

A text dump on Vanguardism

Contents

Introduction	3
A Look at Leninism by Ron Tabor	8
Preface	8
Introduction	9
-ONE-	
What Kind of Revolution?	14
-TWO-	
Party, Class and Socialist Consciousness	26
-THREE-	
The “Ethos” of Bolshevism	35
-FOUR-	
State and Revolution	47
-FIVE-	
Lenin’s Theory of Knowledge	
Part I	58
-SIX-	
Lenin’s Theory of Knowledge	
Part II	66
Conclusion	77
 — Texts Written by Vanguardists —	 87
The Foundations of Leninism by Stalin	88
Introduction	88
I. The Historical Roots of Leninism	90
II. Method	94
III. Theory	99
IV. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat	111
V. The Peasant Question	119
VI. The National Question	127
VII. Strategy and Tactics	134
VIII. The Party	145
IX. Style in Work	156

Introduction

Ted cycled through a bunch of reactionary dispositions starting with fascism and ending on a kind of anti-tech vanguardism. He advocated an organizational strategy similar to Maoism and suggested seeing if alliances could be made with jihadists like Bin Laden.¹²³⁴⁵⁶

(ii) If a member of the anti-tech organization can find a place on the editorial board of a radical environmentalist periodical (for instance, the Earth First! journal), he will be able to influence the content of the periodical. If a majority of anti-tech people can be placed on the editorial board, they will be able in effect to take the periodical over, minimize its leftist content, and use it systematically for the propagation of anti-tech ideas. ...

How can anti-tech revolutionaries get themselves into positions of power and influence in radical environmentalist groups? The most important way will be through the moral authority of hard work. In every organization which they seek to capture, the communists are the readiest volunteers, the most devoted committee workers, the most alert and active participants. In many groups, this is in itself sufficient to gain the leadership; it is almost always enough to justify candidacy [for leadership].

The [Communists] in penetrating an organization... become the 'best workers' for whatever goals the organization seeks to attain.

Prior to that final struggle, the revolutionaries should not expect to have a majority of people on their side. History is made by active, determined minorities, not by the majority, which seldom has a clear and consistent idea of what it really wants. ...

When the system becomes sufficiently stressed and unstable, a revolution against technology may be possible. The pattern would be similar to that of the French and Russian Revolutions. French society and Russian society,

¹ Strategic Guidelines for an Anti-Tech Movement

² Industrial Society and Its Future

³ Unabomber; In His Own Words

⁴ Letters from a serial killer: Inside the Unabomber archive

⁵ Ted Kaczynski's Letter Correspondence With David Skrbina

⁶ Children of Ted; The Unlikely New Generation of Unabomber Acolytes

for several decades prior to their respective revolutions, showed increasing signs of stress and weakness. Meanwhile, ideologies were being developed that offered a new world-view that was quite different from the old one. In the Russian case revolutionaries were actively working to undermine the old order. Then, when the old system was put under sufficient additional stress (by financial crisis in France, by military defeat in Russia) it was swept away by revolution. What we propose is something along the same lines.

It seems to me, that there are discontented groups that could be very useful if we could, so to speak, recruit them.

Then when the right moment comes, they will be in a position to strike. The thing is that people will tend to be attracted to a movement not only on the basis of agreeing with its ideas, but if they see it as effective, having a clear-cut agenda, cohesive, purposeful and active.

In certain quarters, there is a rejection of modernity, among muslim militants, and I'm wondering what extent it might be useful to our movement to carry on discussions with the Muslim militants and see whether there is sufficient common ground there for any sort of alliance.

If he were simply that, I might be inclined to support him, but my guess is that his motive is less an opposition to modernity than a desire to create an Islamic 'great power' that would be able to compete on equal terms with other great powers of the world. If that is true, then he is just another ruthless and power-hungry politician, and I have no use for him.

Concerning the recent terrorist action in Britain: Quite apart from any humanitarian considerations, the radical Islamics' approach seems senseless. They take a hostile stance toward whole nations, such as the US. or Britain, and they indiscriminately kill ordinary citizens of those countries. In doing so they only strengthen the countries in question, because they provide the politicians with what they most need: a feared external enemy to unite the people behind their leaders. The Islamics seem to have forgotten the principle of "divide and conquer": Their best policy would have been to profess friendship for the American, British, etc. people and limit their expressed hostility to the elite groups of those countries, while portraying the ordinary people as victims or dupes of their leaders. (Notice that this is the position that the US. usually adopts toward hostile countries.)

So the terrorists' acts of mass slaughter seem stupid. But there may be an explanation other than stupidity for their actions: The radical Islamic leaders may be less interested in the effect that the bombings have on the

US. or the UK. than in their effect within the Islamic world. The leaders' main goal may be to build a strong and fanatical Islamic movement, and for this purpose they may feel that spectacular acts of mass destruction are more effective than assassinations of single individuals, however important the latter may be. I've found some support for this hypothesis:

"[A] radical remake of the faith is indeed the underlying intention of bin Laden and his followers. Attacking America and its allies is merely a tactic, intended to provoke a backlash strong enough to alert Muslims to the supposed truth of their predicament, and so rally them to purge their faith of all that is alien to its essence. Promoting a clash of civilizations is merely stage one. The more difficult part, as the radicals see it, is convincing fellow Muslims to reject the modern world absolutely (including such aberrations as democracy), topple their own insidiously secularizing quisling governments, and return to the pure path."

It's certainly an oversimplification to say that the struggle between left & right in America today is a struggle between the neurotics and the sociopaths (left = neurotics, right = sociopaths = criminal types)," he said, "but there is nevertheless a good deal of truth in that statement.

The current political turmoil provides an environment in which a revolutionary movement should be able to gain a foothold." He returned to the point later with more enthusiasm: "Present situation looks a lot like situation (19th century) leading up to Russian Revolution, or (pre-1911) to Chinese Revolution. You have all these different factions, mostly goofy and unrealistic, and in disagreement if not in conflict with one another, but all agreeing that the situation is intolerable and that change of the most radical kind is necessary and inevitable. To this mix add one leader of genius.

It is clear that in Ted's view some types of racism and ethnic conflict should be encouraged, so long as they are stresses useful in breaking down the industrial system:⁷

134. For all of the foregoing reasons, technology is a more powerful social force than the aspiration for freedom. But this statement requires an important qualification. It appears that during the next several decades the industrial-technological system will be undergoing severe stresses due to economic and environmental problems, and especially due to problems of human behavior (alienation, rebellion, hostility, a variety of social and psychological difficulties). We hope that the stresses through which the system is likely to pass will cause it to break down, or at least weaken it

⁷ Industrial Society and Its Future

sufficiently so that a revolution occurs and is successful, then at that particular moment the aspiration for freedom will have proved more powerful than technology.

He further defines some of the stresses that he hopes to originate from race hatred and ethnic rivalry, political extremism, anti-government groups, and hate groups:⁸

150. As we mentioned in paragraph 134, industrial society seems likely to be entering a period of severe stress, due in part to problems of human behavior and in part to economic and environmental problems. And a considerable proportion of the system's economic and environmental problems result from the way human beings behave. Alienation, low self-esteem, depression, hostility, rebellion; children who won't study, youth gangs, illegal drug use, rape, child abuse, other crimes, unsafe sex, teen pregnancy, population growth, political corruption, race hatred, ethnic rivalry, bitter ideological conflict (i.e., pro-choice vs. pro-life), political extremism, terrorism, sabotage, anti-government groups, hate groups. All these threaten the very survival of the system. The system will be FORCED to use every practical means of controlling human behavior.

Here is Ted's reading recommendations on the subject of revolution:⁹

This writer has had no opportunity to study more than a few of the works of history, political science, sociology, and revolutionary theory that may be relevant to the anti-tech enterprise. Worthy of careful attention are the works of Alinsky, Selznick, Smelser, and Trotsky that appear in our List of Works Cited. But there is a vast amount of other relevant literature that deserves to be explored; for example, the literature of the academic field known as "Organizational Behavior," and the works of Lenin to the extent that they deal with revolutionary strategy and tactics (his ideological hokum is merely of historical interest). Thorough library research will reveal an unending series of other relevant works. It is worth repeating that this literature will provide no recipes for action that can be applied mechanically. It will provide ideas, some of which can be applied, with suitable modifications, to the purposes of an anti-tech organization. ...

List of Works Cited ...

Alinsky, Saul D., Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals ...

Selznick, Philip, The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics ...

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Strategic Guidelines for an Anti-Tech Movement

Smelser, Neill., Theory of Collective Behavior ...
Trotsky, Leon, History of the Russian Revolution ...
Bowditch, James L., Anthony F. Buono, and Marcus M. Stewart, A Primer
on Organizational Behavior ...
Christman, Henry M. (ed.), Essential Works of Lenin ...
Lenin, Vladimir Ilich, Lenin on Organization ...
Lenin, Vladimir Ilich, Collected Works ...
Historical Materialism (Marx, Engels, Lenin) ...
Stalin, J., Foundations of Leninism ...

In short:

- Rules for Radicals by Saul Alinsky
- The Organizational Weapon by Philip Selznick
- Theory of Collective Behavior by Neil Smelser
- History of the Russian Revolution by Leon Trotsky
- A Primer on Organizational Behavior by James L. Bowditch
- Essential Works of Lenin
- Lenin on Organization
- Collected Works of Lenin
- Marx, Engels Lenin: Historical Materialism
- Foundations of Leninism by Stalin

A Look at Leninism by Ron Tabor

Date: 1988

Source: <archive.org/details/lookatleninism0000tabor>

Preface

THE book in your hands was originally written as a series of articles in the *Torch/La An tore ha*, a newspaper published by the Revolutionary Socialist League, in 1987 and early 1988. The ideas presented in these articles had been germinating in my mind for quite some time. They were, in particular, an offshoot of work on a previous book, *Trotskyism and the Dilemma of Socialism* (with Christopher Z. Hobson), a history of Trotskyism and a critique of Leon Trotsky's theory of the nature of the Soviet Union.

During the course of writing that book, it became clear to me that Trotsky's tendency to lay the blame for the totalitarian evolution of the Soviet regime solely at the hands of Joseph Stalin, and to exonerate Lenin of any responsibility, was, at the very least, one sided. The question¹ What role did Bolshevik Party founder and leader, V.I. Lenin, and his theories and practical activity play in the establishment of that oppressive society (which we call state capitalism)?—thus presented itself.

The result was a considerable amount of additional reading on the October Revolution, the Civil War and its aftermath, various philosophical questions, and a re-reading of a number of works of Lenin himself. Partial conclusions from this program were recorded in a number of rough drafts of documents intended for internal discussion in the Revolutionary Socialist League and in a talk presented at the 1986 convention of that organization. I was not satisfied with any of these presentations of my conclusions, however

At a certain point in my reevaluation of Leninism, it occurred to me that the fundamental outlook and mentality of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party as a whole were overwhelmingly authoritarian, and I could no longer square my acceptance of Leninism with my more fundamental commitment to a revolutionary libertarian socialism. As a major leader of the RSL, I could not in good conscience keep this conclusion to myself. The series of articles now compiled in this book was my attempt to explain and motivate my thinking.

Since they were written over a period of 13 months, for a newspaper and hence for a fairly broad audience, and often under the pressure of deadlines, the articles are occasionally repetitive, while some issues are covered somewhat simplistically. Moreover,

a number of topics—the attitude of Lenin toward the peasantry, for example—were omitted for reasons of time and space. Despite this, the articles represent an accurate enough presentation of my current evaluation of Leninism to warrant re-publication in book form. It is hoped that whatever weaknesses the resulting book exhibits do not prevent it from being of some value for those looking for a political outlook and strategy that are both revolutionary and anti-authoritarian.

I would particularly like to thank Bruce Kala for his time and patience both in typesetting the original articles and inserting the various minor editing changes made since then. All errors, of course, are solely my responsibility.

Introduction

IN the discussion that follows, Leninism is taken to mean the theory and practice of the political tendency/faction/party within the Russian revolutionary movement led by V.I. Lenin, from around 1900, through the October Revolution of 1917, to the early years of the Bolshevik regime. Although other individuals played prominent roles in various phases of the Bolshevik tendency, Lenin was by far the dominant personality, as theoretician, organizer and overall leader. Bolshevism was overwhelmingly *his* idea. And while Lenin's ideas and policies changed during the course of his political career, there is sufficient unity and continuity among them to justify describing and analyzing them as Leninism.

This series is not meant to be a complete work on Leninism. Nor is it intended to be a “balance sheet,” a careful weighing of pluses and minuses. Having considered ourselves Leninists for the length of our history as a tendency, our task now is not to look at the positive but, in the interests of an insightful analysis, to focus on the negative, to look for the weaknesses in Leninism. A discussion of the pluses — in the light of the negatives — and a balance sheet can come later.

Our unifying theme, though, is not negativity *per se*, but a particular question or problem. This can be described roughly as follows: What responsibility does Leninism/Bolshevism have for the social system, and the crimes, of what we have loosely called Stalinism and more accurately labelled state capitalism?

As most readers of the *Torch/La Antorcha* are aware, we do not believe that the social systems that exist in Russia, China, Cuba, Eastern Europe, Vietnam, etc., are socialist, moving toward socialism, workers' states or even progressive. Instead, we consider them to be highly statified variants of capitalism—state capitalism. In these societies, the workers and other oppressed people, deprived of political rights and power over the state, are exploited by a bureaucratic elite built around the party/state economic, political and military apparatus.

I do not intend to argue for, let alone try to prove, this position here. (We have discussed it many times elsewhere.) It is a premise of the series. Taking it as a starting

point, I am particularly interested in the establishment of the very first state capitalist regime—that in Russia—which was the outcome of the October (Bolshevik) Revolution of 1917. This revolution and regime were not only the inspiration and model for the revolutions and processes that established the other state capitalist systems. In addition, because of the nature of the October Revolution itself, the insurrection and the Bolshevik regime it established have been key factors supporting the illusion that the state capitalist regimes are socialist.

We believe that the October Revolution was, to a considerable degree, a revolution carried out by the working class and supported by the peasantry. The Bolshevik Party, which led the revolution (along with the Left Social Revolutionaries and various anarchist organizations) had won majorities in the soviets (workers' councils set up by the workers themselves after the revolution in February), the factory committees and other mass organizations. Most of these soviets had passed resolutions calling for "All Power to the Soviets" some weeks before the revolution.

The uprising itself was effected by a fairly broad number of workers', soldiers' and sailors' organizations, most of which were not part of the Bolshevik Party or even under its firm control. Moreover, after it had occurred, the insurrection was approved by an All-Russian Congress of Soviets and by other mass organizations. (The insurrection was also supported *de facto*—indeed, made possible—by the mass of peasants, who rose up and seized and divided the landed estates during the summer and fall of 1917.)

The October Revolution, in other words, was not simply a Bolshevik coup d'état, carried out against the wishes and behind the backs of the workers and peasants.

Despite the popular nature of the insurrection, however, the regime that finally emerged from the revolution, the Civil War and Stalin's consolidation of power was a frightful totalitarian dictatorship that had deprived the workers of any control over the factories, had taken the land back from the peasants, had deprived both of them of control over the state, as well as virtually all political rights, and had killed millions of people in the process.

In the past, we tended to pin the responsibility for this development on 1) Joseph Stalin, who took over the leadership of the Bolshevik (Communist) Party after Lenin's illness and death, and 2) objective conditions. In other words, paraphrasing Leon Trotsky's analysis, we believed that certain objective conditions—the failure of workers in other countries to carry out successful revolutions, the counter-revolutionary attempts and imperialist interventions in Russia, Russia's historical backwardness and poverty, along with the disruption and devastation brought about by World War I, the revolutions and Civil War — prevented the Bolshevik government from evolving into a healthy proletarian dictatorship ("a state that is already becoming a non-state," a "Commune-type state," etc.). Instead, they enabled a bureaucracy, led and organized by Stalin, to seize power, eliminate the last vestiges of workers' control over the economy and state, smash the peasants and consolidate itself as a state capitalist ruling class.

Yet, is this the whole story? Is it really possible to place the responsibility/blame solely on objective conditions and Stalin, and to leave the Bolsheviks and Lenin blame-free? I don't think so.

There are a number of questions whose very posing suggests that the Bolsheviks themselves (meaning Lenin and the party as a whole prior to Stalin establishing his stranglehold over it) have at least some responsibility for what happened. For one thing, how did Stalin get to be the head of the party? Why was a man like that in the party in the first place? What kind of party would enable someone like Stalin to thrive in it, be a major leader for many years and finally establish himself as its key leader?

Why did Lenin appoint Stalin to the Organization Bureau and Secretariat of the Party, let alone appoint him, or allow him to become, General Secretary of the Party? Why did so many Bolsheviks line up with Stalin against Trotsky and against, so it would seem, the original ideals of Bolshevism? What enabled Stalin so easily to don the mantle of Leninism? Why didn't more Bolsheviks organize to stop Stalin? Why did they allow themselves to be "liquidated" by him without a serious struggle?

All these questions suggest, at least to me, that there was something in the theory and practice of the Bolshevik Party, its politics and methods, its atmosphere and "ethos" that 1) gave rise to Stalin and 2) helped create the circumstances that allowed him to consolidate state capitalism in Russia.

Holding Lenin and the Bolsheviks (and Leninism) at least partially responsible for the establishment of state capitalism flows not just from the above questions about Stalin and the party, but even more from an objective look at the state and society that had been established in Russia at the conclusion of the Civil War (when Lenin was still alive and well).

By this time, the Soviet government was a one-party regime, run totally by the Bolsheviks. The party dominated the soviets, which had become little more than vehicles for carrying out policies the Bolsheviks decided rather than the arena in which the workers determined policies and chose and controlled their leadership. Nor did the workers run the factories or any other part of the economy. The factory committees had long been superseded by "one-man management" — Bolshevik appointees in no way elected or controlled by, or responsible to, the workers.

Almost all other political parties were either outlawed or barely tolerated (until 1922 when they were outlawed) and harassed by the Cheka (political police). After the ban on internal factions in the Bolshevik Party was adopted in March 1921, the Cheka hounded opposition forces even within the party. The trade unions were almost exclusively arms of the state and while some strikes were legal under the NEP (New Economic Policy, adopted in 1921), strikes were strongly discouraged and strikers, and especially strike leaders, were harassed and arrested.

More broadly, the Bolshevik Party was isolated from the popular classes, including the overwhelming majority of the workers and peasants. This is indicated by the Bolsheviks' suppression of the uprising at the Kronstadt naval fortress, the mass peasant uprisings in a number of provinces (e.g., Tambov) and the near general strike in Petro-

grad, which had long been the Bolsheviks' chief political base—all of which occurred at the close of the Civil War in early 1921. In short, while the Soviet state was nowhere near the Stalinist nightmare it was to become, by 1922, the foundations of a state capitalist regime had been constructed, replete with censorship (libraries were periodically purged to eliminate “offensive” material, including outdated Bolshevik writings), secret police, labor camps, etc.

The point here is not that the post-Civil War regime in Russia was fully state capitalist and totalitarian. Nor is it that the Bolsheviks were totally responsible for the establishment of such a regime and therefore the Bolsheviks were nothing but a state capitalist political force. (I think the question is more complicated than this.) It is to indicate that an objective look at the problem suggests that the Bolsheviks have to be held at least partially responsible for the establishment of state capitalism, and the Stalinist hell-hole, in Russia. (Hopefully, just *how* responsible will emerge from the series.)

Why is the question of Leninism and its relation to Stalinism/ state capitalism so important to us? There are two interrelated reasons. 1) When the Revolutionary Socialist League was founded, we defined ourselves essentially as “orthodox Trotskyists” with a state capitalist position on the nature of Russia and the other so-called “socialist countries.” Our Trotskyism included a belief in an orthodox Leninism and Marxism, more or less as defined by Trotsky. We rarely posed it precisely this way, but this is what we meant when we defined Trotskyism as the “continuity” of Marxism and Leninism.

Unlike other left groups, however, we were not content to define ourselves in a certain “orthodox” way and then leave our politics alone. For a variety of reasons (one of which was the impact of the women’s and the lesbian and gay liberation movements), we subjected our politics to a continual questioning. In particular, we began to investigate Trotskyism in some detail.

A key impetus for this process was internal to our theory. Specifically, we began to realize that if Trotsky had been wrong about the nature of Russia, this error was not likely to have been an isolated one, without effect on other aspects of his politics and methods. Among other things, we recognized that in addition to what we saw as the positive, pro-socialist aspects of Trotsky’s politics (leading him ultimately to call for a revolution against Stalin and to advocate a multi-party democracy under a workers’ state), there were what we called “state capitalist” aspects or tendencies, tendencies that justified or implied state capitalism. It was these tendencies that led Trotsky’s followers in the Fourth International, after the expansion of state capitalism into Eastern Europe following World War n, to capitulate and become apologists for state capitalism. (As this suggests, the most obvious state capitalist aspect of Trotskyism was Trotsky’s position that Russia under Stalin was a “degenerated workers’ state,” and its implied corollary that a state can be a workers’ state even though it is not controlled by—indeed, actually oppresses—the workers.)

In short, we decided that there were definite state capitalist aspects to Trotskyism and that we should discard those, retain the “pro-socialist” aspects, modify the others as needed, and generally move away from an “orthodox” (formalistic, dogmatic) conception of politics toward a more synthetic (some might say eclectic) approach. The latter includes looking at, and borrowing from, other left-wing political traditions, such as anarchism.

As part of our developing critique of Trotskyism, we began to pay special attention to the period from the October Revolution, through the Civil War, to Lenin’s incapacitation and *de facto* retirement in late 1922–23. This was the period, according to Trotsky, in which the Bolshevik regime was a relatively healthy workers’ state (it had “bureaucratic distortions,” in Lenin’s phrase). It became clear to us, however, that this was far from the case, especially if viewed from the Marxist ideal of a state already beginning to wither away, etc.

