writing here as a political actor having to represent such forces in pursuit of such aims threatened by such obstacles, to appeal to such interests and win over such allies while resisting the stratagems of such adversaries. He was writing from outside and could act only by lending elements of analysis to those who had to act—and react—within the field of forces that constituted the concrete political situation in Russia. But historical analysis can serve as a guide to political action only by understanding and incorporating the logic of this field of political forces. Historical materialism, at least as applied by Marx, was only a "guiding thread" to the historical study of social formations, not a substitute for concrete analysis. The task of working out a concrete historical materialist analysis of the social and political forces in process of formation in tsarist Russia had not yet been undertaken. Marx's analysis may have helped to locate Russia in historical materialist terms, but it could not serve to guide Marxist political action within Russia.

## Plekhanov and Peasant Passivity

When the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 triggered the machinery of police repression but not the expected revolutionary uprising, populism appeared to have reached an impasse. In response, the former *Chernye peredeltsi* formed the Group for the Emancipation of Labor, the first professedly Russian Marxist organization. Georgii Plekhanov's rebuke to his former populist comrades in the 1883 pamphlet *Socialism and Political Struggle* announced the parameters of Russian Marxism: "To bind together

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<sup>12</sup>Marx, 1881a, p. 102.

<sup>13</sup>See Walicki, 1969, p. 189.

in one two so fundamentally different matters as the overthrow of absolutism and the socialist revolution, to wage revolutionary struggle in the belief that these elements of social development will *coincide* in the history of our country *means to put off the advent of both*.”<sup>14</sup>

Commodity production had already taken root in Russia, Plekhanov claimed, and its unfettered growth was both necessary and progressive. “Russia will continue to proceed along the path of capitalist development, not because there exists some external force, some mysterious law pushing her along that path, but because there is no effective internal force capable of pushing it from that path.”<sup>15</sup> For Plekhanov, the Russian countryside figures as an empty page upon which capital can inscribe its inexorable logic: “[T]he independent development of the village commune ... consists in disintegrating.”<sup>16</sup> The primitive vitality of the commune, he thought, could not survive the advent of commodity production and the eclipse of the isolated natural economy. Though untouched by the storms of political revolution, it “turns out to be powerless and defenceless against the logic of economic evolution.”<sup>17</sup> The commune was static and the peasantry passive, in contrast to the dynamism of capital and the agency of the proletariat. The commune is transformed, in the circumstance of commodity production, “from a means of protecting the producers against capitalist exploitation ... [into] a powerful instrument of [capitalist exploitation].”<sup>18</sup> The logic of commodity exchange, hastened by the reform edict of 1861, deepened the incipient social divisions in the commune, giving rise to an upstart class of petty rural capitalists and usurers and a mass of semi-proletarians without the means to work their allotments and thus constrained to work for others. In this context, communal obligations and restrictions served only to perpetuate the most primitive and brutal forms of capitalist exploitation and “the utopian enemies of capitalism,” the populist friends of the commune, “prove in reality to be the accomplices of capitalism in its most coarse, shameful and harmful form.”<sup>19</sup>

Although thoroughly oppressed and exploited under the existing regime, the peasant was no revolutionary protagonist: “The Russian revolutionary movement, whose victory would be first and foremost profitable to the

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<sup>14</sup>Plekhanov, 1883, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup>Plekhanov, 1895, pp. 678–681.

<sup>16</sup>Plekhanov, 1885, p. 309.

<sup>17</sup>Plekhanov, 1885, p. 241.

<sup>18</sup>Plekhanov, 1885, p. 240.

<sup>19</sup>Plekhanov, 1901, p. 686.

peasants, finds among them hardly any support, sympathy, or understanding."<sup>20</sup> Because it ties the interests of the peasants to the land, the commune "hinders their intellectual and political development by limiting their outlook to the narrow bounds of village traditions."<sup>21</sup> Parochial in outlook and profoundly unaware of his place in society, the peasant "remains a mere *cipher* in the sense of some conscious impact upon the blind forces of the economy."<sup>22</sup>

The peasant was, in this respect, the "political antipode" of the worker. "The historical role of the peasant is as conservative as that of the worker is revolutionary"<sup>23</sup> and this conservatism could be shaken only when "the proletarian, ejected from the countryside as an impoverished member of the village commune, returns as a Social-Democratic agitator."<sup>24</sup> If Marx's scenario required an intermediary to provide the commune with access to the scientific, technological and political achievements of capitalist civilisation, for Plekhanov, the intermediary can be none other than the industrial worker. The disintegration of the commune can be halted only through "a new popular force capable of putting an end to capitalism." But this force, the working class, itself comes into being only through the logic of capital, from elements thrown off in the very process of communal disintegration.<sup>25</sup>

## Lenin and the Critique of Populism

By the time Lenin entered the debate with Marxism's populist critics, its context had changed. The intervening decade had seen a dramatic expansion of capitalist production in Russia and revolutionary populism had given way to "legal populism." Lenin characterized the development as follows:

[T]he old Russian peasant socialism split up ... making way for workers' socialism, on the one hand, and degenerating into vulgar petty-bourgeois radicalism, on the other ... From a political programme calculated *to arouse the peasantry* for the socialist revolution *against the foundations of modern society*

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<sup>20</sup>Plekhanov, 1888, p. 359.

<sup>21</sup>Plekhanov, 1888, p. 359.

<sup>22</sup>Plekhanov, 1896, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup>Cited in Keep, 1963, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup>Plekhanov, 1888, p. 361.

<sup>25</sup>See Plekhanov, 1888, p. 361.

there has emerged a programme calculated to patch up, to “improve” the conditions of the peasantry *while preserving the foundations of modern society*.<sup>26</sup>

The issue was no longer the advent of capitalism in Russia but whether the logic of its development must preclude practical proposals to defend the traditional institutions of the people. Plekhanov’s highly abstract argument, that the dynamism of the productive forces would eventuate in a capitalist Russia either directly, through an internal logic of economic development, or indirectly, through international movements of capital and the logic of inter-state competition that led the pre-capitalist tsarist state to foster the growth of capitalism, did not speak to the new populist concern. Indeed, his acknowledgement of Russian capitalism’s possible dependence upon the strategy of the tsarist state might read as an admission that capital was an artificial product and that the decline of traditional “socialist” institutions could be remedied by the state’s pursuing more enlightened policies. The analysis Lenin proposed, organized around a concern to undermine the new populism *from within* by providing a detailed demonstration of how large-scale production, which the populists identified with capitalism, was growing inevitably out of the very social relations they sought to defend against it, was well designed to address the changed terms of debate.

The Emancipation Edict of 1861 dealt the social-estate system a decisive blow, according to Lenin, and ushered in a fundamental realignment of social forces in Russia; unity of the whole people against serfdom gave way to struggle between the classes of capitalist society. Though the populists were hardly ignorant of the facts of Russian social development—Lenin’s own analysis was largely based on the empirical data they collected—they lacked the conceptual apparatus needed to explain these facts and, consequently, to act effectively upon them.

Mistaking the organic connection between the separation of the peasants from their means of production in the countryside (“de-peasantizing”) and the implantation of large-scale capitalist industry in the towns, populists might bemoan each of these phenomena but could understand neither. The impoverished peasants, no longer able to satisfy their own needs, had to turn to the market; their poverty did not signal the impossibility of Russian capitalism but one aspect of its development. Bound up with the social division of labor, the market grew in and through the very logic that generated a polarization of social classes. But the separation of the direct producers from

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<sup>26</sup>Lenin, 1894a, pp. 264–265.

the land and the means of production and their subordination to capital did not result immediately from this logic, which moved through successive phases and even sustained the remnants of the preceding economic order for some time. The development of capitalism:

begins with *merchant's* and *usury capital*, then grows into industrial capitalism, which in its turn is at first technically quite primitive ... then organises manufacture—which is still based on hand labour, and on the dominant handicraft industries, without breaking the tie between the wageworker and the land—and completes its development with large-scale industry ... [T]his last, highest stage ... constitutes the culminating point of the development of capitalism, *it alone* creates the fully expropriated worker who is free as a bird, *it alone* gives rise (both materially and socially) to the 'unifying significance' of capitalism ... *it alone* opposes capitalism to its 'own child.'<sup>27</sup>

Concerned primarily with the formation of the home market, Lenin conceived the growth of capitalism as a radically internal process. The limits to capital were relative, pertaining to its internal contradictions. Capitalist social relations could be transformed through the play of these internal contradictions, "but only when such action originates *from the people themselves whose social relations are being ... changed.*"<sup>28</sup> Lenin characterized Russian Marxists as "socialists whose point of departure is the view that the reality of our environment is capitalist society and that there is only one way out of it—the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie."<sup>29</sup>

## Class Struggle in the Democratic Revolution

The pre-capitalist institutions and practices that were the target of the democratic revolution not only encumbered the workers' efforts to build independent organizations and to reflect upon their experience of struggle with capital, they were entwined with the primitive forms of the capital relation—usury and merchant's capital—that prevailed throughout the countryside. "[U]nless these pillars of reaction are overthrown," he wrote, "the Russian rural proletariat, whose support is an essential condition for the victory of the working class, will never cease to be downtrodden and cowed,

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<sup>27</sup>Lenin, 1894b, p. 438.

<sup>28</sup>Lenin, 1894b, p. 372.

<sup>29</sup>Lenin, 1894a, p. 197.

capable only of sullen desperation and not of intelligent and persistent protest and struggle.”<sup>30</sup> Uprooting the institutional bases of pre-capitalist relations of personal dependence, the democratic revolution undermines the most brutal forms of capital; securing the political conditions for capital accumulation and the generalized domination of its developed forms, it affords the rural proletarians a margin of personal independence and dignity and hence the possibility of organized resistance to exploitation. In waging a struggle for democracy, the working class of large-scale machine industry acted on behalf of the semi-proletarianized rural masses, as yet unable to act for themselves. Acting as the champion of all the oppressed and exploited in the democratic revolution, the proletariat asserted itself as the vanguard of the socialist revolution. The revolutionary struggle against tsarism “at the head of all the democratic elements” was thus incumbent upon the working class by virtue of its socialist vocation.

Proletarian hegemony figures in the analysis of the young Lenin alternately in the character of the industrial working class as the vanguard of all the exploited and in the imperative that it assume leadership of “all the democratic elements.” The persuasiveness of his argument depends upon the tacit identification of these two formulations. But if all the democratic elements can really be identified with the exploited, then the distinction between democratic and socialist revolutions, the lynchpin of social democratic strategy, would seem rather tenuous. The proletarian claim to leadership of all the exploited was well grounded in Lenin’s analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia—if exploitation was everywhere capitalist in nature and if the circumstances of producers everywhere approximated more and more closely those of the industrial working class. But if, perhaps by virtue of common resistance to capitalist exploitation, the rural semi-proletarians could really follow this lead, it is surely a *socialist* revolution that such universal class solidarity would enact. Lenin’s own analysis, however, indicates that a democratic revolution is necessary *before* they can follow it. The bourgeois-democratic revolution must therefore reflect a different and more complex alignment of social forces. In this case, the hegemony of the proletariat requires appropriately different analytical foundations; the forms in which hegemony is exercised over non-proletarian allies must be considerably less straightforward. The leadership of “all the democratic elements” would have to take account of the diversity of class interests involved in the

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<sup>30</sup>Lenin, 1894a, p. 291.

struggle for democracy. But Lenin neither supplies analytical foundations for such an exercise of hegemony nor specifies the forms it might take.

The contention that "the exploitation of the working people in Russia is everywhere capitalist in nature, if we leave out of account the moribund remnants of [the] serf economy"<sup>31</sup> left no theoretical scope for an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry, that is, with a social force that united the "petty-bourgeois peasantry" with the nascent peasant bourgeoisie and the masses of semi-proletarianized peasant labourers. Reading the social dynamic of the countryside immediately from the process of capitalist class polarization, Lenin consigned the revolutionary efficacy of the peasantry to "the epoch of the fall of serfdom".<sup>32</sup> All that remained of the peasant estate was the petty-bourgeois residue left by this process, whose vacillation in the struggle for democracy was expressed ideologically in the paradoxes Lenin found in legal populism. Most strikingly, he identified the reactionary side of populism with its defence of communal institutions—that is, with the very aspect of the populist programme that lent it a socialist allure. Populist criticism of land poverty, high payments and bureaucratic tyranny was not socialist, but its democratic thrust could "facilitate the workers' direct struggle against capital" by helping rid capitalist "oppression of the medieval rubbish that aggravates it."<sup>33</sup> But through collective responsibility for taxes and land redemption payments and control over the passports needed for internal migration, the commune already institutionalized the power of the peasant bourgeoisie; as an obstacle to the free movement of the impoverished semi-proletarians, it impeded the rationalization of capitalist agriculture. The inalienability of allotments merely bound the working peasants more tightly to the local landlord or kulak. Such derogation from democratic freedoms perpetuated the most backward, brutal and stultifying forms of capitalist exploitation.

Lenin's critique of petty-bourgeois democracy was thus at the same time an exposure of the socialist self-deception of populism; indeed, it is reminiscent of the *Communist Manifesto*, which identified petty-bourgeois socialism as "both reactionary and utopian." He envisaged with approval the formation of a petty-bourgeois democratic party but "only when a durable programme of *democratic* demands has been drawn up that will put an end to the prejudices of the old Russian exceptionalism," that is, only

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<sup>31</sup>Lenin, 1894a, p. 299.

<sup>32</sup>Lenin, 1894a, p. 279.

<sup>33</sup>Lenin, 1894a, p. 289.

when the socialist aspect of petty-bourgeois ideology had been excised. He pledged social democratic support for “any struggle waged by the democrats against reactionary institutions,” including, by implication, the commune.<sup>34</sup> However, Lenin does not give the prospect of a forward-looking petty-bourgeoisie much weight; it is plausible at all only because, like Plekhanov, he portrays the “moribund remnants” and “reactionary institutions”—absolutism, the social-estate system, the commune, and so on—as mere passive obstacles to the logic of capitalist progress. They are not understood as entering into the process whereby the identities of social forces are constituted and their alignment determined. Hence the alignment of social forces at work in the revolutionary process in Russia effectively becomes an exemplification of the logic of capitalist development. Thereby a dynamic of class struggle characteristic of developed capitalism and appropriate to socialist revolution is transposed onto the process of democratic revolution. In this context, neither the bourgeois nor the peasant is a revolutionary actor; in this context, petty-bourgeois social strata are neither an effective force nor, according to Marx and Engels,

revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat.<sup>35</sup>

Non-proletarian participation in the revolution was thus accidental rather than essential, a matter of individual volition rather than social force;

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<sup>34</sup>Lenin, 1894a, pp. 292, 293. Instructive in this regard is Lenin’s response to the formation in 1893 of the short-lived *Narodnoe pravo* party (Party of the People’s Right). Subordinating the theme of Russian exceptionalism to the struggle against the autocracy, the *Narodopravtsi* managed to avoid the direct departures from democracy characteristic of legal populism; though retaining a social-revolutionary idiom, they were critical of populist apoliticism and accorded primacy to the struggle for political reforms and liberties. While greeting their manifesto, Lenin held that the advance it represented underscored the inherent inconsistency of all populist democracy. The ideological insistence of the *Narodopravtsi* upon the participation of the masses of the people themselves in the struggle for democracy was defused and contradicted by their abstract notion of the “people,” unrelated to definite social relations of production. In Lenin’s view, their desire for a fusion of all revolutionary elements in the common struggle for political rights could draw force from nothing but such abstractions, in naïve disregard of the material conditions and interests from which alone the political engagement of the masses could proceed. The combination of real revolutionary forces is “much better achieved by the separate organisation of the representatives of the different interests and by the joint action of the two parties in particular cases” (1894a, pp. 330–331).

<sup>35</sup>Marx and Engels, 1848, p. 494.

as such, its effect upon the revolutionary process could not be grasped theoretically. If the proletariat is pre-eminent in the democratic revolution, it is not because it exercises hegemony over other democratic forces but because it is the only effective revolutionary force. In this case, however, the distinction between democratic and socialist revolutions is reduced to a strategic calculation of the instrumentalities available to the workers for achieving socialism, unsupported by historical materialist analysis of the shifting alignment of social forces at each stage of the process.

## An Alliance of Workers and Peasants

The emergence, as the century drew to a close, of a narrowly corporatist—"economist"—tendency in Russian social democracy and the related threat of a liberal strategy of hegemony gave expression to a crisis in the project of proletarian hegemony and occasioned Lenin to rethink the political logic of the struggle for hegemony. In this context, Lenin returned to the shape of the class struggles in the countryside: in *The Workers' Party and the Peasantry*, described by a populist writer as "a landmark in the evolution of Marxist views on the rural masses,"<sup>36</sup> he distinguished between "two kinds of class antagonism exist[ing] side by side" in the Russian village, "the antagonism between the agricultural workers and the proprietors" and that "between the peasantry as a whole and the landlord class as a whole." The former, although "becoming more acute," lay in the future, while the latter, "gradually diminishing," already belonged largely to the past.<sup>37</sup> Yet the antagonism between landlords and peasantry was of greater practical significance for the present: the agricultural labourers "are still too closely connected with the peasantry ... still too heavily burdened with the misfortunes of the peasantry as a whole to enable [their] movement ... to assume national significance, either now or in the immediate future."<sup>38</sup> Implicit in this analysis was the possibility of a revolutionary movement of the peasantry as a whole. But as yet it was only implicit and only a possibility. And a possible alliance with the peasantry was not yet counterposed to other potential alliances, notably with the bourgeois opposition. Even after a wave of peasant unrest swept across the south of Russia from the Ukraine to the

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<sup>36</sup>See Treadgold, 1976, p. 79.

<sup>37</sup>Lenin, 1901, p. 423.

<sup>38</sup>Lenin, 1901, p. 424.

Urals in 1902, he reserved his judgment: “[W]e cannot ... say in advance whether, when the revolution awakens them to political life, our land-holding peasants will come out as a democratic revolutionary party or as a party of Order.”<sup>39</sup> This reserve was expressed in the agrarian programme of the RSDLP (Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party), drawn up by Lenin and adopted at the Second Congress, in which figured prominently a demand for the return of the “cut-off lands” (*otrezki*), lands expropriated from the peasants in 1861 as part of the payment exacted for their legal emancipation. Criticised at the congress as both meagre and impractical, this demand did not reflect concerns about the propriety of peasant land seizures, but doubts about the revolutionary capacity of the peasants.<sup>40</sup>

The same reserve characterized Lenin’s initial reaction to the peasant movement in 1905. From its inception, the peasant movement left the mere *otrezki* in its dust. “All land to the people!” So spoke a Ukrainian peasant sailor, Matinishenko, expressing his impatience with the *otrezki* proposal while visiting Lenin in exile.<sup>41</sup> Lenin reiterated the claim that the solidarity of the peasantry as a whole would surely exhaust itself in the demand for the return of the cut-off lands, beyond which antagonism would flare up between the rural proletariat and the incipient peasant bourgeoisie. But wishing to avoid anything that might appear to constrain the revolutionary initiative of the peasant movement, he urged the replacement of the *otrezki* demand in the party programme with a more adaptable, open-ended call for the formation of revolutionary peasant committees that could set about dismantling the remnants of serfdom and reorganizing rural society along democratic lines.<sup>42</sup> For the same reason, he rejected agitation for nationalization of the land, although this was the most far-reaching measure of agrarian reform consistent with capitalism. A call to nationalize the land could not serve to focus the revolutionary struggle for democracy, “for it does not place the stress on the peasants’ relations to the landlords (the peasants take the land of the landlords) but on the landlords’ relations to the state.”<sup>43</sup> Lenin was evidently still laboring under the impression that the peasants did not yet grasp their “relations to the landlords.” Only after the breadth and

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<sup>39</sup>Lenin, 1903, pp. 444–445.

<sup>40</sup>See RSDLP, 1904, pp. 249–295.

<sup>41</sup>Krupskaya, 1930, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup>Lenin, 1905b, pp. 247, 248.

<sup>43</sup>Lenin, 1905e, p. 312; see Lenin 1905b, pp. 249–250.

resilience of their movement had demonstrated the contrary would he revisit the issue of nationalization in light of the peasants' relation to the state.

Only after he had examined through the optic of the struggle for hegemony how the "two kinds of class antagonism" intersected to shape the terrain of the bourgeois-democratic revolution could Lenin assign the peasantry a determinate position in the strategic matrix of the political struggle. The results of this examination were spelled out most fully in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905). Even the most thorough revolutionary transformation would not "depart from the framework of the bourgeois, i.e., capitalist socio-economic system" or touch "the foundations of capitalism ... without a series of intermediary stages of revolutionary development."<sup>44</sup> It was nonetheless possible, within these limits, to distinguish between a form of "democratic revolution ... advantageous mainly to the big capitalist, the financial magnate, and the 'enlightened landlord'" and "a form advantageous to the peasant and the worker."<sup>45</sup> In accordance with the predominance of one or the other form, as determined by "the objective combination of the operation of the various social forces," Lenin distinguished "two possible courses and two possible outcomes of the revolution in Russia."<sup>46</sup>

For the big bourgeoisie, landlords, factory owners and fashionable "society", it was advantageous that:

the necessary changes in the direction of bourgeois democracy ... take place more slowly, more gradually, more cautiously, less resolutely, by means of reforms and not by means of revolution; [that] these changes spare the 'venerable' institutions of the serf-owning system (such as the monarchy) as much as possible; [that] these changes ... develop as little as possible the independent revolutionary activity, initiative, and energy of the common people.<sup>47</sup>

It would be to the advantage of the workers and peasants, by contrast, that these changes be accomplished in a revolutionary fashion without the "delay, procrastination, the painfully slow decomposition of the putrid parts of the national organism" attendant upon the farrago of reform. The workers and peasants who would "suffer first of all and most of all from that

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<sup>44</sup>Lenin, 1905c, pp. 49, 56.

<sup>45</sup>Lenin, 1905c, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup>Lenin, 1905c, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup>Lenin, 1905c, pp. 50–51.

putrefaction” would be better served by a revolutionary “amputation.”<sup>48</sup> The workers were obliged by their very class position to wage a consistent struggle for democracy, while the peasantry’s struggle against the old order in the countryside rendered it revolutionary and potentially a force for republican democracy.<sup>49</sup> The decisive victory of the revolution would necessitate an insurrection of “the [armed] people, i.e., the proletariat and the peasantry,” culminating in a provisional government with the will to employ the dictatorial measures required to break the counterrevolutionary resistance of the landlords and the big bourgeoisie, to ensure “a radical redistribution of land in favour of the peasantry,” to establish “consistent and full democracy, including a republic,” and to extirpate “all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage” in the factory as well as the countryside, so as to “lay the foundation for a thorough improvement in the conditions of the workers” and to spread the spark of revolution into Europe.<sup>50</sup> Should the strength, the determination and the cohesion of the popular democratic forces prove inadequate to the task, however, their revolutionary ferment would have served the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie as a bargaining counter in its negotiations with tsarism. The deal already assiduously sought by the government and the liberals would be concluded with “some form of representative assembly convened by the Tsar, one that could be called a constituent assembly only in derision ... a docked constitution, or, if the worse comes to the worst, even [with] a travesty of a constitution.”<sup>51</sup>

Social democracy was inextricably implicated in a strategic matrix of political struggle organized around state power and structured by the struggle around these two possible forms of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The struggle for hegemony was waged through the constitution and disaggregation of class alliances with the potential to determine the predominance of one form or the other in the course of the revolutionary transformation. The Mensheviks’ failure to distinguish between the two forms of the bourgeois-democratic revolution undermined their efforts to escape the political orbit of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie and allowed them to serve as a conduit for bourgeois influence in the working-class movement. The independence of the proletariat could be expressed only in and through a decisive victory over tsarism and, consequently, only in fostering

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<sup>48</sup>Lenin, 1905c, p. 51.

<sup>49</sup>Lenin, 1905c, pp. 51–52.

<sup>50</sup>Lenin, 1905c, pp. 56–57.

<sup>51</sup>Lenin, 1905c, pp. 47, 58.

the spontaneous revolutionary movement of the peasantry and educating it to the political struggle for democracy:

[T]o avoid finding itself with its hands tied in the struggle against the inconsistent bourgeois democracy the proletariat must be class-conscious enough and strong enough to rouse the peasantry to revolutionary consciousness, guide its assault, and *thereby* independently pursue the line of consistent proletarian democratism.<sup>52</sup>

The hegemony of the proletariat was thus redefined in terms of the course and outcome of the revolution, made dependent upon an alliance with the peasantry and articulated with the factional struggle inside the RSDLP.

## Class Alliance in Theory and Practice

It has often been assumed that the alliance of proletariat and peasantry was the political conclusion that followed from the analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia Lenin had already worked out by the turn of the century. What evidence there is—and there is a great deal of evidence—contradicts this assumption conclusively. Lenin's revolutionary strategy rested upon an alliance with the whole peasantry, not only the poor peasants; the logic of his political theory and practice is rendered opaque if this is not grasped. The peasantry, as Lenin defined the term, was a social estate encompassing the rural semi-proletariat, the peasant petty bourgeoisie (or middle peasants) and a nascent peasant bourgeoisie, and unified in the struggle against the institutions and practices of serfdom since the "oppression of one social-estate by another can be destroyed only by the whole of the lower, oppressed estate."<sup>53</sup> From his earliest response in March 1905 to the revolutionary actions of the peasantry, Lenin consistently advocated an alliance that included the peasant bourgeoisie. He eschewed any notion that *this* bourgeoisie would side with the landlords: though the independent organization of the rural proletariat was always on the agenda of the social democrats, in the democratic revolution it was also incumbent upon them to act together "with the peasant bourgeoisie against all manner of serfdom and against the

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<sup>52</sup>Lenin, 1905c, p. 60; emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup>Lenin, 1905b, p. 250.

serf-owning landlords.”<sup>54</sup> As land seizures and attacks upon landlords and officials spread and the peasant revolt intensified, this position was asserted with increasing confidence: “The struggle against the bureaucrat and the landlord can and must be waged together with all peasants, even the well-to-do and middle peasants”<sup>55</sup>; “class-conscious socialists must unconditionally support the revolutionary struggle of all, even the prosperous, peasants against the officials and landowners.”<sup>56</sup>

That Lenin understood the peasant movement in this way indicates that the alignment of class forces in the democratic revolution was not to be read immediately from the current phase in the development of the capitalist mode of production, a procedure that would subsume diverse social strata under the simple polarization between proletariat and bourgeoisie. The peasantry with which Lenin sought to cement a revolutionary alliance was no mere semi-proletarian tail of the industrial workers but a distinct social force, albeit one comprised of divergent elements and formed through a struggle specific to it.

[I]t is not two contending forces that form the content of the revolution, but two distinct and different social wars: one waged within the present autocratic-feudal system, the other within the future bourgeois-democratic system, whose birth we are already witnessing ... An arduous and formidable task thus devolves on the socialists – to wage two wars simultaneously, wars that are totally different in their nature, their aims, and the composition of the social forces capable of playing a decisive part in either of them.<sup>57</sup>

The alliance of workers and peasants was not founded upon an identity of class interest but upon the confluence of distinct social interests. The strategy of proletarian hegemony had to be deployed politically, and the alliance with the revolutionary-democratic peasantry constructed politically, around the conjunction of the “two distinct and different social wars.” This alliance did not exemplify and therefore could not have followed from Lenin’s early analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia. It could have been conceived only in response to the experience of the revolutionary peasant movement.

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<sup>54</sup>Lenin, 1905a, p. 233.

<sup>55</sup>Lenin, 1905f, p. 443.

<sup>56</sup>Lenin, 1905g, p. 177.

<sup>57</sup>Lenin, 1905e, pp. 307, 308.

## The Peasant Movement and Historical Materialism

The sweep and resilience of the peasant movement led Lenin to reassess the depth of its roots, to revise his analysis of the social relations of the Russian countryside and to reformulate his agrarian programme accordingly. In so doing, he refined the idea of two paths of bourgeois-democratic revolution, relating it to the theory of capitalist development and thereby equipping the Marxist political project of proletarian hegemony with a solid historical materialist armature. The new analysis was first adumbrated in *Revision of the Agrarian Programme of the Workers' Party*, written for the Fourth (Unity) Congress of the RSDLP, held in April 1906. The peasant movement was given there as grounds for retracting the call for the return of the cut-off lands in favour of a more radical approach and for an implicit but unmistakable critique of his earlier analysis of the development of capitalism in Russia: "Taken as a whole, the landed estate in Russia today rests on a system of feudal bondage rather than on the capitalist system. Those who deny this cannot explain the present breadth and depth of the revolutionary peasant movement in Russia."<sup>58</sup>

The critique was made explicit the following year in *The Agrarian Programme of Social-Democracy in the First Russian Revolution, 1905–1907*, where Lenin attributed "the mistake" of the earlier programme to the fact that:

while we correctly defined the *trend* of development, we did not correctly define the *moment* of that development. We assumed that the elements of capitalist agriculture had already taken full shape in Russia, both in landlord farming (minus the cut-off lands and their conditions of bondage ...) and in peasant farming, which seemed to have given rise to a strong peasant bourgeoisie and therefore to be incapable of bringing about a 'peasant agrarian revolution' ... But the survivals of serfdom in the countryside have proved to be much stronger than we had thought: they have given rise to a nationwide peasant movement and they have made *that* movement the touchstone of the bourgeois revolution as a whole. Hegemony in the bourgeois liberation movement, which revolutionary Social-Democracy always assigned to the proletariat, had to be defined more precisely as leadership that rallied the *peasantry* behind it.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Lenin, 1906a, p. 177.

<sup>59</sup>Lenin, 1907, pp. 291–292.

It had now become necessary, Lenin argued, to think the new estimate of the progress of agrarian capitalism through “to its logical conclusion.” If the elements of capitalist agriculture were still only in formation and bourgeois landlord economy had not yet been consolidated, he reasoned that two types of agrarian capitalist evolution remained open: the “American path,” consisting in the free development of small peasant farming along capitalist lines, or the “Prussian path,” consisting in the gradual evolution of landlord estates into large-scale capitalist farms.<sup>60</sup> The two pertinent transitional forms—the formation of the bourgeois farmer through the differentiation of the peasantry and the passage of the landlord from feudal to capitalist economy—had already been distinguished in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.<sup>61</sup> They figured there, however, as mutually reinforcing elements of an integral process.<sup>62</sup> Only the experience of the peasant movement would lead Lenin to consider them as defining the lines of battle in a social war between landlord and peasant, as conflicting objectives in the strategic logic of political struggle, and therefore as opposing paths of socio-economic development.<sup>63</sup> “If the demand for the confiscation of all the landlord estates proved to be historically correct”—and this was just what the peasant movement demonstrated—then “the beginnings of capitalism in landlord economy can and must be sacrificed to the wide and free development of capitalism on the basis of renovated small farming.”<sup>64</sup> Where the American path implied the radical demolition of all fetters upon capital, both the infrastructure of feudal bondage and oppression and the tsarist state superstructure, the Prussian path signified the indefinite survival of the socioeconomic taproot of political reaction. The American path was the historical materialization of “*narodnoye tvorchestvo* (the creative activity of the people)”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Lenin, 1907, p. 239.

<sup>61</sup>Lenin, 1899, pp. 172–187, 191–251.

<sup>62</sup>See Lenin, 1899, pp. 185–186, 207–208, 210.

<sup>63</sup>In the course of the debate on the agrarian question at the Second Congress of the RSDLP, one of the delegates, Gorin, did draw a contrast between two “methods” of transition from feudalism to capitalism, either direct or through petty proprietorship. He did not, however, draw any political implications from the contrast and if he exhibited any preference for one of the methods, it was for the former, roughly corresponding to Lenin’s “Prussian” path. He did not, in any case, envisage the distinction as a focus of social and political struggles (see RSDLP 1904, pp. 277–278). For Marx’s discussion of the forms of transition to capitalist agriculture, see Marx, 1894, pp. 782–813.

<sup>64</sup>Lenin, 1907, p. 292.

<sup>65</sup>Lenin, 1907, p. 346.

Citing a resolution of the Inaugural Congress of the All-Russian Peasant Union, Lenin asserted that the peasants, in the course of "their struggle against the private ownership of the large estates ... necessarily arrive, and through their foremost representatives have already arrived, at the demand for the abolition of all private ownership of land in general."<sup>66</sup> Judged in terms of his initial estimate of the development of agrarian capitalism, nationalization of the land had seemed a mere paper project, a distraction from the class antagonism between peasant and landlord.<sup>67</sup> Thus, although insistent upon its progressive economic significance, Lenin had hitherto resisted its inclusion in the social democratic agrarian programme. But since the idea had now arisen spontaneously among the peasants themselves, from the very circumstances of small peasant ownership weighed down by medieval exactions, it had to be reckoned with not as an agrarian socialist utopia, but as an expression of the most radical aspirations of the bourgeois agrarian revolution. Indeed, without nationalization of the land the bourgeois revolution could not triumph in Russia: in the struggle between the two paths of bourgeois revolution, it represented a radical "clearing of the estates" by the peasantry so that relations corresponding to "the conditions of free commercial agriculture" could be established.<sup>68</sup> Nationalization of the land, Lenin claimed, was the measure that would give fullest effect to the American path; he could back the claim with the Marxist theory of capitalist ground rent.