As has already been indicated, the soviet regime by this time was significantly bureaucratized (state capitalist), and much of this was the direct result of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks themselves: centralizing economic and political power in their own hands, eliminating direct workers’ control of the factories, suppressing other political tendencies, requisitioning grain from the peasants by force, establishing a secret police, building an army along hierarchical/bourgeois lines, etc. However much these measures were taken in reaction to the equally harsh, if not harsher, measures taken by the Bolsheviks’ opponents, they were nevertheless extremely bureaucratic, coercive and brutal. In addition, the Bolsheviks justified and even glorified them, and made no serious effort to reverse them (except for forced requisitions), after the Civil War was over.

Most important, these measures, for whatever reason they were taken, whether justified or not, involved the *de facto* destruction of the workers’ control over the economy and state. A consideration of this fact at least posed the question that I am now proposing to discuss: How much responsibility for state capitalism lies with Leninism; or, how much state capitalism is there in Leninism?

There is a more general reason for our concern with the question of Leninism, and it is something that has motivated our theoretical interest from before the foundation of the RSL. This is another question: How did revolutionary socialism, a world-view and movement that claim to be for the liberation of humanity through a revolution by its most oppressed classes, wind up creating one of the more oppressive, less liberatory social systems the world has seen? Whatever the achievements of the state capitalist countries (which we don’t propose to dispute or discuss here), these gains have come at the suffering and deaths of *millions* of people. (The estimates of the people who died as a result of Stalin’s forced “collectivization” and the resulting famine, along with the massive purges—not counting deaths in World War II—range upward from 20 million. See Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, Oxford, 1986, and *The Great Terror*, Macmillan, 1968. Estimates of those who died in Mao’s Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China run in the many millions.)

Moreover, the results of this incredible human sacrifice are not dynamic and prosperous social systems in which people live in abundance and security. (With one exception, these countries are now stagnating; the exception, China, is saving itself from stagnation, at least for now, by adopting free market, i.e., traditional capitalist, policies.) Nor are these countries models of, or even moving toward, socialist democracy.

These facts are something that revolutionary socialists, particularly those who consider themselves Leninists, must face up to and take responsibility for. It will not do to pretend that the Stalinist/ Maoist atrocities didn't happen, to downplay their extent and gravity, to consider them merely temporary "aberrations," or to fool oneself into believing that they cannot happen again. To those with open eyes and open minds, the problem remains: The concrete historical result of the program of socialist revolution has not led to what it promised; instead, it has resulted in a stupendous human tragedy. (The relatively benign character of the Cuban and Sandinista revolutions should not blind us to the realities of Russia, China and... Kampuchea.)

Whatever the rest of the left may do, we in the Revolutionary Socialist League feel we have a deep political, and moral, responsibility to investigate as thoroughly as we can why this happened. How can we propose a way forward for workers and other oppressed groups, or say we have a solution to their problems and to the crisis of world capitalism, without investigating the reasons for the historic failure of revolutionary socialism? It is easy to be *against* things—poverty, racism and sexism, the waste and brutality of capitalism, the destruction of tremendous human resources and the environment, the moral corruption, etc.—without doing much theorizing. But to *advocate* a profound social transformation and the creation of a new social system, and to do this in a responsible manner, one ought to have done a great deal of thinking about what it is one is for and whether and under what circumstances it will work. Simply appealing to "historical laws" or the "science" of historical materialism is the same as the Pope appealing to "faith" and "revelation," and equally dangerous.

-ONE-

What Kind of Revolution?

IN this installment of our series, we will focus on the question of broad strategy, particularly—what kind of revolution did the Bolsheviks advocate and prepare themselves for during the period prior to the October Revolution?

Most people not very familiar with Marxist history tend to assume that people and organizations that call themselves Marxist or Communist always advocate and try to carry out *socialist revolutions*—revolutions to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism. Yet, while such revolutions have usually been declared the "ultimate goal" of such groups, Marxian socialists in so-called "underdeveloped" countries have generally advocated *bourgeois* (capitalist) revolutions as the "first stage" of the revolutionary

process in their respective countries. The Russian Marxists were no exception. Up until April, 1917, the entire Marxist movement, including Lenin and the Bolsheviks, advocated and sought to carry out a bourgeois (“bourgeois democratic”) revolution in Russia.

This position was consistent with, and an essential part of, what was considered to be “orthodox Marxism” at the time. This orthodoxy was largely defined by the major theoretician of the international Marxist movement of the time (the Second, or Socialist, International), Karl Kautsky.

Based on a mechanical reading of the major texts of Marxism and a generally formalistic mode of thought, this orthodoxy insisted that each and every country in the world had to go through all of what were considered to be the necessary stages—modes of production—of human society between primitive communism and socialism/communism. These were ancient slave society, feudalism, and capitalism.

Russia around the turn of the century clearly did not have a developed form of industrial capitalism—there was a king, the Tsar, a landed nobility, peasants only recently freed from serfdom and still bound to the land by debts, a lack of political rights, etc. The Marxists of the period considered Russian society to be, or to have just emerged from, a form of feudalism. And the revolution they felt the country was moving toward, and which they advocated and readied themselves for, was a bourgeois one. That is, the revolution would overthrow the Tsar, destroy the landed gentry, free the peasants and set up some kind of bourgeois democratic political system that would guarantee political rights, including the rights to strike and form political parties, freedom of the press, etc.

Not least, the revolution would pave the way for the fullest development of capitalism. Only after a period of capitalist development of undetermined length, during which the country would be industrialized and the working class would grow, organize itself and become conscious of its position in society and of the need to establish its own rule, would a second, socialist revolution take place. Since, according to Marxist theory, socialism requires modern industry and material abundance, and a socialist revolution could only be carried out by a modern working class, the Marxists in Russia, ironically, found themselves advocates of a bourgeois revolution and... capitalism.

With almost no exceptions (Leon Trotsky, after 1905, was one), the entire Marxist movement in Russia subscribed to one form or another of this theory. They not only believed it themselves, but argued vehemently against—that is, denounced — those who disagreed with them, including anarchists and populists, who after 1902 were organized in the Social Revolutionary Party. Marxism, the “science of society,” “scientific socialism”—they contended—deemed that Russia, feudal, semi-feudal, or recently emerged from feudalism, could not “jump over” the “historical stage” of capitalism. And anyone who said it could was a dreamer, a muddlehead or, worse, a utopian. The coming revolution in Russia was going to be, and *had to be*, a bourgeois one.

In all the debates—polemics—Lenin carried out with other individuals, tendencies and parties, up to 1917, he never called the bourgeois nature of the Russian revolution

into question. For example, in Lenin's debates with his main Marxist opponents, such as the "Economists" and the Mensheviks, the question of the fundamental (bourgeois) nature of the coming revolution was never explicitly at issue.

In Lenin's various books and articles on the "agrarian question," on which Lenin was an expert, one of his main aims was to advocate measures that would guarantee the greatest development of *capitalist* relations in agriculture. Significantly, in much of the period between 1905 and 1917, the Bolsheviks' main agitational slogans (directed toward the "broad masses"), known as the "three whales" were, roughly, the eight-hour day, land to the peasants, and a democratic republic. These are all bourgeois-democratic demands.

It was only in early 1917, after the February Revolution had overthrown the Tsar, that the Bolsheviks adopted the point of view that the revolution they sought to carry out would be a socialist one. (Some have argued that Lenin had come to this position as far back as late 1914. While Lenin's thinking changed significantly beginning at that time—the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of the Second International—it is not clear that his view of the revolution had changed prior to late 1916-early 1917. In any case, Lenin was isolated from most of his followers during this period and the changes in his thinking were not likely to have affected many Bolsheviks prior to his, and their, return to Russia after the February Revolution.)

I do not wish to argue the substance of the question here, that is, whether the Russian Marxists were right or wrong in their conception. The point I wish to stress is that throughout the entire formative period of Bolshevism as a political tendency/movement/party, it advocated and sought to implement not a socialist revolution, but a *bourgeois* one. Given this, is it really very surprising that the revolution that the Bolsheviks did carry out in Russia, when judged in terms of its long-term outcome, was basically a bourgeois one, that is, it created a kind of capitalist society, not a socialist one?

I don't mean to be playing with words here, or to be making cheap arguments. I am making a fundamental point. A political movement is defined not only by its long-term proclaimed goal but also, and even more so, by what it organizes itself around in the present and the near- and middle-term future. What it *does* is more important than what it *says* it is "ultimately" for.

Revolutionary Marxists, including Leninists, have always recognized the validity of this point when applied to the parties of the Second International. Although these parties advocated socialism in the long run, by and large, their day-to-day functioning was that of reformist socialist organizations. They ran the trade unions and other mass organizations, fought for pro-labor and other progressive legislation in parliament, etc. Socialism was primarily for speeches on May Day and other working class holidays.

Thus, while Lenin was surprised when the Second International collapsed at the beginning of World War I (most of its constituent parties supported the predatory war aims of "their" respective ruling classes, instead of opposing the war as a whole), we, looking back, can see that this was the most likely development. And some astute

contemporary observers, such as Rosa Luxemburg, long a left-winger in the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD), had realized the true nature of the majority of the movement as early as 1910.

If the argument is valid vis-à-vis the Social Democracy, why does it suddenly become false when applied to the Bolsheviks? For most of their history, I repeat, they advocated and prepared themselves to carry out a bourgeois revolution. Is this significant?

The question is not whether the Bolsheviks were really reformists rather than revolutionaries, but what kind of revolutionaries they were, socialist or bourgeois. If we are to be consistent with our analysis of the Second International, I think we have to answer, or at least be open to the idea, that the Bolsheviks were a kind (a special kind, to be sure), of bourgeois revolutionary!

I am not raising this argument here to *prove* that the Bolsheviks were really bourgeois rather than socialist revolutionaries, but to establish the plausibility of the contention. To me, the fact that throughout virtually their entire history prior to the October Revolution they advocated and prepared themselves to carry out a kind of bourgeois revolution is highly suggestive. Among other things, it makes the apparent paradox of how socialist revolutionaries wound up creating a form of bourgeois society less paradoxical.

A number of arguments can be raised against the point I am trying to establish. One is that the composition of the Bolshevik tendency/movement/party was primarily working class. Actually, this was only true in certain times, such as revolutionary upheavals. At other times, the “class character” of the movement cannot simply be considered to be proletarian. It had members from the working class, but it also had many members who were part of the intelligentsia, a stratum of intellectuals from different backgrounds, roughly the equivalent of the modern middle class. There is also the question of what to consider someone from a working class background who is a full-time party functionary. On balance, throughout much of its history the class character of the Bolshevik movement would have to be considered as *declassé*, that is, as outside the class structure of Russia.

In any case, the nature of a political movement/party is not primarily defined by the class its members and supporters are part of. Most of the members of the Democratic Party in the United States today, for example, are probably workers, but that doesn’t make the party a working class party.

Another argument against my hypothesis that the Bolsheviks were (despite themselves) bourgeois revolutionaries is that they thought of themselves as Marxists, studied Marxism, made it clear to the workers that they were socialists, recruited people to be socialists, etc. But calling yourself a Marxist doesn’t automatically make you one. Nor does being a Marxist automatically make you a socialist, in the revolutionary libertarian meaning of the term.

Most tendencies which today call themselves Marxist we consider to be state capitalist, and their vision of socialism really a form of state capitalism. How do we know what the Bolsheviks’ vision of socialism was? Perhaps they did recruit people to be

socialists, hold study sessions, etc. on socialism. But if their vision of socialism was to any significant degree contaminated by state capitalist ideas — for example, that one party (theirs) will make the decisions for the workers—their advocacy of what they called socialism does not make them socialists.

In fact, it is not clear how much discussion of, or education about, the nature of socialism the Bolsheviks regularly conducted. The Bolsheviks, like the entire Marxist movement going back to Marx and Engels, were impatient with discussions or investigations about what socialism would concretely look like. This was in part a reaction to the utopian socialists, Robert Owen, St. Simon, Fourier, etc., who drew up detailed plans (down to who would live where) about what the ideal society would look like, and, in some cases, actually tried to set up such communities. Correctly sensing the totalitarian nature of such projects (the people in those communities don't decide how the community will be set up; it is decided beforehand, by someone else), Marx and Engels eschewed elaborating, or even discussing very much, their vision of socialism.

This bent was also motivated by a conviction (with its own totalitarian implications, as we will discuss later) that socialism was the necessary (inevitable) outcome of history; since socialism was going to happen, there was no point in figuring out what it would look like.

For whatever reason, then, the Marxist movement up to and through the period we are discussing did not generally discuss or elaborate its conception of socialist society. Given the Bolsheviks' contention that the revolution "on the agenda" in Russia was a bourgeois one, and given the fact that for most of their history they were an illegal, persecuted group, it is not likely that they had many in-depth, detailed discussions about the concrete nature of a socialist society.

A third argument against the contention that the Bolsheviks' advocacy of a bourgeois revolution in Russia was a significant, defining element of Bolshevism is that the Bolsheviks did, prior to the October Revolution, explicitly discuss and change their conception of the nature of the revolution they aimed to lead. This refers to the discussion held in the Bolshevik Party after Lenin's arrival in Russia in early April, 1917, and to the decision of the party, adopted at the so-called "April Conference," a few weeks later, to seek to seize state power at the head of a working class socialist revolution, based on the soviets (the workers' councils established by the workers during and after the February Revolution). They did, of course, have this discussion and make such a decision, among others. But, how deep or thorough was this discussion? How long did it go on?

Lenin arrived in Russia after his long exile in Western Europe on April 3 (old-style Russian calendar), a little over a month after the February Revolution. Prior to his arrival, most Bolsheviks (there were a handful who disagreed), believed that the Bolsheviks' main strategic task was to carry the bourgeois revolution to completion, not to carry out a socialist revolution. And when Lenin first arrived he shocked most Bolsheviks who heard him (again, minus a handful) with his new position, expressed in his "April Theses," that the Bolsheviks should seek to carry out a socialist revolution.

This was considered by almost all Bolsheviks, particularly the longtime members, the “Old Bolsheviks,” to be very unorthodox, heresy, even anarchism.

By the end of April, however, the Bolshevik Party conference (April 24–29) voted overwhelmingly to endorse Lenin’s point of view. The discussion over Lenin’s (unorthodox and heretical) point of view took all of...three weeks. What kind of discussion could they have had in this time? Could it have been very deep? Could it have been very thorough? Could the Bolsheviks have even begun to discuss what the new position really entailed? Did they use the months between April and the October Revolution (October 25) to continue this discussion on an ever-deepening basis? I think the answers to these questions must be “no.”

The Bolsheviks were in the middle of a political and social maelstrom and had a million things to do; they were undoubtedly spending most of their time feverishly agitating and organizing in the midst of hectic conditions.

Lenin did, during this period (he was in hiding, mid-July-late October), write a number of works, mostly short pamphlets, explaining what a Bolshevik government based on the Soviets would look like and what it would do. In particular, during this period Lenin wrote what many consider to be his greatest work, *The State and Revolution*, which discusses his view of the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the withering away of the state, etc. Yet, given the complexity of these issues, these investigations were really not very detailed. Equally important, *The State and Revolution* was never finished and was not published until the following year. It is quite unlikely, therefore, that the Bolshevik Party had a full discussion of either *The State and Revolution* or Lenin’s pamphlets.

In short, I believe the Bolsheviks never had a thorough discussion of the change of position adopted at the April Conference; what it really meant, what a society based on the soviets would look like, what would be the relationship between the soviets, factory committees and trade unions, for example, a question that was to loom very large soon after the October Revolution. And the course of the revolution, specifically the success of the October insurrection, seemed to make such a discussion irrelevant.

Probably the strongest argument that might be leveled against the line of thought I am outlining here is the fact that throughout most of their history prior to 1917 the Bolsheviks did not advocate a “typical” bourgeois revolution, that is, one led by the capitalists and their representatives among the intellectuals, etc. Instead, beginning around 1905, the Bolsheviks advocated a bourgeois-democratic revolution that was to be carried out by the workers and peasants against the Tsar, the landed gentry *and* (paradoxically) *the capitalists* (the bourgeoisie).

As a result, this argument would run, since the Bolsheviks had, since 1905, advocated a revolution carried out by the workers and peasants against the capitalists, as well as the Tsar, landlords, etc., and had always tried to build a base among the working class, to build a working class party, to make the workers class conscious, etc., the switch in strategic conceptions in 1917 was not such a big deal. Indeed, some have

argued, this fact goes a long way to explain why Lenin could change the party's mind, so to speak, on this question so easily.

On one level, this appears to be a substantial argument. Yet, a careful look at the issues involved will, I believe, support and even strengthen my contention. Let's look at the question more closely.

Although almost all Russian Marxists agreed that the revolution they advocated and felt was coming would be a bourgeois-democratic one, they disagreed over the roles different classes would play in the revolution and specifically over the tasks Social Democrats should seek to accomplish. (They all called themselves Social Democrats then; Lenin and the Bolsheviks took up the older name Communists in 1917.) In fact, after questions of organization, it is fair to say that the major differences between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks through most of their history were disagreements over the configuration of the (bourgeois-democratic) revolution in Russia and the role Marxists should play in it.

(For those who don't know, or remember, the terms Bolshevik and Menshevik come from the Russian words Bol'shinstvo and Men'shinstvo, meaning majorityites and minorityites, respectively. At the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, the official name of the Marxist organization, in 1903, the delegates to the congress split into two hostile factions, largely over questions of party organization, questions we will get to later. On one of the crucial votes, the forces led by Lenin won a majority. As a result, Lenin and his followers were called, and called themselves, Bolsheviks. Those who had lost the vote were called Mensheviks. This split was never healed, and the Marxist movement in Russia largely consisted of two factions, with often separate newspapers and structures, coexisting uneasily. The two factions were formally in the same party until 1912, when the Bolsheviks formed their own party. It is typical of Lenin's genius, and the Mensheviks ineffectiveness, that Lenin and his supporters kept the name Bolsheviks, which implies strength, while the Mensheviks were saddled with a name denoting weakness, even though the Menshevik faction was often larger than the Bolshevik.)

The key differences between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks on the question of bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia centered on the role they expected the Russian bourgeoisie to play in the revolution and, therefore, the attitude the working class and Marxists should take toward it.

A mechanical, formalistic conception of a bourgeois-democratic revolution would entail the view that, by definition, a bourgeois-democratic revolution will be led by the bourgeoisie. Specifically, the bourgeoisie, which by nature and class interests prefers a democratic republic, will lead the other progressive forces, including the peasants, the workers and the middle class, in a struggle against the monarch (king, queen, Tsar or whatever), the landed nobility and other feudal forces. It would aim to do away with feudal privileges and all forms of servitude, to set up a democratic republic and to establish the conditions for the fullest and freest development of capitalism.

This was essentially the view of the Mensheviks. They therefore advocated that the chief role of the working class and the Social Democrats was to help the bourgeoisie carry out such a revolution, to push it from behind, as it were. Although advocating the independent organization of the workers in unions, a social democratic party and, during the 1905 revolution, soviets (there is some evidence that the Mensheviks were the first political group to call for a mass, city-wide strike committee in St. Petersburg, which eventually became the Petersburg Soviet), the Mensheviks basically felt that the workers should subordinate themselves to the bourgeoisie, that the latter should have overall leadership of the revolution. Some even warned of the danger of the workers pushing too hard (e.g., striking too much for higher wages, threatening to take over and run the factories, etc.), that this would frighten the bourgeoisie and make it pull back from a militant struggle against the Tsar, gentry, etc.

The Bolsheviks, while accepting the bourgeois-democratic character of the revolution, saw things differently. Instead of starting from an abstract model of the bourgeois revolution, Lenin began with a concrete analysis of the economic, social and political situation in Russia at the time. He was particularly aware of certain “peculiarities” of Russian historical development: 1) The Russian state, certainly since around 1500, had been very strong and tended to dominate Russian society. 2) Since the time of Peter the Great, roughly 1700, the state had sought to encourage economic development, through borrowing technology from Western Europe, as a means of defending itself. 3) As a result, much of Russian industry was built by and/or with the support of the state, and much was state-owned. 4) Russian industry tended to be concentrated in huge enterprises, often employing thousands of workers (such as the giant Putilov metalworking plant in St. Petersburg).

The result of these factors was that the Russian bourgeoisie tended to be small, weak and greatly dependent upon the Tsarist state, while the working class, in contrast, was proportionately large and well-concentrated. Consequently, Lenin reasoned, rather than leading the bourgeois-democratic revolution against the Tsar, the bourgeoisie, at the first sign of independent and militant mobilization of the workers and peasants, would side with the Tsar and the nobility *against* the workers and peasants and the revolution as a whole. (Although the capitalists were frightened of the large, concentrated and oppressed working class, they also feared the millions upon millions of even more oppressed peasants, waiting to wreak vengeance upon the landlords and seize the land, and quite willing to set fire to large portions of the countryside to do so. This is what they did in 1917.)

The leadership of the revolution, Lenin concluded, would fall to the working class and, to a lesser degree, the peasants. It would be they who would carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution, not only against the Tsar and the landlords, *but also the bourgeoisie*.

In the eyes of the Bolsheviks, then, the bourgeois-democratic revolution was defined primarily by the tasks that needed to be carried out, e.g., overthrowing the Tsar, seizing

the land from the landlords, establishing a democratic republic, etc., rather than by being led by the bourgeoisie.

The specific vehicle for carrying out these tasks would be what Lenin called the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.” This was to be, roughly, a centralized, revolutionary government, made up of parties representing the workers and peasants respectively, and based on and supported by the masses of workers and peasants. This dictatorship would be established by armed insurrection. (The Bolsheviks actually attempted such an uprising during the 1905 revolution, in Moscow in December of 1905.)

Although Lenin devoted many of his writings to various aspects of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia, aside from a very broad sketch, he never put forward a worked out conception of what the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” would look like. His failure, or refusal, to do so appears to have been motivated mostly by the belief that it would be impossible to predict precisely what would happen in the course of the revolution, that revolutionaries should not try to cram the class struggle into some narrowly-conceived mold and that, in any case, the Bolsheviks should remain flexible.

Yet, in light of the detail Lenin went into on questions of program (e.g., the “agrarian” and “national” questions), party structure (he called for a reorganization of the party during 1905), and tactics (a major focus of Bolshevik activity during 1905 was the formation of armed squads of workers), the failure to elaborate the structure of the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” is significant. It is particularly noteworthy that the relationship between the political parties, supposedly “representing” the proletariat and the peasantry on the one hand, and the mass organizations of these classes on the other, was never seriously raised or investigated.

Lenin was also not very clear about what would happen to this dictatorship once it had “carried the bourgeois-democratic revolution through to completion,” to paraphrase the Marxist language of the period. He seems to have had two scenarios in mind, both of which can be inferred from *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, a major work devoted to his conception of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia.

In one, the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” would carry out various steps (e.g., overthrowing the Tsar, seizing the land from the landlords, enacting the eight-hour workday) on its own initiative, after which it would organize for elections, based on direct universal suffrage, to a Constituent Assembly. Once this assembly had gathered, approved the revolutionary measures already taken and drawn up a constitution for a (bourgeois) democratic government, the parties constituting the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” would step down, in favor of a newly-elected parliament and government. That Lenin took this scenario seriously is suggested by various of his writings on the agrarian question in which he advocates the relatively long-term development of Russian agriculture on U.S.-style (small, independent capitalist farmer) rather than on Prussian (commercial landed estates) lines.

The second scenario follows the first, up to a point. Very tentatively, and using only the most general terms, Lenin in *Two Tactics* writes that if the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia were preceded, accompanied, or soon followed by one or more socialist revolutions in Western Europe, the revolutionary parties making up the revolutionary democratic dictatorship should seek to retain power and begin taking up socialist tasks, e.g., expropriating the capitalists, etc.

In other words, Lenin raises, very gingerly to be sure, the possibility that under certain circumstances the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia might begin to “grow over” into a socialist revolution. Although this conception would later (during Stalin’s fight against Trotsky in the 1920s) become recognized “Bolshevik” orthodoxy, from the time it was written to early 1917, it had hardly even been considered by the majority of Bolsheviks.

Our point in discussing Lenin’s conception of the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship” was to assess to what degree this weakens my argument that the Bolsheviks had generally advocated and prepared themselves to carry out a bourgeois revolution, and that this had a crucial impact in determining the politics and methods of the Bolshevik Party.

Specifically, it can be argued that since the Bolsheviks had, since 1905, advocated a particular version of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, that is, one led by the workers and peasants against the bourgeoisie, it is not quite true to say that they had always planned to carry out a bourgeois revolution in Russia.

Indeed, it can be argued that the bourgeois-democratic revolution as conceived by the Bolsheviks was a lot closer to a conception of a socialist revolution than a bourgeois one. This is why, so Trotsky insisted, the Bolshevik Party was won so easily to Lenin’s new perspective in April, 1917.

I would contend, however, that the stronger arguments go in the other direction: 1) That despite the new elements in Lenin’s perspective of 1917 what he advocated remained largely within the framework of his earlier conception, in other words, a bourgeois-democratic revolution that, under certain circumstances, “goes beyond” the bourgeois-democratic “phase”; and 2) that what the Bolsheviks actually did, looking at not just 1917, but the entire period from 1917 to 1921, was to implement a version of the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry,” that is, to carry out a very specific, and very radical, kind of bourgeois-democratic revolution.

As we know, in late October, 1917, the Bolsheviks, in alliance with the Left Social Revolutionaries, seized political power at the head of a workers’ insurrection (made possible by the peasants’ spontaneous seizure of the land), and set up a centralized dictatorship. Although this revolutionary government at first rested on and was supported by the workers’ and peasants’ mass organizations, it was not actually controlled by them. Believing that they were going beyond the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the Bolsheviks sanctioned the workers’ seizure of the factories and then expropriated the capitalists altogether. They dispersed the Constituent Assembly and, after the Left SRs revolted against the terms of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, concentrated all

power into their own hands. They also, in June, 1918, launched a campaign against the so-called “middle peasants” in the name of extending the class struggle to the countryside. In this sense, they did go beyond the “typical” bourgeois-democratic revolution. But they did not succeed in creating a true proletarian dictatorship, that is, a government actually run by the workers for themselves. Instead, the Bolsheviks built a government they believed was acting “in the interests” of the workers, which is by no means the same thing.

It may have rested upon the organizations of the workers, but in its methods, e.g., its commitment to extreme centralization, its use of a secret police to hunt counter-revolutionaries, and in its conception of regimented, centrally-controlled economy run by decree from the top, it was far closer to a Jacobin dictatorship (the dictatorship of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, supported by the oppressed “sans culottes” of Paris during the most radical phase of the French Revolution) than to a true workers’ government.

The fallacy in the Bolsheviks’ theory and practice, it seems to me, is that (even within the framework of Marxism) the methods and structure of a socialist revolution are not merely the logical extension of the structure and methods of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry, is not merely the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” going beyond the limits of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Concretely, in a bourgeois-democratic revolution, the tasks “appropriate to” that revolution can be carried out by a party, or parties, that claim to represent the “non-feudal” classes, the bourgeoisie, the peasants and the workers, if they exist. A government of revolutionary intellectuals, for example, as long as it is supported by mobilized masses (sans culottes, peasants, workers) can eliminate a monarchy, sanction the peasants’ seizure of the land, the establishment of the eight-hour day, the calling of a constituent assembly, etc.

In this sense, this government, and the parties participating in it, if there are any, can be said to represent the progressive classes. Once “feudal” or “semi-feudal” institutions are dismantled or significantly weakened, once the major obstacles to commodity production and the accumulation of capital are eliminated, capitalism develops spontaneously, ensuring the ultimate defeat of the reactionary forces. Thus, during the French Revolution, many if not most of the radical measures taken were not implemented by the bourgeoisie, per se, but by essentially middle class intellectuals, supported by the peasants and sans culottes, acting independently of the bourgeoisie. And despite the fact that the Jacobins were eventually overthrown and the monarchy restored, the period of reaction was temporary; capitalism continued to develop and the monarchy was eventually overthrown.

But in a socialist revolution, it is not sufficient for a party that claims to represent the working class to enact measures that are supposedly in the workers’ interests and to concentrate all power in its own hands. It is not, in other words, sufficient for a dictatorship of one party to be supported by members of the class in whose interests

it claims to be acting, i.e., to rest on the mass organizations of the workers, such as soviets.

This government, if it is to remain or, better, become, a true proletarian dictatorship, must increasingly come under the control of the mass, democratic organizations of the workers. Instead, the Bolsheviks believing they represented the interests of the workers, subordinated the soviets (and the factory committees) to themselves, without recognizing what this meant. The result was not a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry moving toward being the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the revolutionary democratic dictatorship that consolidated its own power over and above the classes it claimed to lead.

Unlike the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks managed to fight off the counterrevolution externally and internally, and also to defeat the efforts of the workers and peasants to free themselves from the dictatorship that claimed to represent them (Kronstadt, the Petrograd strikes, the peasant uprisings of 1921). The result, in other words, was a kind of permanent Jacobin dictatorship, a permanent “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the the peasantry,” rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat or the triumph of the old reactionary classes.

Thus, a deeper look at the third and best argument against my proposition (the anti-bourgeois nature of Lenin’s “revolutionary democratic dictatorship”) in fact reinforces my main point, that the Bolsheviks advocated and sought to carry out a bourgeois revolution throughout most of their history, and that this perspective remained the Bolshevik de facto strategy even after the April Conference in 1917.

So, we return to our main starting point. I believe it is correct to say that throughout the overwhelming part of its history prior to the October Revolution, the Bolshevik faction/party advocated and planned to carry out a bourgeois revolution and that, despite Lenin’s new perspective of 1917 and the discussions in the party, this never really changed. Moreover, I would argue that the fundamental nature of the party, its methods, ethos and style, were consistent with, if not determined by, this. As we have discussed, the party was never truly prepared to carry out a socialist revolution, not just in the sense of a working class seizure of power but the construction of a true workers’ state; it never even had a serious discussion of the question.

More concretely, the party’s advocacy of a bourgeois-democratic revolution had to have affected its composition. How many people were attracted to the party specifically because they wanted to carry out a bourgeois-democratic, rather than a proletarian, revolution? (To put it the other way around, how many people were alienated from the Bolsheviks, as well as the Mensheviks, because of their insistence that the revolution had to be bourgeois-democratic; how many people joined the various populist organizations, such as the SRs, or the anarchists, because these advocated a full socialist, or “social,” revolution?)

How many people joined the Bolsheviks because they were basically for economic growth and industrialization, which they perceived to be the way to solve Russia’s

poverty and backwardness, and never gave two hoots about a truly worker-run society? How many people were attracted merely by the thought of having power and prestige, something that was totally closed off to them in Tsarist Russia? How many had their vision of socialism distorted, at the very least, by the failure of the Bolsheviks (and the Mensheviks) to elaborate a conception of a revolutionary democratic socialist society? How many people joined the Bolshevik Party, remained active in it through the October Revolution and the Civil War, participated in the post-war reconstruction, and joined in the persecution of Trotsky, only to perish at Stalin's hands because they were never clear about what was the difference between a workers' state and a dictatorship of revolutionary intellectuals believing they are acting "in the interests of" the workers and peasants?

The point is not to try to answer these questions specifically. The point is to recognize that the Bolsheviks' program, what it included and what it excluded, had to have had an impact on who was attracted to the party, who remained with it, who got power in it, etc. If we keep these questions and the point they imply in mind, we can begin to get some answers to some of the questions raised in the first installment, such as, how did Stalin get to be General Secretary of the Party? why was he able to stand under Lenin's mantle? why did so few Bolsheviks oppose him? etc., etc.

The answer, I think, lies in the recognition that the Bolsheviks ultimately carried out what they had planned to...a unique, very radical type of bourgeois revolution.

-TWO-

Party, Class and Socialist Consciousness

THE subject of this article is the question of socialist consciousness, the revolutionary party and the working class, and the relationship among them. We will specifically focus on some of the conceptions put forward in *What Is To Be Done?*, one of Lenin's most important writings and a major "text" of Leninism/Bolshevism. It is true that Lenin discussed the issues raised in *What Is To Be Done?* in other writings and even wrote things that appear to contradict major ideas in the book. We will take up this question below, but for now, we will direct our attention to *What Is To Be Done?*

To understand what Lenin is getting at in his book, especially in relation to our chief interest—socialist consciousness, the working class, and the revolutionary party—it is essential to understand the context in which the work appeared, what Lenin was trying to accomplish and what those who disagreed with him were saying.

What Is To Be Done?, published in early 1902, was a crucial part of the debate among Russian Marxists over how to build a revolutionary party, specifically, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), in the Russian empire in the early years of the current century. To build such a party was not so easy, since virtually all political activity, and certainly anything liberal, let alone revolutionary, was outlawed.

Revolutionaries of all persuasions were subject to arrest, imprisonment, and exile in remote, forbidding places.

At the time *What Is To Be Done?* was written, a revolutionary Marxist party did exist, but only in name. In reality, the Russian Marxist movement remained what it had been for nearly ten years, a melange of local committees. These were mostly study circles and groups devoted to carrying out “economic” agitation, that is, distributing material focusing on the workers’ wages, working conditions, etc., and supporting various strikes. They were generally isolated from each other and carried out their activities autonomously. In essence, the movement at this time was a milieu, not a party.

Earlier, four years before *What Is To Be Done?* was written, an attempt had been made to remedy this situation. At the so-called First Congress of the RSDLP, held in Minsk in March 1898, a manifesto was adopted, a structure was decided upon, leaders were elected and a decision to publish a party newspaper was made. But the Tsarist political police (the Okhrana) arrested the participants of the congress soon afterwards and, as a result, the state of the movement remained virtually unchanged. (None of the nine delegates to that First Congress played a major role in later Russian events.)

This attempt to organize a party occurred against the background of a growing wave of workers’ strike activity. Beginning in the early 1890s, the still small and very young working class in the Russian empire launched strike struggles that eventually shook the major cities. Working conditions were terrible: hours were dreadfully long, pay was hardly existent, maiming accidents were common, the workers were subject to fines for “poor work” and other infractions, the overseers were brutal, etc. Spurred in part by an economic upturn in the 1890s, desperate workers went out on strike to improve their conditions. These strikes were “spontaneous,” insofar as they were not planned or led by organized revolutionaries, although individual revolutionaries undoubtedly took part.

It was in this situation that a young (25 years old) Lenin had played his first major role in the Russian Marxist movement. In 1895 he and Julius Martov, the future leader of the Mensheviks, put together a 22-person group that soon called itself the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of Labor. Lenin urged his immediate colleagues and other Marxists to orient toward the workers’ mass strike movement, writing broad agitational literature directed at the workers. (Prior to this, most Marxist activity had consisted of study circles among a very small number of “worker-intellectuals,” some of whom opposed the orientation to mass agitation.)

In December 1895 Lenin and nine others in the group were arrested and tried. Lenin was sentenced to one year in prison followed by three years in Siberia. He was released in January 1900 and went into exile in Western Europe. There he met with the “founding fathers” of Russian Marxism, specifically G.V. Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, and Paul Akselrod, in order to win them over to his plan to rebuild the RSDLP following the disastrous aftermath of the First Congress.

Lenin’s plan, first put forward publicly in some articles in 1900, had a number of aspects. Probably most important, he proposed to rebuild the RSDLP around an

“All-Russian” newspaper. This was to be a newspaper directed to all the nationalities and regions of the Russian empire, in contrast to local journals directed toward single cities. This paper would be written and published abroad, in the safety of exile, and smuggled into Russia by various means. Such a newspaper would provide the Marxists in Russia and those others who read it with a national (in fact, transnational, since Russia consisted of many nations) point of view, rather than a local one.

Equally, this All-Russian newspaper would provide the basis to build an organizational structure, an apparatus, around which to rebuild the RSDLP. Specifically, Lenin proposed that this apparatus focus on smuggling the paper into Russia and distributing it to the workers and other interested people. The nuclei of this network would be local committees, all of whose members would be underground, that is, without legal identity, and would be paid, meagerly to be sure, by the party. This network/apparatus would be as centralized as possible and united by an “iron discipline” (firm adherence to agreed-upon rules of operation). Overall national (All-Russian) positions on various political and programmatic questions would be determined by periodic delegated congresses and, between these gatherings, by elected leaders living abroad, not by local and regional committees.

Lenin was particularly concerned to build a strong, well-functioning organization that could resist Tsarist repression. He attributed the failure to build a party up to that point to what he considered the “amateurishness” of the Russian Marxists, including parochialism, sloppy methods, lack of a serious division of labor, etc. To counter this, he called for “professionalism” and a party of professional revolutionaries. This was meant in two distinct but interrelated senses. One was the general meaning of professional—using unified, tested methods, training experts in various phases of revolutionary activity. The second sense of “professionalism” was narrower and quite literal. As we noted, the party, at least initially, would consist exclusively of underground operatives, full-time people, paid by the party and living clandestinely.

An additional aspect of Lenin’s strategy was that the All-Russian newspaper, and the party as a whole, would emphasize what Lenin called “political agitation”: articles and exposes addressed primarily to *political*, as opposed to “economic” issues (wages, working conditions, strike struggles). A focus on political questions, Lenin argued, would tend to raise the workers’ consciousness from its current level (the workers were, after all, already carrying out spontaneous strikes over local “economic” issues) to a higher, more political level, and at the same time encourage them to think in terms of the whole Russian empire, not just their own locality.

With the support of Plekhanov, Akselrod and Zasulich, Lenin, Martov and V. Potresov launched this All-Russian newspaper, called *Iskra* (*Spark*), in December 1900, and began to build a following, and an apparatus. A companion theoretical journal, *Zarya* (*Dawn*), was launched in April 1901.

Of course, not all of the people, committees, etc., in the Russian Marxist movement agreed with Lenin’s conception. To simplify, we can note that the opposition to the ideas of the *Iskra*-ists focused on two points. One was that the *Iskra*-ists ignored the

“economic” struggle—the workers’ struggles over wages, working conditions, etc. The other was that the *Iskra-ists*’ emphasis on centralized structure and decision-making violated the autonomy of the local committees, that is, that it was undemocratic.

We do not wish to debate here the merits and demerits of the Lenin/ZsAzo-ists’ strategy nor of the arguments of their opponents. Our concern is to sketch the context in which *What Is To Be Done?* was written and within which its contents must be understood. *What Is To Be Done?* was an attempt to defend the ideas behind the *Iskra-ists*’ strategy and to win supporters to it; a second congress of the RSDLP was being planned for the following year and Lenin felt very strongly (as he did about nearly everything), that the approach he advocated was the only way to build, and maintain, a truly revolutionary Marxist party in Russia. *What Is To Be Done?*, then, was both a defense of his strategic/*organizational* conception for building the RSDLP and an elaboration of it.

Typical of the Marxist polemics of this period (and most others), Lenin’s arguments about how to build the party are buttressed by discussions of fundamental theoretical questions, such as the nature of socialist consciousness and how it is created, to which we now turn.

(Incidentally, the name of the book, *What Is To Be Done?*, comes from the title of a famous novel, written by the Russian populist N.G. Chernyshevsky in 1862, considered one of the key manifestos of Russian populist thought.)

For our purposes, the chief import of *What Is To Be Done?* is that it elaborates a conception of the political consciousness of the working class and how it develops, and the role of a revolutionary party in that process, that had a fundamental, indeed defining, impact on the development of Leninism/Bolshevism. Although, as we mentioned, Lenin occasionally said other things about the question, the theory elaborated in *What Is To Be Done?* represented a major ideological assumption of Bolshevism, underpinning the Bolsheviks’ conception of the nature of the party, its relationship to the working class, its strategy, tactics and methods. This conception, moreover, remained central despite the various changes in Lenin’s/the Bolsheviks’ ideas. And, I would argue, this conception has a fundamentally totalitarian/state capitalist implication.

The relevant passage from *What Is To Be Done?* is as follows:

We have said that *there could not yet be* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It could only 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 labour legislation, etc. (Trade unionism does not exclude “politics” altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted some political [but not Social-Democratic] agitation and struggle.) The theory of Socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals.

There are two distinct, but related, points here. One is that the working class, by itself, meaning the mass of workers in the absence of an organization of Marxist revolutionaries, is only capable of developing trade unionist consciousness, e.g., understanding the need to organize unions, to organize and strike for higher wages, better working conditions and other benefits. By themselves, in other words, the majority of workers will not, and cannot, come to socialist conclusions, that is, recognize the need to unite as a class and to rise up, overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society.

The second key point is that “social democratic” consciousness, what we call revolutionary socialist consciousness, something developed and maintained by socialist intellectuals, must be brought to the workers from “without,” from a party that stands on these ideas, that is, a Social Democratic Party.

Before proceeding to our discussion of the state capitalist implications of these theses, it is worth making a number of preliminary comments about them. First, these ideas were not unique to Lenin. As he himself said, this was the conception of the major theoretical leader of the international Marxist movement of that time, Karl Kautsky. Lenin, seeking to convince the majority of Russian Marxists of his strategic and organizational ideas, sought to justify them with arguments of the most “orthodox” of Marxists. Whether or not all, or even most, members of the Social Democratic movement agreed with Kautsky is a different matter. It was convenient to quote from the “Pope of Marxism.”

Second, we doubt that Karl Marx would have agreed precisely with Kautsky’s formulation. Although Marx well knew how much work socialist intellectuals (particularly himself) had put into elaborating socialist ideas and theory, I suspect he felt that what he had done was to recognize, elaborate and put into writing something that was happening, or would happen, independently of his consciousness, that is, among the working class itself. But this is a point for another, much larger, discussion.

Third, there is some truth in what Kautsky/Lenin wrote. *During non-revolutionary periods*, that is, outside of mass revolutionary upheavals, most workers are *not* revolutionary socialist (we are accepting, for the moment, the equation between “social democratic” and “revolutionary socialist”).

During “normal” times, most workers are trade unionist, if they are that, and many workers may not even recognize that they are members of a common social stratum. (In the U.S. most workers probably consider themselves part of an amorphous “middle class.”) At best, only a small number of workers consider themselves revolutionary socialists and they are, by and large, outside the ongoing life of the majority of workers. Insofar as they, along with middle class revolutionaries, convince other workers to be revolutionary socialists, they are bringing socialist consciousness to the workers “from without.” Even in revolutionary periods, the revolutionary consciousness that many workers develop may not be “truly” revolutionary, in the Marxist sense. It might be anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, revolutionary populist, or some other kind of consciousness that most Marxists have considered to be not “proletarian.”

Fourth, although the conception that Lenin defends has strong state capitalist/totalitarian implications, it does have a positive, that is, democratic and even libertarian, aspect as well. (This is probably one of the things that has helped obscure the state capitalist implications for many people, including this writer.) This is the idea that socialists should be open and straightforward about what they believe. They should try to convince people (workers and others) to be revolutionary socialists, openly and honestly. They should not hide their ideas, pretend to be something else, and come up with some trick or scheme that will convince people to be socialists in the absence of dialogue and rational argument. In this sense, revolutionary socialists do, and should, bring socialist consciousness to the workers. As Leon Trotsky said, revolutionaries should “say what is,” i.e., tell the truth to the workers.