Marx distinguished two forms of rent, differential and absolute.<sup>69</sup> Differential rent is based upon differences between better and worse soils in production and consists of the difference between the individual price of production on the better soils and the highest price of production on the worst soil. It arises inevitably in capitalist agriculture through the action of competition, whether the land is privately owned or not. Absolute rent, by contrast, arises through the monopolistic relation of private property in land. Capitalist agriculture is historically characterized by a lower organic composition of capital, lower productivity of labour, and hence a higher rate of surplus value than industry. The institution of private property in the

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<sup>66</sup>Lenin, 1906a, p. 180.

<sup>67</sup>Lenin, 1905b, pp. 249–250.

<sup>68</sup>Lenin, 1907, p. 277.

<sup>69</sup>See Marx, 1894, pp. 614–781, especially 640–647 and 748–772. The theory of ground rent is also the subject of the greater part of Marx, 1968. Lenin's discussion of Marx's theory, while polemical, is accurate; it also draws upon the account in Kautsky, 1898, pp. 101–120.

land, however, constitutes a significant barrier to the free penetration of capital into agricultural production and effectively prevents agricultural capital from entering into the formation of the average rate of profit. The sale of agricultural products at a price above even the highest price of production is thereby possible, with the difference accruing to the landowner in the form of absolute rent. Tantamount to the abolition of absolute rent, nationalizing the land would promote the application of capital to agriculture more consistently than any other measure: money capital that would otherwise be tied up in the purchase of land could be invested directly in production and the subjection of the peasant to usury capital would thus be eroded.<sup>70</sup>

Although nationalization of the land corresponded to a definite phase of the peasant struggle against feudal landlordism, it was bound to come into contradiction with the desire in the emergent class of petty capitalist farmers for their own privileges of ownership. This contradiction, expressed in the farmers' demands for the restoration of private property and division of the land, would sap the worker-peasant alliance. Absent a socialist revolution in Europe, the requirements of capitalist development would at some point overcome all the influences counteracting the demand for restoration. Nationalization would nonetheless have demonstrated enduring historical significance; in shattering the carapace of medieval social relations that weighed upon the Russian countryside, it would have established the most advantageous point of departure for the American path of agrarian capitalist development, and in helping to dislodge one form of private property, the working class would have made its aspirations felt everywhere.<sup>71</sup> Lenin's analysis of the peasant struggle for nationalization of the land thus vindicated in historical materialist terms not only the moral but also the material significance of the struggle for proletarian hegemony in the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

## Peasant Ideology and Proletarian Hegemony

When Lenin incorporated nationalization of the land into the agrarian programme he proposed to the Unity Congress, Plekhanov taunted him with the spectre of *Narodnaia volia*.<sup>72</sup> Along with the majority of delegates,

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<sup>70</sup>Lenin, 1907, pp. 295–316.

<sup>71</sup>Lenin, 1907, pp. 323–325.

<sup>72</sup>See Baron, 1963, pp. 265–267; Lenin, 1906b, pp. 283–284; Lenin, 1906c, p. 331.

Plekhanov backed a Menshevik agrarian programme whose centrepiece was the notion of "municipalization," the transfer of the landed estates to "organs of local self-government." Since the proposal for municipalization did not designate the mode of agrarian transformation—it referred neither to peasant committees nor to the direct seizure of the land, and the transfer of land was not conditioned upon a democratic republic<sup>73</sup>—Lenin estimated that it amounted in practice to a call for transfer of the landed estates to the *zemstvos* (local councils dominated by landlords and gentry), something the peasants would never accept. The prospect, stressed by Plekhanov, that municipalization would constitute an institutional guarantee against counterrevolution was illusory, Lenin argued, for the only real guarantee would be a socialist revolution in the West, while the only guarantee within the power of the Russians themselves was the thoroughness of the revolutionary transformation "effected by the revolutionary class directly."<sup>74</sup> He would later buttress this argument with the trenchant observation that municipalization, applied only to the landed estates, would leave intact the existing demarcation between landlord and peasant lands, itself an integral element of the system of medieval landownership: "[I]t is necessary to 'unfence' *all* the land, landlord as well as allotment land ... The whole land must be 'cleared' of all medieval lumber."<sup>75</sup>

Isolated even among the Bolsheviks in espousing nationalization, Lenin lent his vote to the "divisionists" who advocated the formation of peasant committees and the seizure and division of the land by the peasants themselves: "municipalisation is wrong and harmful; division is wrong but not harmful."<sup>76</sup> But Lenin and the proponents of "division" diverged in their assessment of the potential latent in peasant ideology. For the "divisionists," noteworthy among whom was the young Stalin, the decisive issue was working-class support for the legitimate and progressive demands of an ally in the revolutionary struggle: "If the emancipation of the proletariat must be the act of the proletariat itself, then the emancipation of the

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<sup>73</sup>See Ascher, 1976, pp. 64–65.

<sup>74</sup>Lenin, 1906b, p. 281. Despite his estimate of the economically progressive character of nationalization, Lenin rejected its use as a revolutionary slogan throughout 1905. Considered in abstraction from his re-evaluation of Russian peasant ideology, itself intimately bound up with his reassessment of rural social relations in light of the experience of the peasant movement, Lenin's reversal on this question is incomprehensible, as is the politico-strategic significance he would come to assign to nationalization.

<sup>75</sup>Lenin, 1907, p. 424.

<sup>76</sup>Lenin, 1906b, p. 286.

peasants must be the act of the peasants themselves.”<sup>77</sup> Despite this appreciation of peasant self-activity, the “divisionists” did not take the peasants at their word. But without taking them at their word, the divisionists were ill-equipped to recognize and respond to the political challenge of establishing a connection between the peasant agrarian revolution and the struggle for a democratic republic, the challenge of political leadership in the worker-peasant alliance.

“The peasant says: ‘The land is God’s, the land is the people’s, the land is nobody’s.’”<sup>78</sup> This idea sustained the populist belief in the socialist propensities of the Russian peasants. According to Lenin, the “divisionists” correctly diagnosed the material interest underlying it: peasant socialism was a matter of mere words. Talk about “God’s land” was the ideological expression of the peasants’ desire to enlarge their small farms at the expense of the landed estates; behind the words, what they really wanted was the right to buy and sell land. “[T]he advocates of division *rightly* understand what the peasants say about nationalisation ... [but] they do not know how to convert this correct interpretation into *an instrument for changing the world*.”<sup>79</sup> Including division in the programme would leave social democratic activists in the anomalous position of trying to persuade crowds of peasants who insist that the land belongs to God, the people or nobody of the advantages of division, whereas including nationalization would provide activists with the means to connect the agrarian demands of the peasantry with political education in favour of a republic.

You say that everybody ought to have the right to use the land? You want to transfer the land to the people? Excellent! But what does transferring land to the people mean? Who controls the people’s wealth and the people’s property? The government officials, the Trepovs. Do you want to transfer the land to Trepov and the government officials? No. Every peasant will say that it is not to them that he wants to transfer the land ... Hence—we will explain to the peasants—if the land is to be transferred to the whole people in a way that will benefit the peasants, it is necessary to ensure that all government officials without exception are elected by the people.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Stalin, 1906, p. 240.

<sup>78</sup>Lenin, 1906b, p. 287.

<sup>79</sup>Lenin, 1906c, p. 345.

<sup>80</sup>Lenin, 1906b, p. 287.

The "divisionist" approach to the peasantry relied upon the same sort of procedure that Lenin had earlier employed in dissecting populist ideology into progressive (bourgeois-democratic) and reactionary (utopian-socialist) elements and advising its proponents to retain the former while eschewing the latter.

Simply disregarding the utopian-socialist idiom of the peasant movement in favor of a diagnosis, even though ultimately correct, of its material interest in private property, the "divisionists" were proceeding, albeit implicitly, in the same fashion. It was still necessary, in order to foster the independence of the agricultural proletariat and to appreciate the dynamic of the agrarian revolution, to distinguish the revolutionary-democratic force of the peasant conviction that "the land should belong to the whole people" from its freight of utopian-socialist illusion. But since the idea, however illusory, had gripped the masses, the illusion was inextricably intertwined with the force; it was not possible, in practice, simply to dispense with it. Lenin would later cite Engels in this connection: "What formally may be economically incorrect, may all the same be correct from the point of view of world history."<sup>81</sup> The distinction between the two aspects of populist ideology could be transformed into "an instrument for changing the world," but only on the condition that it not be reduced to a distinction between the emancipatory power of the truth and the chains of mere illusion. "We must say [to the peasants]: there is a great deal of truth in what you say about the land being God's, nobody's or the state's; but we must look at the truth very closely."<sup>82</sup> The politics of alliance with the peasants was no simple matter of acting upon their interests, correctly conceived, and leaving their illusions aside; it necessitated reckoning with illusion, though not as a mere token of respect, working with it as a condition of collective action and a function of political leadership.

Through the experience of the revolutionary movement of the peasantry, Lenin incorporated into the politico-strategic logic of the struggle

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<sup>81</sup>Cited in Lenin, 1909, p. 401. Lenin comments that "the conditions of life of the Russian peasantry being what they are, its bourgeois-democratic revolutionary spirit could not be ideologically expressed otherwise than in the form of 'belief' in the sovereign virtue of land equalization ... Our Mensheviks have never been able to understand these words of Engels. While exposing the *falsity* of the Narodnik doctrine, they closed their eyes like pedants to the *truth* of the contemporary struggle in the contemporary bourgeois revolution, which is expressed by these quasi-socialist doctrines."

<sup>82</sup>Lenin, 1906c, p. 345.

for hegemony not only the war over the agrarian social structure, but even the ideology that actuated the peasant masses in that war. The peasantry would enter ubiquitously and in some respects quite intricately into his political calculations. This was exemplified when in the summer of 1905, in an effort to forestall demands for a constitution and pacify the revolutionary movement, the tsarist government conceded a merely consultative assembly to be elected on a severely restricted property franchise, the projected Bulygin Duma. The liberal bourgeoisie responded in conciliatory fashion, but the liberal professions and the employees, grouped in “the most comprehensive organisation of the bourgeois intelligentsia,” the Union of Unions, decided upon a boycott of the Duma. In an effort to deepen the split between the liberal bourgeoisie and the bourgeois intelligentsia and thereby buttress the elements from which a political leadership of the revolutionary peasant movement might be drawn, Lenin urged support for the boycott idea and social democratic efforts to radicalize the boycott campaign. The bourgeois intelligentsia “could become an important force in the struggle ... against the autocracy ... *provided it draws closer to the people* ... Powerless by itself, it could nonetheless give quite considerable sections of the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry just what they lack—knowledge, programme, guidance, and organisation.”<sup>83</sup>

This analysis provided an early indication of a course of action Lenin would pursue consistently across the shifting conjunctures of the struggle for hegemony, at least until the world war: encouraging the formation of an independent political party of the peasantry and fostering, with advice and criticism, the emergence and radicalization of a non-proletarian political leadership for the peasants. It anticipated, and perhaps it suggested, Gramsci’s celebrated analysis of intellectuals and the peasantry.<sup>84</sup> Recognizing the autonomy of the peasant movement allowed Lenin to pursue apparently contradictory lines of intervention in tandem: by subjecting peasant populism to historical materialist critique, he demonstrated its formal economic or utopian illusions and asserted a distinction between proletariat and peasantry; by encouraging the emergence of the peasantry as an independent, non-proletarian political force, he could foster its world-historical truth—that is, its historically progressive illusions. Extracting “the

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<sup>83</sup>Lenin, 1905d, pp. 214, 215.

<sup>84</sup>See Gramsci, 1926.

sound and valuable kernel of the sincere, resolute, militant democracy of the peasant masses from the husk of [populist] utopias"<sup>85</sup> would not be simple, neither politically nor theoretically.

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<sup>85</sup>Lenin, 1912, p. 359.

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# 14

## The Impact of the SPD Model on Lenin and Bolshevism

Lars T. Lih

During the first decade of its existence, Bolshevism defined itself as the Russian branch of “revolutionary social democracy.” The first step away from a mythologized toward a historical understanding of Lenin and Bolshevism is to understand this self-definition. Prior to World War I, social democracy was an international workers’ movement dedicated to achieving socialism and represented by political parties in most of the major “civilized” countries (primarily Western Europe, Russia, North America and Japan). The present-day connotations of “social democracy” are misleading when talking about the outlook and reputation of social democracy before 1914. Today’s social democracy is the equivalent of democratic socialism, that is, the branch of socialism that defined itself in contrast to dictatorial communism; it is reformist and non-revolutionary. Prewar social democracy was also a part of the broad left, “the democracy,” but it defined itself in contrast to the rest of the democracy as the branch that was committed to socialism. It saw itself and was seen by others as a radical threat to the existing order.

The flagship party of social democracy was the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD). The SPD grew up in the 1870s and 1880s; by the 1890s, it had survived a period of intense government persecution to become the largest political party in Germany. By this time, a loose organization of national social democratic parties called the Second International

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had risen up (the First International had been founded in the 1860s by Karl Marx and others). In the 1890s, a broad reformist current began to call for a revision of the traditional revolutionary rhetoric of social democracy (hence “revisionism”). Since there now existed an explicitly non-revolutionary wing of social democracy, the more orthodox and Marx-based wing began to call itself “revolutionary social democracy.” The Russian Bolsheviks saw themselves as disciples of the Western European revolutionary social democrats, whose works were eagerly translated into Russian. Karl Kautsky, the acknowledged spokesman for European revolutionary social democracy, had so much prestige among the Bolsheviks that he can almost be called an honorary Bolshevik—until the outbreak of the world war in 1914, when he was hated as a “renegade” as much as he had been earlier admired.

Nevertheless, there were some fundamental contrasts between the situation in Western Europe and the situation faced by the Russian Bolsheviks. The Western European social democratic parties operated legally and enjoyed sufficient political freedom (freedom of speech, press, assembly) to carry out impressive agitational campaigns and to sustain a flourishing socialist press. In tsarist Russia, no political parties were legal before 1905, and the socialist parties were never legalized. Forced underground, they could only dream of someday publishing the kind of high-circulation newspapers that were commonplace in Western Europe and of sending spokesmen to address huge rallies. For the time being, they were forced to use badly printed leaflets and newspapers smuggled in from abroad, while trying to preserve minimal organizational continuity under repressive police persecution.

This situation meant that the first priority of the Russian social democrats was not a socialist revolution but an anti-tsarist revolution that would institute basic political freedom. Since anti-tsarist feelings were widespread in Russia, this priority meant that the Russian revolutionary social democrats were paradoxically less isolated than the Western European socialist proletariat. Crucially, the socialist proletariat in Russia could realistically strive for an anti-tsarist alliance with the land-hungry peasantry.

Lenin had strong roots in the Russian revolutionary tradition, but even these Russian roots can only be understood in terms of this tradition's own evolution toward social democracy. Bolshevism was not the brainchild of Lenin, despite his fundamental role as its chief ideologue and spokesman. In terms both of its organizational concept and its overall strategic orientation, Bolshevism was a Russian movement that tried to implant the perspectives of European “revolutionary social democracy” into the inhospitable soil of absolutism. Lenin became its leader because he expressed the aspirations

of this movement better than any other. As is often the case, the attempt to import a foreign model into a very different context stimulated creativity and led to unexpected originality.

## Social Democratic Roots in Marx and Engels

According to Marx and Engels, the proletariat had been given a mighty mission to take over state power and use it to institute socialism. This meant that the workers themselves were the only ones who could carry out their own emancipation. But this task of world-historical proportions required a huge amount of preparation, since the workers had to understand and accept their mission and then had to organize themselves to be able to carry it out. As Marx put it, the workers needed to be “united by combination and led by knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> In turn, these twin tasks—organization and enlightenment—required political freedom if they were to be carried out at the mass level of society-wide classes.

At first, Marx and Engels expected that the task of introducing political freedom would fall to the bourgeoisie, although bitter experience both in France and Germany convinced them otherwise. But “bourgeois democracy” was too important to be left to the bourgeoisie. Responding to the situation in Prussia in the mid-1860s, Engels told the workers that even if the bourgeoisie itself was too frightened to fight for “its own principles,” “the workers’ party would have no choice but, notwithstanding the bourgeoisie, to continue its campaign for bourgeois freedom—freedom of the press and rights of assembly and association—which the bourgeoisie had betrayed. Without these freedoms the workers party will be unable to move freely itself; in this struggle it is fighting to establish the environment necessary for its existence, for the air it needs to breathe.”<sup>2</sup>

Engels says here that political freedom was an urgent priority for the proletariat and that the proletariat has become the principal champion of political freedom in Germany and France—and yet he still refers to political freedom as “bourgeois freedom.” The air of paradox—the proletariat fighting for bourgeois principles—is still present in the debates among Russian social democrats a half-century later.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), 518 (Inaugural Address of the First International) (in English in the original).

<sup>2</sup>Engels, “The Prussian Military Question and the German Workers’ Party,” Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 20: pp. 77–78.

These foundational principles of Marx and Engels' new approach had far-reaching implications for working-class political organization, and they provided the basic orientation for social democracy and for the German SPD in particular. The strategic implications of Marxism's focus on the mission of the proletariat were set out with admirable clarity in 1884—the year after Marx's death—by the non-socialist British economic historian John Rae, in one of the earliest academic essays on Marx:

A social revolution needed other and larger preparation; it needed to have the whole population first thoroughly leavened with its principles; nay, it needed to possess an international character, depending not on detached local outbreaks, but on steady concert in revolutionary action on the part of the laboring classes everywhere ...

What was first to be done, therefore, was to educate and move public opinion, and in this work the ordinary secret society went but a little way. A secret propaganda might still be carried on, but a public and open propaganda was more effectual and more suitable to the times. There never existed greater facilities for such a movement, and they ought to make use of all the abundant means of popular agitation and intercommunication which modern society allowed. No more secret societies in holes and corners, no more small risings and petty plots, but a great broad organization working in open day, and working restlessly by tongue and pen to stir the masses of all European countries to a common international revolution.<sup>3</sup>

## Ferdinand Lassalle and the Permanent Campaign

German social democrats revered Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864) as the founder of their party. Although his heritage to the SPD was a mixed one that included false starts about party democracy and attitude toward the state, Lassalle deserves his status as one of the pioneers of social democracy for two main contributions. The first is bringing out the emotional implications of the concept of a historical mission: a noble task that one has an obligation to accept. As he put it, “we may congratulate ourselves, gentlemen, that we have been born at a time which is destined to witness this the most glorious work of history, and that we are permitted to take a part in

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<sup>3</sup>John Rae, *Contemporary Socialism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), pp. 127–129.

accomplishing it.” This destiny imposes the obligation of a quasi-religious earnestness, as revealed by the following climactic passage from one of Lassalle’s most influential writings, *The Worker Program*:

Nothing is more calculated to impress upon a class a worthy and moral character, than the awareness that it is destined to become a ruling class, that it called upon to raise the principle of its class to the principle of the entire age, to convert its idea into the leading idea of the whole of society and thus to form this society by impressing upon it its own character.

The high and world-wide honor of this destiny must occupy all your thoughts. Neither the burden of the oppressed, nor the idle dissipation of the thoughtless, nor even the harmless frivolity of the insignificant, are henceforth becoming to you. You are the rock on which the Church of the present is to be built.

It is the lofty moral earnestness of this thought which must with devouring exclusiveness possess your spirits, fill your minds, and shape your whole lives, so as to make them worthy of it, conformable to it, and always related to it. It is the moral earnestness of this thought which must never leave you, but must be present to your heart in your workshops during the hours of labour, in your leisure hours, during your walks, at your meetings, and even when you stretch your limbs to rest upon your hard couches, it is this thought which must fill and occupy your minds till they lose themselves in dreams.<sup>4</sup>

This high-minded rhetoric had a great impact not only in Germany but in Russia. Thirty years later, propagandizing among the workers of Petersburg, the Russian social democrat K.M. Takhtarev found that Lassalle’s “idea of the worker estate” made a very strong impression on the workers in his study circle.<sup>5</sup>

Lassalle also deserves the title of founder of German social democracy for another crucial political innovation: the permanent campaign. The mass political campaign was then a relatively recent political tool, one that was made possible by what John Rae called (as quoted earlier) “all the abundant means of popular agitation and intercommunication which modern society allowed.” Prior to Lassalle, however, this tool had been used only sporadically and in ad hoc fashion; for example, in order to repeal the British Corn Laws (an example that was a direct inspiration for Lassalle). Lassalle’s idea

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<sup>4</sup>As cited in Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered* (Haymarket Press, 2006), pp. 53–61.

<sup>5</sup>K.M. Takhtarev, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Peterburge, 1893–1901 gg.* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1924), p. 24.

was to use and expand campaign techniques of propaganda and agitation in order to spread the socialist message day in and day out:

Organize yourselves as a Universal Union of German Workers for the purpose of a legal and peaceful but unwearying, unceasing agitation for the introduction of universal direct suffrage in every German state. Found and publish newspapers, to make this demand daily and to prove the reasons for it from the state of society. With the same funds circulate pamphlets for the same purpose. Pay agents out of the Union's funds to carry this insight into every corner of the country, to thrill the heart of every worker, every house-servant, every farm-laborer, with this cry ... Propagate this cry [for universal suffrage] in every workshop, every village, every hut. May the workers of the towns let their higher insight and education overflow on to the workers of the country. Debate, discuss, everywhere, every day without pausing, without ending.<sup>6</sup>

The permanent campaign was an essential item in the institutional DNA transmitted from the Second International to the postwar Third International. Compare these words of Lenin (from *Left-Wing Communism*, his pamphlet written for the Second Comintern Congress in 1920) with the Lassalle passage just quoted:

The Communist Parties must issue their slogans; real proletarians, with the help of the unorganized and downtrodden poor, should scatter and distribute leaflets, canvass workers' houses and the cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages ... they should go into casual meetings where the common people gather, and talk to the people, not in scientific (and not in very parliamentary) language, they should not at all strive to 'get seats' in parliament, but should everywhere strive to rouse the minds of the masses and to draw them into the struggle, to catch the bourgeois on their own statements, to utilize the apparatus they themselves have set up, the elections they have appointed, the appeals to the country they have made, and to tell the people what Bolshevism is in a way that has never been possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times.<sup>7</sup>

The permanent campaign became the most distinctive and innovative feature of the SPD and the other European parties that followed its lead. For example, Jules Guesde, founder of the *Parti Ouvrier Français*, called

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<sup>6</sup>As cited in Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism* can be found at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/index.htm>.

for “a propaganda that is both vigorous and unrelenting [*aussi active que continue*]” that would result in a “*proletariat conscient et organisé*.”<sup>8</sup> (Guesde himself was very popular among Russian Marxists, and his many pamphlets translated into Russian constituted another channel for the diffusion of the SPD model.) Thus the SPD fully deserves the label “party of a new type.” In fact, all of the European social democratic parties can be called “vanguard parties” in the sense that they did not see their mission as simply reflecting the opinions of the working class as a whole, but rather as spreading the socialist message. Thus they recruited into the party only those whom they considered to be the elite of the working class, that is, workers who consciously accepted the socialist message and were willing to propagate it to their less enlightened comrades. As Karl Kautsky put it, “the task of Social Democracy is to make the proletariat aware of its task.”<sup>9</sup> This fundamental self-definition had its basis in the short but tremendously influential career of Ferdinand Lassalle.

## SPD as Model Party

The strength and prestige of the SPD was a source of confidence—no, *the* source of confidence—for socialists the world around. In a book reporting on the German Party for an American audience, the socialist Robert Hunter reels out the facts that gave rise to this immense prestige: “The German party is the oldest and largest socialist organization in Europe. It represents the thought of a very large proportion of the working men of the entire nation. There are more socialists in Germany than there are people in Spain, or Mexico, or in Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Norway put together. Its present vote would have elected the President of the United States up till the time of Grant’s second term. It polls a million more votes than any other party in Germany.”<sup>10</sup>

In the two decades after the Erfurt congress in 1891, the German social democrats thus became the largest party of Germany and even the world, with a prestige unmatched in international socialism. Its brilliant political spokesmen (party leader August Bebel was considered one of the best

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<sup>8</sup>Marc Angenot, “*Place au prolétariat conscient et organisé!*” (Montréal : CIADEST, 1992).

<sup>9</sup>All Kautsky quotations in this essay are from Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm* (Dietz Verlag: 1967), originally published 1892.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Hunter, *Socialists at Work* (Macmillan Company: New York, 1908).

orators in Europe), its impressive party congresses, its dazzling array of central and local newspapers, its inspiring rallies, and its wide range of cultural societies were all aimed at creating (in Vernon Lidtké's phrase) an "alternative culture" based on proletarian class solidarity and hostility to the German establishment.<sup>11</sup>

In order to carry out the permanent campaign bequeathed to the party by Lassalle, the SPD created a remarkable agitation machine. The single most impressive feature of this machine was the party press. In 1895, there were 75 socialist newspapers, of which 39 were issued six times a week. These newspapers catered to a broad variety of workers. There were newspapers for worker cyclists and worker gymnasts, for abstinent workers and even for innkeepers. By 1909, the total circulation was over one million, a figure that implies a great many more actual readers. But the printed word was embedded in a wider context of the face-to-face spoken word. Social democratic agitation was also conducted by means of public meetings, smaller conferences for the party militants and agitation by individual members.

The SPD did not confine itself to political propaganda and agitation. The social democratic movement in Germany consisted of a wide range of institutions that attempted to cover every facet of life. Party or party-associated institutions included trade unions, clubs dedicated to activities ranging from cycling to hiking to choral singing, theatres and celebratory festivals. The broad scope of the movement's ambitions justifies the title of Vernon Lidtké's classic study *The Alternative Culture*. Looking just at Lidtké's index under the letter "W," we find the following: workers' athletic clubs, workers' chess societies, workers' consumer societies, workers' cycling clubs, workers' educational societies, workers' gymnastic clubs, workers' libraries, workers' rowing clubs, workers' Samaritan associations, workers' singing societies, workers' swimming clubs, workers' temperance associations, workers' theatrical clubs, workers' youth clubs.

A final aspect of the SPD that was extremely important for Lenin can be described using Lenin's own image: the SPD acted not only as a fighter for socialism and a spokesman for proletarian interests, but also as the people's tribune, that is, it aggressively defended democratic values and the immediate interests of the people at large. As an English journalist put it in 1912, the German social democrats were "the only unterrified, tooth-and-nail foes of reaction, insensate militarism and class rule, the one voice which cries out

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<sup>11</sup>Vernon Lidtké, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

insistently, fearlessly, implacably, against the injustices which, in the opinion of many patriotic men, are retarding the moral progress and sapping the vital resources of the German nation.”

Parliament was an extremely important forum for the social democratic tribune of the people. The SPD made a practice of putting up candidates in every district, even when there was no chance of being elected—anything to spread the socialist message. Parliament itself was seen primarily as a forum for broadcasting the social democratic outlook on events. This aspect of the SPD became highly important for Lenin after the 1905 revolution, when he fought for effective party use of the new Russian legislature, the Duma.

Another weapon used by the SPD in its role as people’s tribune—one of central importance to Lenin’s argument in *What Is To Be Done?*—was what Lenin called political indictments: the exposure of corruption and scandal. Uncovering abuses, often with the help of sympathetic whistle-blowers who passed on incriminating documents, was a major activity of the socialist press. Observers attributed an “incredible influence” to the embattled party due to the “unfriendly and relentless eye” it cast on events affecting all classes of society.<sup>12</sup> In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin argued that similar political indictments should be a central feature for the underground social democratic newspaper *Iskra*.

Finally, the SPD model had a strong emotional component that expressed itself in the narrative of the inspired and inspiring activist spreading the word of social democracy and building up a world-wide army of fighters for the cause. A passage from the American socialist Robert Hunter evokes the socialist fervor that was part of the SPD heritage to Bolshevism:

Almost unknown to the world outside of Labor a movement wide as the universe grows and prospers. Its vitality is incredible, and its humanitarian ideals come to those who labor as drink to parched throats. Its creed and program call forth a passionate adherence, its converts serve it with a daily devotion that knows no limit of sacrifice, and in the face of persecution, misrepresentation, and even martyrdom, they remain loyal and true ... From Russia, across Europe and America to Japan, from Canada to Argentina, it crosses frontiers, breaking through the carriers of language, nationality, and religion as it spreads from factory to factory, from mill to mill, and from mine to mine, touching as it goes with the religion of life the millions of the underworld. Its converts work in every city, town and hamlet in the industrial nations, spreading the new gospel among the poor and lowly, who listen to their words

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<sup>12</sup>Hunter, *Socialists at Work*, pp. 213–214.

with religious intensity. Tired workmen pore over the literature which these missionaries leave behind them, and fall to sleep over open pages; and the youth, inspired by its lofty ideals and elevated thought, leave the factory with joyous anticipation to read through the night.<sup>13</sup>

## Karl Kautsky and the SPD Model

The relationship between Bolshevism and Western social democracy is embodied in the figure of Karl Kautsky, the preeminent spokesman of “revolutionary social democracy” during the two decades prior to the First World War. During all this time, Russian social democrats and the Bolsheviks in particular looked upon Kautsky as teacher and mentor. He undoubtedly played a greater role in the socialist education of ordinary Bolsheviks than any single Russian writer, including Lenin. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin set out Kautsky’s relation to Russian Bolshevism generously and accurately:

Undoubtedly, an immeasurably larger number of Kautsky’s works have been translated into Russian than into any other language ... The Russian workers, by making in 1905 an unusually great and unprecedented demand for the best works of the best Social-Democratic literature and editions of these works in quantities unheard of in other countries, rapidly transplanted, so to speak, the enormous experience of a neighboring, more advanced country to the young soil of our proletarian movement.<sup>14</sup>

Kautsky’s writings had an enormous impact on Bolshevism and on Lenin as an individual on a variety of crucial issues up to 1914 and even beyond. Here we will discuss Kautsky’s writings of the 1890s that served Russian social democrats as a guide to the logic of the SPD model. When people are inspired by a foreign political institution, direct contact is usually less significant than written expositions of an idealized model of the actual institution. So it was in the case of young Russian socialists in the 1890s who were inspired by the SPD. Their understanding of the inner logic of the German Party came primarily from Kautsky’s *Erfurt Program*, written as a commentary on the party program adopted by the SPD at a party congress in Erfurt in 1891. German social democracy had just forced the German government

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<sup>13</sup>Hunter, *Socialists at Work*.

<sup>14</sup>Lenin, V.I., *Polnoe sobranie sochineniia* (PSS), 5th ed. (Moscow: Gos. Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1958–1964), 33: 104 (*State and Revolution*).

to back down and to rescind anti-socialist legislation that had essentially outlawed the party, so that the party's international prestige among socialists was particularly high. Kautsky's *Erfurt Program* remained the basic textbook for Russian social democrats even in the 1920s.

Kautsky's understanding of the inner logic of Marx-based social democracy was summarized in the pithy formula "Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement." This formula had very wide currency in international social democracy. The young Lenin described it as "K. Kautsky's expression that reproduces the basic ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*."<sup>15</sup> According to this formula, the ideal of socialism that originated in the educated classes could only be realized if a mass workers' movement accepted it; conversely, the worker movement could only achieve its goal if it accepted socialism as its final goal. In practical terms, the merger formula pointed to the social democratic mission of educating and organizing on a national level.

This mission was crippled at the outset if political freedom is absent. The achievements of German social democracy were only possible because of the relative political freedom of the German empire. The crucial weapon of the socialist press was particularly dependent on political freedom. For this reason, Kautsky's *Erfurt Program* insisted on the primary importance of political freedoms for the proletariat:

To bring these masses into contact with one another, to awaken their awareness of their broad community of interests and to win them over for organizations capable of protecting their interests—this implies the possibility of speaking freely to the great masses, this implies freedom of assembly and the press ... Without the help of the press, it is absolutely impossible to unite the huge masses of today's wage labor into organizations and to get them to the level of unified action.

For all these reasons and more, there was no worse sin from a social democratic point of view than to disparage the crucial role of political freedom:

Where the working class bestirs itself, where it makes the first attempts to elevate its economic position, it puts political demands next to purely economic ones—namely, demands for freedom of association, of assembly, of the press. These freedoms have the greatest significance for the working class: they are among the conditions that makes its life possible and to which it

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<sup>15</sup>Lenin, PSS, 4: 189 (1899).

unconditionally owes its development. They are light and air for the proletariat; he who lets them wither or withholds them—he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them—that person is one of the proletariat’s worst enemies. It doesn’t matter how great a love for the proletariat he feels or fakes, it doesn’t matter whether he calls himself an anarchist or a Christian-Socialist or whatever. He harms the proletariat just as much as a declared foe; it’s all the same whether he does this from evil will or simply from ignorance—he must be fought against in the same way as acknowledged opponents of the proletariat.