This is in contrast to other approaches which are, in fact, dishonest and manipulative. One of these is the reformist approach Lenin argued against in *What Is To Be Done?*, that if the workers are just encouraged to fight reform struggles they will automatically come to socialist conclusions. In this conception, there is no need for socialists to argue openly and explicitly for (perhaps unpopular) socialist ideas, and to convince people. Rather they should pretend to be simply “militant unionists” or militant whatevers, that is, something other than what they are. (In fact, if you cease to advocate socialism and function like a reformist, you become a reformist, regardless of what you call yourself.) Not only is this dishonest, it winds up strengthening reformist ideas among the workers and building a reformist workers’ movement, not a revolutionary one. In this sense Lenin’s conception was superior to that of his reformist (“Economist”) opponents.

Another approach which doesn’t argue openly for socialism motivates many people who pursue a terrorist strategy. People are asleep, this reasoning often goes, numbed by the mass media, habit, fast food or “repressive desublimation” (in the conception of Herbert Marcuse), and the job of revolutionaries is to wake them up. Hence, the use of bombs. One doesn’t argue for socialism, one tries to “galvanize” the people.

Both these approaches, in failing to openly argue for socialist ideas, failing to “bring socialist consciousness to the working class” (using these words loosely) are dishonest and manipulative. They too have a state capitalist implication: the workers are too stupid to be convinced; an elite has to trick them into fighting for socialism.

All this being said, we now turn to the question of the state capitalist/totalitarian implications of Lenin’s formulations on socialist consciousness and the role of the party in *What Is To Be Done?* By state capitalist/totalitarian implications we mean explicit or hidden conceptions and/or tendencies that imply, point to, or justify state capitalism—the rule of an elite over the working class in the name of socialism.

Perhaps the best way to approach this is to list a number of interrelated ideas that follow from the *What Is To Be Done?* formulations. If the workers are able, by themselves, to come only to trade union consciousness, and socialist consciousness must be brought to them from “without,” by revolutionary intellectuals/the revolutionary party, then:

1. The source, repository and guarantee of socialist consciousness are socialist intellectuals/the revolutionary party, not the working class

2. What ultimately matters, in terms of a socialist revolution, is that state power is seized by the revolutionary party; the bottom line of what constitutes socialism/the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the state is ruled by a revolutionary party.

3. In any conflict between the revolutionary party and the working class, the revolutionary party is right, and the party has the right, even the duty, to rule “in the name of,” “in the interests of,” the working class.

Prior to the seizure of power by a revolutionary party, these state capitalist/totalitarian implications are not very clear; they represent a kind of hidden potential. After all, the party is trying to “reach” the working class, carry out propaganda and agitation, form various organizations, etc.—in general, trying to create socialist consciousness among the workers. If the workers don’t care to listen, if they refuse to be socialists, the party remains relatively isolated and small. Moreover, one can conceive, in theory, of a relationship between the working class and the revolutionary party, during and after the seizure of power, in which the party does not rule over the working class, but provides the leadership for the class rule of the workers.

But things are always more complicated in reality than in theory. Socialist theory, in particular, has a tendency to assume that the workers’ “true” or “appropriate” consciousness (truly “proletarian consciousness”) is socialist ideology. This leads directly to the idea that once the working class becomes socialist, certainly once a working class insurrection is carried out, the workers will not have any fundamental disagreements with the revolutionary party.

But what if this isn’t true? What if, after certain developments following a workers’ insurrection, the workers no longer fully support the revolutionary party? What if they cease being revolutionary? What if they remain revolutionary, but their notion of being revolutionary differs from that of the revolutionary party? What if workers and the party remain in basic agreement, but develop strategic, tactical or organizational differences, which in conditions of upheaval, can become divisive and quite bitter?

In all these circumstances, the logic of Lenin’s formulations in *What Is To Be Done?* implies, points toward, and justifies, the rule of the party *over* the workers. In other words, it implies, points toward, and justifies state capitalism. In short, the state capitalist/totalitarian implications of these formulations can become explicit once a working class insurrection takes place.

This is not inevitable. As we noted, one can conceive of a democratic/socialist relationship between the working class and one revolutionary party during and after the seizure of power. But a state capitalist outcome is highly probable.

This is especially true if the party has been built around the idea that it, and only it, is the true repository and guarantee of socialist consciousness, and that every other political organization is, at bottom, ultimately bourgeois and counterrevolutionary. Unless the revolution goes almost perfectly and is beset by few obstacles (and this is

not likely), almost all the training and ways of thinking and acting of its members will push that party toward ruling “in the name of,” “in the interests of,” the working class.

In fact, the state capitalist/totalitarian implications of the ideas in *What Is To Be Done?* go deeper than this. While *What Is To Be Done?* says that the revolutionary intellectuals/the revolutionary party is the source of socialist consciousness, it also defines the revolutionary party as “professional revolutionaries,” the full-time party apparatus. Adding this thought into the hopper, we get the additional implication that the ultimate source, repository and guarantee of socialist consciousness is the *party apparatus*, the functionaries. And, by logical extension, after the seizure of power, the only guarantor of the proletarian or socialist nature of the state is the rule of the party apparatus, the bureaucrats.

This implies that when conflicts develop between the party and the mass organizations of the working class (the workers’ councils [soviets], factory committees, trade unions, workers’ militia, etc.), the party is right and takes precedence. It has the right to make the decisions and rule over the working class. And, in turn, when conflicts develop between the *party apparatus* and other sections of the party, the party apparatus is right and takes precedence. It has the right to make the decisions and rule over the rest of the party (and, of course, the working class). This is what happened in Russia after the October Revolution.

One does not need to argue that Lenin explicitly held and defended the state capitalist/totalitarian conceptions that are implied in *What Is To Be Done?* (He probably thought that once the workers had become socialists and had followed the party in carrying out the revolution, the issue of the party ruling over the workers would never even arise.) For now, all we need to note is that the formulations in *What Is To Be Done?* do contain such implications.

In fact, Lenin elsewhere wrote things that implied the direct opposite of the passages in *What Is To Be Done?* In an article called *The Reorganization of the Party*, written in late 1905, just after the most radical events of the (unsuccessful) 1905 Revolution, Lenin wrote: “The working class is instinctively, spontaneously social democratic.” (Once again, this meant revolutionary socialist, since Lenin and the Bolsheviks still called themselves Social Democrats). This article was written to argue for admitting workers “at the bench” (workers who had normal jobs, like in factories) into the party, and reorganizing and broadening the party accordingly. Lenin was trying to overcome the resistance of some party members who were afraid that admitting members who were not full-time, paid functionaries would dilute the revolutionary character of the party.

That Lenin would write something like the sentence cited above during the 1905 Revolution makes perfect sense. There was a revolution going on and the workers, without any help from the revolutionary organizations, had become quite militant and revolutionary. (All the revolutionary organizations, including the Bolsheviks, were small and relatively marginal to the revolutionary goings on. Leon Trotsky played an important role as chairman of the St. Petersburg soviet, but as an individual figure, not as a member of a party-type organization.)

The Bolsheviks at this time were still organized as an underground apparatus of professional operatives. Hence Lenin's proposal to open up the party to "non-professionals." Hence, too, his argument against those who resisted his proposal, in essence, "the workers are already revolutionary."

Despite this article, the conception put forward in *What Is To Be Done?* remained, I would contend, the dominant one among the Bolsheviks. *What Is To Be Done?* was essentially the founding document of the Bolshevik faction/party, with elaborate discussions of fundamental issues in socialist theory and practice. *The Reorganization of the Party* was in no way comparable; it was a minor piece. While we do not know for sure, we can guess that new members of the Bolshevik faction/party were urged, probably required, to read *What Is To Be Done?* soon after, maybe even before, joining. Older members probably went back and reread it, to refresh their memories. It is almost certain, however, that this was not true of *The Reorganization of the Party*.

Maybe even more important, central leaders of the Bolshevik Party, including many "Old Bolsheviks" such as Joseph Stalin, were trained in the ideas and practices of *What Is To Be Done?* Some went back to the original *Iskra* period and the period from the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903 to the 1905 Revolution. Others were trained in the years after 1905–06 when the workers became politically quiescent and conservative and all the revolutionary organizations shrank drastically. The Bolsheviks, as much by necessity as by choice, became little more than a professional underground apparatus, and sometimes barely this. This remained the case roughly until the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917.

Later Bolshevik leaders, recruited and seasoned under these conditions, would almost automatically agree with the conceptions in *What Is To Be Done?* And all would be prone to act according to its implications before, during and after the October Revolution.

The most convincing evidence of the impact of the state capitalist/totalitarian implications of the ideas in *What Is To Be Done?* is what actually happened after the October Revolution, particularly during the Civil War. As we have mentioned the Bolsheviks centralized all political power in their own hands. This included subordinating the soviets, factory committees, unions, militias, and other mass organizations (where these had not been disbanded) to their direct control and "discipline." These measures were certainly taken under specific conditions, including internal counterrevolutionary uprisings, foreign intervention, incredible devastation and poverty.

And perhaps the Bolsheviks would have preferred not to have taken them (although many of the measures were praised, even glorified, by N.I. Bukharin, the party's major theoretician).

Yet, the steps taken were totally consistent with the conceptions put forward in *What Is To Be Done?* They were justified by leading Bolsheviks, including the not very "Old Bolsheviks" Leon Trotsky and Karl Radek.

The party [is] entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashe[s] with the passing moods of the workers' democracy... It is necessary to create

among us the awareness of the revolutionary, historical birthright of the party. The party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering in the spontaneous moods of the masses, regardless of the temporary vacillations even in the working class. (Trotsky)

The Party is the politically conscious vanguard of the working class. We are now at a point where the workers, at the end of their endurance, refuse any longer to follow a vanguard which leads them into battle and sacrifice... Ought we to yield to the clamours of workingmen who have reached the limit of their patience but who do not understand their true interests as we do? Their state of mind is frankly reactionary. But the Party has decided that we must *not* yield, that we must impose our will to victory on our exhausted and dispirited followers. (Radek)

And needless to say, these steps were warmly embraced by Stalin and other “Old Bolsheviks” who took the ball and kept running.

Is this purely a coincidence?

-THREE-

The “Ethos” of Bolshevism

IN this article, I will discuss what might be called the “ethos” of Bolshevism. By “ethos,” I mean the overall outlook, attitudes and style—the culture, roughly—of the faction and party that has come to be known as Bolshevik. “Ethos” is a somewhat vague term. Nevertheless, there are certain fairly definite characteristics of the Bolsheviks, both as individuals and as a tendency/party, and of their political outlook, that can be discerned.

One of the most salient aspects of the ethos of the Bolshevik tendency is what might be called the cult of the “hards.” The Bolsheviks prided themselves on their toughness. They even referred to themselves as “the hards.” This was in contrast to what they derided as the “softness” of the Mensheviks. As the Bolsheviks saw it, they were strong, tough and unvacillating; the Mensheviks weak, soft and indecisive. The Bolsheviks prided themselves on their skill in functioning “underground” and on their willingness to endure the hardships this entailed. They considered the Mensheviks as less capable of working under conditions of clandestinity and too anxious to function legally, no matter what restrictions this entailed. The Bolsheviks also saw themselves as more proletarian than the Mensheviks, whom they considered more middle class (even when this was not strictly true).

Even more important, the Bolsheviks viewed themselves as being more politically intransigent than the Mensheviks, more hostile to the Tsar, landlords and capitalists, more suspicious of the bourgeois liberals.

This intransigence, or political “hardness,” referred both to political stance and to the question of methods. In general, the Bolsheviks’ political program was more radical

than the Mensheviks; they had a more radical position on the agrarian question, one of the main issues in Russia.

The Bolsheviks were also more willing to advocate and use violent tactics. During the 1905 Revolution, for example, one of the Bolsheviks' main emphases was on organizing armed fighting squads with the idea of carrying out an armed insurrection.

In this cult of "hardness," political position and personal style, faction policies and personal characteristics, were considered integrally connected, even if this was not true of every individual in the faction. (For example, Grigorii Zinoviev, a leading Bolshevik, was well-known among the Bolsheviks for his vacillating temperament and even cowardice.)

However true or false this conception was in general, it *did* tend to reflect the personal characteristics of the main leaders of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, Yuli Martov and V.I. Lenin, respectively. Martov appeared to be physically weak, somewhat slovenly, overly cautious politically and an undisciplined thinker and speaker. Lenin, on the other hand, gave the impression of personal strength and energy; he was also neat, *very* decisive politically and an incisive thinker and speaker.

The Bolsheviks' conception of themselves as the "hards" reflected their ideal, or model. This was, as we discussed in our last article, the professional, full-time revolutionary. He (and, by and large, he *was* a he) was illegal. He lived and worked "underground," without permanent home, hiding and often running from the police. He subsisted on very little and could look forward to periods of jail and exile. He was totally devoted to his work. He was a professional, a skilled operative.

Almost anybody who survived such an existence for any period of time had to be, or had to become, "hard," or tough. (The Bolsheviks, by the way, tended to wear black leather jackets and coats, which became kind of a badge with them.)

There are two aspects of the question of "hardness" that are worth noting. One is the question of "discipline." This was meant both in a political or party sense, and in a personal and individual sense. Discipline in the political sense meant a total commitment to the principles and the policies of the party. Whatever one might think of these, even if one had disagreements with the policies, or "line," of the party, one firmly defended them and carried them out. Raising one's differences was reserved for specific periods, and even then, solely within the party or faction. The Bolsheviks often used the term "*iron discipline*," as something to strive for.

Another aspect of "discipline" consisted of personal dedication and single-mindedness. This included a kind of asceticism, a pride in being able to do without luxuries and things most people take for granted, including family and a social life.

This asceticism was not something we merely point to in hindsight; it was explicitly held up as an ideal. Lenin was known for his frugality, his lack of affectation and a willingness to live without luxuries. (He did live considerably better than most peasants and workers, however.)

Significantly, the name of Lenin's book *What Is To Be Done?*, as we mentioned, was borrowed from the title of a book by N.G. Chernyshevsky. Written in solitary

confinement in 1862, this book was virtually the bible of the young, mostly middle-class and upper-class radicals of the 1860s who “went to the people” (the peasants) to bring them enlightenment and radical ideas. A striking figure in the book is a young man, Rakhmetov. Of plebian origins, Rakhmetov is a tower of strength. He believes only in the cause and is totally devoted to the “people.” Not least, he prepares himself for the coming struggle (implicitly, a vast upheaval) by sleeping on a bed of nails and otherwise toughening his body and mind. The connection between Rakhmetov’s style and that of the Bolsheviks was no accident.

Now, there is much that is positive about the Bolsheviks’ stress on “hardness,” both politically and personally. It is good for revolutionaries to be radical, intransigent, decisive and loyal to one’s organization and its policies. It is also positive to be dedicated, skillful and willing to endure hardships, to suffer for the cause. “Hardness,” in this sense, is one of the things that enabled the Bolsheviks to survive the stresses of Tsarist repression and the revolution, to lead the October Revolution and prevail during the Civil War. Certainly, any serious revolutionary organization needs a good dose of this.

Yet, “hardness” can be taken too far. And a *cult* of “hardness” can lead to serious distortions. On a minimal level, it can become a kind of revolutionary puritanism which condemns even modest common comforts as luxuries and frivolities, and sneers at people who want to live normal lives, not totally dedicated to the cause.

It may also entail a hostility toward the “too open” expression of the “positive” emotions—love, joy, happiness, etc.—and to a denigration of pleasurable activities as “decadent” or “bourgeois.” It can thus become very “macho,” implicitly or explicitly looking down on women, gay people, and on anything we might call sexual liberation.

A cult of “hardness” can also lead to a willingness to advocate, even prefer, brutal, coercive methods, and to an insensitivity to human suffering.

Had “hardness” remained a question of individual style or attitude, or had it been part of an ethos of a party that remained out of power, a cult of “hardness” might not amount to much. What makes a cult of “hardness” in a political organization potentially dangerous is the possibility that it becomes part of a *state ideology*.

If a party putting itself on its “hardness” becomes the sole political power in a state, the party may tend to *impose* its hardness on everybody else. Then what started out as the personal puritanism of members of a faction or party before the revolution becomes a kind of *state puritanism*, imposed by the various means at the disposal of a state afterward. The result can be regimentation and a punitive attitude toward classes, groups and individuals who oppose or do not fully agree with the goals and methods of the ruling party.

More generally, just as the “puritan ethic” of the 16th and 17th centuries reinforced the capitalist dictum “accumulation for the sake of accumulation” on the part of individual capitalists, so does a state puritanism lend itself to the same dictum on the part of the state. This, in fact, is the ethic of state capitalism.

Most ominously, a state cult of “hardness” can lead quite logically to the idea that if brutal coercive methods are justified before and during a revolution, they are also

justified afterwards. But the ability to utilize such methods will have been enormously increased, since the party now has the vast power of the state (police, prisons, armies, etc.) at its disposal. Thus, if it is okay to sacrifice individuals in the name of the cause, it is also okay, *and possible* to justify sacrificing even more people, perhaps whole classes, if it serves the interests of the great cause of socialism and the liberation of humanity.

Another aspect of the “ethos” of Bolshevism worthy of note is what can be called a cult of centralism and centralization.

Generally speaking, the Bolsheviks strongly favored centralism over decentralism, which they saw in a negative light. This attraction to centralism had a number of roots, not all of which are clear. As an organizational principle for their faction/party, the Bolsheviks advocated what they called “democratic centralism.” This was, in fact, a necessity largely imposed on them by the circumstances under which they operated for most of their history: they were an outlawed group, subject to arrest, imprisonment, exile, etc., if caught. To build a strong organization that could resist repression, that is, survive, they adopted centralism.

Yet, the Bolsheviks revered centralism far beyond the necessities of underground existence. They seemed to have considered it not only stronger organizationally than decentralism but also inherently more democratic. Some of the Bolsheviks’ reverence for centralism appears to have come from their admiration of capitalist industrial technique and structure. One of their main criticisms of Russia was its backwardness—what we would call the underdeveloped character of its economy. The Bolsheviks saw the capitalist factory, run on a centralized basis, as a progressive institution, technically speaking.

Lenin, for example, constantly held up the highly centralized and hierarchical German postal system and German industry as a whole as an example for the Russians to adopt. Thus, after the October Revolution, Lenin defined the creation of a highly centralized economic apparatus as a major goal of the Soviet state.

The organization of accounting, the control of large enterprises, the transformation of the state economic mechanism into a single huge machine, into an economic organism that will work in such a way as to enable hundreds of millions of people to be guided by a single plan—such was the enormous organizational problem that rested on our shoulders. [Political Report of the Central Committee to the Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the RCP(B), delivered March 7, 1918. *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 90–91.]

Lenin’s commitment to, virtual adoration of, centralism can be seen in his fairly frequent recommendation that the economy, revolutionary army, and soviet state be “subordinated to a single will” (presumably his, but that, for the moment, is not the point we are stressing).

Here it is worth citing a fairly long passage in order to get a relatively broad feel of Lenin’s thinking on the question.

...it must be said that large-scale machine industry—which is precisely the material source, the productive source, the foundation of socialism — calls for absolute and

strict *unity of will*, which directs the joint labours of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people. The technical, economic and historic necessity of this is obvious, and all those who have thought about socialism have always regarded it as one of the conditions of socialism. But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.

Given ideal class-consciousness and discipline on the part of those participating in the common work, this subordination would be something like the mild leadership of a conductor of an orchestra. It may assume the sharp forms of a dictatorship if ideal discipline and class consciousness are lacking. But be that as it may, *unquestioning subordination* to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry. [“The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government” written March-April, 1918. *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 268–269.]

In the previous paragraph, Lenin writes “There is, therefore, absolutely *no* contradiction in principle between Soviet *{that is, socialist}* democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals.” [P. 268.]

Thus, in Lenin’s view, extreme, even absolute, centralization was far from being antithetical to socialist democracy. It was perfectly compatible with it, in some sense, its perfect embodiment.

It is not my point, here, to prove that a commitment to centralism, seeing it as an intrinsically progressive and even proletarian form, is *per se* state capitalist. But it is fairly easy to see that a political party whose commitment to centralism became virtually a point of principle would resort to extreme centralist measures (backed by “iron discipline”) to preserve what it considered to be the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is also easy to see why such a party would not recognize that extreme centralism would eventually destroy—by choking off real workers’ control and democracy—the proletarian state they thought they were defending. And why, later on, such a party would revert to extreme centralist measures as the main way to industrialize the country.

Part of the Bolsheviks’ cult of centralism was an infatuation with (economic) planning. To the Bolsheviks, and to all too many Marxists, the essence of socialism is economic planning. This is in contrast to capitalism which, on the whole, is chaotic, working through the free, or partially free market.

But there is planning and there is planning. It depends on who is doing it and how it is done. Today’s Russian economy is supposedly planned, but anyone who knows anything about how it actually works knows that it is an unplanned mass of chaos. What is “planned” and what happens have little relation to each other. Planning by a bureaucratic state capitalist class that exploits the working class is not the same as democratic, socialist planning by the workers. The Bolsheviks were never clear about this and tended to conflate the two ideas.

Part of the responsibility for this rests with Marx and Engels themselves. They contrasted the chaos and anarchy of the capitalist market to the supposedly planned nature of production inside the factory.

Perhaps a small factory, the kind that Engels managed for many years, is really planned. But a huge capitalist combine, such as General Motors, has many divisions, sub-divisions, bureaucracies, etc., competing for resources, recognition, etc.. While more planned than the market, it is not truly planned. Like the modern Russian economy as a whole, such a firm is closer to marginally managed chaos than real planning. And to the degree any given factory is planned, such planning is based on brutal regimentation. A whole society built around the bureaucratic and hierarchical principles of a capitalist corporation would not be planned; it would be a stifling, bureaucratic nightmare.

Like Marx and Engels, the Bolsheviks tended to equate socialist planning with the planning typical of capitalist firms. Planning was to be done by economic experts in a supposedly “scientific” manner, based on the complete nationalization (centralization) of industry. It was not supposed to be a question of politics subject to discussion and debate by the workers.