The idea that political freedoms were light and air for the proletariat became the underlying premise of Russian social democracy’s basic political strategy. The First Congress also issued an influential Manifesto drafted by Petr Struve. In this document—the first official programmatic document of the RSDWP—we read that “political liberty is as necessary to the Russian proletariat as fresh air is to healthy breathing. It is the fundamental condition for its free development and for a successful struggle for partial improvements and final emancipation.” In the first issue of *Iskra*—the underground newspaper that Lenin and his close colleagues founded in late 1900—the same point is hammered home using the same metaphor. The main charge contained in their polemics against social democratic “economism” was that it focused on economic issues to the exclusion of the fight for political freedom.

Kautsky was also hugely influential in providing the ideas behind what the Bolsheviks later called “hegemony”: the mission of the proletariat to provide leadership to all the laboring people, and to the peasants in particular. Social democracy, Kautsky wrote in the *Erfurt Program*, has a tendency “to become more and more a national party—that is, a *Volkspartei*, in the sense that it is the representative not only of the industrial wage-laborers but of all the laboring and exploited strata—and therefore the great majority of the population, what is commonly known as the *Volk*.” This feature of the social democratic narrative was overwhelmingly important for Russian social democracy.

According to Kautsky, social democracy will ultimately be able to lead the non-industrial laboring classes partly because socialism is in the interest of all laboring classes. But this long-term perspective does not begin to exhaust the potential for leadership of the *Volk* in the here and now. Precisely because social democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement, it is not restricted to defending worker interests and preaching socialism. “Social Democracy cannot defend exclusively the interests of the

proletariat. Its historical mission is to precipitate social evolution in every domain in which it can act, and to take in its hands the cause of all the exploited and all the oppressed.” Thus social democracy encourages the proletariat to see itself as “the sworn enemy of any exploitation or oppression, in whatever form they might take—it is the champion [*Vorkämpfer*] of all exploited and oppressed.”

Compare Kautsky’s words to Lenin’s exhortation in 1903: “The doctrine of Social Democracy must not be taught from books alone; every instance, every case of oppression and injustice we see around us must be used for this purpose. The Social Democratic doctrine is one of struggle against all oppression, all robbery, all injustice. Only he who knows the cause of oppression and who *all his life fights every case of oppression* is a real Social Democrat.”<sup>16</sup>

The flip side of this mandate to provide leadership to all the oppressed and exploited was the necessity of denying this leadership role to other groups. The Bolsheviks in particular insisted that the upcoming Russian revolution would fall far short of its goals if the liberals assumed the leadership role. This rejection of liberal leadership was not a Russian invention, for it had deep roots in Germany (as shown by the Engels comment about Prussia quoted earlier). The German socialists had long given up on the German bourgeoisie as a force even for wide-ranging democratic reform. Kautsky generalized this perceived failure of the German bourgeoisie with the following epigram: “In fact, the European bourgeoisie east of the Rhine has become so weak and so cowardly that in all likelihood the regime of the sabre and of the bureaucracy cannot be broken until the proletariat is in a position to conquer political power, so that the fall of absolutist militarism will lead directly to the seizure of political power by the proletariat.”

Put all these premises together, and we see that “Social Democracy, the party of the class-aware proletariat, is by that very fact the most solid support of democratic aspirations, a much more reliable support than—the [bourgeois] democrats themselves.” According to this logic, the social democratic proletariat was the most reliable supporter of democracy precisely because it saw democracy not as an end in itself but rather as only a means to an end—an absolutely vital means. It would have loved democracy a little less had it not loved socialism a little more.

Kautsky was important to Lenin and the Bolsheviks as the most prestigious spokesmen for social democracy’s left wing that called itself

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<sup>16</sup>Lenin, PSS, 7: 197–198 (from “To the Rural Poor”).

“revolutionary social democracy.” The formation of two wings in the SPD and in European social democracy generally became evident in the second half of the 1890s, especially after Eduard Bernstein mounted his “revisionist” attack on party orthodoxy. Bernstein wrote a book-length defense of his version, and Kautsky responded with a book-length defense of orthodoxy. In 1902, Kautsky made a more positive case for “revolutionary social democracy” in *The Social Revolution*, a book that argued that class contradictions were not becoming muted (as argued by the revisionists) but instead were growing more and more acute every day. Lenin instantly arranged for a Russian translation of *The Social Revolution*.

Finally, we should note that Kautsky strongly supported *Iskra*, the underground newspaper published by Lenin and his colleagues starting in late 1900. Kautsky contributed articles (one of these contributions, *Slavs and Revolution*, was still quoted with pride by Lenin in 1920) and defended *Iskra* in German Party circles.

## Lenin, a Russian Social Democrat

Lenin became a convert to social democracy around 1894. He saw social democracy as the way out of the impasse reached by the Russian revolutionary movement in the 1880s (an impasse brought home to Lenin personally by the execution in 1884 of his older brother Alexander for an attempt to assassinate the tsar). During the 1890s, he put his energy into writing a party program for the fledgling and still strongly repressed Russian social democratic party. These program drafts were unabashedly based on the German Erfurt Program and on Kautsky’s book-length commentary. For all these reasons, I suggested in my study of *What Is To Be Done?* that Lenin could be usefully described as “a Russian Erfurtian.”<sup>17</sup>

As Lenin wrote in response to attacks from other Russian revolutionaries that the Russian social democrats merely imitated foreign models: “Not in the slightest are we afraid to say that we wish to imitate the Erfurt Program. There is nothing bad about imitating something good. Precisely because one so often hears opportunist and half-hearted criticism of this program, we consider it our duty to openly speak up for it.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, Lenin realized that the SPD program had to be carefully adapted to Russian

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<sup>17</sup>Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, Chapter Two.

<sup>18</sup>Lenin PSS, 4: 219.

conditions. The two main contrasts with the situation in Germany was the absence of political freedom and the presence of a large and dissatisfied peasantry. Lenin spent much time and effort to respond to these special Russian circumstances—but always, he fervently claimed, in a social democratic spirit.

After 1905, splits among the German “revolutionary social democrats” themselves, accompanied by a growing party crisis, complicated relations between German and Russian social democrats. Nevertheless, the impact of the basic SPD model as exemplified and elaborated prior to 1905 had an impact on Bolshevism that is hard to overestimate—and, furthermore, one that continued at least through Lenin’s lifetime. We will now look at a few of the most crucial aspects of this impact.

## Basic Goals of Russian Revolutionary Social Democracy

In the 1890s, when Russian revolutionary social democracy was taking shape, the main division among Russian Marxists arose out of different attitudes toward the SPD model and thus toward political freedom as an urgent goal. The Russian critics of “orthodox social democrats” such as Plekhanov, Martov and Lenin, all rejected political freedom as a priority goal and therefore explicitly rejected the standard model of European social democracy as embodied in the German SPD.

Elena Kuskova, the author of the famous “economist” *Credo*, was blasé about the usefulness of political freedom for worker struggle. Further, Kuskova made clear her opinion that a constitutional system was in itself no big prize. She pointed out that the reactionary bourgeoisie in the constitutional West forced workers to fight even for their established rights. Since the Russian bourgeoisie would certainly follow their example, “it is utopian to think the overthrow of the autocracy would cause the Russian bourgeoisie to change the political position of the workers ... One must not expect anything from a constitution in Russia.” She also soundly rejected the SPD model itself: “Any talk about an independent worker party is in essence nothing more than the product of the transfer of alien tasks, alien results, onto our soil.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, another “economist” critic, K.M. Takhtarev, recalled that in conversations with Lenin in London in the early years of

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<sup>19</sup>Georgii Plekhanov, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923–1927), 12: 489, pp. 167–168.

the century, he realized that the root of their disagreements was that Lenin regarded “the German Social Democratic party as a model working-class party.”<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Plekhanov’s Emancipation of Labor group and the *Iskra* group led by Lenin and Martov all used the German Party both as an inspiring example of workers standing up for themselves and as an object lesson in the need for political freedom. As an illustration, we can turn to a small book published by Lenin in 1903 entitled *To the Rural Poor*. The subtitle of this book promises to explain “what the Social Democrats want.” *To the Rural Poor* is in fact one of the very few works in which Lenin sets forth in systematic fashion what he sees as the basic principles of social democracy. For this reason, this book has historical value today far beyond the specific topic of Lenin’s views of the peasantry. Lenin answers his own question “what do the Social Democrats want?” by energetically asserting that “the Russian Social Democrats are first and foremost striving to win *political freedom*. They need political freedom in order to unite all the Russian workers extensively and openly in the struggle for a new and better socialist order of society.”<sup>21</sup>

The following extensive quotation from Lenin’s book brings out the central importance of German Social Democracy as a real-world proof of the Social Democratic message:

In all European countries where the people have won political liberty, the workers began to unite long ago. Throughout the whole of Europe, workers who own no land and no workshops and who work for other people for wages all their lives are called proletarians. Over fifty years ago, the call was sounded for the working people to unite. ‘Workers of all countries, unite!’—during the past fifty years these words have circled the whole globe, are repeated at tens and hundreds of thousands of workers’ meetings, and can be read in millions of Social-Democratic pamphlets and newspapers in every language ...

Everything is done to prevent the workers from uniting: either by means of direct and brutal violence, as in countries like Russia where there is no political freedom, or by refusing to employ workers who preach the doctrines of socialism, or, lastly, by means of deceit and bribery. But no violence or persecution can stop the proletarian workers from fighting for the great cause of the emancipation of all working people from poverty and oppression. The number of Social-Democratic workers is constantly growing.

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<sup>20</sup>Takhtarev, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 179–181.

<sup>21</sup>Lenin, PSS, 7: 133.

Take our neighboring country, Germany; there they have elective government. Formerly, in Germany, too, there was an unlimited, autocratic, monarchist government. But long ago, over fifty years ago, the German people destroyed the autocracy and won political freedom by force. In Germany laws are not made by a handful of officials, as in Russia, but by an assembly of people's representatives, by a parliament, by the Reichstag, as the Germans call it. All adult males take part in electing deputies to this assembly. This makes it possible to count how many votes were cast for the Social-Democrats. In 1887 one-tenth of all votes were cast for the Social-Democrats. In 1898 (when the most recent elections to the Reichstag took place) the Social-Democratic vote increased nearly threefold. This time more than one-fourth of all the votes were cast for the Social-Democrats. Over two million adult males voted for Social-Democratic candidates to parliament.<sup>22</sup>

The goal of political freedom continued to be a central point of contention between “revolutionary Social Democrats” vs. “opportunists.” Indeed, of the two wings in Russian social democracy—Mensheviks and Bolsheviks—the Bolsheviks were the ones for whom the conquest of political freedom was the most urgent priority. Lenin's fight against “liquidationism” from 1910 to 1914 can serve as an example. The “liquidationists” (at least as described by Lenin) thought that while more political freedom was definitely needed, there now existed enough of it in tsarist Russia to be getting on, so much so that an illegal underground party was now only a hindrance. Lenin responded that the underground remained the only space for true political freedom in Stolypin's Russia, that is, the only space where a socialist could say what he or she really thought about the necessity of a democratic republic and about socialism. Furthermore, the abandonment of anti-tsarist revolution as an urgent goal was an unacceptable betrayal of political freedom:

It is extremely important to point out that freedom of the press, association, assembly and strikes is [indeed] *absolutely* necessary for the workers, but precisely in order to implement [these freedoms] we must understand the *inseparable connection* between them and the general foundations of political freedom, between them and a *radical* change in the entire political system. Not the liberal utopia of [obtaining meaningful] freedom of association under [Stolypin's] Third of June regime, but a struggle *for the sake* of freedom in

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<sup>22</sup>Lenin, PSS, 7: 139–140.

general, and for freedom of association in particular, *against this regime* all along the line, against the *foundations* of this regime.<sup>23</sup>

## Underground of a New Type

The basic strategy of the *Iskra* group—a strategy inherited by the Bolsheviks—can be summed up as follows: Let us build a party as much like the German SPD as possible so that we can overthrow the tsar and create a party even more like the SPD! In the late 1890s, Martov explained the logic of this strategy:

The liberation of the workers can only be the job of the workers themselves. In order to attain the final goal of the worker movement—the triumph of socialism—it is necessary beforehand to enjoy broad political freedom, which is the one thing that will allow the proletariat to develop its strength and its self-awareness to the extent needed to take social production into its own hand. Therefore, the task of the Russian worker party is to develop in the worker masses, despite all political constraints, an awareness of the necessity of attaining political struggle and to organize them for the struggle with the Russian autocracy.<sup>24</sup>

The “political constraints” mentioned by Martov were extremely severe: fierce police repression that forced the party underground, continual arrests and disruption of organizations, and no chance to publish legally, to hold rallies or even publicly to advocate a democratic republic. A Russian socialist’s political strategy depended crucially on his or her empirical view on how formidable these constraints were. On this issue, the pessimists were the critics of orthodox social democracy as represented by the *Iskra* group. In her *Credo*, Kuskova listed all the problems faced by social democrats in Russia, ranging from the low cultural level of the workers to efficient tsarist repression, and concluded that the resulting picture was “capable of plunging the most optimistic Marxist into gloom.”<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, Lenin’s whole strategy for anti-tsarist revolution depended on the optimistic assumption that the Russian workers would respond

<sup>23</sup>Lenin PSS, 22: 199 (unpublished article of November 1912); “radical change in the entire political system” is a euphemism for “revolution” that was used to get past the censor.

<sup>24</sup>Martov, *Proletarskaia bor’ba v Rossii*, (St. Petersburg, 1904), 80.

<sup>25</sup>The *Credo* text as published by Lenin, PSS, 4: 167–168.

enthusiastically to the revolutionary message of the social democrats even under repressive tsarist conditions. The debate over organization can therefore be summed up as follows:

*Critics of Iskra:* Anyone with a realistic view of the situation will realize the futility of turning the Russian workers into a meaningful mass revolutionary force under tsarist absolutism. On the one hand, Russian industrial workers, fresh from the village and inclined either to passivity or *buntarstvo* [unorganized riots], will not understand or respond to the revolutionary message. On the other hand, a gaggle of inexperienced students, joined by a few propagandized and therefore isolated workers, will prove no match for the highly effective tsarist policy.

*Lenin as spokesman of Iskra:* Such skepticism and pessimism are heresy. Anyone can see how the workers are becoming more and more revolutionary, more and more willing to fight the government where it hurts. Rather, the bottleneck is us, the social democrats—our lack of organization and competence. Such is the level of worker militancy that if we had been efficiently organized, we could have transformed Russia long ago.<sup>26</sup> And we social democratic revolutionaries *can* organize ourselves efficiently—we *can* have *praktiki* on the ground who are sufficiently skilled at the revolutionary trade that they can survive amid repression and set up a centralized nationwide organization in the true social democratic spirit.

In making these arguments, Lenin naturally turned again and again to the German model. “Look at the Germans.” “Take the Germans.” “Take the example of Germany.” “Take German Social Democracy”—these are typical phrases from *What Is To Be Done?*<sup>27</sup> Whenever Lenin wanted to illustrate a point or clinch an argument, he resorted to the SPD model. This model was authoritative for all of international social democracy, but probably nowhere else in the socialist literature is the SPD so exhaustively and so admiringly made the basis for argument as in Lenin’s book of 1902. To match it, we must look ahead to the use made of the Soviet or Chinese models by twentieth-century communists in their internal polemics.

The German model becomes more meaningful within *What Is To Be Done?* because it is continually contrasted with the “English” model. The clash between these two models is basic to *What Is To Be Done?* as a whole. When Lenin contrasts, say, social democratic politics to *tred-iunionist* poli-

<sup>26</sup>This is the point Lenin was making with his celebrated epigram from *What Is To Be Done?*: “give us an organization of revolutionaries—and we will turn Russia around!” (Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, pp. 428–432).

<sup>27</sup>Lenin PSS, 6: 132, 121, 40, 97.

tics, he is also contrasting, even on a linguistic level, the German model to the English model, since social democracy in the relevant sense is a German coinage while *tred-iunionist* flaunts its Englishness. Germany is the country where the worker class built up its own independent, class, political and socialist party as the center of a wide-ranging movement seeking to embrace all manifestations of worker life. England is the country where the workers contented themselves with building up strong and effective trade unions defending the interests of particular trades while at the same time accepting a position of political dependence and refusing to accept the great historical mission of introducing socialism. To choose Germany over England was what it meant to *be* a social democrat, and so Lenin made the most of the Germany/England contrast in his effort to reveal the heretical leanings of his opponents.

The innovative use of the permanent campaign that marked the SPD and other European social democratic parties was impossible in tsarist Russia because the necessary political conditions were absent. But the fact certainly did not mean that the permanent campaign was not a potent ideal for Russian social democracy. The attitude of Russian social democratic *praktiki* toward the massive rallies, parades, newspapers and congresses they observed in Western Europe was something like that of children with their noses pressed against the glass of an inaccessible candy store. Memoirs written by these *praktiki*, both Bolshevik and Menshevik, often contain an episode where the author goes abroad, sees a massive parade or protest rally, and wonders if he or she will ever live to see such things in Russia.

The new type of underground built up by the underground activists and idealized by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* was aimed at applying the permanent campaign to the extent possible in absolutist Russia. The old type of underground tried to wall itself off from society in order to carry out assassination plots and the like. The aim of the new type of underground was to connect to the workers by as many threads as possible (to use the image of the Bolshevik *praktik* M. Liadov), while still preserving security. The techniques developed to pull off this daunting task were collectively called *konspiratsia*. For this reason, I have elsewhere called this new type of underground “the *konspiratsia* underground,” which can be defined as “the attempt to replicate the institutional logic of the SPD model as much as possible under repressive underground conditions.”

The idea that political freedoms were light and air for the proletariat thus became the underlying premise of Russian social democracy’s basic political strategy. But what practical relevance could this idea have to scattered and isolated Russian activists such as Lenin who lived under

the repressive absolutism of the tsar? The SPD model imposed two basic tasks on Russian social democrats, and Lenin devoted much attention and effort to both of them. The first was to tie together unconnected social democratic committees into a larger whole: a social democratic *party* of national scope, with regular congresses, central party bodies, official party newspapers, and some sense of genuine party discipline, and other trappings of the social democratic model. Lenin felt that by and large the Russian social democrats had achieved this aim prior to the 1905 revolution.

The other basic task was to fight for the political freedom that was light and air for the proletariat and an absolutely essential condition for applying the SPD model. Genuine political freedom could only be established in Russia by a revolutionary overthrow of the tsar. For this reason, a socialist workers party needed to take upon itself the task of leading a “bourgeois-democratic” revolution and carrying it “to the end,” that is, achieving the maximum amount of political and social transformation possible under the circumstances. In order to accomplish this task, the party also needed to become the spokesman of peasant aspirations.

In later years, Lenin became disillusioned with the actual, empirical SPD, since he realized it had gradually become dominated by its “opportunist” and revisionist wing. He also became disillusioned by Kautsky the empirical individual, because of what Lenin saw as his refusal after 1914 to live up to his own radical pronouncements. For this reason, Lenin demanded that Russian social democracy change its name from “Russian Social Democratic Labor Party” to “Russian Communist Party” (the name change was made in 1918). Nevertheless, “Revolutionary Social Democracy” as incarnated by the SPD was a source of fundamental features of his outlook throughout his political career.

## The SPD Model After 1905

Central to the Bolshevik outlook after 1905 was the strategy of “hegemony”: class leadership of the peasants by the socialist proletariat in a drive to carry the revolution “to the end;” that is, accomplish as much progressive social transformation as possible, given the need to preserve the worker/peasant alliance. This strategy was founded on empirical realities of Russia that stood in vivid contrast to Germany—in particular, the presence of a revolutionary peasantry in Russia vs. a conservative peasantry in Germany.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the overall logic of hegemony arose from crucial aspects of revolutionary social democracy that go back to Marx and Engels: the responsibility of the socialist proletariat to carry out necessary “bourgeois” tasks if the bourgeoisie itself failed to do so, combined with social democracy’s role as a champion of *all* the oppressed and exploited, not just the industrial proletariat. Thus it comes as no surprise that Karl Kautsky sided with the Bolsheviks in their disputes with the Mensheviks over revolutionary strategy. In his article of 1906, “The Driving Forces of the Russian Revolution and its Prospects,” he energetically endorsed the hegemony strategy. Indeed, this article is a classic statement of the Bolshevik position.<sup>28</sup>

In 1914, the majority leadership of the SPD gravely disappointed the Bolsheviks when it voted to support the war effort of the German government. The actual SPD could no longer serve as a model party. This disillusionment did not lead to a wholesale rejection of SPD ideals or (as many writers maintain) to a radical rethinking of the so-called “Marxism of the Second International.” Lenin’s diagnosis was that the cancer of “opportunism” had taken over the party organism and destroyed the ability of the party to live up to its own previous ideals. To prevent a recurrence of the disease, Lenin insisted on the necessity of a new opportunist-free International. The aim of this change was to allow genuine revolutionary social democracy to flourish unhindered. Similarly, when Lenin insisted on changing the name of the party from “Russian Social Democratic Labor Party” to “Russian Communist Party,” his motivation was not a rejection of social democratic ideals but rather a defiant protest against the opportunists who, he fervently believed, had sullied the banner of social democracy. In the same way, he used Kautsky’s name as a label for any hypocritical refusal to live up to radical rhetoric. But Lenin’s term *kautskianstvo* was not a rejection of the writings of “Kautsky when he was a Marxist” (a phrase often used by Lenin after 1914). On the contrary, Lenin claimed to represent the heritage of those writings far better than Kautsky himself did. I have therefore described Lenin’s rhetorical strategy in this period as “aggressive unoriginality”: he energetically insisted on his continuity with prewar revolutionary social democracy, while arguing that his opponents were shameful renegades from their own declared ideals.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>This seminal text can be read in Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, eds., *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution* (Brill, 2009), along with commentaries by Lenin and Trotsky (the young Stalin also wrote one).

<sup>29</sup>Lars T. Lih, “‘A New Era of War and Revolution’: Lenin, Kautsky, Hegel and the Outbreak of World War I,” in *Cataclysm 1914: The First World War and the Making of Modern World Politics*, ed. Alexander Anievas (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

## The SPD Model After 1917: Political Freedom vs. the Permanent Campaign

Anyone who tried to predict the Bolshevik attitude toward political freedom after 1917 on the basis of prewar pronouncements would have been sorely disappointed. The elimination of political freedom under the Bolsheviks ran along three tracks: the open and systematic elimination of “bourgeois” political opposition, the more ad hoc elimination of socialist opposition, and finally the slower asphyxiation of political life within the party itself. Post-revolutionary Bolshevik rhetoric about political freedom also stands in striking contrast to the prewar rhetoric we have seen earlier.

Political freedom in capitalist countries was now denounced as a complete and useless fraud. Thus, Bukharin writes in the *ABC of Communism* that the bourgeoisie wields large-circulation newspapers, while “the worker, although on paper he has ‘rights,’ in fact has nothing.” The worker has “formal” freedom, but “essentially there is here *no* freedom at all, *because it is impossible to put into practice.*”<sup>30</sup> In 1919, at the founding congress of the Communist International, Lenin maintained that “in bourgeois usage, freedom of the press means freedom of the rich to bribe the press, freedom to use their wealth to shape and fabricate so-called public opinion ... an utterly foul and venal system that gives the rich control over the mass media.” Fighting for the expansion of political freedom is pointless: “The more democracy and the republican system are developed,” the more “strikingly, sharply, and cynically” do freedom of the press and other political freedoms reveal themselves as deceptions.<sup>31</sup> In Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, the whole topic of political freedom is absent, save for the following ominous remark: “The venal and rotten parliamentarianism of bourgeois society is replaced in the Commune by institutions in which freedom of judgment and discussion does not degenerate into deception.”<sup>32</sup>

There were many reasons for severe restrictions on political freedom in Russia during the revolutionary era. The years 1914–1921 were not good for political freedom anywhere. As Nikolai Bukharin remarked in early 1918, “In a revolutionary epoch ... the press, meetings, meetings are the weap-

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<sup>30</sup>Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *Azbuka kommunizma (ABC of Communism)* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1919), paragraph 49.

<sup>31</sup>Riddell, *Founding the Communist International: proceedings and documents of the First Congress, March 1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), pp. 152–153.

<sup>32</sup>Lenin, PSS, 35: 47–48.

ons of civil war, together with munition stores, machine guns, powder and bombs.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the shift in the Bolshevik outlook is striking and undeniable. How did the Bolsheviks themselves account for the change? Let us start off with a remarkable statement by Bukharin, one of the few leaders to directly confront the seeming contrast between earlier and later stands on political freedom: In 1918, he wrote:

Another question may be put to us: why did the Bolsheviks never before speak of the complete destruction of the freedom of the bourgeois press? ... The reason is very simple. The working class at that time was not yet powerful enough to storm the bourgeois fortress. It needs time to prepare, to gather strength, to enlighten the masses, to organize ... It could not come to the capitalists and their government and demand: “close your newspapers, Messrs. Capitalists, and start newspapers for us workers.” They would have been laughed at ... And that is why the working class (and our party) said “long live freedom of the press (the whole press, the bourgeois press included!)” ... Now times have changed.<sup>34</sup>

Hal Draper comments on this argument: “Bukharin claimed that the movement had lied in the past, and he was telling the truth now: but in fact, of course, no such absurd conspiracy had ever existed—Bukharin was lying *now*, to cover up a 180° turn in his view of democracy.”<sup>35</sup> Draper is course correct that Bukharin misrepresents the conscious intentions of the prewar social democracy. And yet, Bukharin’s comment reminds us of the central rationale for social democratic support of political freedom, namely, enabling the permanent campaign. Political freedom was valued by social democrats primarily because it made possible the effective preaching of the socialist message. Given this rationale, his application of the logic of the permanent campaign to the new context of a social democratic party in power makes a good deal of sense.

Social democrats had always envied the tools of indoctrination at the command of the elite classes. If one mark of an SPD-type party was the massive effort to inculcate an alternative culture, then certainly one possible path for an SPD-type party in power was to try to accomplish the same task

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<sup>33</sup>Bukharin’s *Program of the Communists (Bolsheviks)* (1918) is available online under the title *Programme of the World Revolution*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1918/worldrev/index.html>.

<sup>34</sup>Bukharin, *Program of the Communists*.

<sup>35</sup>Draper, *The “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” from Marx to Lenin* (Monthly Review Press, New York: 1987), p. 142.

on a much more grandiose scale. Grigorii Zinoviev gives us the underlying rationale that explains why the Bolsheviks chose this path:

As long as the bourgeoisie holds power, as long as it controls the press, education parliament and art, a large part of the working class will be corrupted by the propaganda of the bourgeoisie and its agents and driven into the bourgeois camp ... But as soon as there is freedom of the press for the working class, as soon as we gain control of the schools and the press, the time will come—it is not very far off—when gradually day by day, large groups of the working class will come into the party until, one day, we have won the majority of the working class to our ranks.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the centrality of the permanent campaign had enormous implications for revolutionary social democracy's attitude toward political freedom—although, depending on the context, these implications could be diametrically opposed. Before the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks were determined fighters for the political freedom that would allow them to mount the campaigns, rallies, agitational pamphlets, press and cultural societies that parties like the SPD employed to spread the message in a hostile environment.

After the conquest of power, the Bolsheviks relied on the same techniques, now backed up with state resources. By eliminating all competition and by mobilizing resources by fiat, the state discovered that it could put on campaigns on an inconceivably grander scale than it could previously. Furthermore, the state was able to use coercion to prohibit any messages from hostile sources. The Bolsheviks in power still pursued their former goal of spreading the socialist message, but instead of political freedom, they instituted what might be called “state monopoly campaignism.” Much of what we associate with a totalitarian “propaganda state”—the incessant campaigns, the ubiquitous “agitprop”—had its roots in the innovative practice of prewar social democracy, but now applied without any limit or rival.<sup>37</sup>

The SPD was a party of a new type that served as a model for all other parties in prewar social democracy. It pioneered the innovative techniques of the permanent campaign and the alternative culture in order to spread the socialist message. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were champions of political freedom in tsarist Russia because they saw freedom of speech and freedom

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<sup>36</sup>John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (Pathfinder Press, 1991), 1: 153.

<sup>37</sup>See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

of assembly as light and air for their efforts to emulate the German model. When the Bolsheviks came to power, the same model now made them enemies of political freedom, since they realized they could carry out the permanent campaign and inculcate the alternative culture much more efficiently if they eliminated the political freedom of everybody else. The Bolshevik Party no longer looked up to the German SPD as a model party, but instead presented itself as the model party for revolutionary socialists worldwide.

## Author Biography

**Lars T. Lih** lives and works in Montreal, Quebec. He is an Adjunct Professor at the Schulich School of Music, McGill University, but writes on Russian and socialist history on his own time. His recent publications include *Lenin Rediscovered* (2006) and *Lenin* (2011). At present, he is preparing a collection of his articles under the title *Deferred Dreams*.

# 15

## Lenin and Imperialism

Alex Callinicos

### The Bloodiest Storm in History

One issue that must be addressed in any assessment of Lenin's thought today is its contemporary relevance. But the main question of substance at stake in his writings on imperialism—the relationship between global capitalism and geopolitical struggles—undeniably retains its actuality. This is brought out by an article entitled “The War and Modern Business” published in *The Economist* on 19 December 1914 from which Lenin quotes in his *Notebooks on Imperialism*, the preliminary studies for *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*:

Until the bloodiest storm in history burst at the end of July, it was hardly possible to tell where Krupp began or Creusot ended. War loans were inextricably mingled with peace loans, and deadweight debt with full capital issues. Whether to destroy or to construct, whether to build canals or forts, ocean liners or battleships, the whole world of business and finance seemed to have centred itself in London, Paris and Berlin. The financial houses were almost of necessity Anglo-German, Anglo-French and Anglo-American; directorships were interlaced, branches of agents existed in nearly all the cities of the Old World and of the New. Monster companies and corporations welcomed shareholders of all nationalities, with very little regard for the diplomatic alliances

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... It was a truism six months ago to say that nationality was no obstacle to business arrangements ... All this came to an end all of a sudden. (CW 39: 278)

A similar picture of the global integration of capitalism before August 1914 was famously used by Norman Angell in his book *The Great Illusion* to argue that war had become economically futile (Angell 1913). His arguments anticipated by almost a century the idea put forward by boosters of contemporary economic globalization, and also by some critics (notably Michael Hardt and Toni Negri), that the declining power of the nation state renders geopolitical rivalries obsolete (Hardt and Negri 2000). By contrast, no-one politically conscious at the beginning of the twentieth century could ignore the reality of interstate conflicts (Angell was trying to make the case, as the title of his book makes clear, that these conflicts expressed mistaken beliefs). But the relationship between this reality and structural transformations in capitalism was a matter of intense debate among the Marxists of the day.

From the 1890s onwards, a series of controversies about imperialism developed within the Second International. These were partly motivated by immediate political developments—the South African War (1899–1902), for example, and the arms race among the Great Powers—but they fed into the growing divisions over strategy and tactics within the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Colonial policy was one of the issues that set the increasingly polarized right, center and left at odds. And some of the most theoretically innovative works that Marxists produced in this period—notably Rudolf Hilferding’s *Finance Capital* (1910) and Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913)—were at least in part contributions to this debate. Thus Hilferding sought to set the growing tensions among the Great Powers in the context of the emergence of a more “organized” capitalism characterized by oligopoly, cartels and the growing dominance of banks over industrial firms (the relationship he named “finance capital”). For Luxemburg, by contrast, they reflected the struggle between rival capitals to find markets in the colonized and semi-colonized countries and thereby to postpone the full impact of what she argued was capitalism’s inherent inability to realize all the surplus value it accumulates.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See the outstanding edition of texts in Day and Gaido (2011) and for a more limited theoretical overview, Callinicos (2009, ch. 1).