As a result, workers’ control of factories and industry as a whole, which the Bolsheviks advocated during 1917, was seen by them as a stepping-stone, a transitional measure, to something else, something “more socialist”: nationalization of industry and so-called “socialist” planning. The Bolsheviks did not conceive of socialist planning as being compatible with the direct workers’ control of the factories, which they saw as an anarchist idea. They were therefore for “workers’ control” during 1917 only insofar as it led “further” (and because during and after the February Revolution the workers had occupied the factories and established their control).

Thus, as soon as they were able, the Bolsheviks subordinated the factory committees to other institutions (the trade unions) and ultimately effectively did away with them altogether. They were replaced by “one-man management.” While this has often been explained as motivated by necessity (the onset of the Civil War, the drastic decline of the economy, etc.), and this is true to a degree, it was also totally consistent with the Bolsheviks’ pre-existent ideas and leanings, particularly their idolization of centralism.

As we have mentioned, one source of the Bolsheviks’ commitment to centralism was a belief in the inherent progressiveness of bourgeois technology. Bourgeois technology, and its corollary, industrialization, were also virtual cult objects on the part of the Bolsheviks.

Although they were fiercely opposed to traditional capitalism, capitalist corporations and banks and individual capitalists, the Bolsheviks were extremely fond of bourgeois technology, particularly the techniques of capitalist industry.

But their attachment was not limited to merely the industrial processes, as such—technology in the narrow sense of the term— but to the overall methods and even structure of capitalist industry. This included the centralization, the hierarchical structure of management, piecework and other facets of (bourgeois) “scientific management” (e.g., Taylorism).

Lenin actually believed that the overall structure and methods of capitalist industry could be taken over, in toto, by a proletarian state. To Lenin, all that mattered to make

this type of structure proletarian was that it be controlled by a state based on soviets. Thus, in May, 1918, Lenin wrote:

Here (in Germany) we have “the last word” in modern large-scale capitalist engineering and planned organization, *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. [“‘Left-wing’ Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 334.]

(It is worth noting that many of the arguments in Lenin’s articles and speeches we have cited, as well as others from the period, were intended to refute those, both outside the Bolshevik party and *inside* it, who disagreed with the course Lenin advocated. This is an indication that not all Bolsheviks agreed with Lenin, and that the specific aspects of the Bolshevik ethos we have been discussing do not comprise the sum total of Bolshevism.)

Lenin did not see that industrial technique, organizational structure and methods are not purely scientific questions, politically neutral; he did not realize that they have a definite class content. Specifically, Lenin did not recognize that the German industry, and capitalist industry as a whole, of his time, was a thoroughly bourgeois institution in every facet. Merely subordinating a capitalist economic apparatus to soviets (assuming the soviets are controlled by the workers), does not automatically make the apparatus proletarian. It has to be thoroughly revolutionized by the workers themselves.

It is understandable why the Bolsheviks would consider bourgeois industry to be progressive in and of itself. From their position within Tsarist Russia, the main problem was the poverty, ignorance, disease, etc., of the workers and peasants. And this, it appeared to them, was caused primarily by the economic, political and cultural backwardness of Russia. Within this context, capitalist technology and capitalist managerial techniques, etc., were easily seen as progressive *per se*. What Russia needed, so it seemed, was a thorough-going economic transformation, a basically capitalist industrialization.

This was one motivation for the view they held throughout most of their history that the revolution on the order of the day in Russia was a bourgeois one, not a socialist one. And, as we saw in the second installment in this series, the main goal of this revolution would be to clear the way for the fullest development of capitalism in Russia.

When the Bolsheviks altered their strategy in April, 1917, and oriented themselves toward a working class revolution and the establishment of what they saw as a proletarian dictatorship, their commitment to bourgeois technology — industrial methods and managerial structure—did not really change. They felt: 1) since industry, etc., was now controlled by a soviet government, that is, a workers’ state, it *ipso facto* served the interests of the working class (and peasants), 2) the main task within Russia was to build up the industrial apparatus and the economy in general, to industrialize the

country. This would lay the material basis for establishing socialism and, eventually, communism.

As a result, they became even more committed to the centralization, hierarchy and discipline of capitalist industry, and paid no attention at all to developing a system of direct working class control over the economy. If anything, the fact that this industry was now under their control, which they assumed meant the control of the working class, led them to discard whatever objections to centralization, hierarchy and dictatorial management they might have had.

The Bolsheviks did not merely justify these steps by citing the intensification of the economic crisis and the onset of the Civil War in 1918. They also advocated, justified and defended them as a point of principle, as steps toward socialism. One of N.I. Bukharin's main theoretical works written during the Civil War, *The Economics of the Transformation Period*, was a virtual hymn to centralization. And Bukharin was the Bolsheviks' major theoretician.

Here we can see a direct basis for both the aims and the methods of Stalin's program of forced industrialization. Once it became clear that the post-war wave of workers' revolutions had been defeated, and since the working class as a whole had "shown" that it lacked the revolutionary will (the Kronstadt uprising, the Petrograd general strike), it seemed logical that the chief task of the party was to force the workers and peasants to industrialize the country.

Based on bourgeois technology and centralized planning, industrialization, Stalin thought, would create abundance, the material basis for communism, thus opening up the road to the next stage of human society. But with the workers and soon the peasants deprived of any control over the means of production, the cults of centralism and bourgeois technology and, as we will soon discuss, coercive methods, left them subordinated, exploited and decimated. Given Stalin's assumptions, many of which were taken over from Bolshevism, the result was, and could only have been, a state capitalist industrialization.

An additional feature of the Bolshevik ethos was a belief in the efficacy, even desirability, of coercive, brutal methods. I mentioned this above in the section on the cult of hardness, but there are additional points to be made.

When I refer to the Bolsheviks' attraction to coercive methods, I am not just repeating the standard bourgeois reproach of Marxism that "the end justifies the means." (In fact, the capitalists themselves believe that the end, e.g., profits, the defense of capitalism, does justify the means — injurious working conditions, the death penalty, chemical warfare, nuclear weapons—but this is too long a discussion to embark upon here.) Nor do I reject violent methods *in toto*; I am not a pacifist. In general, I accept Marx's conception that a revolution necessarily entails violence, but by and large this is, or should be, the violence of the overwhelming majority *against* a very small minority of exploiters and their agents. So, the problem is not one of coercion/violence in the abstract.

There seems to me to be two issues involved. The first is whether those who are resorting to coercive measures are aware that using them entails a cost: that they can undercut the goal they are purportedly being used to reach, and that at some point such measures can actually preclude the reaching of that goal.

What I am getting at is that brutal methods tend to demoralize and dehumanize those who employ them. It seems to me that if we seek to build a more humane society than capitalism, then we should always attempt to use methods that are more, rather than less, humane than those of the capitalists.

The other issue involved in the question of the use of coercion/ violence by revolutionaries is: against whom are the coercive measures directed? If the vast majority of workers and other oppressed people use violence against the capitalists and their hangers-on, that is one thing. If a relatively small minority of revolutionaries winds up employing brutal methods against large numbers of workers, etc., then this is something else.

All this being said, I would argue: 1) that the Bolsheviks were overly inclined to advocate coercive/brutal methods, in general; 2) that they seemed to be unaware that this might undermine the very goal they claimed to be fighting for; and, 3) that, at least implicitly, these coercive measures would logically wind up being directed against members, even large sectors, of the working class, whose vanguard the Bolsheviks claimed to be.

Since this is such a strong charge (and a charge typically raised by opponents of socialism), it is worth citing some passages from Lenin's writings and speeches to substantiate it. The three I have chosen were written or spoken in April and May of 1918. This was after the October Revolution but before the onset of the Civil War (which was really to get underway in June, 1918).

In this period, the new Soviet government, consisting of the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries, was faced with fairly rapid economic decline and the onset of social and economic chaos. The government had also recently signed the onerous Brest-Litovsk treaty with the Central Powers, which had entailed the loss of a great deal of Russian territory and industry. We say this both to give the context of Lenin's comments as well as to present them in the best possible light.

In "*Left-wing*" *Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality* (May 5, 1918 *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 344) Lenin wrote: "Another thing is that the courts are not sufficiently firm. Instead of sentencing people who take bribes to be shot, they sentence them to six months' imprisonment."

Here, Lenin is demanding that people who take bribes be shot.

The death penalty for taking bribes certainly appears very harsh to me, especially since it is not *ipso facto* an act of active counter-revolutionary behavior.

Even more important, it is worth recognizing that at this point in the Russian Revolution, bribe-taking was pandemic to Russian society. (The normal practices of peacetime had been greatly extended by the World War, the revolution and a devastat-

ing economic crisis.) To shoot all those who accepted bribes would be to execute a hell of a lot of people, not all of who were actively counterrevolutionary or even bourgeois.

Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that Lenin thought similar punishment should be meted out to other “people who infringe the measures passed by the Soviets” (quote from the same passage). Well, by this time, the soviets had outlawed private trade. But with the breakdown of the economy, and the little time since the seizure of power, the state trade network was very new and extremely inefficient. In fact, it hardly existed. In this situation, many ordinary workers and peasants engaged in private trade just to survive. So we can see that Lenin is advocating, however implicitly, shooting a very, very large number of people.

Perhaps Lenin thought such “firm” measures would actually suppress bribe-taking. If so, he was only deluding himself. In conditions of extreme scarcity and chaos, people will do what they have to do to eat and feed their families, even if they face the supreme penalty if caught. They did so in Russia.

So, here we see an example of Lenin’s preference for brutal methods, coupled with a belief in their effectiveness. Not only is his choice of methods excessively brutal, it also entails coercion against workers and peasants, not just a handful of oppressors. Even more frightening, such measures have a tendency to create enemies of those who use them.

Thus in the above example, as I have indicated, most of those who took bribes or engaged in private trade were not counterrevolutionaries. At most, to use Bolshevik terminology, they were only “objectively” counterrevolutionary.

But, I would argue, shooting people engaged in bribe-taking or private trading is the surest way to turn those not yet caught into “subjective” counterrevolutionaries. And this is indeed what happened.

Beginning in the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks “brought the revolution to the countryside” (as they called it), and began the forced requisitioning of grain from the so-called middle and rich peasants. This measure turned millions of peasants against the new Soviet regime, led to a vast contraction of cultivated land and food production, and a consequent famine, and resulted in a bloodbath in the countryside.

Of course, the Bolsheviks were not solely to blame for this. The White armies were probably even more brutal than the Bolsheviks. But the Bolsheviks’ policy of trying to suppress all private trade shared a great deal of the responsibility for what happened. It also made it virtually certain that the vast majority of peasants would be, and would remain, deeply hostile to the Bolshevik regime.

(The Bolsheviks’ agrarian policy, as well as others pursued by the Bolsheviks in the early years of the revolution, is discussed and criticized by the basically pro-Soviet Russian dissident historian, Roy Medvedev, in his recent book, *The October Revolution*.)

Another passage from Lenin’s writings and speeches in this period illustrates the problem even more clearly.

In his speech in the Moscow Soviet of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies, of April 23, 1918, Lenin said:

This country, which the course of history has advanced to the foremost position in the arena of the world revolution, a country devastated and bled white, is in an extremely grave situation and we shall be crushed if we do not counter ruin, disorganisation and despair with the iron dictatorship of the class conscious workers. We shall be *merciless* both to our enemies *and to all waverers and harmful elements in our midst* [emphasis added] who dare to bring disorganisation into our difficult creative work of building a new life for the working people. [*Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p. 233.]

Here, two points are worth stressing. First, not only are the Bolsheviks to be "merciless" toward their enemies, they will also be so toward "waverers" and "harmful elements in our midst." "Waverers" and "harmful elements" are very broad words and, in the circumstances of the time, probably encompassed a lot of people.

And Lenin is not only threatening (at least implicitly) many ordinary workers and peasants with Bolshevik mercilessness (probably execution), he is also threatening those elements *within the Bolshevik Party* who disagree with the need for this kind of "mercilessness." This is merely the broad version of Lenin's demand to shoot those caught taking bribes and engaging in private trading.

Second, in this passage, Lenin advocates the "iron dictatorship of the class conscious workers." Here, in Lenin's mind, Marx's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat (a dictatorship of the entire, or almost the entire, working class), has become the dictatorship of *part* of the proletariat, the "class conscious" workers, who are, by Lenin's definition, the members of the Bolshevik Party.

And the task of these workers is to impose their "iron dictatorship" not only on class enemies (capitalists, landlords, Tsarist officers, etc.), but also on those workers who are not class conscious, as the Bolsheviks define such consciousness. That is, on those workers who do not agree with what they are for. That is, the rest of the working class.

Right here is the theoretical blueprint for what was to exist by the end of the Civil War in early 1921. By that time, the Bolsheviks had imposed their "iron dictatorship" on the rest of the working class, supposedly in the interests of that class. But these workers did not agree about who represented their true interests: in March, 1921, to show their opposition to Bolshevik "mercilessness," they paralyzed Petrograd, the capital, with a general strike.

The next passage (a short one), I wish to cite poses Lenin's attitude toward the question of methods quite succinctly. It is also from "*Left-wing*" *Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality*.

"...we must not hesitate to use barbarous methods in fighting barbarism." (P. 340.)

To me, this pretty much sums up the issue underlying all the questions we have been discussing. It sums up all too much of what I have called the Bolshevik "ethos." And, it sums up what was, and I think could only have been, the logical outcome of a revolution led by a party with that "ethos." For, it seems to me, if one sets out to use barbarous methods to fight barbarism, the result can only be...barbarism.

The main point I have been trying to establish is that there were many aspects of the style and culture of the Bolshevik Party that pointed in the direction of state capitalism. These were tendencies that implied the establishment of a dictatorship of a self-proclaimed socialist elite over the workers and peasants “in the interests of” those classes and “in the name of” socialism and communism.

It is not that objective conditions—poverty, the destruction of war and revolution, political isolation—did not play a part in the establishment of such a dictatorship. They certainly did. But what the Bolsheviks thought and did (and did very aggressively), greatly contributed, in the context of those conditions, to that same outcome.

For example, if one effect of the objective conditions is to undermine the institutions of workers’ control over the economy and state, then what the Bolsheviks did in the context of those conditions worked to further those tendencies rather than to counter them.

Moreover, once the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party had been established, it is not clear to me that, even had there been successful workers’ revolutions in Western Europe, the Bolsheviks would have reestablished real proletarian democracy, including legalizing other left tendencies. Nor is it obvious that, given their infatuation with centralization and “scientific” planning, they would have tried to set up real workers’ control of the factories and the economy as a whole. In the past, I used to think so. Today, I am not so sure.

In sum, I believe that the Bolshevik ethos, and particularly the mind-set of Lenin, its creator and major leader, was laced with tendencies, attitudes and conceptions that pointed in the direction of state capitalism. Even if they do not add up to state capitalism entirely, they certainly helped lay the basis, and provided the justification, for the direction Stalin took after Lenin’s death.

In conclusion, let me quote, once again, from Lenin’s writings from the spring of 1918. (We have already cited a part of this passage.)

While the revolution in Germany is still slow in “coming forth,” our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort*, in copying it and not shrink from adopting *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it. Our task is to hasten this copying even more than Peter [Tsar Peter the Great—rt] hastened the copying of Western Culture by barbarian Russia, and we must not hesitate to use barbarous methods in fighting barbarism.

With or without the objective conditions, this looks to me like a recipe for state capitalism.

-FOUR-

State and Revolution

THIS installment of our series on Leninism will focus on *The State and Revolution*. Written in the summer of 1917 during the Russian Revolution itself, this is one of Lenin's most important works.

In many ways, this installment is the most difficult for me to write. *The State and Revolution* was one of the first, if not *the* first, of the works of Lenin I ever read. This relatively small book had a profound effect on a teenager coming of age in the early '60s.

While my family was radical (the word used then was "progressive"), *The State and Revolution* convinced me to become a Leninist and to want to be a professional revolutionary "when I grew up." Here, it seemed to me, was a revolutionary and democratic vision worth devoting my life to. I read *The State and Revolution* at least once a year for many years thereafter.

And in many ways, *The State and Revolution* is Lenin's most libertarian work. Here was Lenin breaking decisively with the reformist and statist conceptions of the Second (Socialist) International, demanding a return to the much more radical ideas put forward by Karl Marx in his writings on the Paris Commune. Here was Lenin elaborating a notion of a revolutionary society based on soviets (workers' councils) and other institutions of direct workers' rule. Here was Lenin emphasizing that *the ultimate goal of proletarian revolution is the withering away of the state*.

For many years, *The State and Revolution* was the foundation stone on which I elaborated my politics. It was what I pointed to in arguing against liberal and reformist positions. It was what I used as the starting point for fighting my own (and others') illusions in the so-called "socialist countries." And it was what I kept coming back to in an attempt to develop a revolutionary, democratic conception of socialism that remained within the overall framework of Leninism (via Trotskyism, for example).

It was also the one work of Lenin's in which I had the most difficulty discovering what I have been calling "state capitalist tendencies." The book seemed so revolutionary, so anti-state, that for the longest time I could not see any foreshadowings of Stalinism/state capitalism in it. It was probably this, as much as anything else, that prevented me from recognizing the role that Lenin (and Leninism) had in creating Stalinism/state capitalism. After all, if Lenin's vision of 1917 was as democratic and anti-state as it seemed, then it seemed logical to blame what happened in Russia on "objective conditions" — and on Stalin. That is, on anybody and anything but Lenin.

Yet, recognizing the state capitalist tendencies in *The State and Revolution* is crucial to coming up with a realistic assessment of Leninism. If Leninism is significantly statist, it ought to be apparent, or at least discernible, in this book. If it is not, then perhaps Leninism isn't as statist as the anarchists, anti-authoritarians and libertarians contend.

The often heard argument from many anarchists, libertarians, etc., that Lenin stole the ideas in *The State and Revolution* from the anarchists only muddies the waters. It accepts that the book is a truly libertarian document and then avoids a serious analysis of how Lenin, the arch-statist, could come up with it by claiming that he really didn't.

A meaningful analysis would at least attempt to show the different degrees of continuity and discontinuity between *The State and Revolution* and Lenin's other works. It would also analyze the circumstances that would induce Lenin to write such a work and, most important, would attempt to elucidate whatever state capitalist tendencies *are* present in the book, however modest or hidden they may be.

On its own terms, the argument that Lenin lifted much of *The State and Revolution* from the anarchists seems implausible to me. I do not mean to deny the possibility that Lenin might have been influenced by anarchist ideas in this period (he certainly began to see the ulterior motives behind the reformists' attacks on anarchism). But I don't think this tells us much. Unfortunately, Lenin had little but contempt for anarchism, the anarchist movement and anarchist thinking: he generally debunked it as a form of petty bourgeois ideology, whatever he might have thought of individual anarchist militants.

The genesis of *The State and Revolution* is more reasonably explained by two factors:

1. The collapse of the Second (Socialist) International at the outset of World War I caused Lenin to take a very critical look at what had been considered "orthodox Marxism" at the time. In this rethinking, involving a reading of some of the works of the philosophical forerunner of Marx, G.W.F. Hegel, Lenin broke out of the mechanistic stage-ism of Social Democracy.

He began to see Russia as a part of a *world* capitalist system that was suffering a serious global crisis. This opened him up to the idea that the Russian Revolution need not be limited to a bourgeois-democratic stage until the victory of one or more socialist revolutions in Europe and led him to think in terms of a worker-led revolution in Russia that would be the first battle in an international socialist revolution.

2. Equally important, the form of this revolution in Russia, and of the revolutionary government that would emerge from it, was suggested by the course of the class struggle itself. By the time Lenin arrived in Russia in early April 1917, the workers and soldiers had not only (spontaneously) toppled the Tsar. They had also set up mass democratic institutions (soviets, factory committees, etc.), and were, to a considerable extent, running Russian society through them. Between his theoretical reconsiderations of basic questions of Marxism and the imposing reality of the achievements of the Russian workers, Lenin did not need to borrow, or steal, from the anarchists, to come up with *The State and Revolution*.

In my opinion, then, *The State and Revolution* is the organic result of the development of Lenin's thinking. That it is as libertarian as it is is a reflection of the libertarian impulse in Marxism and the even greater libertarian impulse of masses of workers attempting to carry out a social revolution.

Despite all this, however, there *are* state capitalist tendencies in *The State and Revolution*. And those who want to evaluate Leninism from a libertarian point of view ought to be able to reveal them and analyze them.

One reason *The State and Revolution* appears to be so libertarian is that it proclaims that the main goal of Marxists is the establishment of a stateless and, of course, classless society. The goal of the socialist revolution, Lenin insisted, was the establishment of communism, a society without social classes and without a state of any kind. Nor was this meant to be in the far distant future. Be-

cause of the world crisis of imperialism, this goal was an immediate, practical one.

This may seem obviously Marxist to those who have read Marx and Engels. But at the time, Lenin's assertion was seen as quite radical because the Socialist International had quietly shelved such ideas (reserved for May Day speeches, at best) as part of the "utopian" and unrealistic dreams of Marx and Engels in their younger years. The actual goal of Social Democracy was increasingly a democratic capitalist welfare state. For Lenin to resurrect and even to emphasize Marx and Engels' radical and apparently anti-statist vision (and to call attention to the fact that this was expressed as "late" as 1871 in Marx's writings on the Paris Commune) was almost heretical.

Despite how anti-statist the call for a revolution to establish a classless and stateless society may sound, a careful reading of *The State and Revolution* shows that the book is not nearly as antistate as it seems. In fact, it is quite pro-state, but in a hidden sort of way.

The source of this paradox is the notion of *the withering away of the state*. In Marxist theory, the state, after a successful socialist revolution, is not abolished. It withers away: it disappears gradually. This flows, supposedly, from the very nature of the form of government established by a successful proletarian uprising. The proletariat rises up, smashes the old bourgeois state, and builds a new state based on workers' councils and other democratic institutions of the working class and other oppressed classes. The job of this state is primarily to defeat counterrevolutionary attempts, to complete the destruction of the bourgeois state, to finish suppressing the capitalist class and other oppressor classes, and to draw the masses of workers and other oppressed people into the day-to-day management of society. To the degree these tasks are accomplished, and relative scarcity, the material basis of class society and the state, is overcome, there is no need for such a state and it will gradually wither away.