There was one notable absentee from this debate—the author of what proved to be the most celebrated text on imperialism. Why did Lenin come so late to the subject of imperialism? It was not for lack of ability. From his earliest Marxist writings in the 1890s, Lenin showed himself to be a first-rate political economist, with a deep grasp of the categories of Marx's *Capital* (the second and third volumes of which were then only recently published) and the capacity to mobilize them in detailed analysis of complex economic forms. Indeed, in his new biography of Lenin, Tamás Krausz contends:

Even before 1905, Lenin revealed that Russia became embedded in the world system through a process that today we might describe as 'semi-peripheral integration', whereby precapitalist forms are preserved under capitalism in order to reinforce subordination to Western capitalist interests. Capitalism integrated precapitalist forms within its own functioning. (Krausz 2015: 363)

But this understanding was developed in the course of an analysis of the specificities of the Russian social formation. Here we touch on the rational kernel of Lars Lih's celebrated thesis that Lenin, prior to 1914, was "a Russian Social Democrat" who sought to build a revolutionary movement in Russia on the model of the West European parties of the Second International—above all the SPD, and whose most important theoretical reference point was provided by the writings of Karl Kautsky (Lih 2006: 5). Lenin's overriding focus until August 1914 was indeed on Russia. As an internationalist he was of course interested in debates and developments in the European movement, but he remained preoccupied to the point of obsession with the contradictions of Russian society and with the struggle to build a revolutionary party capable of exploiting these contradictions when they finally exploded (see especially Cliff 1975).

However, the outbreak of war—in which recent scholarship shows the tsarist regime of Nicholas II played a leading role—brought the world to Russia's doorstep.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the enormous shock of the support given the war by most of the parties of the Second International—and above all by the SPD—forced Lenin abruptly to give priority to international questions. The complicity of so much of the international socialist movement in a war they had committed themselves to opposing represented an enormous crisis for the left that it was urgent to address in a context where the figure who previously had been the main source of Marxist theoretical authority—Kautsky—had

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<sup>2</sup>Clark (2013) and Lieven (2015).

discredited himself in Lenin's eyes by his equivocations and failure to oppose the war.<sup>3</sup> The discussions of imperialism and nationalism in *Die Neue Zeit*, the SPD theoretical journal edited by Kautsky, excerpted in the *Notebooks on Imperialism*, have a feeling of Lenin playing catch-up; from her privileged vantage-point in the German Party's prewar battlefield, Luxemburg had lost any illusions in Kautsky by 1910 at the latest.

## Against Kautsky

Certainly, then, the *object* of Lenin's attention shifted. But how much of a *theoretical* reorientation did this entail? Raya Dunayevskaya was one of the first commentators to argue that August 1914 marked a break in Lenin's thought: "Confronted with the appearance of counter-revolution *within* the revolutionary movement, Lenin was driven to search for a philosophy that would reconstitute his own reason." (Dunayevskaya 1971: 168) Like Michael Löwy, Stathis Kouvelakis and Krausz, she attaches great importance in this reconstitution to the detailed study of Hegel's *Science of Logic* that Lenin started shortly after the outbreak of war in September 1914.<sup>4</sup> Lih, however, frontally opposes what Alan Shandro calls "the theme of Lenin's Hegelian epiphany" (Shandro 2014: 253). For Lih, Lenin's post-August 1914 stance is characterized by "*aggressive unoriginality*": he remains faithful to the truth of Kautskyan Marxism, criticizing its author for his infidelity, summed up by the title of Lenin's 1918 pamphlet *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. In particular, Kautsky's 1909 book *The Road to Power* is a crucial reference point for Lenin, for deviating from which the former is condemned. *The Road to Power* still resonated with the radicalizing impulses of the Russian Revolution of 1905 sufficiently to prompt the SPD leadership to refuse to authorize a second edition (Stenson 1991: 165–168). In it Kautsky announced "A New Period of Revolution," stoked in part by imperialist rivalries—a perspective that Lih contends continued to inform Lenin's own approach after August 1914 (Lih 2009, 2011b).

We shall consider this last claim below. But there is a methodological point that is worth making first. Lih is undoubtedly right about the importance

<sup>3</sup>See, on Kautsky and the First World War, Stenson (1991: 177–201).

<sup>4</sup>Löwy (1993), Kouvelakis (2007), and Krausz (2015). Neil Harding also argues that 1914 marked a major shift in Lenin's theoretical analysis, although he puts less emphasis on the contribution made to this by his reading of Hegel and argues that the shift was already underway before the outbreak of war: Harding (2010).

of the pre-August 1914 Kautsky for Lenin.<sup>5</sup> But this settles nothing about the *content* of either writer's theoretical discourse. Without espousing the Foucauldian idea of the death of the author, one can still insist that, just as human beings make history in circumstances not of their choosing, writers are not in full control of the texts they produce. As Louis Althusser insisted, texts must be read attentively for the slips, elisions, omissions and tensions they involve (Althusser and Balibar 1970). Such a symptomatic reading may identify logical contradictions and implications that passed the author by; it also (though this is a point Althusser was less ready to acknowledge) must reconstruct the historical conditions—discursive and non-discursive—in which the texts were produced. This last point is crucial in Lenin's case: however loyal a (pre-1914) Kautskyan he might have considered himself, he was operating in a radically different context from that of Kautsky—not the steady accumulation of members and votes that the SPD was able to achieve under the partial bourgeois democracy of the heavily industrialized *Kaiserreich* but the constantly contested attempt to build and sustain a revolutionary Marxist organization, normally illegally and from exile, in an overwhelmingly peasant society under entrenched autocratic rule. This gave a distinct inflection to Lenin's strategic vision, in itself thoroughly orthodox and shared with Kautsky and Luxemburg, of a bourgeois-democratic revolution in which the Russian working class would lead the peasantry to settle accounts with the old regime. It is in this context that the term “hegemony” entered the language of Marxist debate, initially to characterize the relationship between proletariat and peasantry in the revolution. As Shandro puts it:

With the emergence of the politico-strategic logic of the struggle for hegemony, the status – the place and function – of the materialist conception of history in Lenin's thought shifts; it comes to function increasingly as a research programme rather than an accomplished theory, as a ‘guiding thread’ rather than a ‘general historico-philosophical theory.’ By taking some distance from the temptation of premature theoretical and practical ‘synthesis’ (or closure) – by ‘tarrying with the negative’, as Hegel might say – in examining the experience of the struggle for hegemony in the bourgeois-democratic revolution through the optic of Marxist theory, the optic itself can be opened up to that

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<sup>5</sup>See Lih (2011a), which compiles all Lenin's comments on Kautsky between 1914 and 1924. The thesis of Lenin's Kautskyism is strongly contested in Corr and Jenkins (2014). As they point out, Massimo Salvadori long ago argued that, *pace* Lenin, from the 1890s onwards, Kautsky consistently espoused parliamentary democracy as the inescapable framework of social progress: Salvadori (1979).

experience and reoriented where necessary in its light, extended and transformed. (Shandro 2014: 161)

Before August 1914, this relative openness was expressed theoretically in particular in Lenin's studies of the agrarian question in Russia, which were remarkable for their care for empirical detail; Lenin's sensitivity to social complexity; and the willingness he showed to change his mind, for example, over the extent to which the development of capitalism had disintegrated the peasantry (Shandro 2014: 217–225; Howard and King 1989, ch. 11). But it is also operative in a practice of party-building that, however much it was legitimized by appeal to the Kautskyan canon, in reality diverged radically from that of the SPD (Harman 1968–1969). Against this background, the idea of a “Hegelian epiphany” makes a certain sense, so long as one does not understand it as an instantaneous revelation. As Kouvelakis emphasizes, alone among the great revolutionary Marxists of his day, Lenin responded to the catastrophe of August 1914 by insisting on undertaking an intense philosophical reflection that could begin to render explicit what was already emerging in his earlier theoretical and political practice. What this involved is not, in any detail, the subject of this essay, but it is indicated in the brief section on dialectics in an encyclopedia article on Marx—a text, as Kouvelakis puts it, “[s]traddling the moment of the disaster,” since it was written in July–November 1914 (Kouvelakis 2007: 174; see also Krausz 2015: 146–148). Here Lenin says that the conception of development that Marx takes from Hegel is far more comprehensive and far richer in content than the current idea of evolution, since it is

a development ... that proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; ‘breaks in continuity’; the transformation of quantity into quality; inner impulses towards development, imparted by the contradiction and conflict of the various forces and tendencies acting on a given body, or within a given phenomenon, or within a given society; the interdependence and the closest and indissoluble connection between *all* aspects of any phenomenon (history constantly revealing ever new aspects. (CW21: 54)<sup>6</sup>

This thinking of non-linear trajectories through catastrophe, driven by inner contradictions and requiring a totalizing method open to the unexpected,

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<sup>6</sup>See my discussion of the hazards of Marx's own appropriation of Hegel in Callinicos (2014a).

informs Lenin's response to the outbreak of war and the disintegration of the international socialist movement. Thus, in the key text *The Collapse of the Second International* (written in May–June 1915), it informs his critique of Kautsky's rambling and equivocating discussion of the origins of the war, which stresses the role played by relatively backward states such as Russia, Austria-Hungary and Serbia, in which the tendencies towards finance capital anatomized by Hilferding were not fully realized, and a variety of motivations—notably national aspirations—were at play in pushing Europe over the precipice: “At first sight the current world war is thus not an imperialist one. And yet it is an imperialist war, but only in a final sense.” (Kautsky 2011b: 833). Lenin responded:

There are no ‘pure’ phenomena, nor can there be, either in Nature or in society – that is what Marxist dialectics teaches us, for dialectics teaches us that the very concept of purity indicates a certain narrowness, a ‘one-sidedness’ of human cognition, which cannot embrace an object in all its totality and complexity. There is no ‘pure’ capitalism in the world, nor can there be: what we always find is *admixtures* either of feudalism, philistinism, or of something else ... Certainly, reality is infinitely varied. That is absolutely true! But it is equally indubitable that amidst this infinite variety there are two main and fundamental strains: the objective content of the war is ‘continuation of the politics’ of imperialism, i.e. the plunder of other nations by the decrepit bourgeoisie of the ‘Great Powers’ (and their governments), whereas the prevailing ‘subjective’ ideology consists of ‘national’ phraseology which is being spread to fool the masses. (CW 21: 236–237)

Here, Lenin advances an understanding of capitalism as a complex totality articulating together a plurality of determinations. No doubt this understanding is informed by what Krausz called the “scientific discovery of this alloy of a variety of forms of production and divergent historical structures” that Lenin made in his pre-war writings on Russia (Krausz 2015: 89). But now it serves a totalizing grasp of the capitalist world system, as Althusser observes in Lenin's response a couple of years later to the outbreak of the February revolution in Russia (Althusser 1969). Already in the polemical texts of 1915, Lenin portrays a world driven to war by the domination of finance capital; thus the analysis of *Imperialism* is implicit in these writings. Its function is political—to delineate the tasks of the revolutionary left and to demarcate the latter from the right and center of the old International. Thus, in *Under a False Flag* (written in February 1915), Lenin criticizes the pro-war Menshevik Potresov for citing the support of Marx, Engels and

Lassalle for different national wars in mid-nineteenth century Europe. This line of reasoning fails because of its elision of the differences in historical epochs:

The usual division into historical epochs, so often cited in Marxist literature and so many times repeated by Kautsky and adopted in Potresov's article, is the following: (1) 1789–1871; (2) 1871–1914; (3) 1914–?

Here, of course, as everywhere in Nature and society, the lines of division are conventional and variable, relative, not absolute. We take the most outstanding and striking historical events only approximately, as milestones in important historical movements. The first epoch from the Great French Revolution to the Franco-Prussian war is one of the rise of the bourgeoisie, of its triumph, of the bourgeoisie on the upgrade, an epoch of bourgeois-democratic movements in general and of bourgeois-national movements in particular, an epoch of the rapid breakdown of the obsolete feudal-absolutist institutions. The second epoch is that of the full domination and decline of the bourgeoisie, one of transition from its progressive character towards reactionary and even ultra-reactionary finance capital ... The third epoch, which has just set in, places the bourgeoisie in the same 'position' as that in which the feudal lords found themselves during the first epoch. This is the epoch of imperialism and imperialist upheavals, as well as of upheavals stemming from the nature of imperialism. (*CW* 21: 148)<sup>7</sup>

Different epochs command different revolutionary strategies and tactics, Lenin argues. Marx and Engels sought to push the bourgeois revolutions against the old regime to their utmost democratic limits (for example, calling in 1848 for a united Germany to mount a revolutionary war against tsarist Russia as the citadel of European reaction). But in the epoch of imperialism the bourgeoisie have exhausted their progressive potential: their expansionism and rivalries are drowning the world in blood and destruction. The responsibilities of Marxists (increasingly characterized by Lenin not as Social Democrats, but as Communists) are not to seek out the more "progressive" side in these conflicts but to use them as an opportunity for revolutionary transformation. Hence Lenin's insistence (defended against other anti-war leftists such as Luxemburg and Trotsky) that revolutionaries should welcome the defeat of their own government as creating the conditions for revolt from below and thereby turning the imperialist war among states into an international civil war between classes. Hence also the need to break with

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<sup>7</sup>For more discussion of the concept of epoch in Marxism, see Callinicos (2005).

the old International and found a new revolutionary Third International based on a correct understanding of the new epoch and its tasks.

In *Under a False Flag*, Lenin praises Kautsky for having, in *The Road to Power* and elsewhere, “outlined with full clarity the features of the third epoch,” but sardonically comments “Kautsky is now burning that which he worshipped yesterday” (CW 21:47). Indeed, Shandro observes:

The primary target of Lenin’s theory of imperialism was not the ‘social chauvinism’ of those like Plekhanov who sided with their respective imperialist government ... but ‘Kautskyism,’ the Social Democratic current whose opposition to the war was conceived apart from the struggle for socialist revolution and undertaken instead with a view to preserving the conditions for an eventual fraternal reunification of the Socialist International once hostilities had concluded. (Shandro 2014: 257)

Throughout the texts culminating in *Imperialism*, Lenin consistently targets Kautsky’s theory of ultra-imperialism, first set out in an essay largely drafted before the outbreak of war but published in September 1914, and also called *Imperialism*. Here Kautsky defines imperialism as “the product of highly developed industrial capitalism. It consists of the drive of every industrial capitalist nation to conquer and annex an ever-greater *agrarian* zone, with no regard to the nations that live there” (Kautsky 2011a: 758). Competition over agrarian areas provokes geopolitical rivalries and the arms race “that have in the final analysis been the cause of the actual outbreak of the long prophesied world war.” However:

There is no economic necessity for continuing the arms race after the world war, even from the standpoint of the capitalist class itself, with the exception of, at most, certain armaments interests.

On the contrary, the capitalist economy is threatened precisely by the contradictions between its states. Every far-sighted capitalist must call on his fellows: Capitalists of all countries, unite! (Kautsky 2011a: 771–772)

On the one hand, Kautsky argues, the arms industry’s demands were undermining the export of both goods and capital: “This policy of imperialism, therefore, cannot be continued much longer.” On the other hand, the process of organization of capital anatomized by Hilferding at the national level can spread transnationally:

The frantic competition of giant firms, giant banks and billionaires forced the great financial groups, who absorbed the small ones, to come up with the notion of the cartel. In the same way, the world war between the great imperialist powers can result in a federation of the strongest among them, who would thus renounce their arms race.

Hence, from the purely economic standpoint, it is not impossible that capitalism may still live through another phase, the transfer of cartel policy into foreign policy: a phase of ultra-imperialism, against which, of course, we must struggle as energetically as we do against imperialism, but whose perils would lie in another direction, not in that of the arms race and the threat to world peace. (Kautsky 2011a: 774)

So Lenin's *Imperialism* is directed against Kautsky's *Imperialism* and its suggestion that capitalism might enter a new peaceful "phase of ultra-imperialism." Hence the pamphlet's sub-title, *The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.<sup>8</sup> In other words, imperialism represents the culmination of capitalism, beyond which there lay only socialist revolution (or the barbarism evoked by Luxemburg in her anti-war *Junius Pamphlet*). It is clear that in taking this stand Lenin thought of himself as invoking the old Kautsky of *The Road to Power* against the new prophet of ultra-imperialism. But he was only partially right. Notice that, in the passages cited above from Kautsky's *Imperialism*, he refers to both imperialism and ultra-imperialism as "policies." A policy is something state managers voluntarily adopt and may, equally voluntarily, renounce. There is an optional quality to a policy that is brought out indeed in Kautsky's suggestion that ultra-imperialism might supplant imperialism. But if we turn to *The Road to Power*, we find imperialism characterized in similar terms, albeit in the context of a much more radical analysis. Thus: "it is possible that this very *policy* of imperialism may become the starting point for the overthrow of the present ruling system." Again: "the *policy* of expansion," and again: "The *policy* of expansion or imperialism" (Kautsky 1909: 106, 108, 112; italics added).

Arguably, it is this conception of imperialism as a policy, even when Kautsky is at his most revolutionary, that leaves him open to the idea that the First World War was an aberration that might be overcome in a more pacific transnational capitalism. Lenin, by contrast, understands imperialism

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<sup>8</sup>Elsewhere, I have suggested that Lenin in fact intended to call the pamphlet *Imperialism, the Latest Stage of Capitalism*: Callinicos (2009: 44). But it seems pretty clear from the *Notebooks* that Lenin proposed such a title only as a second best to get around the Russian censorship: see the plan in *CW* 39: 230–239.

as an epoch (indeed the ultimate epoch) in capitalist development, arising from profound and irreversible structural transformations in the mode of production. Lenin makes these differences explicit in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, where he calls imperialism “*moribund* capitalism, capitalism in *transition* to socialism” and condemns Kautsky:

who refuses to regard imperialism as a ‘phase of capitalism’ and defines it as a *policy* ‘preferred’ by finance capital, a tendency of ‘industrial’ countries to annex ‘agrarian’ countries. Kautsky’s definition is thoroughly false from the theoretical standpoint. What distinguishes imperialism is the rule *not* of industrial capital, but of finance capital, the striving to annex *not* agrarian countries, particularly, but *every* kind of country. Kautsky *divorces* imperialist politics from imperialist economics, he divorces monopoly in politics from monopoly in economics in order to pave the way for his vulgar bourgeois reformism, such as ‘disarmament,’ ‘ultra-imperialism’ and similar nonsense. The whole purpose and significance of this theoretical falsity is to obscure the *most profound* contradictions of imperialism and thus justify the theory of ‘unity’ with the apologists of imperialism, the outright social-chauvinists and opportunists. (*CW* 23: 107)

This article was written in October 1916, after Lenin had finished *Imperialism* in the first half of the year. Though he subtitled the pamphlet *A Popular Exposition*, it is in no sense a distillation or popularization of what he might have regarded as the best results of the earlier Marxist controversies in imperialism. The *Notebooks on Imperialism* devote five printed pages to *Finance Capital* compared with fifteen on Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz’s *Britischer Imperialismus und englischer Freihandel zu Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, even though Lenin describes the author of the latter work as a “[s]coundrel of the first order and vulgar to boot, Kantian, pro-religion, chauvinist” (*CW* 39: 446). An entire notebook is dedicated to the radical liberal J.A. Hobson’s *Imperialism*. In preparing his own work on imperialism, Lenin shows a definite preference for empirical data from mainstream sources over Marxist theoretical analyses, even though he takes in a few texts from the debates in the Second International.

This is, at least in part, a sign of Lenin’s intellectual self-confidence. Thus his notes on *Finance Capital*, after taking Hilferding to task for arguing that “money enters into exchange without value,” offer this concluding assessment:

Finance capital = bank capital dominating industry.  
 [is it not sufficient to say: 'finance capital = *bank* capital?]

***Three main factors:***

Definite degree of development and growth of *big* capital ... The role of the *banks*. (Concentration and socialisation.) | corporations in America. |

*Monopoly* capital (control of so large a part of a particular industry that competition is replaced by *monopoly*) ... ((America and Germany)) ...

*Division of the world* ... (Colonies and spheres of influence) (CW 39: 334, 338)

However, though Lenin damns Hilferding's conception of finance capital with faint praise, the two share a broadly similar understanding of the transformation undergone by the mode of production, summed up by the Hilferding at the beginning of his book:

The most characteristic features of 'modern' capitalism are those processes of concentration which, on the one hand, 'eliminate free competition' through the formation of cartels and trusts, and, on the other, bring bank and industrial capital into an ever more intimate relationship. Through this relationship ... capital assumes the form of finance capital, its supreme and most abstract expression. (Hilferding 1981: 21)

So for both, the driving force of transformation is "development and growth of *big* capital." Lenin broadens out Hilferding's conception in his famous definition of imperialism:

(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance capital,' of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all

territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed. (*CW* 22: 266–267)

Nevertheless, the concentration of economic power is the decisive feature of the structural transformation that becomes visible in imperialism. Thus: “If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism.” (*CW* 22: 266) In addition: “in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism.” (*CW* 22: 298) However, this process produces the opposite of the pacific transnational capitalism that Kautsky hopes to see emerge out of the bloodshed of the trenches: “Domination, and the violence that is associated with it, such are the relationships that are typical of the ‘latest phase of capitalist development’; this is what inevitably had to result, and has resulted, from the formation of all-powerful economic monopolies.” (*CW* 22: 207) Critically, this is because “the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts. Monopoly is the transition from capitalism to a higher system.” (*CW* 22: 206) This explains the struggle by rival imperialist states to divide and re-divide the world among them. Moreover, since violence is now a constitutive feature of capitalism in its maturity, socialist revolution is necessary to end war, since violence is now a constitutive feature of capitalism in its maturity.

For this argument to work, Lenin has to explain why the process of organization should not, as Kautsky suggests it would, transcend the nation state, with international cartels providing the framework for the peaceful division of the world. Lenin poses the question in one of his plans for *Imperialism*: “Ultra-imperialism or inter-imperialism?” (*CW* 39: 201) The issue at stake here has lost none of its actuality. When Hardt and Negri say “Imperialism is over,” they are referring to Lenin’s imperialism as Lenin conceived it: “what used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and post-imperialist.” (Hardt and Negri 2000: xiv, 9) The thesis of an end to geopolitical rivalries is shared by many who would not endorse Hardt’s and Negri’s conception of Empire as a transnational network capitalism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For example, Panitch and Gindin (2012); for the contemporary debate on Marxism and geopolitics, see the texts collected in Anievas (2010).

Lenin's own answer to this thesis is summed up in the next item in the plan: "Uneven growth" (*CW* 39: 201). The concept of uneven development is one of the two main claims to originality of *Imperialism*. Lenin's first public formulation of the idea appears in *On the Slogan of the United States of Europe*, which appeared in August 1915. The slogan had been put forward before the war by Kautsky. It was criticized by Luxemburg, who denounced "'Europeanism' as an imperialist abortion" (Luxemburg 2011: 456), but was raised again by Trotsky in July 1915 from an anti-war position (Trotsky 2011). Lenin does not simply repeat Luxemburg's argument that concrete proposals for European federation consistently took an imperialist form, but offered a broader argument:

A United States of Europe under capitalism is tantamount to an agreement on the partition of colonies. Under capitalism, however, no other basis and no other principle of division are possible except force. A multi-millionaire cannot share the 'national income' of a capitalist country with anyone otherwise than 'in proportion to the capital invested' (with a bonus thrown in, so that the biggest capital may receive more than its share). Capitalism is private ownership of the means of production, and anarchy in production. To advocate a 'just' division of income on such a basis is sheer Proudhonism, stupid philistinism. No division can be effected otherwise than in 'proportion to strength', and strength changes with the course of economic development. Following 1871, the rate of Germany's accession of strength was three or four times as rapid as that of Britain and France, and of Japan about ten times as rapid as Russia's. There is and there can be no other way of testing the real might of a capitalist state than by war ... Under capitalism the smooth economic growth of individual enterprises or individual states is impossible. Under capitalism, there are no other means of restoring the periodically disturbed equilibrium than crises in industry and wars in politics. (*CW* 21: 341)

Lenin generalizes this argument in *Imperialism* when criticizing the theory of ultra-imperialism. Kautsky assumes the possibility under capitalism of *permanent* agreements among rival imperialist interests to partition the world between them:

We ask, is it 'conceivable', assuming that the capitalist system remains intact—and this is precisely the assumption that Kautsky does make—that such alliances would be more than temporary, that they would eliminate friction, conflicts and struggle in every possible form?

The question has only to be presented clearly for any other than a negative answer to be impossible. This is because the only conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, interests, colonies, etc., is a calculation of the *strength* of those participating, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for the *even* development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries is impossible under capitalism. Half a century ago Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, if her capitalist strength is compared with that of the Britain of that time; Japan compared with Russia in the same way. Is it ‘conceivable’ that in ten or twenty years’ time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained unchanged? It is out of the question. (*CW* 22: 295)

Lenin relies, in this argument, on two premises. First, capitalism is an anarchic system in which agreements among the competing units of the system are based on their relative strengths—capital in the case of firms, military power in the case of states. Secondly, as he says against Trotsky, “[u]neven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism.” (*CW* 21: 342)<sup>10</sup> But what is crucial for the argument is the claim that capitalism does not simply develop unevenly, but that the dynamic character of the accumulation process means that “strength changes with the course of economic development.” Uneven development constantly shifts the global distribution of relative economic and military power. If this were not the case, rival firms and states could stably carve up respective spheres of influence on the basis of their relative strength. But the reality and even the prospect (here Lenin’s argument overlaps the realist tradition in International Relations) of redistributions of power wrought by the flight forward of capital accumulation constantly threaten to destabilize interstate relations.

## The Ambiguities of Finance

This idea of a process of uneven development that disrupts any temporary equilibrium of power among capitalist states is a fertile one that helps illuminate contemporary geopolitical struggles.<sup>11</sup> More problematic is the economic analysis with which it is interwoven in *Imperialism*—in particular,

<sup>10</sup>The “law of uneven development” was later used by Stalin and his followers to justify the idea of “Socialism in One Country,” an argument rebutted in Trotsky (1970).

<sup>11</sup>See Callinicos (2009), esp. chs. 2, 5 and Callinicos (2014b).

in how it conceives finance and crises. For Lenin, “imperialism is the rule *not* of industrial capital, but of finance capital,” but, as Giovanni Arrighi points out in a brilliant essay, “this concept is erected on two theoretical constructions—that of Hobson and that of Hilferding—which are not only distinct, but even *incommensurable*, in that they cannot be reduced into a single ideo-typical structure.” (Arrighi 1978: 152). Against Kautsky, Lenin praises the non-Marxist Hobson, “who *more correctly* takes into account two ‘historically concrete’ ... features of modern imperialism: (1) the competition between *several* imperialisms, and (2) the predominance of the financier over the merchant” (CW 22: 269). But whereas for Hilferding, finance capital sets the seal on a process of *national* organization of capital in which the dominance of the banks over industry is indissociable from the concentration and centralization of capital in production and circulation, Hobson ignores the latter process and conceives finance very differently. As Arrighi puts it:

In Hobson’s view, then, high finance presents two main characteristics. In the first place, it is a *supranational* entity lying outside the plane defined by the expansion of the nation-state. Secondly, while not belonging to this plane, it nevertheless influences it in a critical manner. *For in so far as it is a speculative intermediary on the monetary market*, high finance tends to transform the excess liquidity present on the market into demand for new investment opportunities, that is, principally for state loans and territorial expansion. (Arrighi 1978: 117)

Finance, as Hobson portrays it, is centred on the City of London, and the specific role that it played in the world economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in financing international trade and investment. By 1914, approximately a third of all negotiated securities worldwide were quoted on the London Stock Exchange, while sterling bills of exchange financed approximately 50% of world trade. The last days of July 1914 saw what Richard Roberts calls “the most severe systemic crisis London has ever experienced—even more so than 1866 or 2007–2008—featuring the comprehensive breakdown of its financial markets” as the prospect of the war causing large-scale default (for example, by German borrowers) prompted a desperate rush for gold (Roberts 2013: 13, 24, 5). London’s position in articulating a dense web of transnational financial relationships—evoked by *The Economist* in the passage cited at the start of this essay—was crucial to the global power of British imperialism, but it also made it uniquely vulnerable to their unravelling. What John Darwin calls this “globalization in

an imperial setting” was in any case very different from, as Arrighi puts it, “German nationalist imperialism,” where, he argues, “finance capitalism was subordinated to, and subsumed under, the nation-state and industrial capital” (Darwin 2009: 102; Arrighi 1978: 128, 129).

Lenin was aware of the distinctive features of British imperialism: in his notebooks he excerpts what he describes as “[a] very good article, explaining the causes of British power” from ‘*Die Bank*’ on London’s role as clearing house and financier of world trade (*CW* 39: 78). But *Imperialism* focuses on the domination of banks over industry, particularly in Germany. This encourages him—and even more so Nikolai Bukharin in *Imperialism and World Economy* (1917)—to highlight tendencies towards the national organization of capitalism, culminating in the emergence of what Bukharin calls “state capitalist trusts” (Bukharin 1972). This captured an important element of developments after 1914, when the combination of world war and depression caused the fragmentation of the global economy into protectionist blocs: in this context, as Arrighi notes, the banks found themselves increasingly subordinated to states intent on promoting economic growth for military and political reasons. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly a limitation of Lenin’s theory that it failed to address the distinctive structure of the biggest imperialist power of the early twentieth century, particularly as Britain’s global reach (underpinned by the Royal Navy) gave it an important advantage in denying Germany access to food and raw materials in 1914–1918 (Offer 1989). And of course the long contest between Britain and Germany ended in 1945 with the hegemony of another liberal imperialist state, the USA, which used the capabilities offered by a vast continental economy to reconstruct a world market open to its banks and transnational corporations.<sup>12</sup>

The emphasis that both Lenin and Bukharin place on imperialism’s tendency to promote the national organization of capitalism leads to a second problem: where does this leave economic crises? After all, Marx argues that a cyclical movement towards crises is inherent in capitalism. While he was never able to develop a systematic theory of crises, his multi-layered discussion in *Capital* and its preliminary manuscripts comes to focus on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as competition among rival firms promotes a rise in the organic composition of capital (the ratio of investment in

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<sup>12</sup>See, on the nature of US hegemony, Panitch and Gindin (2012). Tooze (2014), argues that even the First World War and its aftermath promoted an abortive movement towards liberal imperialism in a study that is unusual in mainstream historical scholarship for its willingness to engage intellectually with Lenin and Trotsky.

means of production to wages), so that surplus value falls relative to capital (Callinicos 2014a, ch. 6). Crises help to restore profitability by destroying surplus capital and forcing up the rate of exploitation, thereby allowing what Marx calls the “vicious circle” of boom and slump to continue (Marx 2016: 364). Over time, however, this process fed into the long-term tendency towards concentration and centralization of capital that Hilferding, Kautsky, Lenin and Bukharin all held responsible for the structural transformations they debated.

For reasons that have yet to be explained, the Marxists of the Second International tended not to use Marx’s theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in explaining crises. Instead, they relied on the idea (also present in Marx) that capitalism’s anarchic course of development tends to generate disproportionalities between the different branches of production. However, in *Imperialism*, Lenin relies on an even older idea, dating back to Malthus at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that crises arise from a scarcity of effective demand caused by the under-consumption of the masses. In this respect, he follows Hobson, who argues:

It is not industrial progress that demands the opening up of new markets and areas of investment, but mal-distribution of consuming power which prevents the absorption of commodities and capital within the country. The over-saving which is the economic root of Imperialism is found by analysis to consist of rents, monopoly profits, and other unearned or excessive elements of income, which, not being earned by labour of head or hand, have no legitimate *raison d’être*. Having no natural relation to effort of production, they impel their recipients to no corresponding satisfaction of consumption: they form a surplus wealth, which, having no proper place in the normal economy of production and consumption, tends to accumulate as excessive savings. (Hobson 1902: 85–86)

Lenin rejects Hobson’s reformist conclusion—that the economic basis of imperialism can be removed by progressive policies of income redistribution that raise domestic demand, but he takes over the rest of his argument:

It goes without saying that if capitalism could develop agriculture, which today is everywhere lagging terribly behind industry, if it could raise the living standards of the masses, who in spite of the amazing technical progress are everywhere still half-starved and poverty-stricken, there could be no question of a surplus of capital. This ‘argument’ is very often advanced by the petty-bourgeois critics of capitalism. But if capitalism did these things it would not be capitalism; for both uneven development and a semi-starvation level of

existence of the masses are fundamental and inevitable conditions and constitute premises of this mode of production. As long as capitalism remains what it is, surplus capital will be utilised not for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the masses in a given country, for this would mean a decline in profits for the capitalists, but for the purpose of increasing profits by exporting capital abroad to the backward countries. In these backward countries profits are usually high, for capital is scarce, the price of land is relatively low, wages are low, raw materials are cheap. (*CW* 22: 241–242)

This is, remarkably, the closest that Lenin comes to relating imperialism to a theory of crises. This neglect means that he is able to avoid confronting the implications of the progressive national organization of capitalism, particularly if this culminated in state capitalism. Surely a state-managed economy, where market competition had been overcome, could avoid the disproportionalities between different branches of production that early twentieth century Marxists used to explain economic crises (and indeed divert excess savings to domestic investment)? Both Hilferding and Bukharin drew this conclusion, though the latter continued to argue that socialist revolution was still necessary because the geopolitical antagonisms between imperialist powers would continue to drive the system towards war. Not only did this argument leave inter-imperialist competition without any economic explanation, but it was soon confronted by an enormous anomaly in the shape of the Great Depression, still the most severe economic crisis in the history of capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

## Imperialism and Anti-Colonial Revolt

Lenin's casual treatment of crisis theory is perhaps symptomatic of the extent to which politics is in command in his theory of imperialism. Even his main intellectual innovation—the concept of uneven development—serves to rule out the possibility of Kautskyan ultra-imperialism. The second claim of *Imperialism* to originality—the integration into the theory of imperialism of the approach Lenin had previously developed regarding the national question—plays an even more directly political role. As Arrighi puts it, “Lenin’s fundamental insight was precisely his stress on the tendency of imperialism to generate national liberation movements, and his perception that this

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<sup>13</sup>For a more extensive discussion of the difficulties economic crises posed for the classical theorists of imperialism, see Callinicos (2009: 53–61).

tendency constituted the limit, *at the level of international relations*, of the imperialism of his epoch.” (Arrighi 1978: 91)

The stress that Lenin places on nationalist revolts against imperialism must be seen against the background of the broader problem-situation he faced with the outbreak of the Great War. Shandro notes: “If any theoretical coordinate was swept aside in the Leninist critique of imperialism, it was the orthodox Marxist assumption of the political unity of the working-class movement and of the Marxist party of the proletariat” (Shandro 2014: 255). In the SPD before August 1914, both Kautsky in the center and Luxemburg on the left had accepted co-existence with the right within the same party. Such a stance no longer seemed acceptable to Lenin after the collapse of the Second International. The Bolsheviks had already organizationally broken with the Mensheviks (who experienced divisions over the war similar to the SPD). Now Lenin argued on an international scale that the revolutionary wing of the workers’ movement could no longer co-exist with pro-war opportunists and centrists such as Kautsky who covered for them.