This flows from the nature of the state itself. Under class societies, such as ancient slave systems, feudalism, capitalism, etc., the state is an instrument of a tiny minority to maintain its rule over the exploited majority. Given the disparity in the sizes of the oppressor and oppressed classes respectively, this task requires a large and elaborate apparatus ultimately based on coercion and consisting of "bodies of armed men, prisons, etc."

The state after a successful proletarian revolution, on the other hand, is not an instrument of a tiny minority over the vast majority, but the reverse. It is a weapon of

the vast majority to suppress the former ruling and exploiting minority. Thus, as its tasks are completed, it no longer has any purpose and gradually disappears.

While this seems to make sense, in fact it contains a number of fallacies. In order to see them, it is worth considering what this conception of the nature of the revolutionary state and its eventual withering away means in terms of the tasks facing revolutionaries. In other words, how would revolutionaries holding to this theory of the state and its eventual elimination think of what they should do during and after a revolution?

The practical application of this theory, it seems to me, is that the key job of revolutionaries after a successful proletarian revolution is not to do away with the state, but *to build a new one*. Moreover, in order to suppress the bourgeoisie and the other exploiters most efficiently, this state should be *as strong and all-embracing as possible*. Finally, since this new “proletarian” state will “inevitably” wither away once the exploiters and counterrevolutionaries are suppressed and the workers are drawn into administering society, there is no need to safeguard the workers, the revolution or the revolutionaries themselves from “their own” state.

This is the crux of the paradox I mentioned above. The very revolutionaries who claim that they are *against* the state, and for *eliminating* the state, who say they are the only ones who can do away with the state, etc., see as their central task after a revolution to build up a state that is more solid, more centralized and more all-embracing than the old state.

This, it seems to me, is the key problem with *The State and Revolution* and, in fact, the entire Marxist theory of the state. In this theory, the key goal (or one of them), the elimination of the state, supposedly happens by itself; it is taken care of by the “historic process.” Human beings don’t have to worry about it: what they have to worry about is building up a new state.

But what if the historic process doesn’t work out as Marx and Engels and Lenin thought it would? What if, instead of withering away, the revolutionary state sticks around? What if some individuals or groups of individuals in powerful positions in that state decide they don’t want the state, and their power, to wither away?

The result, even under optimal conditions, is likely to be a “revolutionary” society governed by a large, powerful and omnipresent state apparatus, which is justified by the absurd notion that the purpose of such a state is to eliminate the state. We call this state capitalism.

On one level, the underlying fallacy in the theory of the state put forward in *The State and Revolution* can be described by the common phrase “It looks good on paper, but...” In other words, it is wishful thinking; it assumes the best.

On a somewhat deeper level, the problem is the belief that the theory has captured the full reality of the state, its essence, purpose, and historical direction. And since the theory declares that the “logic” of this essence, purpose and historical direction is that the state will eventually be eliminated, “negated,” “transcended” via a “dialectical” (apparently contradictory) process, this is what will inevitably happen. The fallacy, in

other words, is that the theory has reduced historical development to a (dialectical) logic that it declares to be inevitable, even if this may not be so.

Those who detect a criticism of Hegelian thinking here are correct. In my view, the Marxist theory of the state and its eventual withering away is essentially Hegelian. Although Marx and Engels felt that they had broken decisively with their philosophical mentor, the Marxist world view—from its conception of history, to *Capital* to its underlying philosophical outlook—is fundamentally Hegelian. And even though Marx and Engels described their viewpoint as a materialism, in contrast to Hegel’s idealism, their world view remained, in my opinion, as idealistic as Hegel’s, although unconsciously so.

The so-called “laws of history,” as expressed in “historical materialism,” are a kind of logic, or thought. And it is this logic that ultimately determines human history. This is idealism.

Marx and Engels, or maybe just Engels, occasionally described what they had done as turning Hegel on his head, or standing an upside-down Hegel on his feet. But Hegel turned upside down or right side up is still Hegel.

Lenin’s (and Marx and Engels’) theory of the state, to repeat, is based on the notion that the (dialectical) logic of the state (and of history) guarantees that the state under a revolutionary society will disappear.

But what if this dialectical logic is too neat? What if this view of the state (and history, human society, etc.), ignores or defines out of existence other aspects of the state (and history, human society, etc.), that are not reducible to logic (even dialectical logic)? If, however brilliant it might be, the theory is not 100% correct (and no theory can *ever* be 100% correct), the stage might just be set for Marxist revolutionaries, fervently believing Marxist theory, and organized in an extremely disciplined and well-organized party, to create a “dictatorship of the proletariat” that might not wither away as it was supposed to.

I think this is, at least in part, what happened after the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks sought to build up a strong state apparatus, based on the soviets, trade unions and factory committees. Convinced that the stronger, more efficient and more centralized this apparatus was, the easier it would be to smash the old state and ruling classes, defeat the counterrevolutionary attempts and draw the workers into administering society, and convinced that once these tasks were accomplished and other revolutions had succeeded in the West, the state would wither away, the Bolsheviks gave no thought to the other, supposedly higher goal of doing away with the state. Although they proclaimed their goal to be the elimination of the state, their *de facto* goal was to build a new, more efficient, more centralized one. They succeeded.

The point is not that the workers and other oppressed people should not build up a strong set of organizations during and after a revolution to manage the economy and society, defend their gains and suppress the exploiters, etc. But they also need to take steps to prevent a new state from arising and oppressing them. That is, they need to figure out concretely how they are going to build a stateless society.

The Marxist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, as elaborated in *The State and Revolution*, “arms” the revolutionary party with the need to build up a new, revolutionary state, but it *disarms* the workers about the need to fight against a new state forming.

At this point (if they haven’t already), someone will protest that Lenin, citing Marx, talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat being a state of the armed workers, the proletariat organized as the ruling class, a state that is already beginning to wither away, a state that is already in the process of becoming a non-state, etc.

Yes, someone else will say, and he also included detailed discussions of various measures to maintain the workers’ control over their state, for example, having the soviets combine legislative and executive powers, having the workers’ delegates be subject to immediate recall, having all state officials receive no more than an average worker’s salary, etc.

This is certainly true, although how detailed these discussions are and how effective the measures proposed would be can be disputed (leaving aside the question of whether the Bolsheviks ever seriously tried to implement them).

The problem, however, is not that Lenin gave no thought to how the workers might control the new state apparatus, but that his very conception of that apparatus was bourgeois. In the previous installment of this series, I discussed Lenin’s infatuation with bourgeois technology, centralization, technocratic planning, etc. Lenin seemed to assume that capitalist industry, managerial techniques, etc., were class-neutral, that is, that what made them bourgeois was that they were controlled by the bourgeoisie and were used to further its interests.

He therefore assumed that after a revolution, the workers could take over this industry, technology, etc., more or less *as is*, and put it to work for themselves. All that was necessary, he thought, was that the workers needed to be able to control it (although by 1918, in my opinion, he seemed to think that control by the Bolshevik party was sufficient to guarantee working class control; in 1922–23, he seems to have changed his mind, but by that time it was too late).

It did not occur to him that capitalist industry, technology, managerial techniques, etc., are bourgeois through and through, in their very structure. The same mistake is apparent in *The State and Revolution*.

To be specific: as we know, Lenin was very impressed with the German postal system and believed that its class content did not reside in its form of organization, but in the fact that it was subordinated to a landlord-Junker state. This idea appears in *The State and Revolution*. It is worth citing a passage at some length:

A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the *postal service* an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At the present the postal service is a business organised on the lines of a *state-capitalist* monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organisations of a similar type, in which, standing over the “common” people, who are overworked and starved, one has the same bourgeois democracy. But the mechanism of social management is here

already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machine of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the “parasite,” a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them *all*, as indeed *all* “state” officials in general, workmen’s wages. Here is a concrete practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfillment will rid the working people of exploitation... To organise the *whole* economy on the lines of the postal service... all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—this is our immediate aim. This is the state and this is the economic foundation we need. (*Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 426–7, emphasis in original.)

Reading this in light of everything that has happened in the state capitalist countries (and refusing to give Lenin the benefit of the doubt, as I used to do), I find this passage truly frightening. Lenin wanted to organize *all society* along the lines of the German postal system, replete with bourgeois technicians, foremen, etc., under the illusion that this structure could be effectively controlled by the workers. Even if all the measures Lenin proposed were implemented, this apparatus would eventually wind up dominating the workers rather than the other way around.

This is because the apparatus itself, *the way it is organized*, its structure, its mode of operation, etc., is bourgeois (the German postal system was probably partly feudal). And as it operates, it reproduces bourgeois social relations within it; this is the very condition of its operation. Even granting Lenin the best intentions, an entire society built along the lines he is describing looks more like a bureaucratic nightmare than a society moving toward eliminating the state.

Unfortunately, this was the model Lenin and the Bolsheviks used to reorganize Russian society in the spring of 1918 and after. It explains why they subordinated the factory committees to the trade unions, why they instituted one-person management, why they built a standing army with traditional discipline, officered by Tsarist generals, etc., etc. You cannot blame this all on the economic crisis, the counterrevolution, the revolt of the Left SRs, etc. While the specific measures may have been determined by these objective conditions, the overall bent, the overall orientation, is present in *The State and Revolution*, written when Lenin was optimistic about the Russian Revolution and the international revolution.

A few other passages from *The State and Revolution* will help to flesh out Lenin’s vision of the revolutionary state/society.

“Until the higher phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the *strictest* control by society *and by the state* over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption...” (Page 470, emphasis in original.)

According to Lenin, the “vital and burning question of *presentday* politics” is: “the expropriation of the capitalists, the conversion of *all* citizens into workers and employees of *one* huge syndicate—the whole state...” (Page 470.)

A few pages later Lenin predicts: “The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory...” (Page 474.)

To be sure, Lenin always emphasizes that the “control” must be exercised “not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of *armed workers*...” (page 470), that the work of the “syndicate” be completely subordinated “to a genuinely democratic state, the state of the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies” (page 470), etc., etc.

But the point made earlier about the German postal system applies here as well. If the institutions of the revolutionary society, such as the economy, are organized along what are essentially bourgeois lines (one huge factory, one huge office, with foremen, accountants and bourgeois technicians), then that society will remain bourgeois. It will be only a matter of time before the bourgeois social relations, continually reproduced and reinforced within the very heart of society, will undermine the control of the “armed workers” and the “Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.”

At its best, the workers’ control that Lenin talks about is entirely external to the apparatus. But if the workers continue to live and, even more important, *work* in an environment, in a structure, that is bourgeois, their own activity and their *consciousness* will revert to being bourgeois. Although true social liberation cannot be achieved all at once, it cannot be compartmentalized either.

If the workers are to control the post-revolutionary society, they have to control it at all levels, especially at the immediate levels of their own lives. Lenin seems to believe the workers can continue to work under what are essentially bourgeois conditions while somehow exercising control over this bourgeois apparatus. This is, at best, wishful thinking.

Although I think the theoretical point has been made, I cannot resist the temptation to point out what kind of vision these passages suggest. Although Lenin talks in democratic terms, his conception is very hierarchical and very regimented. There is virtually no room for individual difference and creativity, let alone people just goofing off. With the whole of society organized as one big factory and one big office, liberation is defined as being a disciplined member of an industrial army.

This jibes with the infatuation with economic growth and modernization that I discussed in our last installment as being central to the Bolshevik ethos. It also points directly toward Stalin’s commitment to industrialization “by any means necessary.” It is not yet, not explicitly, as inhumane as Stalin’s, but it certainly gets the ball rolling in that direction.

This brings me to the next state capitalist aspect of *The State and Revolution* that I wish to discuss here. This is the fact that although Lenin talks about workers’ control, winning the battle for democracy, the proletariat organized as the ruling class, uniting legislative and executive functions in individual governing bodies, etc., nowhere in the work do we get an idea that the workers will discuss, decide and carry out *political* decisions. If anything, Lenin seems to think that after the revolution, the questions facing the workers will be overwhelmingly administrative.

Accounting and control — that is *mainly* what is needed for the “smooth working,” for the proper functioning, of *the first phase* of communist society. (Page 473.)

When the *majority* of people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general and popular... (Pages 473–4.)

From the moment all members of society, or at least the vast majority, have learned to administer the state *themselves*, have taken this work into their own hands, have organised control over the insignificant capitalist minority, over the gentry who wish to preserve their capitalist habits and over the workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism—from this moment the need for government of any kind begins to disappear altogether. (Page 474, emphasis in original.)

Throughout this lengthy passage, and throughout *The State and Revolution* as a whole, there is no mention of the need for the mass of workers to make *political* decisions. The workers’ tasks, it seems, are predominantly to suppress and/or “control” the former capitalists, the gentry, etc., and to “keep accounts.” These are basically administrative tasks. Somehow, political decisions, political discussion and debate are absent. Lenin seems to assume that once the dictatorship of the proletariat is established, political discussion

— political debate, political conflict, politics period — is transcended. (Either that or political decisions are reserved exclusively for the revolutionary party, the truly class conscious workers.)

As with much of *The State and Revolution*, it is not obvious that Lenin’s conception is undemocratic. It *looks* democratic: he talks of workers’ control, workers administering the state, a state of the armed workers, etc., etc., but the meat, the content—workers directly and immediately running society, workers, not bourgeois specialists and political leaders, making the political and economic decisions—is just not there.

This helps to explain one of the outstanding features of *The State and Revolution*, in this case an omission. There is no discussion of the revolutionary party in this work, let alone of a multiparty system. I think this is very significant.

After all, Lenin spent most of his adult life building, or trying to build, a revolutionary party. Building such a party was *the* central strategic task of revolutionaries short of carrying out a successful working class revolution. In fact, the existence of such a party was, for Lenin, the *necessary condition* for such a revolution to succeed.

Moreover, it is the revolutionary party, we will remember, that is the source and guarantor of socialist consciousness. Without the party, Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?*, the working class can only attain trade unionist, reformist consciousness. For Lenin to omit a discussion of the revolutionary party in as central a work as *The State and Revolution* means something.

There are, among others, two plausible explanations for this. One, Lenin felt that the revolutionary party would continue to exist and lead the workers. Indeed, its authority

would be undisputed, owing to the success of the revolution, etc. Two, Lenin felt that the party would not be needed and would dissolve.

I personally feel that the first explanation is the likely one. Given Lenin's entire conception of consciousness and leadership, I do not think he could conceive of the dictatorship of the proletariat without the "leading role" of the revolutionary party.

But on some level, it really doesn't matter which explanation is more plausible because they both imply the point made earlier—in Lenin's conception the mass of workers do not make political decisions, either because they are reserved for the party (the workers' delegates can "discuss" and approve party decisions in the soviets), or because they no longer need to be made.

It is tempting to belabor this point, to try to prove it rather than just suggest it. But I don't think it can be proven directly. Those who feel that Lenin believed in true workers' democracy, where the workers discuss and carry out the political and economic decisions of society, will read *The State and Revolution* in that light. After many readings of the book, and much thought, I do not believe Lenin believed in what we would call workers' democracy. Direct workers' control over the factories and workers' democracy are, to Lenin, stepping stones, part of a transitional stage, toward a very abstract "higher democracy," what is in fact a very centralized, hierarchical, bureaucratic, regimented "dictatorship of the proletariat."

This point can perhaps be better made the other way around. Lenin does not seem to recognize that the socialist revolution must involve, at its very core, a change in *social relations*, a change in how people relate to each other. This change has to start right from the beginning; it cannot be delayed until some indefinite point in the future, say, the so-called "higher phase" of communism.

Under capitalism, people by and large relate to each other in a competitive, alienated manner. Cooperation exists, of course, but it tends to be subordinated to the competitive, hierarchical structure and ethos of capitalism. Socialism is a society in which cooperation — people helping each other, trying to work together, trying to live together — becomes predominant. People still compete, but this competition is primarily constructive, it remains within the framework of people cooperating.

During a revolution, the new, cooperative social relations have to begin appearing among the workers and oppressed classes right away. The workers have to learn how to relate to each other in this new way. They learn this through reorganizing their work situations, and through directly governing society at all levels. They have to learn how to manage all of their affairs through cooperation. And they (we) can only learn this by doing it directly.

This dimension of the socialist revolution seems to be totally lost on Lenin. The socialist revolution, in his conception, is largely a change in form. But much of the content of the old society—bourgeois technology, bourgeois managerial techniques, hierarchical structures, factory discipline and, I would suggest, bourgeois social relations—remains.

In fact, the whole human dimension is lacking from *The State and Revolution*. True, Lenin is writing theory and theory is abstract. But somehow his theory about what

ought to be one of the profoundest transformations of human society, of human social relations, of the human personality is disturbingly flat, non-human. At times, Lenin seems to get excited, but his vision is so abstract that it all rings hollow to me, at least now.

I suspect that this flatness reflects a far deeper problem in his thinking and in much of Marxist theory in general. Somehow, people, concrete human beings, are not quite real. The real reality is the social and historical categories, social classes, states, forces and relations of production, modes of production.

These categories may or may not be useful in analyzing history and human society. But they are not themselves that history, that society, that human reality. Human beings (and human history) cannot be reduced to purely logical categories. They are more complicated than that. This is what makes them interesting, unique, lovable, hateable, etc. And it's what makes human beings and human societies ultimately unpredictable. Without this unpredictability, without the special dimension of people that cannot be reduced to categories, to abstractions, there is no life.

The fundamental fallacy of *The State and Revolution*, much of Marxism and much of most of what passes for sociology and social theory, then, is that it takes itself too seriously. It believes that the abstractions, the categories, the theories are the real reality, and the concrete, the non-reducible, is some kind of epiphenomenon, something derivative and not quite real. These theories may or may not be true (meaning, roughly, approximately true), but they are not the reality. Concrete people, concrete history—life—is the reality.

Seeing Marxist theory as the underlying reality, Lenin, in *The State and Revolution* and elsewhere, conceived of a vision of the revolutionary society that constrains human beings and human life within what are ultimately dead abstractions. With a fundamental approach and mindset like this, is it any wonder that the movement Lenin built and led created a society that squelches out life in the interest of dead structures, categories and ideology?

By way of conclusion, I want to repeat a point I've made periodically. I am not trying to prove that everything Lenin did or wrote is undemocratic, state capitalist or totalitarian. Nor am I suggesting that Lenin willfully, knowingly, was an undemocratic person (like, say, Adolf Hitler, who knew exactly what he was doing). I think Lenin saw himself as being very democratic, very committed to workers' rule, etc. Yet, his underlying conception and vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or a worker-run society, were undemocratic.

A lot of the reason for this had to do with the fact that he was a product of his time and place; backward, undemocratic Russia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a tiny, very young working class surrounded by millions of illiterate peasants, etc. Part of the reason had to do with Lenin's own upbringing and personality.

But I think most of the reason for Lenin's ultimately undemocratic vision was his belief that Marxism was a science, which, to him, meant that it was absolutely true. If the theory is True, and it says that a workers' revolution and a workers' society will

take such and such a form and do such and such a thing, then there is no place for real democracy. Since it is all inevitable, there is no room for choice or, if there is choice, it is the prerogative of those who understand the Science, who have access to the Truth, that is, the revolutionary party. This will be the theme of the next installment.

-FIVE-

Lenin's Theory of Knowledge

Part I

IN this installment of our series on Leninism, I propose to take up Lenin's conception of human knowledge and truth.

This is a complicated subject which would be very difficult to write about even if I were an expert. Since I am not, and since I am writing to an audience made up of readers with different levels of philosophic (and other) knowledge, and since I am writing a newspaper article, not a book, my task is not easy. I say this by way of an apology right at the outset: I am sorry if my discussion is not as lucid as it might be.

However, I really have no choice but to make the attempt to explain these matters since I believe they are the heart of the problem this series is meant to investigate.

And this is, to repeat, to what degree is the theory and practice of Leninism responsible for the establishment of state capitalism in Russia? Or, putting the question somewhat differently, what aspects of the theory and practice of Leninism point to, or presage, state capitalism?

Contrary to my usual procedure, I will state my conclusions first.

I am convinced that Lenin and the Bolshevik Party as a whole believed: 1) that there is an absolute truth (I mean by this that reality is determined and predictable); 2) that absolute knowledge, that is, perfect knowledge of that truth, is possible; 3) that such truth and knowledge exist in respect to human society and history; 4) that Marxism is the knowledge of this truth; and 5) that within Russia, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were the only real Marxists.

I am also convinced that these propositions are the philosophical foundation of state capitalism, that they, when combined with the Marxist call to carry out its program through the seizure of state power, point directly to the establishment of state capitalism. I do not insist that a party holding to these or similar propositions will *inevitably* create state capitalism, only that if it *does* seize state power, it is highly probable that it will.

If there is one and only one (political) truth, and if your party, by virtue of its ideology and program, is the sole possessor of that truth, then you are not going to think very highly of political debate, political pluralism, and the right of other parties

and organizations to exist, organize themselves and openly propagate their views. You might not always be against these things, but they will never be the top priority.

Since you already have the truth, politically and otherwise, you don't need a dialogue/debate with other forces to obtain it. And if you *have* seized power and things get rough, political pluralism and debate will seem like downright luxuries that can, and should, be done away with, if "only temporarily." Which, to a great degree, was done by the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership, not Stalin's, in Russia.

I do not contend that Leninism and Marxism are the only world views that hold to notions of absolute truth and knowledge. Probably most people in the world—certainly in the West—believe in absolute truth and knowledge, in the sense that there *is* an absolute truth, and absolute knowledge of that truth, at least in some domains, is possible.