This required Lenin to re-think the problem of revolutionary agency. He had already challenged in the Russian context the idea that the organic development of the working-class movement would necessarily produce a political expression uniting the whole proletariat against capital. Now he argued that the opportunist right no longer represented merely mistaken political and ideological views. They had a social base that aligned them with imperialism. To develop this idea, Lenin formulated the most problematic aspect of his theory of imperialism, namely the idea that the pro-war left were the political and ideological expression of the labor aristocracy, a section of the working class that had been bought off with the super-profits of imperialism. His discussions of the labor aristocracy show the influence of Hobson, from whom Lenin also took over the idea that imperialism represented the decay of an increasingly parasitic capitalism. Hobson, ironically, developed these themes mainly in the context of speculating about the possibility of an ultra-imperialist development, for example, through a condominium of the Great Powers over China: “This would drive the logic of Imperialism far towards realization; its inherent necessary tendencies towards unchecked oligarchy in politics, and parasitism in industry, would be plainly exhibited in the condition of the ‘imperialist’ nations.” Most of Western Europe might then be dominated by

little clusters of wealthy aristocrats drawing dividends and pensions from the Far East, with a somewhat larger group of professional retainers and tradesmen and a large body of personal servants and workers in the transport trade

and in the final stages of production of the more perishable goods: all the main arterial industries would have disappeared, the staple foods and manufactures flowing in as tribute from Asia and Africa. (Hobson 1938: 314)

One only has to remember that Hobson's and Lenin's speculations were made on the eve of the Fordist era, when, amid war and depression, the advanced capitalist economies developed mass industrial production on an unprecedented scale, to see how problematic the theme of parasitism is. Capitalism was far from exhausting its productive potential. The theory of the labor aristocracy is probably the weakest element of Lenin's conception of imperialism, both analytically and empirically. It is at best a placeholder for an adequate materialist interpretation of what he rightly saw August 1914 as dramatizing, namely the consolidation of reformist workers' movements institutionally bound to the status quo.<sup>14</sup> But, at the same time as trying to make sense of the divisions inside the working class, Lenin discovered an ally for the new revolutionary International in the shape of nationalist movements in the colonies.

Lenin had already developed a distinctive approach to the national question before 1914, arguing that in multinational empires such as tsarist Russia, social democracy should support the right to self-determination, including political separation, by oppressed nationalities. This set him at odds not only with the Austro-Marxists, who sought to preserve the political unity of Austria-Hungary by conceding cultural autonomy for national minorities, but also with fellow members of the Second International left such as Luxemburg, for whom the global integration of capitalism was rendering the nation state obsolete. For Lenin, by contrast, the function of supporting national self-determination was political—to promote the transformation of the Russian working class into a collective subject through a break with the dominant nationalism within the empire and to win powerful allies in the struggle against the autocracy (Löwy 1976). The outbreak of war prompted him to generalize this approach by insisting that the revolutionary left supported nationalist revolts against the imperialist powers. This, once again, set him at odds with other members of the anti-war left, such as Luxemburg and even his fellow Bolshevik, Bukharin.

Two of Lenin's most powerful contributions to these debates were written in July 1916, soon after he had finished *Imperialism*. Against Luxemburg's argument for the economic obsolescence of national conflicts, Lenin insists:

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<sup>14</sup>See the comprehensive discussion in Post (2010).

National wars *against* the imperialist powers are not only possible and probable, they are inevitable, they are *progressive* and *revolutionary*, although, of course, what is needed for their success is either the combined efforts of an enormous number of the inhabitants of the oppressed countries (hundreds of millions in the example we have taken of India and China), or a *particularly* favourable combination of circumstances in the international situation (for example, when the intervention of the imperialist powers is paralysed by exhaustion, by war, by their mutual antagonisms, etc.), or a *simultaneous* uprising of the proletariat of one of the Great Powers against the bourgeoisie (*CW* 22: 310)

Implicit in this argument is a distinction between the reactionary nationalism of the imperialist powers and the progressive nationalisms that justify colonial risings against them. The social and political nature of anti-colonial nationalism was at stake in the debates in the Bolshevik Party, which reached their highest pitch over the Easter rising in Dublin in April 1916, when Irish republicans and socialists mounted an armed insurrection against British rule. In *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up*, Lenin strongly challenges the argument of the Bolshevik left that the rising was a petty bourgeois putsch:

To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.—to imagine all this is to *repudiate social revolution*. So one army lines up in one place and says, ‘We are for socialism,’ and another, somewhere else and says, ‘We are for imperialism,’ and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a ‘putsch.’

Whoever expects a ‘pure’ social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is ... The general staffs in the current war are doing their utmost to utilise any national and revolutionary movement in the enemy camp: the Germans utilise the Irish rebellion, the French—the Czech movement, etc. They are acting quite correctly from their own point of view. A serious war would not be treated seriously if advantage were not taken of the enemy’s slightest weakness and if every opportunity that presented itself were not seized upon, the more, so since it is impossible to know beforehand at what moment, where, and with what force some powder magazine will ‘explode.’ We would be very

poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise *every* popular movement against *every single* disaster *imperialism* brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis. (*CW* 22: 355–356, 357)<sup>15</sup>

This passage admirably brings out what Shandro calls the “politico-strategic logic” of Lenin’s thinking. He presents imperialism as a complex totality in which inter-imperialist antagonisms, the class struggle between capital and labour, and anti-colonial nationalisms together form an interweaving pattern of conflicts. The task of revolutionary leadership is intellectually to master this pattern as a contribution to the overthrow of the entire system. But the movement that achieves this overthrow will not be a simple expression of the class antagonism between capital and labour. It can only be forged on the basis of a strategic understanding that seeks to link together proletarian revolt and colonial risings. The theory of imperialism is of service to this understanding because it offers the framework in which these two different logics of struggle can be articulated together as necessary responses to the complex totality that is “capitalism in its latest phase of development.” So fully to understand *Imperialism*, we have to set it alongside, not merely the pre-war theoretical debates among the Marxists of the Second International, but also the political, and often highly polemical, writings in which Lenin seeks to carve out and defend a response to the disaster of August 1914.

From a theoretical point of view, *Imperialism* might also be set alongside Luxemburg’s *Accumulation of Capital*. The latter work is, of course, a much grander, more ambitious and more systematic intellectual work. But both can be seen as fertile contributions to the Marxist critique of political economy that nevertheless suffer from severe analytical weaknesses.<sup>16</sup> Both reach the same conclusion from different theoretical premises: imperialism is no accident or passing moment, but a necessary consequence of the logic of capitalist development to which the only response is socialist revolution. But Lenin differs from Luxemburg in vindicating the agency of the colonial masses as subjects of their own liberation in a global process of anti-imperialist revolt. The interweaving of socialist revolution and national liberation that he achieved proved, for better or worse, crucial to the history of communism in the twentieth century.

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<sup>15</sup>For a contemporary Marxist interpretation of the Easter rising and its consequences, see Allen (2016, chs. 1–4).

<sup>16</sup>See, for *The Accumulation of Capital*, Hudis (2015), the contemporary responses in Day and Gaido (2011, 676–752) and Kowalik (2014).

Whether and how that thread might be picked up today is an important aspect of the legacy of *Imperialism*.

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# 16

## Lenin and the New Economic Policy

Edward A. Rees

The New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced by the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, marked a specific era in the development of the Soviet Bolshevik regime, an interregnum between war communism and the creation of the Stalinist administrative command economy. Amongst political observers and historians, the NEP has generated considerable debate. Was the NEP an alternative path to the construction of socialism, which might have avoided the worst excesses of the Stalin era and allowed the development of a different relationship between state and society? Was the NEP an attempt to rethink the strategy of socialist construction or was it a political expedient intended to ensure the survival of the regime and to allow it to re-gather its strength before launching a new offensive on the path to socialism? To what degree was Bolshevism an ideologically driven movement and how far was it capable of pragmatism? What were the choices available to the Communist Party leadership and could the NEP have provided a viable course for the longer-term development of the regime? Was Stalinism a logical development of or a deviation from Leninism? Only under Gorbachev in 1988–1989 did the Soviet state again try to re-examine the question of whether

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the NEP could historically have provided a non-Stalinist path of development for the country.<sup>1</sup>

## From War Communism to the NEP

The Bolsheviks' attitude to the management of the economy and to the transition to socialism needs to be placed in a broader context. The October Revolution was proclaimed as the first proletarian, socialist revolution, and justified as a trigger to a European revolution. The Bolsheviks set themselves in opposition to the capitalist world. But the Bolsheviks also rejected the Mensheviks' claim that Russia lacked the preconditions for building socialism.<sup>2</sup> The Bolsheviks repudiated social democracy over questions of theory and methods, and advanced a different conception of politics. Bolshevism set itself world changing ambitions, and was under an obligation to prove itself. It envisaged the socialist economy as one where private property, the market and money were replaced by a system of collective ownership and distribution.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks had no experience of economic management. In the *April Theses*, he indicated that the peasants would not be obstructed in their desire to seize gentry land, but the extent of state regulation and ownership of industry remained clear. In the doctrinaire *State and Revolution*, he offered only the most vague generalizations concerning the organization of the state and the management of the economy. In October 1917, the Decree on Land effectively legalized peasant seizures of gentry estates. The same month, some of the main industries and financial institutions were nationalized. In his theses on war and peace in January 1918, Lenin declared "for the success of socialism in Russia a certain amount of time, several months at least, will be necessary." In '*Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-bourgeois Mentality* in April 1918, Lenin wrote that the greatest threat to the Soviet regime was posed by private capitalism and petty bourgeois (peasant) commodity production: "If in approximately six months' time state capitalism became established in our republic, this would be a great success and a

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<sup>1</sup>R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989) ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup>The breach between communism and social democracy was marked by Lenin's *April Theses* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, and the exchanges between Trotsky and Kautsky on terror.

sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have been permanently consolidated and will have become invincible in our country.”<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1918, virtually all industries were nationalized, with the state attempting to regulate production and distribution. The state resorted to a system of compulsory requisitioning of agricultural produce to meet the needs of the army and the urban population via the People's Commissariat of Food Supply. State policies driven by ideological priorities had ruinous economic consequences. The collapse of trade and hyperinflation created a barter economy. By 1920, agricultural production was below 50% of pre-war levels and industrial production was below 20%. Even in these dire circumstances, the Bolshevik government still thought of the future transformation of Russia, with the launch in 1920 of “GOELRO,” the project for the electrification of the whole economy. In an attempt to deal with the ruinous state of the rail network, a large part of the gold reserves was spent on importing locomotives and rolling stock.<sup>4</sup>

In 1920, the British philosopher Lord Bertrand Russell visited Moscow and had discussions with Lenin, Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders. As a libertarian socialist, he offered his assessment of the Soviet regime. He concluded that the attempt to build communism had been an abject failure, and that the Bolshevik government would thereafter turn itself into a regime of modernization. Bolshevism, he judged, was a narrow-minded, doctrinaire creed, blinkered by its own ideology, and driven by a messianic, quasi-religious zeal, which had the capacity to produce its own inquisition.<sup>5</sup>

The economic historian Alec Nove saw war communism as a policy that was driven primarily by the exigencies of civil war, and thus saw it as a departure from the policies pursued during the first eight months of Soviet power, when the objective had been a form of state capitalism.<sup>6</sup> By contrast Silvana Malle depicts war communism as a leap into socialism driven by ideological zeal.<sup>7</sup> The notion of Bolshevism as an ideologically driven

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<sup>3</sup>V.I. Lenin, *‘Left-Wing’ Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality* (Moscow, 1968) p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Anthony Heywood, *Modernising Lenin's Russia: Economic Reconstruction, Foreign Trade and the Railways* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999).

<sup>5</sup>Bertrand Russell, *Bolshevism: Practice and Theory* (New York, 1972: first published in 1920 as *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*).

<sup>6</sup>A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (London, 1969) chapters 4–6.

<sup>7</sup>Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918–1921* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985). On Bolshevik authoritarianism, see Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990).

movement is supported by Richard Pipes' analysis of Lenin's commitment to the use of extrajudicial methods in enforcing policy during war communism. Lenin's secret correspondence in these years provides testimony to a visceral hatred of the "kulaks," and a willingness to use the full power of the state against them.<sup>8</sup> Lenin's actions were based on an ideological justification of the use of terror based on a consequentialist view of morality—whatever aided the revolution was right.<sup>9</sup>

The serious shortcomings of war communism soon became apparent. Trotsky in February 1920 submitted proposals to the Central Committee to abandon the system of grain requisitioning. Lenin came out against the proposal and the Central Committee rejected the idea. Having been stifled, Trotsky advanced proposals for a more thoroughgoing militarization of the economy, with the use of labor armies, a proposal that was also rejected.<sup>10</sup>

Lenin's resistance to a change of economic course reflected an ideological commitment to war communism, as well as a belief in its practical efficacy: once the civil war had been won, the economic system could be made to function. Only twelve months later did he recognise the need for a radical change of policy. The intense peasant revolt in Tambov province was the deciding factor. The Politburo on 8 February 1921 discussed the abandonment of grain requisitioning. A draft thesis was prepared and the Politburo on 16 February sanctioned publication of a pro-reform article in *Pravda*. A secret working party headed by A.D. Tsyurupa worked on the proposal. The Central Committee accepted the working party's report on 24 February.<sup>11</sup>

Pressure for an urgent change of course came also from the wave of industrial unrest in Petrograd, Moscow and other large industrial centres. The major revolt at the Kronstadt naval base, which was suppressed with force, demonstrated the regime's vulnerability. Intense debate in the party on the trade union question with the emergence of the Workers' Opposition, pointed to the danger of regime collapse.

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<sup>8</sup>Richard Pipes (editor, with the assistance of David Brandenberger), *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (documents translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick) (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1996). For a view of Lenin as an ideologue, see A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (Methuen, London, 1984).

<sup>9</sup>E.A. Rees, *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin: Revolutionary Machiavellism* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004) ch. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (Introduction by Joseph Hansen) (Pathfinder Press Inc, New York, 1970) pp. 463–464.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Macmillan, London, 2000) pp. 424–425.

The Tenth Party Congress met on 8 March, 1921. Lenin's opening speech provided a grim survey of the political situation. He proposed substituting a tax in kind for surplus grain appropriation stemming from the acute disparity in working class and peasant interests. Free exchange or free trade meant the revival of capitalism. The excesses of war communism—wholesale nationalisation of industry and the clampdown on local commodity exchange—lay at the roots of the crisis. He highlighted the positive role of the People's Commissariat for Food Supply (NKProd) but also alluded to gross abuses of power by its officials. The modernisation of agriculture and the transformation of the mentality of the peasants would, he forecast, take "generations" or "decades". The NEP was crucially intended to restore the trade link between industry and agriculture. The success of the NEP was crucially linked to developing foreign trade under a state monopoly. Lenin specifically identified the NEP with the strengthening of the middle peasants as a counterweight to the kulaks. This marked a significant shift in his class approach to the peasantry.

Notwithstanding reservations, the Congress approved the NEP. With the civil war won there remained the urgent tasks of stabilizing the regime and finding a means of delivering the economy from its state of dire collapse. The NEP represented, for many party members, a humiliating retreat. This was associated with dramatic tightening of the political regime. The consolidation of the one-party state saw the outlawing of the Mensheviks and SRs (pro-peasant Socialist Revolutionary party), and the tightening of discipline within the Communist Party, and the ban on faction, with the Workers' Opposition declared an Anarcho-Syndicalist deviation. The consolidation of the regime was shaped by the economic collapse, the upsurge of popular unrest, the declassing of the proletariat and the isolation of the revolution.<sup>12</sup>

At the Tenth Party Conference in May 1921, the NEP was subject to scathing criticism: industry was neglected, workers were losing out, and the power of the kulaks was unchecked. Unprecedented criticism was directed at Lenin as party leader, with not a single speaker supporting him.<sup>13</sup> This reflected the ingrained commitment of the party rank and file to "socialist" principles. The introduction of the NEP was accompanied by the severe famine of 1921–1922, which required recourse, albeit reluctant, to foreign aid in order to alleviate its worst effects.

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<sup>12</sup>Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought, Vol. 2: Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution* (Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1981) ch. 11 and 13.

<sup>13</sup>Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, pp. 430–431.

Under the NEP, economic management of the economy passed to the People's Commissariat of Finance, headed by G. Ya. Sokolnikov. The Commissariat of Food Procurement was scrapped. A new role was assigned to the commissariats in charge of domestic and foreign trade. The planning agency Gosplan was left without any clearly defined role. The industrial commissariat, Vesenkha, was now subject to the discipline of market economics. The NEP represented a turn towards realism in matters of economic management: the acceptance of private ownership, the reestablishment of the market, and the acceptance of a money-based economy.

The NEP marked a retreat into a mixed economy. Whilst the commanding heights of the economy remained in state ownership, the peasants were freed of the system of compulsory grain requisitioning, and required to initially pay a tax in kind, which was then converted into a monetary tax. The peasants were now allowed to sell whatever surpluses they had on the free market. This provided the framework for the revival of the market economy. State industries were required to adapt to the discipline of the market—those that were unprofitable were compelled to close, shed labor or find markets for their goods. Large numbers of small and medium-sized enterprises were leased to individual entrepreneurs. At a macro-economic level, the state sought to stabilize the currency, by introducing the chervonets rouble backed by gold, and to secure revenue through taxation, and to cut back on expenditure that could not be covered by income. The NEP, by incentivizing peasant production, contributed to a re-establishment of rural–urban trade, but economic imbalances persisted, reflected in the Scissors Crisis of 1922–1923.

## Lenin on the Soviet Party State

In *The Tax in Kind*, written in April 1922, Lenin argued that war communism had been forced on the Soviet government by circumstances. “Under this peculiar War Communism we actually took from the peasant all his surpluses—and sometimes even a part of his necessities—to meet the requirements of the army and sustain the workers. Most of it we took on loan, for paper money. But for that we would not have beaten the landowners and capitalists in a ruined small-peasant country.” This hardly did justice to the anti “kulak” crusade that had been part and parcel of war communism.

According to Lenin: “Freedom of trade is capitalism” but the government needed to control profiteering to steer capitalism in the direction of state capitalism. Only on this basis could large-scale industry be revived.

State capitalism represented a transition to “a regular socialist exchange of products.”<sup>14</sup>

In this work, Lenin provided an analysis of the Russian economy, which in effect recapitulated his views as outlined in 1918. The Russian economy, he argued, comprised five distinct elements: (1) patriarchal, mainly natural peasant farming (i.e. subsistence peasant agriculture); (2) small commodity production (comprising the majority of those peasants who sold grain); (3) private capitalism (this included the speculators who undermined the state’s monopoly over the grain trade); (4) state capitalism (including the grain monopoly, bourgeois cooperatives, merchants who traded with the state; concessions of state enterprises leased to private entrepreneurs); and (5) socialism (nationalized enterprises).

Lenin declared that, “At present petty bourgeois capitalism prevails in Russia.” The greatest threat was posed by the “anarchy of small ownership”: the petty bourgeois element was “the principal enemy of socialism in our country” and posed the most direct threat to “workers’ power.” The priority was to “subordinate the petty bourgeoisie to our control and accounting.” Socialism could coexist with state capitalism: “given a really revolutionary-democratic state, a state–monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step ... towards socialism...” He drew a parallel but also a contrast between the Soviet state and the Prussian “Junker-capitalist state,” both as agencies of modernization in different directions, reflecting different class interests.

At the Eleventh Party Congress in March–April 1922, Lenin insisted that the NEP was a response to circumstances beyond the party’s control. On the failure of war communism, he offered the rather lame explanation: “We were unable to introduce direct communist distribution. We lacked the factories and the equipment for this.” He insisted that the NEP had been adopted by the Tenth Party Congress with the greatest unanimity: the party had had no choice but to adopt a new approach to the socialist economy, and to establish a link with peasant agriculture. The NEP was “the basis of our entire policy;” its fate and the fate of communist rule in Russia were inseparably connected. The regime’s survival depended on its ability to manage the economy. But the NEP posed an “enormous danger” by allowing capitalism to grow out of the small peasant economy. A “last and decisive battle” with capitalism was impending.<sup>15</sup> The test for the party was its ability

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<sup>14</sup>V.I. Lenin, *The Tax in Kind, in Collected Works* (Moscow, 1965), Vol. 32, pp. 329–365.

<sup>15</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Speeches at Party Congresses (1918–1922)* (Moscow, 1971) p. 205.

to manage capitalism to stimulate an economic recovery. Russia was a form of state capitalism under a proletarian state, a situation about which Marx had said nothing. The challenge was to create a proletarian state that was able to control and manage this system of state capitalism

For a year, the party had been in retreat. Now, Lenin declared, it was time to “halt the retreat”—a phrase repeated seven times in his speech. When an army was in retreat, machine guns were positioned to ensure that the retreat did not turn into a rout. He threatened to put before firing squads those Mensheviks and SRs who claimed that the October Revolution had been premature and that the communist experiment had failed. The GPU, the secret police and the courts had still a role to play in regulating events. The party required iron discipline and a resolve to ensure that the NEP would not mean a slide into capitalism. The Soviet state was overly bureaucratic and was unable to effectively manage the economy. Soviet officials lacked culture and initiative and communist office holders were arrogant and inexperienced.<sup>16</sup> By November 1922, disturbances in the countryside had virtually ceased, the peasants were paying the tax in kind, light industry was recovering, but heavy industry remained in the doldrums.

The adoption of the NEP in no way weakened the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Whilst the terror of the civil war period abated, and the powers of the Cheka and the revolutionary tribunals were curbed, there was no suggestion that this should usher in a rule of law that might in any way curtail the state’s freedom to act. Extrajudicial measures were intended to be held in reserve. In response to reports of profiteering by traders, the so-called Nepmen, Lenin responded: “we need a number of model trials with the harshest sentences. The Justice Commissariat obviously doesn’t understand that the New Economic Policy requires new methods of applying punishment of new harshness.”<sup>17</sup>

On 3 March 1922, Lenin, in a letter to Lev Kamenev, stressed that the NEP did not mean a liberalization of the regime: “It is the biggest mistake to think that NEP will put an end to the terror. We shall return to the terror, and to economic terror.”<sup>18</sup> In a note to D.I. Kursky, the People’s Commissar for Justice, on 17 May, he insisted on inserting into the new criminal code a paragraph that would “openly set forth a statute which is both principled

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<sup>16</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie* (5th edition) (hereafter PSS) Vol. 45, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>PSS, Vol. 54, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup>PSS, Vol. 44, p. 428.

and politically truthful (and not just juridically narrow) to supply the motivation for the essence and justification of terror, its necessity, its limits.”<sup>19</sup>

In March 1922, Lenin proposed to the Politburo draconian measures regarding the suppression of the Orthodox clergy, including the executions of priests at Shuia.<sup>20</sup> This letter, with its invocation of Machiavelli’s dictum that terror should be used quickly and decisively, was never included in Lenin’s collected works and its authenticity was officially denied until the 1980s.

In June–August 1922, 34 leading figures of the SR party were put on trial in Moscow accused of organizing uprisings against the Soviet government, working in league with the foreign interventionist forces and murdering workers’ leaders. The trial went ahead despite protests from Western labor and socialist parties.<sup>21</sup> In total, 12 defendants were sentenced to death. This was the first show trial in Soviet Russia directed at crushing opponents and moulding popular opinion. Thereafter, the charge that opponents were engaged in terroristic activity in league with foreign powers was to be regularly invoked.<sup>22</sup>

Action was taken to curb academic freedom and to expel anti-Soviet intellectuals from their posts. In August 1922 Lenin authorised the expulsion of 80 leading scholars from Russia. He responded to Gorky’s protests in crude scatological terms and advising him not “to waste yourself on the whining of decaying intellectuals”.<sup>23</sup>

## The Limits of the NEP

The NEP undoubtedly brought a new tone into Lenin’s pronouncements especially with regard to the peasantry. The poisonous language with which he had denounced the “kulaks” disappeared. The middle peasants were spoken of as potential allies of the poor peasants. Instead of a strategy of class war directed at splitting the peasantry, there was now discussion of how the

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<sup>19</sup>PSS, Vol. 54, pp. 189–190.

<sup>20</sup>N.N. Pokrovsky and S.G. Petrov, *Arkhivy Kremlya: Politbyuro i tserkov 1922–1925gg.* (Moscow, 1997) pp. 113–198. Richard Pipes (ed.) *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archives*, pp. 152–155.

<sup>21</sup>PSS, Vol. 33, pp. 243–244.

<sup>22</sup>Marc Jansen (trans. Jean Saunders) *A Show Trial Under Lenin: The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow, 1922* (The Hague, London, 1982).

<sup>23</sup>Stuart Finkel, “Purging the Public Intellectuals: The 1922 Expulsions from Soviet Russia,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October, 2003) pp. 589–613.

self-interest of the peasantry as a whole could be harnessed for raising the economy.

The retreat to a market economy was to be carefully regulated. Gosplan was retained as an agency that would allow state planning to be strengthened at some stage in the future. The state's monopoly of foreign trade was to be retained—a point that Lenin, in 1922, insisted on in his exchanges with Politburo colleagues. Foreign investors were to be allowed into the Soviet Union but the concessions were strictly regulated.<sup>24</sup>

Lenin's *On Cooperation*, written in January, 1923, is commonly seen as a landmark in his thinking. In this, he highlighted the great significance of the cooperative movement. The purpose was to temper the capitalistic features of the NEP and to use the cooperatives as a lever to check its excesses. The proletarian state should provide economic inducements to assist the cooperatives. The peasants should be turned into cultured traders. This would require a whole epoch: "one or two decades". The cooperatives provided a check on the private traders and could be more easily controlled by the state.<sup>25</sup> *On Cooperation* is a theoretically slight work. Its focus is on trade cooperatives rather than marketing or producer cooperatives. The article failed to explain how the cooperatives fitted in with the Bolsheviks' long-term aspiration of reorganising agriculture along collectivist lines.

Notwithstanding a softening of its rhetoric the Bolshevik government maintained a firm grip on peasant agriculture. In some regions, such as Ukraine, the poor peasant committees of the civil war era were retained. The power of the state remained a check on the potential growth of the power of the richer peasants. The pursuit of class war may have receded as an immediate objective, but had by no means been abandoned.

In *How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate and Better Fewer, But Better*, Lenin highlighted the Communist Party's inability to steer the car of state. He warned of the ideas of the right-wing Russian émigré N.V. Ustrialov voiced in *Smena Vekh (Changing Landmarks)*, which foresaw the communist regime being taken over from within, with its commitment to socialist transformation being progressively abandoned. In 1923, L.B. Krasin, a leading member of the party, advocated granting greater power to the bourgeois specialists as part of a technocratic programme for the modernization of the country.

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<sup>24</sup>Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, p. 452.

<sup>25</sup>Lenin, *The Tax in Kind*, Collected Works (Moscow, 1965), Vol. 32, pp. 329–365.

Lenin advanced a three-fold plan: to strengthen the party-state, to increase working-class influence in the state, and to introduce elements of self-regulation to ensure that the proletarian dictatorship did not lapse into a system of arbitrary rule. In practice the plan served to greatly strengthen party control over the state.<sup>26</sup>

Lenin, on returning to work after his stroke in the autumn of 1922, was shocked by Stalin's accumulation of power in the Secretariat. Lenin proposed to Trotsky that he become one of his deputies in Sovnarkom, to strengthen the governmental body, and to counterbalance the influence of the party apparatus. Trotsky turned down this offer, but later claimed that Lenin had proposed to him an alliance to fight the bureaucracy emanating from the party apparatus, in particular from the party Secretariat. In January 1923, Lenin dictated the famous postscript to his *Testament*, which called for Stalin's removal from the post of General Secretary. Stalin's abrasive personality posed a danger of exacerbating conflicts within the leadership. Whilst appearing trivial, Lenin warned this defect of character could become a "decisive trifle".

Stalin weathered this assault and, as party General Secretary, arrogated to himself the right to interpret Leninism, with his lectures *Foundations of Leninism* and to interpret how Lenin had seen the role of the party.<sup>27</sup> With the notion of "socialism in one country" Stalin introduced a major theoretical innovation which appealed to the Bolshevik notion of self-reliance and stressed that the future of Soviet Russia was no longer bound to the fate of the world revolution. In 1915, Lenin had cautiously admitted the possibility of socialism being initially established in one state. The abstruse question of what would constitute the final victory of socialism, and whether this would require the triumph of socialism in the leading capitalist states, as a result of Stalin's intervention, was bypassed and left as an issue to be decided in the future.<sup>28</sup> Stalin's espousal of "socialism in one country" was seen as turning his back on the commitment to world revolution, of which Trotsky was the main advocate.

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<sup>26</sup>Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia*, ch. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Service, *The Bolshevik Party in Revolution, 1917–1923* (London, 1979).

<sup>28</sup>Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study In Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism* (Routledge, London and New York, 2002). Ch. 7 "Socialism in one country".

## Lenin's Legacy

With Lenin's death in 1924, his legacy became a matter of bitter contention between the rival groups struggling for the succession. The notion that Lenin had introduced the NEP, had elaborated a strategy for its development, and that its survival would last for an extended period of time, was generally upheld. The NEP brought important concessions to the peasantry and small businessmen and traders. The rhetoric of class conflict was muted. Nationalities policy was adjusted to appeal to non-Russians. In 1925, the anti-religious campaign was eased. The question of how long the NEP would be preserved remained uncertain.

The Soviet regime's nationalization of foreign-owned assets in 1917–1918 precluded the possibility of large-scale foreign investment or loans. The destruction of the large estates made the state highly dependent on market conditions and the willingness of peasants to market their grain and to purchase consumer goods, to facilitate accumulation. Funding the new investment in industry, however, proved highly problematic.

On the left of the party, the NEP was hotly contested. E.A. Preobrazhenskii argued that it represented not only a concession to capitalist elements, but favoring the peasantry as against the industrial working class, and privileging agriculture as against industry. Whilst light industry was able to respond by producing goods for the peasant market, it was compelled to lower prices and thus was unable to generate large capital accumulation. Large-scale industry without state support was unable to reconstruct and re-equip. Preobrazhenskii argued for using state regulation to turn the terms of trade against the peasants, through lower prices for agricultural produce and higher prices for goods supplied to the peasant market—in effect using the peasantry as a colony to be exploited through a form of “primitive socialist accumulation” for the needs of industrialization.<sup>29</sup> The state used pricing and taxation policy for capital accumulation and employed its planning levers to channel investment into heavy industry.

In 1924, the emergent triumvirate of Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin rejected Trotsky's call to temper the NEP on the grounds that it reflected an “underestimation of the peasantry” and because supposedly it marked a decisive break with Lenin's views. In 1925, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Dzerzhinsky and Krupskaya concluded that the NEP had gone too far. Their attempts to modify the operation of the NEP were repulsed by Stalin in alliance with

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<sup>29</sup>Donald Filtzer, ‘Preobrazhenskii and the problem of the Soviet transition,’ *Critique* 9:1, pp. 63–84.