I am also not arguing that a belief in absolute truth and knowledge necessarily equals a totalitarian ideology. Albert Einstein, the author of the theory of relativity, believed that the universe is deterministic, that is, that there is an absolute truth in respect to the structure of the universe. He also believed that science is capable of comprehending it, in other words, that an absolute knowledge of that structure is possible. Yet, Albert Einstein was one of the least totalitarian-minded people of this century.

I do suggest, however, that the belief in absolute truth and knowledge is the kernel of a totalitarian ideology and that every world view or ideology based on such a belief has a *totalitarian potential*.

The chief Western religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are good examples. They are all based on a belief in both absolute truth and absolute knowledge of this truth (not that they are always internally consistent about this). And they all contain totalitarian potentialities.

Look at Islam, not only in Iran, whose current rulers hold to a particularly fundamentalist version of that religion, but elsewhere. Look at Judaism, not only right-wing fanatics, such as Meir Kahane, but also mainstream Zionism. Look, too, at the fundamentalist Christian groups in the U.S. which, taken as a whole, are very large, very rich and very powerful and scare me to death: they want to impose their very narrow and reactionary ideology on everybody in the country.

Not least, look at the Catholic Church. For a variety of reasons, the totalitarian potential of Catholicism (which, as such, is neither greater nor less than that of Protestantism, Islam or Judaism) is particularly apparent. Catholicism has a dictator (the Pope, God's representative), a very defined and narrow dogma and regulations, from which dissent is not allowed (Pope John Paul II reminded U.S. Catholics of this in his recent tour), a huge political apparatus, including courts and a secret police.

In the past, the Church also attempted to set up actual totalitarian societies. In Western Europe during the Middle Ages, it came quite close to doing so, at least as close as one could get given the limited technology available. It owned between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the land and exploited thousands of serfs. It imposed a nearly complete ideolog-

ical (religious) monopoly on the entire society. Jews were sometimes tolerated (under special restriction), but often massacred, as during the Crusades. Pagan traditions were snuffed out or coopted. And the Inquisition, in its various versions, investigated, exposed, tortured and killed heretics.

In fact, the Church, under the aegis of the archfanatical Jesuits (the Society of Jesus), *did* build a totalitarian society in Paraguay, where it ruled over and exploited large numbers of the indigenous people (in the interests of their salvation, of course).

These examples suggest, at least to me, that the belief in absolute truth and knowledge is the underlying core of totalitarian worldviews. In and of itself, however, such a belief does not necessarily add up to totalitarianism. In order for a world view to be such, it must also believe that absolute truth and knowledge are possible in respect to human society, that is, economics and politics, that it (the particular world view) itself embodies the sole knowledge of that truth, and that this world view, and an economic, political and social program reflecting it, should be imposed on society.

Although I believe all these characteristics pertain to Leninism, I would particularly like to focus on one, Lenin's conception of truth and knowledge.

Lenin, like most people of his day, believed in absolute truth and knowledge, that is, that the world has a definite, determined structure, and that precise, absolute knowledge of that truth is possible. He wrote an entire book devoted to defending this proposition (although he hedged his words), along with his interpretation of dialectical materialism, which he considered to be the philosophy of Marxism.

The book is *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, published in 1909, and it is this work that I wish to discuss at some length.

Materialism and Empirio-criticism was written as a polemic against Anatoly Bogdanov and Aleksandr Lunacharsky, two Bolsheviks who were attracted to the ideas of Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius, Henri Poincare and other scientists, mathematician and philosophers who were the precursors of a school of philosophy called logical positivism. Bogdanov and Lunacharsky had been interested in the ideas of Ernst Mach (the most influential of these thinkers) for some time and in 1908 published a book that contained contributions from Mach and others. Lenin went to London in that year, spent a lot of time studying the literature and came out with *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* the following year.

Although Lenin had expressed concern about Mach's influence earlier in the decade, his decision to write a book attacking him was motivated primarily by internal Bolshevik factional politics. (When Bogdanov and Lunacharsky agreed with Lenin—indeed, for a while they were his main stalwarts—you can be sure he did not publicly attack them for philosophical heresy. It was only when they disagreed with him that he did so. What this means about Lenin's methods I will leave to the reader's interpretation.)

The circumstances of the dispute were these. In the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905, which was defeated, a great demoralization set in among the working class and the revolutionary movement. The Bolsheviks were not unaffected by this. Luce the

other groups, they lost their mass base, were hit by mass defections and dwindled away almost to nothing. The Bolsheviks' underground apparatus almost ceased to exist.

During this period, Lenin sought to take advantage of whatever scraps of legal activity the Bolsheviks could engage in. One of these was running for and participating in the Duma, a semi-legislative body, elected in a highly indirect and undemocratic manner, that Tsar Nicholas II had conceded at the height of the revolution.

At first, Lenin opposed running in the elections for the Duma and participating in its deliberations. The Mensheviks, who were still in the same party, generally favored participation. Later, when it had become clear that the revolution was over and a reactionary period had set in, Lenin changed his mind and wanted the Bolsheviks to participate to gain whatever space for conducting revolutionary agitation this allowed, no matter how limited.

Within the Bolshevik faction, Lenin was isolated, opposed by his former allies, including Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. (There were a variety of tendencies among the Bolsheviks on this issue. Some favored an out-and-out boycott of the elections and the Duma itself. Some favored participating in the elections, but then, after presenting some kind of ultimatum, walking out. Later some wanted to recall the delegates that had been elected. But the differences are not very significant, at least not today.) Since Lenin felt strongly about the issue, the discussion was heated.

In addition to their "boycottism," Lunacharsky and Bogdanov, along with others, including the writer Maxim Gorky, were playing around with creating a kind of proletarian religion, as a way of competing with the established churches for the minds of the demoralized workers.

Lenin opposed this "God-building," along with "boycottism." Writing *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* was thus a convenient way to discredit Bogdanov and Lunacharsky. It was also a good way to defend what he saw as Marxist orthodoxy and thus firm up the faithful during a particularly rough period.

Although *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* is directed against a number of thinkers, I would like to focus on Ernst Mach (1838—1916), since he was probably the most important of Lenin's targets.

Mach was an Austrian scientist and philosopher, and the author of a number of well-respected books on such topics as dynamics and optics. Like most physical scientists of his day, Mach was particularly concerned about a number of contemporary developments that violated the strictures of the accepted physics of his era. In fact, these developments were to lead to the collapse of the entire edifice of classical physics (built up over a period of over three hundred years), and a conceptual revolution in science, exemplified by the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics.

Mach's proposal to deal with the developing crisis was to radically apply what has long been a fundamental postulate of scientific thinking—*economy of thought*—e.g., a simple theory is better than a complex one; if a particular idea is not essential to explain something, discard it; the less speculation the better, etc. (The French mathematician

and scientist Laplace, when asked by Napoleon why he had not included God in his theory of planetary motions, replied that he “had no need of that hypothesis.”)

Mach proposed to take this dictum as far as possible, doing away with all conceptions that were not capable of direct experimental verification. He was, in fact, skeptical of all scientific laws, which he considered at worst to be unprovable metaphysical speculations, and, at best, convenient devices for organizing data that the human mind was too lazy to remember in any other way.

Mach was particularly critical of theoretical mechanical models, such as the etherial continuums that were then used to explain the phenomena of light, electricity and magnetism. Insofar as he accepted scientific laws, these were mathematical/statistical models, such as the laws of thermodynamics, which establish general relationships among observed phenomena, without necessarily entailing a specific model of what actually happens on the micro level.

Mach, for example, never accepted the atomic theory of matter, since he couldn’t see atoms and their existence had not yet been experimentally demonstrated. In this, he was to be proven dreadfully wrong.

However, Mach also rejected the idea of absolute space and time, a fundamental tenet of classical (Newtonian) physics. The young Albert Einstein was a follower of Mach and even though he eventually abandoned Mach’s approach, Mach had a profound influence on the development of the theory of relativity. (Ironically but consistently, Mach never accepted that theory.)

Philosophically speaking, what Mach’s approach entailed was to establish immediate sense experience, that is, what we sense, in the most immediate and narrow terms, with our eyes, ears, senses of taste, smell and touch (and, by extension, through experimental apparatuses), as the only basis of real knowledge, the only reality that we are justified in accepting or discussing. Since one can’t truly know anything beyond our immediate sense data, it is futile, indeed self-indulgent, to try to conceptualize it.

The idea, however, leads to, or implies, that there *is* no reality beyond what our senses immediately perceive. This, in turn, implies that being and perceiving are inextricably linked. Put another way, Mach’s approach implies that nothing exists unless it is perceived, that there is no objective reality separate and apart from a perceiving subject.

Now this, in its essence, was the position of the Anglican Bishop, George Berkeley, an 18th-century cleric and philosopher, who based a proof of the existence of God on it. (Nothing exists unless it is perceived. Since there are clearly things that continue to exist when human beings cease to look at them, this is the proof that there exists an omnipresent perceiver—a mind that perceives everything, that is, God.)

(It is worth noting, before we go on, that the idea that being and perception are inextricably linked, that at least on the subatomic level the act of perception determines to some degree what is being perceived is—rightly or wrongly, philosophically-speaking—a fundamental conclusion of the most widely accepted interpretation —the so-called

“Copenhagen interpretation”—of quantum mechanics, one of the chief pillars of 20th century physics.

(It is also worth noting that in contemporary theoretical physics, mathematical models have replaced mechanical ones. This is particularly true of atomic physics: Werner Heisenberg, a major figure in the development of quantum mechanics, wrote in 1945: “The atom of modern physics can be symbolized only through a partial differential equation in an abstract space of many dimensions. All its qualities are inferential; no material properties can be directly attributed to it. That is to say, any picture of the atom that our imagination is able to invent is for that very reason defective.” [Quoted in *A History of the Sciences*, by Stephen F. Mason, p. 502.]

(In short, whatever we may think of the philosophical implications of Mach’s ideas, they have become far more influential in 20th century science than Lenin could have surmised.)

The implied logic of Mach’s ideas that I have sketched was, in fact, the main target of Lenin’s attack on him and the other “empirio-critics” (the term was Avenarius’) in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Mach’s assertion that all that we can know is the immediate data of experience (only the “facts” are real), Lenin argued, leads directly to the rejection of objective reality (a reality that exists independently of a perceiving subject — a fundamental proposition of Marxism) and to the philosophy of Berkeley and religion (what Lenin calls “fideism,” from Latin for “faith”). If one gives one inch of ground to the ideas of Mach, Avenarius and the others, Lenin insists, one abandons dialectical materialism in favor of one or another variety of idealism and bourgeois philosophy.

I believe Lenin’s specific critique of Mach’s position is basically valid. Yet, in attacking Mach, Lenin goes too far in the opposite direction. Where Mach grants scientific laws only a pragmatic, utilitarian validity (i.e., they are convenient for organizing the facts or data), Lenin sets up scientific laws as virtually absolute, as directly reflecting (or corresponding to) objective reality. Despite many caveats and obfuscations, in other words, Lenin argues for the possibility of absolute knowledge.

A careful reading of one of the key passages of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* will show this. The following paragraph (from V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 14, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 326) is a kind of summation, a brief statement of what Lenin is advocating in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* and elsewhere:

Materialism in general recognises objectively real being (matter) as independent of the consciousness, sensation, experience, etc., of humanity. Historical materialism recognises social being as independent of the social consciousness of humanity. In both cases consciousness is only the reflection of being, at best an approximately true (adequate, perfectly exact) reflection of it. From this Marxist philosophy, which is cast from a single piece of steel, you cannot eliminate one basic premise, one essential part, without departing from objective truth, without falling a prey to a bourgeois-reactionary falsehood.

To me, the most striking thing about this passage is its dogmatism. Immediately after writing that consciousness (and hence, knowledge) can only “at best” approximate “being” (reality), Lenin pens what can essentially be paraphrased as “and if you question one phrase of what I have written here (that is, my interpretation of Marxism), you are wrong, have departed from ‘objective truth’ and are promoting ‘bourgeois-reactionary falsehood.’ ”

In other words, while consciousness/knowledge in general may be only approximately true, Marxism (rather, Lenin’s interpretation of it) is absolutely true. And *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* as a whole is written to discourage or prevent any questioning of Marxism in light of the developments in physics that were to culminate in a profound revolution in scientific thought. This, I argue, is the real message of the book. (In fact, there is a lot wrong with Lenin’s paragraph, even from a Marxist framework, but we will get to that later.)

Elsewhere, Lenin lets the cat out of the bag: “Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth, which is compounded of a sum-total of relative truths. Each step in the development of science adds new grains to the sum of absolute truth, but the limits of the truth of each scientific proposition are relative, now expanding, now shrinking with the growth of knowledge.” (P. 135.) On the next page, Lenin writes: “From the standpoint of modern materialism, i.e., Marxism, the *limits* of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is *unconditional*, and the fact that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional.”

These passages are Lenin’s attempts to elucidate a passage he has just cited from Frederick Engels’ *Anti-Duhring*. Although our purpose here is not to discuss Engels’ (or Marx’s) views of truth and knowledge, it is worth citing the critical passage at some length. What follows are Engels’ words as quoted by Lenin {*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, same edition, pp. 133–134):

“Now we come to the question whether any, and if so which, products of human knowledge ever can have sovereign validity and an unconditional claim {*Anspruch*) to truth” (Sth German ed., p. 79). And Engels answers the question thus:

“The sovereignty of thought is realised in a series of extremely unsovereignly-thinking human beings; the knowledge which has an unconditional claim to the truth is realised in a series of relative errors; neither the one nor the other (i.e., neither absolutely true knowledge, nor sovereign thought) can be fully realised except through an unending duration of human existence.

“Here once again we find the same contradiction as we found above, between the character of human thought, necessarily conceived as absolute, and its reality in individual human beings, all of whom think only limitedly. This is a contradiction which can only be solved in the infinite progress, in what is—at least practically for us—an endless succession of generations of mankind. In this sense human thought is only as much sovereign as not sovereign, and its capacity for knowledge just as much unlimited as limited. It is sovereign in its disposition {*Anlage*), its vocation, its possibilities

and its historical ultimate goal; it is not sovereign and it is limited in its individual realisation and in reality at each particular moment.”

Without analyzing this passage in any depth, it is necessary to note that Engels, while admitting the possibility of absolute, “sovereign” knowledge, hedges his bets quite a bit. (In my opinion, he fudges the question.) To say that absolute knowledge is possible through an “unending duration of human existence” and/or the “endless succession of generations of mankind,” or that “human thought is only as much sovereign as not sovereign” is not making a very decisive case. And it quite a bit different from saying that “Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth, which is compounded of a sum-total of relative truths.”

Although Engels is pushed in the direction of saying that approaching the truth “in the infinite progression” (that is, say, the way a hyperbola approaches its asymptotes) eventually adds up to absolute knowledge, he tries to hold himself back. Lenin, on the other hand, at best gives lip service to the idea that knowledge at any given time is relative, and jumps over the “asymptotic gap” as if it had no relevance whatever.

Engels at least had an excuse for believing that knowledge could be compared to a smooth curve, that it increasingly approached absolute truth. He was living in the last stage of an era that had seen the sciences expand more or less continuously and smoothly for a few hundred years. Until the latter part of his life, and certainly during his formative period, scientific developments seemed to fit neatly into the general framework that had reached a polished and elegant form at the time of Isaac Newton (1642–1727). Of course absolute knowledge, as the gradual addition of relative truths, seemed possible.

Lenin, living at the time of a scientific revolution that would overturn the old framework, had no such excuse. And despite this, his views are less tempered than Engels’.

Further on, Lenin is even more explicit. In discussing the role of practice, and after a typical caveat to the effect that practice can never “...either confirm or refute any human idea *completely*” (his emphasis), Lenin writes: “If what our practice confirms is the sole, ultimate and objective truth, then from this must follow the recognition that the only path to this truth is the path of science, which holds the materialist point of view” (p. 141).

And still further, denouncing Bogdanov’s willingness to recognize Marx’s theory of the circulation of money as an objective truth only for “our time,” and refusing to attribute to this theory a “superhistorically objective truth,” Lenin tells the whole story (all emphasis is Lenin’s):

The correspondence of this theory to practice cannot be altered by any future circumstances, for the same simple reason that makes it an *eternal* truth that Napoleon died on May 5, 1821. But inasmuch as the criterion of practice, i.e., the course of development of *all* capitalist countries in the last few decades, proves only the objective truth of Marx’s *whole* social and economic theory in general, and not merely one or the other of its parts, formulations, etc., it is clear that to talk here of the “dogmatism”

of the Marxists is to make an unpardonable concession to bourgeois economics. The sole conclusion to be drawn from the opinion held by Marxists that Marx's theory is an objective truth is that by following the *path* of Marxian theory we shall draw closer and closer to objective truth (without ever exhausting it); but by following *any other path* we shall arrive at nothing but confusion and lies. (P. 143.)

This, I believe, should be enough to demonstrate that Lenin believed in absolute truth (if the words themselves don't convince you, the tone ought to), not only in general, but also that Marxism is that truth, in particular.

-SIX-

Lenin's Theory of Knowledge

Part II

IN our last installment of this series, I began to discuss the question of absolute truth and knowledge and Lenin's attitude toward it.

In particular, I mentioned that I feel that a belief in absolute knowledge represents a "totalitarian kernel," a potential for a totalitarian ideology. And through a cursory sketch of Lenin's book on the question of knowledge, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, I showed that despite some hedging Lenin did believe in absolute truth and the possibility of absolute knowledge.

What I would like to do in this installment is to discuss Lenin's theory of knowledge, particularly its failure to recognize that the mind/knowledge is active; sketch how this conception led him to misunderstand, and in fact to oppose, the scientific revolution going on at the time; and suggest how his belief in absolute knowledge (embodied, at least as far as society and history are concerned, in Marxism) helped pave the way for the establishment of state capitalism in Russia.

In *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Lenin puts forward a theory of knowledge that, at least at that time, underlay his belief in absolute truth and knowledge. This theory can be expressed in a few propositions: 1) reality is nothing but matter in motion; 2) human knowledge is a reflection of that reality and corresponds to it; 3) the truth of any given thought, idea, theory, etc., is proven or disproven through experiments that test predictions deduced from the theory, as well as the general success of the theory in terms of developing technology and furthering science.

Despite the apparent plausibility of this view (it is a kind of common-sense viewpoint), it really can't stand up to a serious investigation of the issue.

In the first place, it is contradicted by other ideas about knowledge and consciousness that Lenin himself held. Lenin, like most Marxists, believed in the notion of "false consciousness." This is a consciousness (a view of the world, a set of values, etc.), held by certain people in society that does not "correspond" to their class position.

For example, to Marxists, the “true” consciousness of members of the working class, true “proletarian consciousness,” is Marxism, or at least some commitment to revolution and socialism. Yet, most workers are not revolutionary socialists; they do not have “proletarian consciousness.” Instead, they share the world views of other, non-proletarian classes, such as the ruling class or sections of the middle class. The workers have “false consciousness.”

This is not just the result of the bourgeois media, bourgeois education, etc., although they certainly contribute. It also is more than the effect of the “hegemony” (a kind of cultural leadership) of the ruling class, in the sense described by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci.

The workers’ “false consciousness” comes from the on-going reality of their daily lives, that they are workers who work at such and such workplaces, sell their labor-power for wages, etc., and enter into certain relations with their co-workers, management, merchants, representatives of the state and (more indirectly) other capitalists. Their “false consciousness” flows out, is a part of, the web of day-to-day social relations that they are enmeshed in. Their consciousness “reflects” these relations.

But this raises a bit of a problem. If “false consciousness” is a reflection of (social) reality, how do we get *knowledge*, if it, too, is a reflection of reality? Or, if knowledge is the result of the reflection of reality in the mind, where does “false consciousness” come from? Clearly, there is something missing, some “middle term,” in Lenin’s theory of knowledge. Lenin has two poles, reality and knowledge, one of which reflects the other. But the nature of that reflection must be different between true knowledge on the one hand and false knowledge on the other. Why and how this happens have to be explained.

In fact, the theory of knowledge that Lenin puts forward is considerably less sophisticated than that of Karl Marx, whose theory Lenin thought he was propounding. (Lenin’s conception is basically a throwback to the French materialists—Diderot, d’Alembert, for example—of the 18th century.)

To Marx, reality (natural or social) and consciousness/knowledge are not two polar terms with nothing between them (one merely reflecting the other). He saw them as different aspects, two facets, of a *social process* (“practice,” or “praxis” in Greek), in which humanity transforms both itself and reality through work.

(Lenin talks about “practice” in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, but he tends to reduce it to a narrow form and to ignore its fundamental content for Marx, the social process through which humanity creates itself.)

In Lenin’s presentation, reality is basically given, stolidly present; human consciousness just reflects it. For all of his talk about *dialectical* materialism, Lenin fails to see the “dialectic” where it can most truly be said to exist—in the process of the reciprocal transformation of humanity and nature through labor.

Marx, in contrast, realized that reality, natural as well as social, is as changed by this process as human beings are. One aspect of this change is obvious: society evolves,

and as it does so the world/ nature is transformed by the development of technology, the impact of human society on nature (not always to the good, clearly), etc.

But there is another facet to this idea, one not so easily grasped. And this is that nature, as it is present to human beings, as human beings perceive and confront it, changes. The nature that primitive peoples perceived, their image of it, is different from that of modern humanity. Some of this change is immediately technical: the universe that contemporary humanity perceives through modern instruments, including radio telescopes, planetary probes, etc., is a lot different from the universe primitive people could see with the naked eye.

But there is a social/cultural difference as well. The universe that was populated and moved by specific gods and spirits is a different universe from that conveyed by the idea that space is most accurately presented as a non-Euclidean geometry and sub-atomic particles by a series of partial differential equations.

It is not that the “ultimate nature” (whatever that might be) of the universe has necessarily changed, only that nature, “reality,” is not just given—presented in toto and as it “really is”—to humanity, so that the human mind simply reflects it. What Lenin didn’t understand (at least when he wrote *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*) is that the human mind (human consciousness, knowledge), taken individually and socially, is *active*. It does not just passively reflect reality; it changes how reality is presented to it, how it perceives reality.