Bukharin and their views were branded as a deviation from Lenin's ideas. Bukharin, as the leading ideologist in the party, emerged as the most outspoken defender of the NEP and attempted, in Stephen F. Cohen's words, to "rethink Bolshevism."<sup>30</sup>

The future of the NEP was closely bound up with the fate of Soviet agriculture. The debate on the nature of the peasantry and the question of rural social differentiation was highly polarized. L.N. Kritsman and his school of agrarian Marxists took the view that peasant society was based on distinct class hierarchies, with the kulaks as a proto-capitalist class who exploited the poor peasants (*bednyaki*) and the landless laborers (*batraki*), with the middle peasants (*serednyaki*) occupying an intermediate position. This view was directly challenged by the populist A.V. Chayanov, who argued that peasant society was more fluid, with the position of households changing over time, determined by fortune and the number of able-bodied figures in the household.<sup>31</sup> In the ensuing debate the agrarian Marxists triumphed. Their views undoubtedly accorded more closely to Lenin's class conception of peasant society.

The Soviet regime's base was urban. It had little understanding of or sympathy for the peasantry. Moshe Lewin argued that the kulak was, in large measure, a political construct, depicted as an exploiting emergent capitalist class and as such the enemy of Soviet power.<sup>32</sup> For Communist Party militants the kulaks, the nepmen, and the bourgeois specialists remained the last social groups who had to be overcome in the advance towards socialism.

Kulaks became embroiled in a battle over statistics. In November 1925, a report by the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) indicated that the NEP was disproportionately benefiting the wealthy peasants, the kulaks, and that class differentiation in the countryside was growing. Whereas the TsSU calculated that the kulaks and well-to-do peasants accounted for 61% of marketed grain, a counter-report prepared by the state inspectorate NKRRKI calculated the figure at 28.6%.<sup>33</sup> From this time onwards, the actual category of kulaks and their relative economic strength became a battle of statistics. The row marked the first direct intervention by the Politburo into the

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<sup>30</sup>S. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (1971), ch. V.

<sup>31</sup>T. Cox, *Peasantry Class and Capitalism. The Rural Research of L.N. Kritsman and his School* (Oxford, 1986). T. Cox, 'Awkward Class or Awkward Classes? Class Relations in the Russian Peasantry before Collectivization,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vii (1979-80); T. Shanin, *The Awkward Class: Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-1925* (Oxford, 1972).

<sup>32</sup>M. Lewin, 'Who was the Soviet Kulak?' *Soviet Studies*, xviii (1966/67).

<sup>33</sup>E.A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia*, p. 125.

details of economic management, which previously had been the preserve of the government, Sovnarkom. Increasingly, economic policy was an area into which the Politburo intruded. The struggle for control of the Politburo and the party became embroiled in the debate on economic policy.

## From the NEP to the Administrative Command Economy

The Fourteenth Party Congress of 1926 proclaimed itself as the “congress of industrialization,” signalling a significant change of priorities. This was embodied by the Dnieper hydro-electric project (*Dneprostroy*). This was the first of a series of grandiose projects of industrial development that demonstrated the capacity of the Soviet state to transform the economy and to raise it to a new level of technology, a testimony to the potential of state planning and entrepreneurship. Stalin initially had viewed the entire scheme with scepticism as regards the use of state resources in an agrarian economy.

By 1927, the view of the party leadership and of the United Opposition was that the period of economic reconstruction had been completed. Industrial and agricultural production had returned to pre-war levels. This vindicated the decision to introduce the NEP in 1921, but it posed the question as to whether it was the suitable framework for the new phase of expanding the economy along socialist lines. The longer the NEP lasted, the more entrenched it became. The debate on the NEP concerned the issue of correcting the economic imbalance, by expanding industry, especially heavy industry, and using agriculture as a resource base for diverting resources—through taxation and pricing policy—into industry.

The NEP was strongly criticised by the left wing of the Bolshevik Party. It was seen as favoring agriculture over industry and encouraging rural differentiation with the rise of the kulaks. The impact of this was seen to be especially dangerous in the non-Russian national regions of the country. It was criticized for the growth of wage inequalities in industry, and for its failure to resolve the problem of urban unemployment, which, in 1925, was around 9%. The NEP fostered the rise of capitalist entrepreneurs and small traders, who were regarded as speculators and profiteers. It was associated with the entrenchment of the influence of bourgeois specialists in the party-state apparatus. The rise of domestic capitalist forces was linked to the external dangers posed by capitalist forces from without.

The criticism of the NEP was tied to the United Opposition's charge of the party's political disconnection from its proletarian class base and from

youth. In 1927, Trotsky issued an alarmist warning that an internal degeneration of the party and the growth of capitalist elements threatened the regime with counter-revolution, Thermidor.<sup>34</sup>

In 1928, Stalin himself turned decisively against the NEP on the grounds that the economic recovery had been achieved, that the Soviet party state was much stronger, and that the growth of capitalist forces now required decisive counter measures. The moves to limit the NEP were developed as reactions to immediate problems in meeting state grain procurement targets. In response to a shortfall in state grain collections, the state could have raised the prices paid for grain. This, however, would have limited the government's ability to use the state budget to increase investment in industry. But raising grain prices in and of itself would have been insufficient: peasant farmers needed consumer goods to buy. In the event of prices for grain being too low, or the supply of consumer goods inadequate, the danger was of the peasants withdrawing from the market.

The counter-policy that became associated with the industrial commissariat Vesenkha and Gosplan was that the priority should be placed on the expansion of heavy industry. This in turn would provide in time the wherewithal for expanding light industry and for the production of tractors, implements for the mechanization of agriculture. This, it was argued, would provide for a reconstruction of the economy, and allow for more rapid growth. However, this required that the state limit its budget commitments for grain procurement, which required a means of extracting grain from the countryside at state-fixed prices.

The assault on the NEP was associated with the build-up of Gosplan and Vesenkha, which favored a shift towards planning and the curbing of the market economy, and giving priority to heavy industry, at the expense of light industry and agriculture. This also had a regional dimension, with traditional heavy industrial centers such as Ukraine and the Urals region emerging as powerful lobbies intent on exacting large-scale investment in competition with one another. The party Central Control Commission and the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, the agency of party-state control, whose reorganization Lenin had proposed in 1923 to assist the government in its management of the NEP, was used in 1929–1930 to push for

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<sup>34</sup>Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)* (edited by Naomi Allen and George Saunders) (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1980) pp. 258–264.

dramatic increases in industrial output targets, and in developing the strategy for the collectivization of agriculture.<sup>35</sup>

The industrialization drive required a stable environment for its realization. Large-scale investment in new plants needed time to be brought to fruition. The NEP economy was subject to the vagaries of the harvest and of the weather, as well as from potential cutbacks in state industrial investment and in purchases of foreign machinery and equipment. The argument of the industrializers was that state policy had to be able to override such market fluctuations.

The state budget was placed under pressure as demands for industrial investment competed with allocations for grain purchasing, as well as with established commitments to administration, transport, education, welfare, military expenditure and so on. With little prospect of increasing state revenue, the government had the option of printing more money, but the experience of hyper-inflation of the civil war period and the lapse into a barter economy ruled this option out. A balanced budget and tight fiscal and monetary policy provided a framework in which the problem of state priorities was to be decided. In this context, the decision was taken to compel the peasants to deliver grain at state-fixed prices.

The period 1914 to 1927 was seen as a lost period where the level of production (after the collapse of the civil war period) had remained largely unchanged. The expansion of heavy industry was intended to rebalance the economy, and to close the gap between the USSR and the advanced capitalist states not only in levels of output but also in technology. The gap was especially pronounced in the military defense industries. The repudiation of the NEP was thus driven by ideological, economic and military arguments.

The struggle over the NEP was a struggle for ascendancy in the Communist Party between Stalin and those identified as the “rightists”. A series of political crises served to discredit the NEP economy, and to justify a fundamental change of course: the war scare of 1927, the grain crisis of 1927–1928, the Shakhty trial of 1928, and the Smolensk scandal of 1929. These provided the basis for campaigns that attacked those in the party leadership most wedded to the NEP, now denounced as the “rightists”—Rykov, head of Sovnarkom; Tomsky, head of the trade unions; and Bukharin, as the party’s principal ideologist.

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<sup>35</sup>E.A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia*, ch. 6, 7.

This shift exploited the instabilities of the NEP, and the constraints that managing the mixed economy imposed on state projects for industrial expansion. These practical problems could have been resolved. But the framework of the market economy required a slower pace of industrial growth and an emphasis on the development of light industry to meet the demands of the peasant consumers. But the turn away from the NEP was shaped by both practical considerations in terms of state objectives, and by an ideological agenda that prioritized the goal of creating a socialist economy, which diverged fundamentally from what was considered the temporary retreat from socialism that was inaugurated in 1921. In 1917 the Bolsheviks temporarily suspended their goal of collectivizing agriculture. Only at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927 was a large expansion of the collective farm system and the enlargement of the cooperative sector in agriculture again put back on the party's agenda as an immediate priority.

In 1928–1929, industrial investment and output targets were relentlessly pushed up. The attempt to expand the collectivized farms and the peasant cooperatives in no way matched the regime's hopes, whereby grain could be secured at low prices to allow the state to increase exports, and to accumulate funds to cover its budgetary commitments. Attempts to persuade the peasants voluntarily to join the collective farms failed, with the state using the anti-kulak campaign as a means to pressurize the peasants to join the collectives.

Bukharin, in *Notes of an Economist* in 1928, outlined a vision of development within the NEP, and offered prophetic warnings of the dangers that Stalin's policy of forced industrialization and agricultural collectivization might entail, but he was unable to overcome the party's deep aversion to the NEP.<sup>36</sup> Lenin's endorsement of it in 1921 was far more equivocal than Bukharin was willing to admit.

Stalin justified the turn away from the NEP by citing Lenin's own words from the period of the civil war. Thus, in his report to the Central Committee, Central Control Commission in April 1929 on *The Right Deviation in the Party*, he rejected Bukharin's charge that the agrarian policy being pursued represented a "tribute" exacted from the peasants as a form of "military-feudal exploitation" by citing Lenin's own words in '*Left-Wing*' *Childishness and*

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<sup>36</sup>N. Bukharin, "Notes of an Economist," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 8, no. 4 (November 1979).

*the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality* of 1918 on the need to control those petty-bourgeois elements in the peasantry who sought to undermine socialist construction.<sup>37</sup>

Amongst economic historians, the viability of the NEP has been long debated. Whilst Maurice Dobb in the 1940s argued that the NEP had, by 1928, reached an impasse, and that industrialization required the abandonment of the market economy,<sup>38</sup> E.H. Carr emphasized the inherent incompatibility between the NEP and the principle of planning, the need for state intervention to promote industrial growth and to fundamentally transform agriculture through mechanization.<sup>39</sup> More recent scholars, notably Mark Harrison, argue that the NEP had not reached an impasse, although the problem of the terms of trade between industry and agriculture, the capacity of the state to mobilize resources for investment in industry, and the balance between investments in light industry as opposed to heavy industry posed real difficulties. Whether the state could use pricing policy to turn the terms of trade against the peasantry as a means of accumulation without this provoking a peasant strike is uncertain.<sup>40</sup>

Agricultural collectivization, contrary to the aims of its authors, did not involve a shift of resources from the agricultural sector to industry. As James Millar has shown, collectivization in the immediate term required a transfer of resources from industry to agriculture, notably in the form of tractors to make up for the loss of horses.<sup>41</sup> What collectivization did was to allow the state to extract grain from the countryside, for domestic use, for military stockpiling and for export, regardless of the will of the peasantry. Peasant flight from the countryside led to the introduction of the internal passports in 1932. In 1932, the concession of private peasant plots represented a significant modification of the policy of socializing agriculture.

Ideologically, collectivization realized the state's goal of socializing peasant agriculture, by breaking the resistance of the peasantry, restructuring rural society, and eliminating the kulaks as a social class. The negative effects in terms of the destruction of property were immense. This allowed the state

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<sup>37</sup>I.V. Stalin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12 (Moscow, 1955). pp. 56–57.

<sup>38</sup>Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development since 1917* (London, 1948) ch. 8 “The Problem of Industrialisation”.

<sup>39</sup>E.H. Carr, “Some Random Reflections on Soviet Industrialisation,” in C.H. Feinstein (ed.) *Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth: Essays Presented to Maurice Dobb* (Cambridge, 1967).

<sup>40</sup>M. Harrison, “Why Did NEP Fail?” *Economics of Planning*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1980), pp. 57–67.

<sup>41</sup>J.R. Millar and A. Nove, “A Debate on Collectivisation: Was Stalin Really Necessary?” In Chris Ward (ed.) *The Stalinist Dictatorship*, pp. 143–165.

to extract grain at will even when grain production and peasant stocks were low, leading to the famine of 1932–1933. The political costs in terms of opposition to state policies were high, creating tensions within the party-state apparatus. The processes of dekulakization and enforced collectivization were instrumental in developing the Gulag labor camp system and in promoting the growth of the police state.

The NEP effectively came to an end in 1929–1930 with the first five-year plan, collectivization and dekulakization. There was no specific date to mark its end. In 1932, there were concessions to the peasants that have been seen as a neo-NEP. In 1934, Stalin declared the Seventeenth Party Congress to be the “Congress of Victors,” but only in 1936 did he proclaim the end of the NEP.

Lenin’s attitude towards the NEP is an issue that divides historians. Moshe Lewin and Stephen F. Cohen view it as a long-term programme for socialist construction, through the development of the cooperatives, a path that might have avoided the resort to state coercive measures that were central to the Stalinist strategy of creating the command economy and collectivizing agriculture.<sup>42</sup> For both historians, this is central in providing within Bolshevism an alternative non-Stalinist path of development, and a path that derived its credibility from having been sanctioned by Lenin. Other historians, such as Richard Pipes, see Lenin’s adoption of the NEP in the 1921 as driven principally by expediency, by tactical considerations. Although Lenin spoke of the NEP continuing for some time, it was never intended to be kept in perpetuity. The possibility of a return to the class-conflict policies of the war communist era was never abandoned.

## The Non-Economic Dimension

The New Economic Policy was always a misnomer. It was above all a political strategy that had economic, social and cultural aspects. Central to the strategy was the weakness of the Soviet regime’s base of social support, which, after 1922, it sought to alleviate through policies of compromise and concessions.

By 1924, the USSR had a population of some 137 million people that was divided into official social categories: employees: 4.7%; workers: 10.1%;

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<sup>42</sup>Moshe Lewin, *Lenin’s Last Struggle* (translated from the French by A.M. Sheridan Smith) (Wildwood House, London, 1973); Stephen F. Cohen, “Bolshevism or Leninism,” in Robert C. Tucker (ed) *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1977) pp. 3–29.

collectivized peasants and craftsmen in cooperatives: 1.3%; individual peasants and free craftsmen: 75.4%; and bourgeoisie, landowners, traders and kulaks: 8.5%.<sup>43</sup> Those broadly defined as workers (the industrial proletariat) represented a small minority, barely larger than those who were defined as members of the exploiting classes. The great majority of the population lived outside the socialized economy and were seen as carriers of ideas and habits inimical to socialism. For the Soviet regime, the existing structure of society and the rapid growth of the rural population posed a serious impediment to the transition to socialism. The regime's base of support was amongst the industrial workers, whose wages had not significantly improved between 1914 and 1927, but who were the beneficiaries of other measures, such as the reduction of the working day to 8 hours.<sup>44</sup>

The weakness of the Soviet regime was also highlighted by its own lack of educated cadres and its dependence on administrators, specialists and engineers inherited from the old regime, those who were defined as bourgeois specialists. It wished to eradicate the remnants of the property-owning classes, and to organize the peasants and craftsmen into collective farms and cooperatives. It aspired to create a new intelligentsia from the working class and the peasantry.<sup>45</sup>

The NEP was associated with concessions in the field of nationalities policy. From 1918 onwards, "sovietizing" the non-Russian areas occupied by the new regime became a prime objective.<sup>46</sup> From 1922, concessions were granted to the non-Russian peoples on the use of native language, the promotion of local culture and advancement of native cadres in an attempt to win their compliance.<sup>47</sup> In Ukraine, this was referred to as "Ukrainization."<sup>48</sup> From 1925 onwards, there was a significant easing of repression against religion. These concessions to non-communist forces, traditional cultural elites, and bourgeois nationalist intellectuals were strongly contested within the party.

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<sup>43</sup>Mervyn Matthews, *Class and Society in Soviet Russia* (MW Books, London, 1972), p. 35.

<sup>44</sup>Maureen Perrie and R.W. Davies, "The Social Context" in R.W. Davies (ed.) *From Tsarism to the New Economic Policy: Continuity and Change in the Economy of the USSR* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1990) ch. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Stalin and the Making of a New Elite 1928–1939,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 39 no.3, September 1979, pp. 377–402.

<sup>46</sup>Pipes (ed.) *The Unknown Lenin*, pp. 152–155.

<sup>47</sup>Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nation and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup>James E. Mace, *Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1983).

The first significant break in nationalities policies came in Muslim Central Asia in 1926 with the attack on traditional Islamic practices, the wearing of the veil, Sharia law, child brides and dowry.<sup>49</sup> The use of intimidation and compulsion to impose Soviet values, intuitions and practices was the harbinger of policies that were to be followed in the non-Russian republics from 1929 when rights on the use of native culture and language were curbed, the importance of the use of Russian as the lingua franca of the state was reasserted. This was combined with a resolute campaign against bourgeois nationalist influences. With it came a renewed attack on religion.<sup>50</sup>

On the cultural front, the NEP was seen as being associated with a measure of pluralism, with various groups contending for dominance in this sphere. This pragmatism sat uneasily with the party's aspiration to control cultural life and to use culture as an instrument of forging a new communist consciousness. Sheila Fitzpatrick characterized the policy from 1928 as being a kind of cultural revolution, based on the rejection of established authority, the mobilization of youth, and the drive towards a more utilitarian conception of culture.<sup>51</sup> In 1932, the doctrine of socialist realism was proclaimed, and in 1934 the first Congress of Soviet Writers with the Union of Writers provided the framework in which all branches of culture could be controlled and regulated. Ideologically, this was associated with the fusion of communism and national traditions, as a form of National Bolshevism.<sup>52</sup>

## Stalin and the End of the NEP

In some regards, Stalin introduced revisions to Leninism. The most famous was the notion of “socialism in one country,” with the stress on Soviet Russia's self-reliance in building socialism, without requiring the aid of other revolutions in the capitalist world. The second innovation was the concept of “revolution from above,” whereby the socialist command economy was created through the actions of the state itself. This took as its cue Engels'

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<sup>49</sup>Douglas T. Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>50</sup>Arto Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief: The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party 1917–1929* (SHS, Helsinki, 1994).

<sup>51</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.) *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931* (Bloomington and London, Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>52</sup>David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 2002).

observation on German history, and on Bismarck's "revolution from above," whereby the power of the Prussian state accomplished the unification of Germany, which the "revolution from below" of 1848–9 had failed to secure. In the case of Soviet Russia, such a strategy was intended to consolidate socialism. Stalin's third innovation was the concept that class conflict intensified in the advance to socialism. This provided a rationalization for the expansion of the power of the party-state.<sup>53</sup>

The introduction of the command economy created grave economic difficulties that its architects had not foreseen. The targets set in the optimal variant of the first five-year plan proved to be hopelessly overoptimistic. The hope that the peasants could be persuaded to join the collective farms also proved unfounded, requiring the authorities to resort to methods of compulsion. Collectivization and dekulakization were instituted as police–military operations.

The socialist economy required eradicating the private sector, subordinating the market, and elevating state ownership and planning as the dominant mode of economic organization. It had a social objective in removing the remnants of the property-owning classes, and organizing peasants and craftsmen into collective farms and cooperatives. It set as its objective the creation of a new intelligentsia from the working class and the peasantry.<sup>54</sup> Culturally, it aimed to create a socialist consciousness within the society, through the extension of mass education, but also through the attack on religion and "bourgeois" nationalism. The control of the arts through socialist realism was part of this project.

The "revolution from above" was intended to strengthen the party's control over the country, and to provide it with the means to direct development. It aimed to strengthen the industrial economy and to build up the military power of the state and to ensure its survival in a situation of capitalist encirclement. The "revolution from above" was not simply about modernization, it was also driven by ideology. The charge that the Mensheviks made against the Bolsheviks in 1917 was that the October Revolution in Marxist terms was premature—that Russia lacked the preconditions for socialism. The "revolution from above" aimed to correct these shortcomings: to build up industry, to enlarge the proletariat, to socialize peasant agriculture, to create a new intelligentsia and to combat traditional ideas and habits. The state itself would create the preconditions for socialism. The consequence was the

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<sup>53</sup>Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin*, ch. 8 and 9.

<sup>54</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Stalin and the Making of a New Elite 1928–1939," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 39 no. 3, September 1979, pp. 377–402.

hypertrophy of the party-state, the enlargement of the police state, the resort to state terror, and efforts to regiment the lives of people.

## Conclusion

The introduction of the NEP in 1921 was a major defeat for the Communist Party. It represented a retreat comparable only to that of Brest Litovsk in the sphere of foreign policy in 1918. Without Lenin's authority it is possible there might have been no NEP.<sup>55</sup> It was viewed as a retreat, a humiliating blow to the prestige of the party, a step backward that gave the lie to all the confident prophesies regarding the advance to socialism. Lenin himself viewed the NEP with distaste but insisted that the party should make this retreat in order to gather its strength at some stage in the future to renew the offensive. The management of the NEP was never free from problems and its duration was relatively short. Lenin's commitment to it was entirely contingent on what it could deliver, how far it was necessary for the regime's survival, and whether the regime had alternatives that could be applied. By 1926, the NEP had reached the peak of its development.

Lenin's political pronouncements in 1922–1923 stand in sharp contrast to those of 1918–1921. The class war advocate and defender of terror of the civil war period became the defender of the NEP, adopting a more conciliatory stance regarding those previously deemed as class enemies. This shift has been variously interpreted. One approach, reflected in the writings of Stephen F. Cohen, is that Lenin, based on experience, sought to rethink Bolshevik strategy as to how socialism could be achieved. In sharp contrast V.M. Molotov, Stalin's right-hand man, in interviews in the post-Stalin era, spoke of the "revolution from above" as a revolution far more ambitious and far-reaching than Lenin's revolution of October 1917. The revolution from above consolidated the Soviet state. It resolved the problems of the party's precarious hold on power as demonstrated during the civil war, and removed the limits that the NEP set on its power *vis-à-vis* the private sector, the non-Russian nationalities and the various religious communities. In Molotov's view the ailing Lenin of his final years was a pale shadow of his former self, that his political defense of the NEP was driven by expediency and did not reflect the true Lenin.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Service, *Lenin: A Biography*, p. 422.

<sup>56</sup>E. Chuev, *Molotov Remembers* (ed. Albert Reis) (Chicago, 1993).

Paul Gregory poses the question of whether the NEP was inherently incompatible with the objective of promoting the industrialization of the country or whether it was the ideology of Bolshevism which doomed it from the outset.<sup>57</sup> The economic constraints within which the government operated played a crucial role in deciding the fate of the NEP. But the decision regarding its future was primarily a political one. Stalin's lurch to the left in 1928 was driven by political calculations regarding the renewal of the programme of socialist construction that embraced economic, social and cultural policies. In this it represented a return to the goal of realizing the Bolshevik agenda of 1917. In the process, the regime itself was transformed.

The NEP was repudiated as it was incompatible with Bolshevism's fundamentalist anti-capitalist ideology. The attempt to reconcile the mixed market economy with Marxist ideology was always strained. Objective problems in managing the NEP and reconciling industrialization with the needs of the market contributed to its undoing. But for the Soviet regime, the compromises with different social groups that were part of the strategy of the NEP carried dangers that the Stalinist leadership were keen to neutralize. The NEP was replaced by a new modernization drive with which the regime's prestige and credibility were bound up. With the command economy, the Soviet state, for domestic and external reasons, embraced and adapted the Russian statist tradition of forced modernization pioneered in earlier centuries by Peter the Great and Sergei Witte.

## Author Biography

**Edward A. Rees** studied political science at the University of York and was a post-graduate student in Russian history at the University of Birmingham. He has taught at the University of Keele and University of Birmingham, UK. He was a Professor of Eastern European History at the European University Institute in Florence from 1999 to 2008. He has published widely on the Soviet political system. His publications include *Political Thought from Machiavelli to Stalin* (2004) and *Iron Lazar: A Political Biography of Lazar Kaganovich* (2012).

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<sup>57</sup>Paul R. Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Archives* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) ch. 1, "The Jockey or the Horse".

# 17

## NEP, the Logical Sequel to the Bolshevik Seizure of Power

Paresh Chattopadhyay

The Bolshevik seizure of state power on 25 October 1917 (7 November according to the Julian Calendar used in Russia at that time) has been widely accepted as a socialist revolution following the claim of the Bolsheviks themselves. Thus Lenin himself, their leader, had declared that “the workers’ socialist revolution began (in Russia) on October 25.”<sup>1</sup> This, of course, follows, again, from Lenin’s claim, made a few months earlier that in Russia “the bourgeois revolution has been completed.”<sup>2</sup> Lenin’s criterion for arriving at this view was what he considered as a change in the class character of the holders of power, that is, a change in what Marx calls in his well-known 1859 preface to his book the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the “edifice” of society, not its foundation constituted by the social relations of (material) production. Contrary to Marx’s materialist conception of history (often inexactly called historical materialism), Lenin totally abstracts from the social relations of production of Russia in arriving at his conclusion on the rise of the bourgeoisie (and landlords), “a new class,”<sup>3</sup> to state power.

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<sup>1</sup>V.I. Lenin, (1917) “Extraordinary All Russia Congress of Soviets of Peasant Deputies”, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 447, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>V.I. Lenin, (1917) ‘The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution’, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 37, and the Seventh Conference of R.S.D.L., *Selected Works*, vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup>V.I. Lenin, (1917) *Selected Works*, vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 37.

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This was a case of a society trying to “leap over the natural stages of development,” as Marx observes in his preface to volume 1 of *Capital*.

In what follows, I first briefly discuss the *nature* of the October Revolution, claimed by Lenin as “a workers’ socialist revolution,” as cited above. Then I argue that the so-called New Economic Policy (NEP) starting in 1921 was a logical sequel to the *nature* of this revolution. Our discussion will be carried on within Marx’s theoretical framework. The discussion of the NEP here concerns mostly its early period, that is, more or less, 1921–1923/24.

## Seizure of Power

The seizure of state power by the Bolsheviks was neither initiated nor led by the working class. On the contrary, a tiny group of unmandated, radicalized petty-bourgeois intellectuals forming the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, far removed from the locus of material production and exploitation, with no accountability to the working people, took the decision to seize power, behind the back and over the head of the assembling Second Congress of soviets, really a seizure of power *from* the soviets—and not from the Provisional Government—under the slogan “all power to the soviets,” and in the name of the working class. A great authority on the Soviet movement of Russia, Oskar Anweiler, has observed:

The October revolution was prepared and accomplished by the Bolsheviks under the slogan ‘all power to the soviets.’ However, an examination of the historical reality shows that only a fraction of the workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ deputies wanted the seizure of power. The majority of the soviets and the masses represented by them of course greeted the fall of the Provisional Government, but refused to have a Bolshevik hegemony.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Oskar Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung in Russland 1905–1921*, Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1958, pp. 258–259. In a relatively recent work, the eminent historian Alexander Rabinowitch reports that the delegates to the Second Congress were asked to fill out personal questionnaires, one of which concerned the type of government they would like to see. Tabulation of the responses showed that the overwhelming number committed to supporting transfer of “all power to the Soviets.” That is, creation of a Soviet government reflecting party composition of the Congress, a Soviet government uniting all socialist elements (*The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, 2004, pp. 139, 167, 291–292). For his part, the eminent historian Moshe Lewin observed that “the opposition to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks alone was more significant within Lenin’s own party than is commonly thought.” (Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, p. 194).

With how much cynicism Lenin treated the great slogan “all power to the soviets” is clearly seen in his confidential correspondence to his leadership comrades on the eve of the seizure of power, published only after Lenin’s demise (“The Crisis has Matured”). While loudly proclaiming publicly “all power to the soviets,” Lenin in his private communication with his leadership colleagues showed utter distrust if not disdain for the soviets—this vehicle of “formal” democracy—and persevered in his attempt to persuade leaders with democratic susceptibilities that the party must alone (*v svoi ruki*) capture power, ignoring the soviets, and that “it would be naïve to wait for a formal majority for the Bolsheviks.” He argued that to “wait” for the Congress of soviets was complete “idiocy,” or “total treachery” (*polnaya izmena*), for the Congress would, and could, “give nothing” (*nichevo ni mozhet dat*).<sup>5</sup>

Far from being the movement of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority—to paraphrase the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*—the Bolsheviks seizing power represented a small minority of Russian society. This was the necessary outcome of the position Lenin clearly held, as seen in his own statements even before coming to power. Thus Lenin remarked: “Since 1905 Russia has been governed by 130,000 landowners. Yet we are told that 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party will not be able to govern Russia.”<sup>6</sup> In the same way, he asserted, “to-morrow, events may put power in our hands, and then we shall not relinquish it,”<sup>7</sup> and a couple of months later added, “if the Bolsheviks succeed in taking power, no power on earth can prevent them from retaining it until the triumph of the world socialist revolution.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, undergoing a surprisingly rapid decay, the soviets as independent self-governing organizations declined as early as the summer of 1918. As Victor Serge commented: “Soviet democracy lasted from October, 1917 to the summer of 1918,” and “beginning in 1919 Bolshevism started to deny all the dissidents of the revolution the right to political existence.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (hereafter SW) vol. 2, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 348; *Izbrannyye Proizvedeniya* (hereafter IP) vol. 2, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury 1982, pp. 345, 346. Hanna Arendt very pertinently remarks: “Without Lenin’s slogan ‘all power to the Soviets,’ there would never have been an October Revolution in Russia. But whether or not Lenin was sincere in proclaiming the Soviet Republic, the fact of the matter was even then his slogan was in complete contradiction to the openly proclaimed revolutionary goals of the Bolshevik Party to ‘seize power’. That is, to replace the state machinery with the party apparatus.” See Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: Viking Press, 1963, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 2, p. 369.

<sup>7</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 2, p. 169.

<sup>8</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 2, p. 385.

<sup>9</sup>Victor Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2001, p. 832.

In his turn, Oskar Anweiler, the great student of the council movement, stressed: “the strength of the soviets lay in their close link with the masses of workers and soldiers whose mouthpiece they were ... They were sensitive barometers of the voice of the masses of the moment ... The radicalisation of the masses had to make itself felt through the radicalisation of the soviets. When a group whose objective is totally opposed to the democratic character of the soviets succeeds in obtaining their leadership with the help and in the name of the masses the consequence has to be the general downfall of the soviets. This was the case of the Bolshevik victory in the October revolution. The soviet movement which began as a democratic movement transformed itself into the springboard of the Bolshevik dictatorship.”<sup>10</sup>

The same author traces the uneasy (if not hostile) relation between the Bolsheviks and the councils (soviets) from the very birth of the soviet movement with the general strike of 1905 in Russia. The Bolshevik treatment of these self-administering organs was in sharp contrast with their treatment by the Mensheviks, on whom the historical reminiscences of the 1789 French Revolution and the Paris Commune of 1871 exercised considerable influence. The Mensheviks saw the new soviets as workers’ revolutionary organs of self-administration. They directly spoke of the formation of revolutionary communes in the interest of promoting the uprising and disorganizing the government.<sup>11</sup> Anweiler stressed that it was “not the Bolsheviks but the Mensheviks who introduced the 1871 Paris Commune in Russia.”<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, in their plan, the Mensheviks spoke of the formation of self-governing, deputized organizations from top to bottom, with a view to uniting the workers and peasants. If there is a question of a theoretical forerunner of the soviet it can be said that it is the Menshevik idea of revolutionary self-administration.

There could be no common ground between the Menshevik idea of self-governing organs of workers and peasants arising spontaneously from the mass movement and the Leninist idea of a party of professional revolutionaries, outside of the great mass of the working people, with a determined and disciplined band of revolutionary fighters organizing the uprising and seizing power. The “revolutionary committees” in the cities and countryside propagated by Lenin had nothing in common with the Menshevik idea of revolutionary self-government of workers and peasants. In the St. Petersburg

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<sup>10</sup>Oskar Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung in Russland 1905–1921*, Leiden: Brill 1958, p. 139.

<sup>11</sup>Oskar Anweiler, 1958, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup>Oskar Anweiler, 1958, p. 85.

soviet created by the general strike of 1905, the Mensheviks saw the far-reaching realization of their idea of the revolutionary self-administration. Anweiler stresses that “as opposed to the Menshevik idea of the revolution as a spontaneous process in the course of which one could not fix any action beforehand, Lenin claimed that an uprising could be fixed if those who fixed it had influence on the masses and knew to assess correctly the moment.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, Lenin considered the Menshevik campaign for revolutionary self-administering organs of the workers and peasants to be a “childish idea”. The organization of self-administration and the free choice of people’s representatives are not the prologue but the epilogue of the uprising, according to Lenin. He wrote: “The Bolshevik revolutionary programme was based on the leading role of the party. Originally the council principle had no place in Bolshevism.”<sup>14</sup>

In his turn, Israel Getzler, the authoritative biographer of Martov, writes that when Martov reached St. Petersburg (in 1905) he recognized at once the embodiment of his idea of revolutionary self-government. He opposed the Bolshevik attempts to bring the soviets under party control. To Martov, the soviets were not just a temporary political center of the workers’ movement—he took them more seriously. The tactical differences between Lenin and Martov indicated different views of history and revolution. As Getzler wrote: “Lenin saw the revolution as a planned seizure of central power synchronised with an armed uprising, while Martov saw it as a progressive replacement of a disintegrating government apparatus by an ever-widening area of revolutionary self-government.”<sup>15</sup>

## A Coercive Regime

A *minority* regime like the one installed by the Bolsheviks *has* to be *coercive*, has to exercise *terror* in order to survive, and when it claims to be a proletarian regime, any opposition to its policies would have to be considered “counter-revolutionary.” Not only did the Leninist leadership refuse to have any collaboration with the rest of the socialists in the soviets, this situation, entirely its own creation, made the Bolsheviks more isolated, and they became

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<sup>13</sup>Anweiler, 1958, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup>Anweiler, 1958, pp. 92, 93, 94.

<sup>15</sup>Getzler, Israel, *Martov: The Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 109.

more terrified of their opponents. Isaac Deutscher affirmed: “They had half suppressed them in order to win the civil war; having won the civil war they went on to suppress them for good, and it was necessary to suppress opposition in Bolshevik ranks as well ... The Bolsheviks hardened in the conviction that *any opposition must inevitably become the vehicle of counter-revolution.*”<sup>16</sup>

A dissident Bolshevik, a metal worker, Shlyapnikov, protested against this one-party rule and the dangers associated with this:

We consider that it is necessary to build a socialist government with all the socialist parties in the soviets in order to consolidate the results of the heroic struggle of the working class and the revolutionary army in October and November. Outside of it there is only one road: *maintaining a purely Bolshevik government by means of political terror.* We think that this will end up by eliminating the mass proletarian organisations from the direction of political life, establishment of an irresponsible regime and the ruin of the revolution.<sup>17</sup>

The great economist and socialist by conviction, Joseph Schumpeter, very realistically summed up the Leninist operation as follows:

The inevitable conflict that split the party (that is, the social democratic party of Russia) into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks (1903) meant something much more serious than a mere disagreement regarding tactics such as the names of the two groups suggest. At the time no observer, however experienced, could have realised fully the nature of the rift. By now the diagnosis should be obvious. The Marxist phraseology which both groups retained obscured the fact that one of them had irrevocably broken away from the classical Marxism. Lenin had no illusion concerning the Russian situation. He saw that the Tsarist regime could be successfully attacked only when temporarily weakened by military defeat and that in the ensuing disorganisation a resolute and well disciplined group could by ruthless terror overthrow whatever other regime might attempt to replace it ... Such a group could only be recruited from the intellectual stratum, and the best material available was to be found within the party. His attempt to gain control of the latter therefore amounted to an attempt to destroy its very soul. The majority and their leader, Martov, must have felt that. He did not criticise Marx or advocate a new departure. He resisted Lenin in the name of Marx and stood for the Marxist doctrine of

<sup>16</sup>Deutscher, Isaac, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879–1921*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 518. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup>Cited by Bukharin as an example of “breach of party discipline.” See Bukharin *O kharktere nashei revoliutsii* (On the character of our revolution) in *Izbrannyye Proizvedeniya*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1988, p. 299. Emphasis in original.

proletarian mass party. The novel note was struck by Lenin ... Un-Marxian was not merely the idea of socialisation by *pronunciamiento* in an obviously immature situation; much more so was the idea that “emancipation” was to be not the work of the proletariat itself but of a band of intellectuals officering the rabble.<sup>18</sup>

An important section of the anti-Stalin Left, mainly the followers of Trotsky, found the civil war to be the sole cause of the failure of the October Revolution and the absence of proletarian revolution (at least) in Europe—the particular policies pursued by the governing Bolsheviks themselves were not at all considered to be a cause. However, this argument is only partially true. Even then, there was a more important point to consider in this connection. Supposing that Europe had successful proletarian revolutions—that would not have affected the situation in Russia, given the very nature of the power holders. The latter would always remain a single party maintaining a minority rule—substituting for the working class—considering all dissidents as counterrevolutionaries unworthy of political existence and requiring coercion, even *after* the civil war dissidence within the party itself was virtually suppressed. This was clearly seen in the resolutions of the 1921 Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party “dissolving immediately all groups formed on the basis of one platform or another.”<sup>19</sup>

It is also important to recognize that the minority character of the regime was extended by the regime itself to the international arena. Franz Borkenau, the noted historian of world communism, shows how Moscow split the Western labor movement. Robert Grimm, the leader of the Swiss socialist party, had suggested the “reconstruction” of the International on a broad basis, a platform that would admit all the working-class parties that had either rejected “social patriotism” during the war or repented for doing so after the war. The French socialist party, during the last months of the war, had voted en bloc against war credits, and was therefore the natural center for such a movement. The idea was for an International in which the Russians should be members but not the masters:

Without a moment’s hesitation, Moscow decided to counter the efforts of the reconstructionists by splitting the labour movement all over the world. If the Russians, instead of seeking friendly relations with the labour movements of

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<sup>18</sup>Schumpeter, Joseph, *Socialism, Capitalism and Democracy*, New York: Harper, 1950, pp. 329–330.

<sup>19</sup>Lenin at the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. (B) March 8–16, 1921 in *SW* vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 583.

other countries, now set out to split them they must make the social-democrats their irreconcilable enemies and thus deprive themselves of the one support abroad upon which they could have counted, had they removed the idea of international split. The Russians were far from realising the factual situation in Europe and were full of revolutionary dreams. Russia would soon bring the world the revolutionary gospel and the revolutionary millennium; only, in order to achieve it, all people must submit to the Russian lead. It is the Islamic idea of a holy war, expressed in terms of historical materialism.<sup>20</sup>

Borkenau, again, notes that Rosa Luxemburg also wanted a new International, but she wanted it to be formed only after powerful anti-war and revolutionary mass movements had grown up in all the decisive countries of Europe. “Her reluctance to join an international dominated by Lenin was based upon her profound distrust of a bureaucratic dictatorship which she foresaw ... would be extended to the international.”<sup>21</sup>

Having accepted without any question, in fact axiomatically, the Bolshevik claim that the October Revolution was a proletarian revolution, this section of the Left mentioned in the paragraph above does not at all take into consideration the factor of coercion exercised by the regime itself against the Left opposition and, much more importantly, against the peasantry. The philosopher Roy Medvedev, whose father, a sympathizer of the Bolsheviks, was liquidated under Stalin, drew attention to the policy of “food detachments” and the “poor peasants committees”—which had “nothing socialist about it”—to which the working peasants and the middle peasants were opposed, adding: “In Russia there were smouldering hotbeds of *civil war* which could potentially burst into flame almost any moment; all that was needed was a pretext, and it was soon found in the form of revolt of the Czech Legion in Russia.”<sup>22</sup> The exercise of coercion and violence by the regime was clearly employed in relation to the country’s vast peasantry. It was not only against the kulaks (rich peasants) but also against virtually all of the middle peasants who had grain surpluses. No enterprising farmer regarded his/her own stocks of grain as “surplus” grown by his own labor on his own land. The “food detachments” took almost all their grain by force

<sup>20</sup>Borkenau, Franz, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1962, pp. 186, 187, 188.

<sup>21</sup>Borkenau, 1962, p. 89, who makes the interesting remark: “Bakunin had already preached centralised, clandestine organisation of selected revolutionaries. He had attempted to create it in the West, among members of the First International. His argument was that a mass movement is inevitably shifting, uncertain and half-bourgeois, and that only a clandestine group of selected, disciplined revolutionaries can guarantee revolutionary purity” (Borkenau 1962, p. 33).

<sup>22</sup>Roy Medvedev, *The October Revolution*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, pp. 168–169.

and paid almost nothing. The Bolsheviks resorted to mass violence. The economic historian Alec Nove observed, “compulsory delivery of food came to mean a policy in which each peasant household was ordered to deliver its surplus to the state. In some cases this was outright confiscation.”<sup>23</sup>

Maurice Dobb, an avowed sympathizer of the Bolshevik regime, wrote in his historical account:

On May 14, 1918, a decree of the Central Executive Committee (TSIK) declared that the peasants having surplus grains but refusing to deliver them at fixed prices be declared ‘enemies of people, and deprived of rights of citizenship to be brought before a revolutionary tribunal ... Committees of Village Poor established to enforce requisition from the well-to-do peasants precipitated the final break with the Left Social Revolutionaries. Also it antagonised not only the kulaks but also the mass of middle peasantry who constituted the majority in the countryside ... In the degree that the requisitioning policy was extended, peasant resistance grew ... The original requisitioning policy was replaced by arbitrary levies by local allocation departments. Increasingly there were forcible and inquisitorial methods of collection, and this sharpened peasant hostility and resistance ... An epidemic of peasant risings spread over the Volga region and west Siberia and in Tambov gubernia.<sup>24</sup>

## War Communism and Popular Unrest

The period from mid-1918 to the spring of 1921 is called “war communism,” more or less coinciding with the civil war in Russia. This period was marked by extreme centralization, elimination of money replaced by barter, and above all, maintenance of compulsory delivery by the peasants of surplus food grain to the government (*Prodrazverstka*) system. This was really confiscation. Private trade in grain and other produce was forbidden. In industry, all large- and medium-sized businesses were nationalized. To manage them, administrative departments (*Glavki*) were created under the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy (VSNKh). The distribution of consumer goods was centralized and rationed. The illusion of having embarked on a socialist revolution in Russia, resulting in the belief that the war communism was the period of leaping into socialism, had reached the

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<sup>23</sup>Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, Penguin, 1982, pp. 59–60.

<sup>24</sup>Dobb, Maurice, *Soviet Economic Development since 1917*, New York: International Publishers, 1966, pp. 104, 105, 117, 118.

highest level of the Bolshevik Party. Two Russian economists of the ultimate phase of the regime have described this period as follows: "In economic discussions of those years War Communism was sometimes viewed not as an extraordinary, temporary, measure engendered by special circumstances, but as a logical and natural step in the formation of new socialist relations. Lenin himself also appeared to believe for a time military, administrative, coercive methods were the best ways to socialist economy. This view was buttressed by the conviction that we would not remain alone for long. Revolution in the West would help solve many of our problems. If we could somehow hold out, the future would become easier. History however turned out otherwise".<sup>25</sup> That Lenin himself was a victim of this "illusion of the epoch," to use Marx's famous expression, is seen in his article "The Task of the Youth League" published in *Pravda* in 1920 (October): "The generation of people who are now at the age of fifty cannot expect to see a communist society. The generation of those now fifteen years old will be living in a communist society in ten or twenty years' time."<sup>26</sup> Once the civil war was over, more and more peasants began to show discontent over the system of compulsory requisition.

On the general situation, referring to the increasing peasant unrest in the country, the noted German historian Richard Lorenz has observed that: "According to official information there existed in the land 165 large armed peasant groups. At the beginning of 1921 there was hardly a government in the land in which there was no *peasant war against the state organs*."<sup>27</sup> Within a short period, the political situation of the country changed considerably. As Lorenz has noted, the ruling party began to experience mass dissatisfaction, which included all classes and strata. The trade unions and factory committees were to a considerable extent transformed into the executive organs of party leadership. The soviets were increasingly bureaucratized. The uprisings and the protest demonstrations reached their climax in the Kronstadt revolt in early 1921. First starting with the demands for the improvement of daily life, the uprising rapidly assumed an overtly political character against the regime. E.H. Carr has pointed out that the demand of the peasants had an important place in the first resolution of the assembly of mutineers: "to give full rights of action to the peasant over all the land, also

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<sup>25</sup>N. Shmelev and V. Popov, *Revitalization of the Soviet Economy*, New York: Doubleday 1989, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>V. I. Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Youth League' (1920, October 2) in *Selected Works*, vol. 3, 1971, p. 483.

<sup>27</sup>Lorenz, Richard, *Sozialgeschichte der Sowjetunion*, vol. 1, 1917–1945. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1976. pp. 119–120. Emphasis added.

to own livestock which he must maintain and manage by his own resources, without employing hired labour.”<sup>28</sup> However, the political aspect of the Kronstadt revolt, this uprising of the proletariat against the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” alarmed the rulers.<sup>29</sup> Their watchword was “all power to the soviets, and not to Parties.” As a noted American historian has remarked, “it was essential for the Communist Party to suppress the idea of Kronstadt as a movement which defended the principles of the October Revolution against the Communists—the idea of the third revolution.”<sup>30</sup> A reliable chronicler of the Kronstadt saga, the historian Israel Getzler, has affirmed:

Amidst the hysteria and cynicism of the Bolsheviks’ reaction to ‘Kronstadt’ Lenin’s immediate comments stand out as sober and honest. The Kronstadters, he conceded frankly, ‘do not want the White Guards, and they do not want our state power either.’ But their ‘new power’, regardless of whether it stood to the left of the Bolsheviks or slightly to the right, was doomed to a crash and bound to serve as a step-ladder to the bourgeois counter-revolution. In his private jottings, Lenin going further diagnosed the uprising as symptomatic of the ‘political side’, the political expression of the economic crisis that beset Russia’s War Communism ‘during the spring of 1921.’ Lenin’s ‘lesson from Kronstadt’ was double-pronged, and fateful in its historical consequences. In politics, Lenin noted, what was needed was ‘a closing of the ranks,’ a tightening up of discipline ‘inside the party’, an insistence on ‘the greatest firmness of the apparatus’, the strengthening of a ‘good bureaucracy in the service of politics’, the stepping up of ‘the implacable struggle against the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and Anarchists’. ‘In economics’, the Kronstadt episode, he thought, pointed to the need for ‘the widest possible concessions to the middling peasantry,’ notably, ‘local free trade’, in short, the New Economic Policy (NEP). Kronstadt revolutionaries indignantly protested: ‘Kronstadt does not demand “free trade”, but the genuine power of the soviets’. This was certainly lost on Lenin, single mindedly bent as he was...on the maintenance and strengthening of the monopoly of power held by the Communist party... Lenin’s response blocked what was still left of the revolution’s political open-endedness, completed the

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<sup>28</sup>Carr, E.H. *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2 London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 271.

<sup>29</sup>In this connection it is interesting to read what Alec Nove has written on Lenin’s reaction when faced with the peasant unrest as found in his notes, 1794 vs.1921. “The Jacobins, in the French revolution, had found that the terror and economic centralization had lost their *raison d’être* with the victory of 1794. The beneficiaries of the revolution, the more prosperous peasants, pressed for relaxation and freedom to make money. This had swept away Robespierre, and the whole revolution moved to the right after the ‘Thermidor’ (the month of Robespierre’s downfall).” (Nove 1982, p. 81).

<sup>30</sup>Daniels, Robert V. *The Conscience of the Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 144.

formation of the highly centralised and bureaucratised single-party dictatorship, and put Russia firmly on the road to Stalinism.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the war and war communism had destroyed the economy. Freight turnover was one fifth of the 1913 level. Industrial output was one third, agricultural output was less than half. Proclaimed by Lenin in March 1921, the New Economic Policy meant a shift from administered “socialism” to *khozraschet* socialism, socialism based on the calculation of profit and loss by industrial entrepreneurs within general state guidelines.”<sup>32</sup>

## New Economic Policy (NEP)<sup>33</sup>

The first and the most important measure under the NEP was to replace *prodrazvestka* with a tax in kind, which was initially set at approximately 20% of the net output of peasant labor, in other words, the tax required deliveries nearly two times lower than the amounts requisitioned under *prodrazvestka*. Later, taxes were reduced to 10% or less of the harvest and were accepted in monetary form. After satisfying the tax in kind, peasants could sell the remaining produce either to the state or on the free market, as they desired. A radical change also took place in industry. *Glavki* were replaced by “trusts.” These were associations of industrial enterprises (*predpriyatiia*) given full economic and financial autonomy, including the right to issue long-term bonds. However, the party firmly held to the decision to retain in the hands of the State the “commanding heights of the economy: banking, large scale industry and foreign trade.”<sup>34</sup> “The heights were governed, in their relations with the rest of the economy, by the laws of the market.”<sup>35</sup> By the end of 1922, about 90% of all industrial enterprises were united in 421 trusts. More than 40% of these were under central authority, the rest under local authorities. The trusts themselves decided what to manufacture and where to sell their products. VSNKh, which no longer had the right to interfere in the activities of the enterprises and trusts, turned into a coordinating centre. This was when the term *khozraschet* appeared. This term

<sup>31</sup>Getzler, Israel, *Kronstadt 1917–1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 257–258.

<sup>32</sup>See N. Shmelev and V. Popov, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>In the following, I draw on E.H. Carr, 1963, Shmelev and Popov, 1989, and Alec Nove, 1982.

<sup>34</sup>Nove, 1982, p. 85.

<sup>35</sup>E.H. Carr and R.W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 1, London: Penguin Books, 1974, p. 665.

means that after making a mandatory fixed payment into the state budget, an enterprise independently determined how to dispose of the income from the sales of its products, disbursing profits and covering losses. At least 20% of the trust's profits had to be put into reserve capital until the reserve was half the capital stock. The reserve capital was used to finance production expansion and defray the losses incurred by economic activities.

A 1923 decree defined trusts as "state industrial enterprises to which the government has given independence in production operations in conformity with the ratified charters, and which operate on the basis of commercial accounting in order to extract profits." Syndicates also began to appear. These were trusts that voluntarily joined together on a cooperative basis to conduct sales, supply procurement, credit and foreign trade operations. By the end of 1922, 80% of industry that had united in trusts was syndicated. They operated virtually in all branches of industry and handled the majority of all wholesale trade.

The sale of finished products, like the purchase of raw and finished materials and equipment, was conducted in a full-fledged market through wholesale trade. A broad network of trade exchanges, fairs and trading companies appeared in the country. In industry and other economic sectors, money wages were reinstated; wage rates that prohibited "leveling" were introduced and limitations were taken off, raising salaries to match growth in productivity. Compulsory labour conscription was abolished, as were main constraints on changing jobs. Thus labor was organized on the principles of economic incentive, which replaced the non-economic coercion of war communism. The leasing of enterprises in possession of VSNKh was regulated by a decree of July 5, 1921 and leasing continued through 1922. A number of enterprises were leased to foreign firms. Legally, they were called "concessions." Capital flowing into the country was accompanied by a flood of immigrant workers. Many of them offered assistance, knowledge and experience. For example, Shmelev and Popov mention that more than 100 mechanics from the Ford factories arrived in 1921–1922 at Moscow Automobile Factory. Similarly, immigrant workers took part in the restoration of the Donetz basin mines, and started agricultural communes and tractor brigades.

Cooperatives of all forms developed rapidly. The role of producer cooperatives in agriculture was minor, but simple—sales, supply procurement and credit cooperatives included more than half the peasant farms by the end of 1920s. A new monetary unit was introduced in 1922—*chervonets* = 10 pre-revolutionary gold rubles—becoming the sole currency in 1924, replacing the old, depreciated *sovznaki*. The whole operation was carried out under

the aegis of the *Gosbank* (State Bank), created in 1921, and of the *Narkomfin* (People's Commissariat of Finance).

The problem of balancing the budget was solved by levying a variety of excise taxes; commuting agricultural tax in kind and corvée into money payments; taxes on private and state enterprises; and income and property taxes, plus voluntary and forced savings. In 1923–1924, the budget was balanced.

During the NEP period, the economic mechanism was based on market principles. In the pre-NEP period, published statistics showed that production in all branches of industry declined continuously until 1920, the worst being in iron ore and cast iron, which in 1920 fell to 41% of the 1913 level. The figure for coal was 27%. In terms of the value of pre-war rubles, the production of fully manufactured goods reached only around 13% of the 1913 value in 1920.<sup>36</sup> The picture clearly changed with the NEP. In just five years between 1921 and 1926, the index of industrial production increased more than three-fold, attaining approximately the 1913 level. Agricultural production increased two-fold, exceeding the 1913 level by 18%. Not only did the peasants, for the first time since the revolution, have a surplus to sell and the legal authority to sell it, but the terms of trade were exceptionally favorable to them. As Carr has beautifully put it: "Partly by design and partly by accident the peasant had become the spoilt child of proletarian dictatorship."<sup>37</sup> However, problems arose too. This concerned the terms of trade between the prices of industrial goods and the prices of agricultural products. The mechanism of market price formation that the authorities were counting on did not work as expected and led to major price discrepancies. The most important disproportion was in prices for industrial goods, which rose much faster than prices for agricultural products. This phenomenon came to be called the problem of "price scissors." "The price scissors" parted in the sense that industrial prices were above, and agricultural prices below, their 1913 prices. In terms of the newly stabilized currency, industrial prices were 276% of those in 1923, while agricultural prices were 89%.<sup>38</sup>

As Alex Nove wrote: "The NEP system of mixed economy weathered the storm, and with the establishment of a stable currency and balanced budgets entered into calmer waters by 1924. The years 1924 and 1925 could be described as High NEP."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2 London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 295.

<sup>38</sup>Shmelev and Popov, *Revitalizing the Soviet Economy*, New York: Doubleday 1989, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup>Nove, 1982, p. 96.

The VSNKh began to set prices on industrial goods, so that trusts and syndicates could no longer put monopoly prices on the market. The measures taken were successful: from October 1, 1923, through May 1, 1924, wholesale prices of industrial goods dropped 26%.<sup>40</sup> Until the end of the NEP, the question of prices continued to be the key in state economic policy.

## The NEP and the Transition to Socialism

Lenin's first alteration to the NEP is found in his speech to the Tenth Congress of the Party (March, 1921) in which he laid down two conditions for a successful transition to socialism in Russia, given that the overwhelming majority of the population consisted of small agricultural producers. Lenin observed that this situation required "a whole series of special transitional measures which would be superfluous in highly developed capitalist countries where wage workers in industry and agriculture make up the vast majority."<sup>41</sup> In such a country, Lenin continued: "socialist revolution can triumph only on two conditions: first, if it is given timely support by a socialist revolution in one or several advanced countries. We have done very much to bring about the condition, but far from enough to make it a reality. The second condition is agreement between the proletariat, which holds state power, and the majority of the peasant population."<sup>42</sup> In the same discourse, Lenin noted that the peasantry was greatly dissatisfied with the government's relations with them. The small farmer demanded two things: a certain freedom of exchange, and the need to obtain commodities and products. Now, free exchange—unrestricted trade—meant turning back towards capitalism. To the question, "could it be done?" the answer given was, yes, it could, given that the proletariat held political power. Lenin underlined: "What is free exchange? It is unrestricted trade, and that means turning back towards capitalism. How can the Communist Party accept it? Would it not undermine the political power of the proletariat? Can it be done? Yes, it can, for everything hinges on the extent. If we were able to obtain even a small quantity of goods and hold them in the hands of the state—the proletariat holding state power—and if we could release them

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<sup>40</sup>Shmelev and Popov, 1989, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup>Lenin *SW*, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 568.

<sup>42</sup>Lenin *SW*, vol. 3, 1971, p. 569.

into circulation, we would add economic power to our political power.”<sup>43</sup> In the same congress, another important measure to satisfy the peasants was also announced: replacing surplus appropriation by tax in kind (*Prodnalog*).

Immediately after the Party’s Tenth Congress, Lenin wrote the brochure *The Tax in Kind*, where he referred to his 1918 pamphlet ‘*Left-wing’ Childishness and Petty-bourgeois Mentality*, in which he had argued that state capitalism would be a step forward compared with the present state of affairs in the Soviet Republic. Petty-bourgeois capitalism, he posited, prevails in Russia, but it is the first stage of economic development that will lead to both large-scale state capitalism and to socialism which will be supported by national accounting and control of production and distribution. State monopoly capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism. Returning to his 1921 text on tax in kind, Lenin underlined that the replacement of the surplus appropriation by tax in kind implying a free market was one of the forms of transition from war communism to socialism. Let us note that speaking of war communism here, which Lenin said was “forced on us by extreme want, ruin and war, which could not be a policy which corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat,”<sup>44</sup> Lenin totally contradicted his own view on war communism expressed earlier. As we saw above, he was completely overwhelmed by the “illusion of the epoch” such that he predicted the advent of the communist society in 10 years. Lenin underlined in the same brochure: “Capitalism is a bane compared with socialism. Capitalism is a boon compared with medievalism, small production, and the evils of bureaucracy which spring from the dispersal of the small producers. Inasmuch as we cannot pass directly from small production to socialism, some capitalism is inevitable as the elemental product of small production and exchange; so that we must utilise capitalism (particularly by directing it into the channels of state capitalism) as the intermediary link between small production and socialism, as a means, a path, and a method of increasing the productive forces.”<sup>45</sup> Later in the same year, at the Seventh Moscow Gubernia conference in October, Lenin accentuated this line. He underlined that the “passage to NEP made us realise that we must abandon the attempt at the immediate construction of socialism and that in several economic spheres we have to retreat to state capitalism.” He added: “the situation created by NEP—development of small enterprises, lease of the state

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<sup>43</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 3, 1971, p. 572.

<sup>44</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 600.

<sup>45</sup>Lenin SW, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 607.

enterprises, etc.—all this is the extension of the state capitalist relations. When we had declared that we were going to replace the requisitions by tax in kind, we had decreed freedom of exchange of agricultural products which the peasants would have at their disposal after paying tax in kind, we had by the same act *decreed the development of capitalism*.<sup>46</sup>

Lenin attached great importance to the alliance (*smychka*) between workers and peasants for building socialism in Russia. He told the Ninth Congress of Soviets (December, 1921): “The key problem is the attitude of the working class to the peasantry, it is the alliance between the two, the capacity of the advanced workers to attract to their side the peasant masses, crushed by the land owners and the old form of the economy, crushed by the capitalists, to demonstrate that it is only their alliance with the workers that can free them from the age old enslavement by land owners and capitalists.”<sup>47</sup> Lenin continued: “If the big industry is flourishing, if it can without delay deliver to the small peasants a sufficient quantity of industrial products, the peasants will be entirely satisfied and they will recognise that the new regime is preferable to the capitalist regime. Such is the case of our retreat; that is why we had to go back to state capitalism, to concessions, to trade. Without this the alliance between the advanced workers and the peasantry would not be realised.”<sup>48</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Lenin attached considerable importance to cooperatives as the road to socialism. One of his last writings was an article entitled *On Cooperation* (January 1923). If state power is in the hands of the working class and the means of production belong to the state, he maintained, the only task that remains is the cooperative organization of the population. He observed: “It is forgotten that owing to the special features of our political system, our cooperatives acquire an altogether exceptional significance. If we exclude concessions, which have not developed on any considerable scale, cooperation under our conditions nearly always coincides with socialism.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>V.I. Lenin, 17th Moscow Gubernia Conference, in *Collected Works*, vol. 33, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, pp. 94, 99. Emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup>V.I. Lenin, Report to the 9th Congress of the soviets, December, 1921, in *Collected Works*, vol. 33, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, p. 156.

<sup>48</sup>V.I. Lenin, Report to the 9th Congress of the soviets, *Collected Works*, vol. 33, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, pp. 158, 160.

<sup>49</sup>V.I. Lenin, ‘On Co-operation’, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 765.

## Conclusion

Marx in his Bakunin critique (1874–1875) observed, “a radical social revolution is bound up with certain historical conditions of economic development. The latter are its pre-conditions. It is therefore only possible where, with capitalist development, the industrial proletariat occupies at least a significant position.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, Marx made several other comments, stressing the requirement that “new, higher relations do not appear before its material conditions of existence have already been hatched within the womb of the old society itself.”<sup>51</sup> As Marx wrote in his essay “Die moralisierende Kritik und der kritisierende Moral” (1847): “Individuals build a new world out of their historical inheritance of their collapsing world. They must themselves in the course of their development first produce the *material conditions* of a new society, and no effort of spirit or will can free them from this destiny.”<sup>52</sup> Even with the strongest will and the greatest subjective effort, if the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of circulation for a classless society do not exist in a latent form, “all attempts to explode the society would be quixotism.”<sup>53</sup> In his 1847 polemic against Karl Heinzen, Marx observes that even if the proletariat overturns the political supremacy of the bourgeoisie, “its victory will only be temporary, a factor in the service of the bourgeois revolution itself, until, in the course of history, material conditions are created which necessitate the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and the fall of the political domination of the bourgeoisie.”<sup>54</sup> We read in an earlier text: “if the material elements of a total revolution are absent (the existing forces of production and the formation of a revolutionary mass which revolts not only against a certain conditions of the past society but against the old “production of life” itself and its foundation, the “total activity” on which it is based) then it does not matter at all for practical development that the *idea* of this revolution has already been formulated one hundred times.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Marx, “Konspekt von Bakunins Buch ‘Staatlichkeit und Anarchie’” (1874–1875) in *Marx-Engels-Werke* vol. 18, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973, p. 633.

<sup>51</sup>Marx, ‘Preface’ to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in Marx and Engels *Selected Works in One Volume*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup>Marx, ‘Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral’ (1847) in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 4 Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972, p. 339.

<sup>53</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse* (1857–1858) in *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft) Penguin 1993, p. 159.

<sup>54</sup>Marx, “Die moralisierende Kritik”, p. 339.

<sup>55</sup>Marx and Engels, ‘Die deutsche Ideologie’ (1845–1846) in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 3, Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1973b, pp. 38–39.

The future society arises from the contradictions of the present society itself. The process is best understood by recalling two methodological principles that Marx derived respectably from Spinoza and Hegel. In his first manuscript for *Capital* Volume Two, Marx completed Spinoza's famous saying "all determination is negation" by adding, "all negation is determination"<sup>56</sup> Years earlier, in his Parisian manuscripts of 1844, while critically commenting on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, Marx had observed that the latter's "greatness" lay in the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle.<sup>57</sup>

Marx shows how capital creates the objective and the subjective conditions of its own negation and, at the same time, the elements of the new society that is destined to supersede it. It is precisely capital's negative side that contributes to the positive outcome. "The material and the spiritual conditions of the negation of wage labour and capital—themselves the negation of the earlier forms of unfree social production—are in turn the result of its own process of production."<sup>58</sup> It is only capital, which by separating the producers from the conditions of production (which are their own creation) and by pursuing the path of production for production's sake (the logic of accumulation), creates, independently of the will of the individual capitalists, an abundance of material wealth.

Marx argues that at a certain stage of capitalism's development, its social relations of production turn into fetters for the further development of the forces of production—including the "greatest productive force, the revolutionary class,"<sup>59</sup> forces that have been engendered by capital itself and that hitherto progressed under it hitherto. This indicates that the old (capitalist) society has reached the limits of its development and that it is time for it to yield to a new, higher social order—which thus signals the beginning of the "epoch of social revolution."<sup>60</sup> "The increasing unsuitability of the hitherto existing production relations of society for its productive development," writes Marx, "is expressed in sharp contradictions, crises, convulsions. The violent destruction of capital, not through the relations external to it, but as the condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which the advice is given to it to be gone and give room to a higher state of social

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<sup>56</sup>Marx, *Ökonomische Manuskripte* (1863–1867) MEGA<sup>2</sup>.4.1, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1988, p. 216.

<sup>57</sup>Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte* (1844) in MEW, *Ergänzungsband*, Part I, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973, p. 575.

<sup>58</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse* (1857–1858), Penguin 1993, p. 749.

<sup>59</sup>Marx, 1965, p. 135.

<sup>60</sup>Marx, 1970, p. 182.

production.”<sup>61</sup> In a famous, often misunderstood text, Marx emphasized: “No social formation ever perishes before all the productive forces, which it is large enough to contain, have developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions have been hatched within the womb of the old society itself. That is why humanity always sets itself only the task which it can solve, and the task itself only appears where the material conditions of its solution already exist or at least are in the process of formation.”<sup>62</sup>

As a matter of fact, in Russia, as in other countries in which party and state were one, the revolutions could only have a bourgeois character, given the objective and subjective conditions, which were too backward for inaugurating socialism as understood, not in its Leninist but in its Marxian sense as an association of free and equal individuals. Humankind (*Menschheit*) always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve, and the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist, or are at least in the process of formation.<sup>63</sup>

Now, many countries, beginning with Russia, where the seizure of power took place in the name of the working class, were materially backward and where pre-capitalist and non-capitalist relations of production largely prevailed. So the task for the victors was first to remove those backward relations before any significant progress could be made. A few months after the seizure of power, Lenin told the Party Congress that “the most developed form of capitalist relation embraced only the small top part (*nebol'shie verkhushki*) of industry and hardly touched agriculture.”<sup>64</sup> As he pointedly observed four years later, “medievalism” had first to be removed, and declared, “our task was to consummate (*dovesti do kontsa*) the bourgeois revolution.”<sup>65</sup> E.H. Carr also highlights the point that the Russian proletariat, the supposed holders of power, not having qualified personnel within its

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<sup>61</sup>Marx, Part of the passage beginning with “advice ... social production” is in English in the manuscript of *Grundrisse*, 1993, p. 749.

<sup>62</sup>Marx, ‘Preface’ to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1859) in Marx and Engels *Selected Works in One Volume*, 1970, p. 182.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>V.I. Lenin, “Political Report at the Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the Party” (1918) in *Selected Works*, vol. 2. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, p. 529.

<sup>65</sup>V.I. Lenin, “Eleventh Congress of the Party” (1922) in *Selected Works*, vol. 3. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 705.

ranks, had to call its “class enemies” for help. Carr refers to the 1919 Party Programme which “had a friendly word for the bourgeois specialists, working hand in hand with the mass of rank and file workers under the leadership of conscious communists.”<sup>66</sup> Lenin, in his article “Integrated Economic Plan” (*Pravda*, February 21, 1921) went so far as to underline that he would “gladly swap dozens of communists for one conscientious qualified bourgeois specialist.”<sup>67</sup>

We have cited above Lenin’s positive attitude to “state capitalism” as a necessary stage for transition to socialism. As E.H. Carr wrote: “Lenin could accept the imputation of ‘state capitalism,’ not as an accusation, but as a panegyric.”<sup>68</sup>

Carr notes that the economic backwardness of Russia helped the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. “But the same fact made the subsequent work of socialist construction infinitely difficult, since they were called on to build a new socialist order without the democratic and capitalist foundation which Marxist theory had treated as indispensable. It was necessary to complete the bourgeois revolution before moving forward to the socialist revolution.”<sup>69</sup> The NEP precisely served as the instrument for achieving the bourgeois revolution. The introduction of NEP to industry produced its logical results. The application of *khozraschet*, as noted earlier, required the return to a monetary economy and was incompatible with any form of wage as a system of free rationing or as a social service rendered by the state to its citizens. As Carr noted, a decree of September 10, 1921 broke new ground by describing the wage system as a “fundamental factor in the development of industry.” Wages were now primarily a matter of relation between the worker and the undertaking in which s/he worked. The decree demanded the removal from the undertaking of everything that was not connected with production and had the character of social maintenance. Any thought of egalitarianism had to be excluded. Wages were linked to productivity. In fact, the end of the civil war and the introduction of the NEP inaugurated a serious and widespread dismissal of workers in response to the dictates of *khozraschet*. Work as a legal obligation was succeeded by work as an economic necessity. A decree of February 9 finally substituted “hiring and firing” for “the compulsory

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<sup>66</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 185.

<sup>67</sup>V.I. Lenin, “Integrated Economic Plan” (1921) in *Selected Works*, vol. 3, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 561.

<sup>68</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 270.

mobilization of labor.”<sup>70</sup> As Carr wrote, “in less than a year NEP had reproduced the characteristic essentials of a capitalist economy.”<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, one can only remark of the claim of Lenin in April 1917 that the bourgeois revolution in Russia was already completed and his additional assertion in October that the socialist revolution had begun, that both were exaggerations. Russian society was pre-capitalist and majoritarian peasant. To assert that from April to October 1917, a span of seven months, that the Russian economy had created the material and social conditions for the genesis of a socialist revolution, was absolute idealism.

Marx wrote in *Capital*: “The life-process of society which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated individuals, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan. This, however, demands for society a certain material groundwork or series of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of *a long and painful process of development*.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 322.

<sup>71</sup>E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1963, p. 323.

<sup>72</sup>Marx, *Capital, a Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1954(1867), p. 84. Translation slightly modified. Emphasis added.

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# 18

## Lenin's NEP and Deng Xiaoping's Economic Reform

Wei Xiaoping 魏小萍

This chapter compares and contrasts Deng Xiaoping's economic reform, instituted in 1978, nearly 30 years after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in China, and Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), instituted in 1921.<sup>1, 2</sup> The NEP and Deng's economic reforms are separated by some 57 years. We can ask ourselves now: what, if any, is the relation between these two economic approaches? If we look at the historical context of Chinese economic reform, the answer must be that there is no direct relation. Yet if we consider the historical context of both, then the answer must be that there is a clearly practical relationship between the two economic approaches. This chapter will discuss common problems that each faced in very different historical contexts and the principles they came up with to deal with these problems.

### On the Historical Context of the NEP in 1921 and the Economic Reform in 1978

After the October Revolution in Russia succeeded, in 1918 during the First World War, the Bolsheviks decided, due to the difficulty of the military situation, to change to a communist system of production and as well as a sys-

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tem of allocation, directly based on the system from the old society. At first, that meant peasants should hand in their food, food that the state needed, according to the rule of collecting surplus food. Then the state would, in principle, allocate this food to each factory. Later on, the Bolsheviks started a historical transformation from capitalism to communism by replacing private ownership with public ownership. This entailed transferring the land from big landlords to peasants, as well as transferring property from big private capitalists to the state. Meanwhile the state further undertook to replace the market economy by a primarily centrally planned form of economy. In a very short time, the transformation of capitalism to communism was completed through the decisive step of abolishing private ownership of the means of production and commodity production.

Before this historical transformation, Russia remained in a period of almost feudal agriculture, in which peasants were the single largest segment of the population. After the transformation, the primary interest in the initial stage of communism centered on collecting surplus food directly from peasants. That meant that the more a peasant produced, the more he had to hand into the state. This in turn resulted in very serious resistance from peasants, leading in turn to serious conflict between the Bolsheviks on the one hand and peasants on the other.

By virtue of this policy, only a few years after the end of the war, the newly Bolshevized Russia was already undergoing an extremely serious economic setback. Productive forces, which had not increased as they supposedly should have, had actually decreased, in turn resulting in a serious shortage of basic supplies of all kinds.

In examining this situation, Lenin was reminded of Marx's theory that between capitalism and communism there should be a transition period, which would simultaneously be both capitalist and communist. In the context, Lenin criticized himself for insisting on a direct transition to communism. He came to the conclusion that a transitional period from capitalism to communism was necessary, that it would probably be lengthy, and that it would require socialist supervision and calculation. But how to carry it out was not clear to him at that time.

To meet the problem, Lenin formulated the NEP. One should say that the NEP was formulated to deal with the consequences of the dramatic transformation of communism during the First World War, rather than an attempt to come to grips with problems arising in the historical transition period.

In his report entitled "New Economic Policy and the Task of Political Education Committee," dated October 17, 1921, Lenin explained this policy as "replacing the collecting of surplus food by a food tax, which was

intended to recover capitalism in a certain scale.”<sup>3</sup> The NEP ended the policy of collecting surplus food. This meant that even after handing in the newly instituted food tax, peasants could either buy or sell their surplus food as they wished. The so-called surplus food only amounted to a small part of their production, though the peasants were the majority of the population. Lenin, as noted, realized that this kind of free market would unavoidably lead to a certain return to capitalism. But it was a possible way at the time to receive food from the peasants without conflicts in developing the productive forces.

The NEP was a way to deal with economic deficiency after the First World War and during the civil war. At the time, Lenin realized that, in practice, the dramatic problem of the transformation from the historical period of feudalism and earlier capitalism to communism was finally different from Marx's theoretical idea of this historical transformation. Marx believed a transitional period between capitalism and communism was necessary. But Lenin's NEP did not represent the period of transition as Marx understood it. According to Marx, during this period there was supposed to be a special commodity and market economy, but without capitalists. So even though Lenin knew Marx's theory of the transitional period, the stated aim of the NEP was to return so to speak further back behind the period of transition. This shows that Lenin was not dogmatic, that he was not wedded to earlier forms of Marxism, that he did not feel obliged to rely on Marx's theory even in practical matters, and that he made his decisions in practical circumstances according to what he understood of the actual situation.

The gap between theory and practice—that is, practice as it really exists as distinguished from theories of practice—is clear, especially if one is prepared to follow the lessons of experience as opposed to mere theory. In this case, one knows or at least should know, what is possible and what is not possible. This is a rough description of the situation Lenin faced at that time as the first person to be faced with the need to apply Marxist theory in a real, large-scale situation.

Lenin was naturally acquainted with Marxist theory. As a leader of the Bolsheviks, he needed to practice the form of the theory he had at his disposal. Yet his realization that in certain circumstances he could not apply Marx's theory led him rapidly to re-adjust his understanding, hence his practice of Marxist policy according to the experience he accumulated from real, concrete situations.

At this point, we need to distinguish between the NEP and its effect in practice. Lenin was very skilled in practical situations. There is no doubt that if he had lived, he would have continued to adjust his theory in the practical situations he encountered. Yet since Lenin fell ill in 1921 and

then died in 1924, he simply had no time to answer these questions. After Lenin left the scene, Stalin assumed control of the economic direction of communism.

Marx distinguished between the model of the communist economy and that of the transitional economy. The problems of his theoretical view only became known to observers after they tried to put the theories into practice. Lenin, when encountering practical problems, quickly switched from one model to the other. In this way, Lenin addressed the practical problems on the basis of experience. But he had no time to think about the problems in theory. We will examine Marx's theoretical approach to problems that later faced China after the Communist Party came to power.

Deng began socialist economic reform in 1978, almost 30 years after the CCP came to power in 1949. The CCP only began to set up a socialist system in the various economic areas in 1956. In this respect, there is a basic difference between the situation in the city and in the countryside. In the city, the initial steps were undertaken in view of replacing private factories with state-owned and collectively owned factories—at the time, the main form of public ownership for industrial property. In the countryside, privately held land was transformed into individually or peasant family-held land through a process that ended in 1952. This transformational process began the movement of organizing cooperative farms in which individual peasants and families joined together. Yet initially the land was still in their hands. This situation lasted until 1956 when the movement of setting up agricultural production teams began. This meant that individual peasants and peasant families joined the collective production team together with their land. This step effectively ended private ownership in the countryside, and created the so-called “production team model” as the new model of production. Starting in 1958, this model was followed by the so-called “big production team,” and after that by “big agricultural production.” This team developed in the People's Commune, the institution that owned land on three different levels, all of which have slightly different economic mechanisms for evaluating and recording economic output.

Meanwhile, in spite of the ongoing process of collectivization, private ownership continued to exist both in the city and the countryside on a very small scale, for instance in small so-called hand-industry, and on the level of small family landholdings. Starting during this period, production was based on central planning and the principle of allocation was reward according to contribution. To some extent, this model resembled the first stage of communism as understood by Marx and Engels. In practice, this model was created by Stalin after Lenin left the scene. More specifically, this refers

to public ownership with central planning, an approach that is followed actively or passively by all the other so-called socialist countries. According to this approach, all state industries belong to a single hierarchy, which is rigidly organized along lines radiating from the center, which is constituted by the government and the party leadership.

The new socialist system, including the new productive forces liberated by the Revolution, did not develop as quickly or, in part, in the ways that Marx thought they would unfold. In fact, the kind of development of productive forces that in fact took place appeared to involve another kind of inefficiency. That is, a decrease or even an absence of economic activity, which in turn caused economic development, if not to disappear, at least to decrease. Only for a short period did the traditional socialist system achieve impressive development, such as in the USSR from the 1920s to 1960s, and in China up to the late 1950s. In both cases, in the USSR and in China, during the initial period, the enthusiasm of the workers was motivated by the excitement of belonging to a new society, at least in theory if not always in practice, guided by socialist justice, socialist collective ethos, and a form of socialist consciousness determined to make a greater contribution to the new society. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm, which emerged at the beginning in salutary fashion, rather quickly waned.

In 1963–1964, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping began a policy of dividing community fields in the countryside into parcels for each family with a determinate responsibility under contract together with a free market. Though it is not certain, some observers think Deng Zihui was the first person to propose these ideas. In the city, in order to increase productive output of state factories, profit was stressed, and the mechanism of a financial bonus was used in combining the reward more tightly with the factory's own productivity.

But no sooner had this strategy been implemented than Mao criticized it as returning to the capitalist road. Mao believed that a bourgeois class would again appear and that those who proposed and tried to implement the idea were in his words “capitalist roaders,” openly or covertly situated in strategic positions within the CCP. Mao, who considered so-called “capitalist roaders” to be right-wing elements, proposed an anti-right political movement to fight any return to capitalism. Further, in 1966, Mao started the Cultural Revolution, which was intended once and for all to totally abolish not only the actuality, but even the very possibility of returning to capitalism.

In 1972, Deng again began to organize the economic sector of China. Yet no sooner had he begun his work than opposition to this project emerged at the highest levels. Mao, who found out and who feared that Deng would

try to do the same thing again that had already been done in 1964, once again initiated a public criticism of Deng. It was only after 1976 when Mao died that Deng was able to re-emerge. As a direct consequence, the economic reforms that stimulated the development of the Chinese economy only began at the end of 1978—that is, two years after Mao passed from the scene.

In retrospect, we can see that the general idea at the beginning of the reform is similar to the economic policy Liu and Deng had earlier proposed in 1964. Liu and Deng both relied on a system of responsibility formalized through a contract that further stressed monetary incentives. Generally speaking, the economic reform process can be divided into three stages.

In the first stage, which extended from 1978 to 1992, the main task consisted in introducing a system of contractual responsibility. The reform process began in the rural areas, where contractual responsibility was interpreted in a way intended to combine the individual peasant's self-interest with family work through "de-collectivizing" community fields into family plots. After a short period of reform, the new system achieved a measure of success in increasing the output of production in the rural areas. Based on these early successes, the system was further introduced in urban areas, where the reform spread to enterprises, then to workshops, and finally to workers themselves. The different layers set up different forms of contractual responsibility in which a monetary incentive was used if, and only if, on inspection the contractual task was satisfactorily fulfilled. Meanwhile so-called "hand-in-profit" for the enterprises was gradually replaced by taxation.

In the second stage of the economic reform, which extended from 1992 to 2001, the market was introduced. This stage began with a speech by Deng in which he raised the crucial theme about, in his words, "Whether a little more planning or a little more market is not the demarcation of socialism from capitalism." According to Deng, "A planned economy is not the same as socialism, capitalism has planning too, a market economy is not the same as capitalism, and socialism has a market too. Planning and the market are only economic methods. The essence of socialism is to liberate production, develop production, eliminate exploitation, and eliminate great differences, at last to reach the aim of wealth for all."<sup>4</sup>

Market mechanisms were originally instituted within a system of private ownership, while central planning was designed for a system of public ownership. Central planning obviously needs to address a series of related concerns. In a market system, the identification of the specific kinds of property that can enter into the market must be clear. On the contrary, for central planning, since there is no clear demarcation of public property,

it is difficult, perhaps ultimately not possible, to make precise economic calculations.

In China, public ownership exists mainly in three forms, including: small collective ownership, whose demarcation is clear; large collective ownership, whose demarcation is already not clear; and finally state ownership in which, at least theoretically, property belongs to all people. The situation was complicated, since before the reform, the central authority not only allocated all productive resources and materials, but also fixed the level of the workers' salaries as well as the price of production.

This kind of centrally planned economy is theoretically interesting but functions awkwardly, even very awkwardly, in practice. Many of the problems are obvious enough. It would, for instance, be very difficult for a state-owned enterprise to enter into the market. If the publicly-owned state enterprises accumulated a deficit or even went bankrupt in the market, who would bear the loss? This problem is regarded by Chinese scholars as that of "absentee ownership."<sup>5</sup>

To counter this problem, with the introduction of the market, the question of property rights was further developed. In this connection, a strong argument appeared that the key problem for further reform was property rights. This problem, which has never been properly solved, continues today. Thus, after the second stage, the difficult process of clarifying property rights became the main trend of reform.

In any case, the problems facing socialist reform have not lessened but rather deepened as the reforms have progressed, and as the market system has continued to spread from production areas to finance and banking. In the process, the originally stable relations between workers and state-owned property were transformed; the so-called "iron rice bowl" was completely abolished; and not only fixed salaries, but also the fixed relation between workers and public property has ceased to exist. In the process, the original relation between the authorities and enterprise was transformed into a capital-investment relation founded on law.<sup>6</sup>

The third stage of the economic reform is the period from 2001 until now. At the end of 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and, as a result, became further involved in the worldwide trend towards ever-increasing globalization. Since Deng Xiaoping died in 1997, before China joined the WTO, he therefore had no direct connection with this new stage. Yet, since it was the logical outcome of China's economic reform, the result has been to further push China's economic reform towards a market-oriented economy increasingly involved in the ongoing world market competition.

Nowadays, many scholars ask about the precise way to envisage the relations between the two. Is there any connection between them, or is Deng's reform idea merely a new version of Lenin's view? In order to answer these questions, we have to look at the historical context of Deng's economic reform.

From the perspective of the historical process of China's economic reform, we can see that Deng's policy was based on ideas from Deng Zihui<sup>7</sup> and Liu Shaoqi.<sup>8</sup> These ideas were themselves based on the accumulated experience of traditional socialist practice, that is to say, on dealing with concrete problems that appeared during various forms of socialism.

There is almost no direct connection between Deng's conception of socialist economic reform and Lenin's view of the NEP. Rather, we could say that both Lenin and Deng had to adopt a practical approach by postponing Marx's idea of socialism. It should come as no surprise that, in virtue of the very similar historical backgrounds of Deng's and Lenin's situations, the basic thrust of Deng's economic reform and Lenin's NEP were in many ways very similar. Deng was, of course, not concerned about following what Lenin did after the First World War. In different ways dictated by their respective situations, both were continually forced to re-adjust the practice of their respective policies, in Lenin's case by turning away from communism, or in Deng's case by turning away from traditional socialism and toward a kind of market or more standard commercial economy, something which each of them understood in terms of the concrete situation.

The result, which cannot be sufficiently emphasized, is the deep, crystal clear similarity between Deng's economic reform and Lenin's NEP. Everything points to the fact that, in each case, attempts to solve concrete problems arising in concrete situations led Deng and Lenin, though working independently, to similar approaches. We can demonstrate this similarity in more detail by turning to common problems of both Lenin and Deng.

## A Shared Problem Facing Both Lenin and Deng

Lenin's NEP and Deng's economic reform were separated by more than 50 years. Both emerged in similar situations in which a Marxist party seized power and, working independently, almost immediately undertook similar historical transformations from a mixed, half-feudal and half-capitalist system to a kind of communist or (again, if there is a difference) socialist economic system. What problems pushed them to start withdrawing from this transformational process step by step?

Human beings obviously depend on the ability to meet basic requirements, which are often abbreviated as food, clothing and shelter. The equally obvious concern for individual welfare did not magically disappear either during or after the revolution. Marxism came to power in Russia and then in China. As a result, the ways in which individuals sought to meet basic needs were not sublated but merely transformed.

One difficulty that both Deng and Lenin faced was the complex relationship between self-interest and public ownership. This was especially crucial in the situation of the peasants. If an individual peasant's labor is not linked or not closely linked to the result, then the individual will be less enthusiastic about work. Then production will not increase to the expected degree and might even decrease to reach an unsurpassable practical minimum.

As soon as Lenin became aware of the crucial problem of economic production that emerged from the failure to collect surplus food, he said: "We should not take the methods of the transition from Communism. Our methods must follow the peasant's self-interest."<sup>9</sup> Though some observers were concerned by the possibility of a return or even a qualified return to the capitalist system of private property, Lenin understood the situation differently. In his view, the difficulty was unrelated to capitalism since the peasant's production and labor had always belonged to the individual. The main feature of the new system consisted in the abolition of private property, or again individually held land. But the peasants, who had no land, were unaffected by this change. On the contrary, the concrete problem consisted in understanding how to combine the individual peasant's productive activity with their self-interest as well as the activity of selected specialists.

The chosen approach of replacing the direct collection of surplus food through the procedure of simply handing in surplus food in the form of a tax left an appropriate space for peasants who, in the changed situation, were still concerned with protecting their own individual interest. The new situation meant that after handing in the fixed tax, each peasant was able to hold on to the surplus that was retained without any further limits being imposed on the quantity accorded to the individual. As a further, complementary measure, capitalists, who had been driven out by the communist revolution intended to abolish the institution of private property, were now invited to participate in a new version of the market. It was understood that they would be able to profit in this way in order to increase economic production.

Some 60 years later, China faced roughly the same economic problems, nearly 30 years after the historical transformation from the old society to a new socialist system. As a result of this transformation—that is, after the

institution of the process of land reform—each individual peasant had his or her own land. According to this model, an agricultural hierarchy was created that ascended step by step from the level of the primary co-operative group or team to the primary production team, from the primary production team to a so-called high production team, and then from the high production team to the People's Commune. As the result of the change in level encompassing the series of distinctions was put in place, the size of property ownership tolerated in the new system became larger and larger. On the highest level—that is, in the People's Commune—a small amount of land was made available to the peasant on a family basis. But the formerly private land was already owned by the Commune through a kind of collective ownership. That is to say, private ownership in the countryside was simply eliminated.

The first historical transformation of twentieth century China ended the situation of alienated labor that was pandemic in capitalism and set up in its place a kind of autonomous labor in a co-operative situation. Actually, in this specific situation what happened was similar to what occurred in the situation of individual peasants in Russia in 1919. In Russia, it could have been anticipated that the peasants increasingly lost their initial enthusiasm for the new situation because of the increasingly problematic relation between the individual peasant and, in Marxist terminology, the objectified result of labor. This difficulty echoed in different ways through the new Chinese reality. In China, as the size of public (or collective) ownership increased, or again collective ownership increased, the direct connection between the individual's interests with the objectified result gave way to a steadily weaker connection between what was in reality produced and the interest in the result. It was then to be expected that as the individual peasant's enthusiasm understandably waned, his or her production also waned, and overall economic productivity not only failed to increase but rather, on the contrary, tended to stagnate.

Different kinds of relations of production correspond to different forms of economic management, such as a centrally planned economy or a market economy. To tighten the connection between individual peasants and their objectified labor not only meant the transformation of collectively owned land to land held by individual peasants in the form of a contractual arrangement, but also the means through which they could control and sell their products in the marketplace—that is, in a way that is not controlled by central planning. There is a logical connection between the form of organization of property and the possible kind of financial behavior. A similar situation was to be found in the city, where it was even more complicated.

Therefore, the logical result of strengthening the relation between the individual peasant's self-interest and work—to avoid the obvious weak point of excessively egalitarian rewards, in 1919, Russian peasants were required to hand in all food that was left after they had met their own needs—lies in introducing monetary incentives to ensure that peasants work hard, in order to sell residual produce in the market. In China, the market economy slowly developed step by step after 1978. In 1992, it was clearly advocated by Deng's speech in his so-called Southern tour. Yet in Russia, where Lenin was able to act more or less as he wanted, this policy was immediately introduced in the NEP.

It is clear that the similarity between Deng's economic reform and Lenin's NEP lies in the fact that both of them faced a similar problem under similar conditions of a historical transformation in the twentieth century. The main difference between them is that, in Deng's case, the socialist period extended for more than 20 years, and Lenin only experienced it for two years. We can see that after 20 years of the opening-up of the economy and reform experience, Deng was able to accurately monitor the result of socialist economic reform, but he did not anticipate anything for the long run. Since Lenin had almost no time to evaluate the impact of the NEP, we do not know what he would have done if he had lived to see the result.

## **The NEP in 1921 and the Economic Reform in 1978**

So far, we have compared the transformation of the existing situation in both China, where the economic situation after the Cultural Revolution was directed by Deng, and in Russia, where the economic situation after the Bolshevik Revolution was directed by Lenin. This section will analyze why in each case a withdrawal from the initial turn from capitalism to a communist form of the planned economic approach was necessary. Though in the short run this step would have without any doubt been successful, in the long run it would have threatened the transformation of post-revolutionary society.

Lenin expressed the principle of the NEP clearly as “the principle of combining the individual's interest with his responsibility.”<sup>10</sup> He further explained that “we must set up all the big sections of the national economy on the basis of combining the individual's interest. We should discuss together and let a special person be responsible for the situation. Since

we were lacking this principle, we suffered a lot for every step we moved ahead.”<sup>11</sup> Lenin regarded this method as adequate for competing with capitalists, hence adequate to turn the peasants away from capitalism. He did not ask questions about how this kind of principle should be formulated. He also did not find the relevant idea in Marx’s writings. What he said about Marx’s ideas for a transitional period from capitalism to communism was actually different from the NEP. Yet for Lenin, as for Marx, the development of the situation after the transformation of society from capitalism to communism was intended to create a situation in which there would be no private ownership, private property or a free market.

In comparison to Lenin’s situation, what Deng did at the beginning of the economic reform was at least initially closer to the period that Marx called the historical transition. But the principle on which Deng relied was similar to that of Lenin. Deng allocated collectively owned land to the individual peasants in each family in combining each individual interest with his personal responsibility in the form of a contractual arrangement. It is important to note that at the onset of the reform period, there was no competition with capitalists in China. At this point, in Deng’s mind the only real competition was from the advanced Western capitalist countries.

In the NEP, Lenin understood state capitalism as a way to use the capitalist function of directing the economy under the control of the Bolshevik state. The aim was to let the economy serve the state. Though Deng never mentioned state capitalism or even capitalism in China, he famously remarked that it did not matter whether a cat was black or white since as long as it catches the mouse it is a good cat. Lenin’s NEP was stopped after his death by Stalin. Deng’s economic reform, which brought back capitalists in different ways, is close to the intention of Lenin’s form of state capitalism. But those capitalists, who in current terminology are now named businessmen, are not somehow left over from the old society, but are rather either created by the economic reform or are brought in from outside the Chinese economic system.

Scholars have often confused Lenin’s model of state capitalism with what Westerners take to be the model of Stalin’s socialism. But they are totally different. Lenin called state capitalism the view that the Bolshevik state allowed individual capitalists to be active in the economy and there were free markets. When Westerners identify the model of Stalin’s socialism as state capitalism, they mean there is capitalist calculation on the level of the state unit. In fact, there were no individual capitalists left. In this sense, though it occurred within the confines of a different historical process, the situation after Deng’s economic reform is similar to the situation after Lenin’s

introduction of state capitalism, but completely different and unlike Stalin's so-called state capitalism.

The character of both, as Lenin knew, is also quite different. When he rethought the problems of the first historical transformation from capitalism to communism, he, as noted, admitted that the Bolsheviks had failed to prepare a transitional period for this transformation: "We supposed that since we have already set up a system of state production and state distribution, we can directly enter into a different kind of productive and distributive economic system as compared with the previous economic system. We supposed that state production and state distribution would struggle against private capitalist production and private capitalist distribution, and during this period of struggle we would set up state production and state distribution in gradually replacing the oppositional system in these two areas."<sup>12</sup> This was clearly the case in the spring of 1918, at a point in which he clearly distinguished two kinds of economic system from the perspective of production and distribution. Meanwhile, Lenin also stressed the importance of calculation, supervision, enhanced labor discipline and increased economic productivity, while simply failing to notice the natural connection of economic activity with the commercial market.

Lenin was confused by this dilemma. On the one hand, he tried to set up state production and state distribution. Yet on the other hand, he was familiar with the necessity for economic calculation, supervision and discipline for the improvement of economic productivity. But how could state production and state distribution function efficiently without a commercial market? And how could a commercial market function efficiently if the question of ownership was not clearly solved?

Lenin became aware of the breadth and depth of the serious economic situation after the first historical transformation. In response, he started the NEP by bringing back the market together with the former capitalists. He should also have noticed the different principles on the basis of experience. Yet, unfortunately, he had neither the time nor the opportunity to examine the problems in detail or to analyze them theoretically. A mere half a year later, after setting in motion the NEP, he summarized the positive result of this practice in the "Report at the Seventh Party Representative Conference on the New Economic Policy in Moscow" in suggesting that, after several months of state capitalism, new economic activity had already been achieved and productivity was improved.<sup>13</sup>

But at the same time he also noticed the emergence of an unfortunately negative result. Though the economic situation for the minority was improved, the majority were still not able to meet their basic needs.

The natural result of the reintroduction of a market economy had brought back the same social conflicts as before, the same conflicts that the abolition of the market economy was intended to resolve. In this situation, Lenin was forced to admit that the party had no previous experience adequate to deal with these new problems.

It is clear that Lenin started the NEP mainly as a social experiment. He did not anticipate the unavoidable result of the functioning of the market economy. He only barely sensed such things as the regulation of commercial activity, or the circulation of money that are both necessary to recover the kinds of big industry that are unavoidably necessary for socialism.

Deng's economic reform occurred in a similar situation. When he started the reform in 1978, he had in mind the economic development of socialism. He said that if our reform had brought out social polarization between the rich and the poor, then it had failed. It seems he simply did not know that the unavoidable result of the function of capital, especially capital still in private hands, as well as the result of a market economy, would naturally bring out social differences. Unlike Lenin, Deng had already devoted almost 20 years to the process of reform. Though he saw the negative results, he never seriously undertook to discuss those problems theoretically. What he did say was that those who became rich at first would help those poor to become rich later. But why did he not know that the function of capital would be to accumulate social wealth in a few hands, hence increasing social differences?

In his recent book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*,<sup>14</sup> Thomas Piketty tries to prove this tendency through macroeconomic statistical data, which show that in the distribution of national wealth, the rate of return on capital is always greater than the rate of economic growth ( $r > g$ ), even without relying on Marx's labor theory of value.

Theoretically different economic models should have different economic results. A socialist model in principle accumulates social wealth in public hands because there is no private ownership, and a capitalist model accumulates wealth in private hands. And for the same reasons, as the organization of economic production, distribution in socialism and in capitalism basically differs.

This point can be generalized. Different social models will have different principles of distribution, ownership and so on. This adherence to basic capitalist values is currently part of what is called social democratic society. Marx disclosed this paradox in his labor theory of value. Some 150 years later, Piketty pointed to this paradox in his study of global macroeconomic statistical data. In the socialist model, public ownership and refund distribution are taken as the basic social values. However, due to the impossibility

of precise economic calculation in a system of public ownership, a graduated form of distribution is replaced by the economically primitive strategy of relatively equal allocation. Both Lenin and Deng encountered and were puzzled by this problem. What they did to deal with it was in each case to allow private ownership to function and to reintroduce a form of the market. Therefore, when Lenin set up the NEP, he relied on the view that it would stimulate peasants', capitalists' and others' enthusiasm for working hard. When Deng started the economic reform, he also relied on the intuition that everyone would benefit if it pushed the people to work hard, both in the city and in the countryside, and that as a result, later on, capitalist economic activity would be stimulated both within China and by being attracted from abroad.

It is clear that in Deng's economic reform, the change in the principle of economic distribution resulted in the change of the underlying economic model as well as the relations of production. Yet since Lenin did not have enough time to arrive at a similar result, it followed that he only left the theoretical problems of the historical transformation from capitalism to communism for us to think about.

## Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that although Lenin's NEP and Deng's reform were separated by many years, the social context as well as the basic economic situation that prevailed after the respective revolutionary transformations were not only similar, but the strategies invoked to deal with them were similar as well. The source of the views was different, however. Deng's idea of economic reform is clearly not based on Lenin's NEP. There are no historical documents that show a direct connection between them. Deng's economic ideas do not come from his appreciation of the Bolshevik experience, but rather derive from the experience of Chinese socialism.

The similarity of the problems that Deng and Lenin each faced and the way they dealt with these problems point to the shared character of the historical transformation from capitalist society to socialist society. It further discloses the deep difficulty of achieving a practical resolution of concrete economic problems. It seems that basic principles are in play in the specific economic contexts. Marx's critique of capitalism did not start from its ideology or from the principle of distribution, though it pointed to the paradox of distributive justice. His critique further pointed to relations of

production, and hence indicated that both socialism and communism must rely on a basic change of the relations of production. After a long and complicated transitional period, at last the principle of distribution would, at least in theory if not in practice, change from the view “from each according to his/her ability” to the view that followed: “to each according to his/her needs.”<sup>15</sup> These pointed to the basic change of distributive justice from a system of distribution based on reward, to a system based on equal distribution without regard to personal contribution.

“From each according to his/her ability” suggested a distributive principle of economic refund based on specific contribution, hence inequality, while “to each according to his/her needs” suggested a very different principle of equal distribution based on individual need. At the time of the civil war in Russia and before the reform of China, Russia and China both practiced forms of equal distribution in reality instead of so-called refund distribution, which Marxian theory took as the norm. In each case, neither really knew how so-called refund distribution could function in practice without a system of production based on value and a market economy.

We are not in a position to say that this problem has been solved today, and we also cannot say that it is only a practical problem. The obvious difficulty of tracing these practical problems to theory on the one hand and the difficulty of rethinking and developing Marx’s theory in the context of modern industrial society on the other hand is a central task for Marxism today.

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