We can clarify this some more by looking at the question a bit differently. Lenin says that the mind reflects reality, but a look at how an individual (or a group of individuals) perceives reality at any given level suggests that this view is simplistic.

Even if we assume that the mind is like a camera, in that it records without alteration the (visual) information it receives, we can easily see that it is not purely passive. A camera has to be pointed in a certain direction; and, with all but primitive cameras, it also has to be focused (manually or automatically). In other words, we have to *choose to look at* something. We don’t just open our eyes and take everything in in 360 degrees, at all distances, etc. This choosing is active. It is not purely passive, like a mirror.

In fact, this activity involves processes a lot more complicated than aiming and setting a focal length. For example, the mind has to *interpret* what it sees, to *arrange* the infinite amount of data that enters it into patterns. A baby not only has to learn how to point his/her eyes in a certain direction and to focus them, he/she also has to learn what the patterns of different colors and shapes mean, which of those colors and shapes “belong together” (e.g., as a material object, as a person, etc.).

Even after we have learned how to recognize patterns and shapes, there always remains the question of relevance. At any given time and place, we have to decide which of all the things we see are relevant to us. If we are in a coffee shop and are seated at a table, the styrofoam cup in front of us is more important than the moving cars in the street outside. But when we are crossing that street a bit later, we’d better be paying more attention to the cars than to the styrofoam cup lying in the gutter.

Just considering the question of one sense, that of sight, we can recognize that a lot more is involved than the eye merely reflecting reality. The visual function involves, requires, the selection and interpretation of the data that impinges on the eye. This is an active process, not a passive process of reflection.

In a recent discussion about his participation in a group of scientists and others searching for fossils in East Africa, Stephen Jay Gould, the Harvard paleontologist and science writer, expresses this point in a somewhat different context. Explaining that while some searchers have a sharp eye for fossil fragments and others can piece them together, he only finds snails, Gould writes:

All field naturalists know and respect the phenomenon of “search image”—the best proof that observation is an interaction of mind and nature, not a fully objective and reproducible mapping of outside upon inside, done in the same way by all careful and competent people. In short, you see what you are trained to view—and observation of different sorts of objects often requires a conscious shift of focus, not a total and indiscriminate expansion in the hopes of seeing everything. The world is too crowded with wonders for simultaneous perception of all;

we learn our fruitful selectivities. (*Natural History*, May, 1987, p. 27.)

If the operation of a single sense is active, isn't it obvious that processes as complex as consciousness and knowledge entail activity? Scientists do not just take in all the data that present themselves to them. They have to choose what data are relevant to them. At the broadest level, this involves choosing the very field any given scientist will study and investigate, or the given problem within the field he/she will investigate.

More specific still, as they seek to investigate a specific phenomenon, scientists have to choose a way of approaching the investigation, to decide what kinds of experiments they will carry out to collect what kind of data. And even when these experiments have been carried out and the data recorded, the collected data does not in and of itself suggest the new concept or theory that will explain the phenomenon under investigation.

At this point what is required is an intuitive leap, an inspired guess, that posits a new conception, a new way of looking at the problem, no matter how far-fetched. Albert Einstein described the process this way:

For the creation of a theory, the mere collection of recorded phenomena never suffices—there must always be added a free invention of the human mind that attacks the heart of the matter. (*The Cosmic Code*, by Heinz R. Pagels, p. 141.)

Now, science is a *social* process; it involves many people communicating with each other, over extended periods of time. As such, it is subject to social and cultural influences. Scientists, like the rest of us, live in the societies of their time and place. They have been, by and large, members of specific social classes, etc. And they live in, and to a great extent are created by, specific cultures. All these influences affect scientific knowledge.

Thus, it is not an accident that the physics that emerged from the so-called Copernican Revolution envisaged the universe largely in mechanical terms, as, say, a huge

clock that was created and set going by a Creator who then sat back to watch the clock work in a beautiful simplicity and regularity. This particular physics was developed during the early stages of the development of capitalism, itself based on the creation and utilization of mechanical devices. The society, the technology and the science were part of a single, very complex social process, each creating the means for the development of the others.

The conceptions of the sciences in that period did not just reflect nature, they actively conceptualized nature in a certain way. Such conceptualizations vary greatly in different times. Today, the dominant conceptions of physics are no longer mechanical.

Specifically, by the latter part of the 19th century, mechanistic explanations of phenomena were no longer sufficient to answer the problems that physicists confronted. A new revolution in physics took place that thoroughly changed the way scientists look at the universe. As a result, today the predominant conceptions of physics are mathematical. Space (Einstein called it space-time) is conceived as a (non-Euclidean) geometry; the structure of the atom as a set of complex mathematical equations.

The main point I am trying to establish here is that the mind, human consciousness, taken individually and collectively, is active, not passive. It chooses to look at/investigate certain things and not others. It sees some things as more important, more relevant than others. It interprets what it sees; indeed, the very act of seeing entails this interpreting. As a result, all knowledge has a degree of subjectivity that cannot be eliminated.

This is why different people see reality differently (see a “different reality”). Older people, on balance, see reality differently from young ones. Artists tend to see reality differently from scientists. People in the ruling class see reality differently from working class people. People whose goal in life is to make money see reality differently from people who live for a cause. Not least, people from different countries and cultures see reality differently from each other.

Scientists, unlike artists, have a mutually agreed-upon method of determining which theory, which interpretation, is right. This is through experimentation and other forms of testing theory. As a result, science often appears to embody or to approach absolute knowledge (at least until the next scientific revolution occurs). Nevertheless, even in science, the subjective element of knowledge, the effect of the fact that the mind is active, is not eliminated.

If the mind/human consciousness is active in the sense I have discussed, what does it mean to say, as Lenin does, that knowledge “reflects” reality? Not a whole lot. Obviously, there is *some* connection, some “correspondence” between reality and knowledge (otherwise, the human race would probably be extinct). But it is certainly not mere reflection. Lenin could put forward his view that knowledge was a simple reflection of reality because he did not understand that the human mind, individually and collectively, as consciousness in general and specifically as science, is active.

Lenin’s one-sided and mechanical conception of human consciousness/knowledge (and his dogmatism) is what made him miss the significance of the scientific devel-

opments that were going on at the very time he was writing. Yes, he does have a chapter (Chapter Five) on the “recent revolution in natural science” in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. But Lenin denies that the revolutionary developments in the natural sciences of his time in fact represent any real challenge to traditional scientific conceptions.

Instead, he accuses those scientists grappling with the meaning and implications of these new developments of failing, when they philosophize, to abide by what Lenin considered to be the de facto dialectical materialism they practice when they function as scientists. In other words, Lenin charges them with a kind of failure of nerve.

Lenin basically believed that the philosophical answers to the problems the physicists and other scientists were struggling with had already been given (by dialectical materialism), and that if the scientists stopped being tempted by idealism and “fideism” everything would work out fine. But it was precisely the traditional conceptions of science, including Lenin’s (and Frederick Engels’) notion of dialectical materialism, that could no longer provide satisfactory answers to the questions being posed by the latest scientific discoveries. As a result, Lenin winds up denying the very existence of the revolution in the natural sciences that he claims to be discussing.

That Lenin did not understand what was actually happening in physics at the time is revealed by his attempts to discuss them concretely. Consider the following two sentences:

Natural science was seeking, both in 1872 and 1906, is now seeking, and is discovering—at *least it is groping its way towards*—the atom of electricity, the electron, in three-dimensional space. Science does not doubt that the substance it is investigating exists in three-dimensional space and, hence, that the particles of that substance, although they be so small that we cannot see them, must also “necessarily” exist in this three-dimensional space. (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, pp. ISO-181.)

Leaving aside the question of “substance,” Lenin was as wrong as he could be regarding the question of three-dimensional space. Lenin was writing *after* Albert Einstein had published his paper on the Special Theory of Relativity (1905) which posited the local-ness and variability of time, thus establishing it as a kind of fourth dimension. (Locations in space—what Einstein called space-time—are defined mathematically by four numbers, three representing the traditional dimensions plus a fourth representing time.) Today, cosmologists, those who investigate and speculate about the ultimate structure of the universe, are thinking in terms of theories that posit that the universe has many more than four dimensions. How about, say, 10?

(Is it perhaps unfair to berate Lenin for not being totally up-to-date about the developments of physics of the time, particularly when Einstein’s theory was relatively little known, unaccepted and in no way confirmed? I don’t think so. Who asked Lenin to write a book about problems of philosophy in light of the scientific revolution then underway? Lenin hangs himself because he raised the issue.)

Not accidentally, the person Lenin is polemicizing against with the sentences quoted is none other than Ernst Mach, whom Einstein credited as being one of his major early influences. Although I cannot do it justice in so limited a space, it is worth looking at the issue more closely. This is because the question Mach was raising was to become a fundamental concern of 20th century physics.

In this section of his book, Lenin is discussing Mach's rather hesitant suggestion that physicists should question, and perhaps abandon, the Newtonian conception of absolute space and time:

In modern physics, he [Mach—rt] says, Newton's idea of absolute time and space prevails (pp. 442–444), of time and space as such. This idea seems “to us” senseless, Mach continues... But *in practice*, he claims, this view was *harmless* (unschadlich, S. 442) and therefore for a long time escaped criticism. (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 179.)

To Lenin, this suggestion is “harmful” and must be rejected. Why? Because “Mach's idealist view of space and time...opens the door for fideism and... *seduces* Mach himself into drawing reactionary conclusions.” (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 179.)

Just what are these reactionary conclusions?

For instance, in 1872 Mach wrote that “one does not have to conceive of the chemical elements in a space of three dimensions.” (*Erhaltung der Arbeit*, S. 29, repeated on S. 55.) To do so would be “to impose an unnecessary restriction upon ourselves. There is no more necessity to think of what is mere thought (das bloss Gedachte) spatially, that is to say, in relations to the visible and tangible, than there is to think of it in a definite pitch.” (27) “The reason why a satisfactory theory of electricity has not yet been established is perhaps because we have invariably wanted to explain electrical phenomena in terms of molecular processes in a three dimensional space” (30). (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 179.)

To Lenin this is an absurdity.

The argument from the standpoint of the straightforward and unmuddled Machism which Mach openly advocated in 1872 is quite indisputable: if molecules, atoms, in a word, chemical elements, cannot be perceived, they are “mere thought” (das bloss Gedachte). If so, and if space and time have no objective reality, it is clear that it is not essential to think of atoms *spatially*! Let physics and chemistry “restrict themselves” to a three-dimensional space in which matter moves; for the explanation of electricity, however, we may seek its elements in a space which is *not* three-dimensional! (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, p. 180.)

In fact, wherever he was coming from philosophically, Mach's suggestion (remember he writes “perhaps”) that scientists not restrict themselves to the traditional Newtonian conception of space and time was profoundly prophetic. Today, it is a fundamental tenet of physics. The theory of relativity, with its positing of time as a fourth dimension, was, as we have said, directly influenced by Mach. In quantum dynamics and its later embodiments (quantum electrodynamics, quantum chromodynamics), atoms and their

constituent parts cannot be conceived spatially, time is reversible and traditional logic does not apply.

What would Lenin say?

The point is not that Mach's philosophy was right and that Lenin's was wrong. The point is 1) Lenin was not cognizant of the true nature of the "revolution in natural science" that he was writing about and which so concerned the people he was polemicizing against.

2) Even more important, *Lenin allowed his philosophical preconceptions to prevent him from even considering, let alone accepting, an idea that would become a fundamental tenet of this century's physics.* Because, in Lenin's view, Mach's view "opens the door for fideism" and "seduces Mach himself into drawing reactionary

conclusions," Lenin condemns out-of-hand Mach's suggestion that scientists "not restrict themselves" to the traditional view of space and time and refuses even to consider that reality might have other than three dimensions.

(I think this is the germ of the attempt to use ideology to tell scientists what to do and how to think that would run rampant in Russia under Joseph Stalin (with resultant punishment, including execution, for those scientists who would not buckle under). If a given theory, proposition or assumption is not consistent with (someone's conception of) dialectical materialism and/or if it leads to "reactionary conclusions," it is *a priori* wrong and cannot even be considered. *In the name of science, ideology is raised above science and presumes to dictate to it.*

(Whether Lenin himself ever tried to tell scientists how to think and what to do is not relevant. What is, is that when a party with Lenin's conception of philosophy and science comes to power, it is highly likely that someone in that party will, sooner or later, try to tell scientists what to do and how to think.)

But Lenin's comment about reality only having three dimensions involves more than ignorance and (can I say it?) arrogance. It implies a certain conception of the relation between knowledge and truth, theory and reality.

This is a tendency toward what I like to call the "hypostatization of theory." By this huge word (I can barely pronounce it) I mean a tendency to believe that theory, concepts, are more real, have more substance, than the reality they purport to explain.

This is the opposite of the way Ernst Mach tended to lean. Mach thought of scientific concepts and theories as "mere thought," as kinds of conveniences, ways for the human mind to organize sensations, or data; the question of whether they were true or not, in the traditional sense of the term, was irrelevant. The only meaningful question to ask is—Does a given theory organize the data conveniently? Or, negatively, does any of the data fall outside the confines of the theory? This is a kind of denigration of theory, a denial of the reality or truth of theory.

In contrast to this, Lenin tends to ascribe to theory a greater truth or substantiality than it can reasonably claim. Once a given theory or concept has been proven "true," in Lenin's view, it has more truth to it than the reality it is meant to describe.

This can be seen in his view that reality is, *and can only be* three dimensional. That reality could have more than three dimensions seems totally bizarre to him. This is because Lenin doesn't realize that dimensionality is a concept—specifically, a geometry—an invention of the human mind.

(“Ordinary” reality, that is, reality that is generally present to human beings, may be almost perfectly definable/explainable in terms of three dimensions. But that doesn't mean that reality has, and can only have, three dimensions. By the same token, the universe can today best be described by the theory of relativity that describes space (space-time) in terms of four dimensions, but that doesn't mean reality has, and can only have, four dimensions.)

Lenin takes the concept (in this case, three dimensionality) and makes it *the reality*. This tendency to “hypostatize theory” can be also seen in his comment, cited in our last installment, about Marx's theory of money having an eternal truth comparable to the fact that Napoleon died on May 5, 1821. (We shall leave aside a discussion of the question of how well this latter “fact” stands up in terms of the theory of relativity: what was a specific date for the Earth and its vicinity was many different dates for other parts of the universe. In some parts of the universe, Napoleon has not yet died. In others, he has not yet been born.)

Now, Marx's theory of money is a brilliant theory (as is his analysis of capitalism, in my opinion), but to claim it has an eternal truth, isn't that going a bit too far? Even Marx, arrogant as he was, only claimed a kind of “epochal” truth for his theory, that is, that it is only valid for a specific historical epoch.

But, assuming that Lenin basically meant that Marx's theory of money is absolutely true, I don't think this can be seriously maintained today. For one thing, it has a philosophical content (about the nature of human beings. that the existence of money reflects their alienation from each other and this true nature), which can neither be proved nor disproved.

Far more important, I don't think the existence of absolute truth and knowledge (which, of course, is what saying Marx's theory of money has eternal truth means) can be reasonably asserted.

This is suggested by one of the main achievements of physics in this century, the theory of quantum mechanics, which has been very successful in explaining and predicting atomic and sub-atomic phenomena. One of the tenets of this theory is that it is impossible simultaneously to exactly measure the velocity and position of a sub-atomic particle, for example, an electron (or a photon of electromagnetic radiation). The more accurately one measures its position, the greater variability of values for its velocity one gets. If one measured an electron's velocity exactly its position could not be measured at all.

This is not, according to the theory, simply something that results from the limitations of our minds and our ability to measure. There is a certain randomness, a certain *indeterminism* in the nature of atomic and sub-atomic phenomena. The more one attempts to gain certainty about one aspect, the less certain others become.

Another aspect of the theory is that sub-atomic particles have a two-sided character. Some of their behavior can be explained by assuming they are particulate, that they are simply particles. Other aspects of their behavior are explainable by assuming that they have wave characteristics. Moreover, these distinct behaviors/characteristics are not combinable. They either exhibit one form of behavior/characteristic or the other; they never exhibit both at the same time. Which characteristic is exhibited depends on the experiment one carries out to look for it.

One explanation for this confusing situation, the one that seems to be the most accepted by modern physicists (insofar as they conceptualize these things: one can simply use the equations—we're talking high level math here—without worrying about what they "mean"), is that the wave characteristics represent an indication of the probability of finding a given particle there at any given time.

The main point is that at the atomic and sub-atomic level, there is a degree of randomness or uncertainty about what goes on at any given time. At least at this level, reality is not determined. There is no absolute truth; reality is not precisely this and not that. It can be both and/or neither.

And where there is no absolute truth, in the sense that reality is not precisely determined, there can be no absolute knowledge. All one can have is approximate knowledge. One cannot know for certain what will happen, all one can have is varying degrees of probability that something will happen. This probability may be very high, but it is always a question of probability, not certainty.

Now, while this to me implies that all of natural reality exhibits probabilistic behavior and that knowledge of "macro" phenomena can also only approximate (in many cases, the variability is too small to be of practical impact), many physicists appear to compartmentalize reality. On the sub-atomic level, there is indeterminism and probabilities. On the supra-atomic level, there is determinism and absolute predictability. Yet, in the past few years, physics has become more concerned with the investigation of random processes, processes that are inherently random and unpredictable, "chaotic." I suspect that over the next few years more and more processes previously perceived as being determined and predictable will wind up in the random or at least somewhat indeterminated category.

What I am really trying to get at here is that between the indeterminated, probabilistic nature of reality and the limitations of our ability to measure and our minds, all knowledge of the natural world is, at best, approximate, probabilistic. *There is no absolute knowledge.* One gets greater or lesser probabilities. In some cases, the probability is so high as to be almost certain, but it is still not certain.

At the risk of simplifying, perhaps it is better to say that reality is always more complicated than any given theory. Reality entails change, novelty. Theory, perhaps because of the nature of the human mind, entails uniformity, or to use a term very much in vogue in physics these days, symmetry. Now, there is clearly symmetry in nature, otherwise scientific theories would not be as successful as they have been.

But what if (as I suspect) reality is not totally symmetrical? What if it is not uniform? What if at some basic level it is asymmetrical? Then, there will always be some aspect of reality that will not be incorporable into theories which, by their nature imply uniformity, symmetry, even if it is a “broken” one. If so, this means that at some point any given theory, no matter how successful in predicting phenomena, no matter how perfect it may appear, will eventually come across some kind of phenomenon which it has not explained or predicted and cannot do so. Or, to put it the other way around, sooner or later scientists will discover a phenomenon which is unexplainable by, and incompatible with, current theory.

(If this is so, Lenin’s hypostatization of theory is in fact a form of that very idealism that Lenin hated so much. Theory is an idea, a concept. To believe that scientific theories represent the real reality, truer than the concrete reality we see, hear, and touch, is to believe that ultimate reality is ideal, not material.

(Lenin says material reality consists of “matter in motion.” But the motions of this matter are governed by the “laws of motion” discovered by science. In other words, the structure of this matter, and the structures that are comprised of matter, are determined by those “laws of motion.” But these laws of motion are a kind of logic. To Lenin, then, the real reality, the defining structure of reality, is the logic defined by these “laws of motion.” This is a form of objective idealism. Unbeknownst to himself, Lenin was an idealist.)

Now, if on the level of natural reality, all knowledge is approximate, probabilistic, are we to seriously think that absolute knowledge is possible when it comes to *social* reality, to history, economics, politics, etc.—in short, to people? I don’t think so. In fact, I think the very idea is absurd.

It is precisely the development of the human mind/human consciousness, which so greatly multiplies the complexity of motivation (including doing things out of spite, out of sheer perversity, just for the hell of it, etc.), that makes people so unpredictable. As a result, absolute knowledge of human beings and human society is out of the question.

But Lenin did believe such a knowledge is possible, indeed, that it existed... in the form of Marxism.

From this Marxist philosophy, which is cast from a single piece of steel, you cannot eliminate one basic premise, one essential part, without departing from objective truth, without falling prey to a bourgeoisreactionary falsehood. (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism, Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 326.)

...the criterion of practice, i.e., the course of development of *all* capitalist countries in the last few decades, proves only the objective truth of Marx’s *whole* social and economic theory in general, and not merely one or the other of its parts, formulations, etc... (P. 143)

And this, as I wrote in our last issue, is the philosophical root of state capitalism. If a party which believes that its ideology is the absolute truth (and every other ideology is a “bourgeois reactionary falsehood”) comes to power in an armed revolution, it will

not put too much of a priority on maintaining the democratic rights of other political parties.

More than this, if the rule of that party is threatened, it will not set too great a priority on maintaining the democratic rights of the class that it claims to represent *especially* if or when members of that class start to behave in a way they are not “supposed to.” After all, it is that party that represents the “true consciousness” of the working class. Thus, those workers who support other parties or organizations will be “under the influence of non-proletarian ideologies.”

And their political rights will have to be repressed in order to defend the “rule of the working class.”

And if the entire working class ceases to support that party, the party will politically disfranchise it in the name of the “historic interests of the working class.” In other words, the ideal, abstract working class of Marxist theory will be elevated above the concrete workers and will become an instrument in the workers’ re-enslavement. This, in a nutshell, is what I believe happened in Russia.

Postscript. During World War I, Lenin read Hegel, particularly his *Logic*. While this study was to have a significant impact on Lenin’s thought, it is not likely to have lessened his belief in the possibility of absolute knowledge. If anything, it probably strengthened it. Hegel’s philosophy is centered around the idea that not only is absolute knowledge possible, but that Hegel’s system *is* that absolute knowledge.

Conclusion

BY now, I suspect that my general assessment of Leninism is pretty clear. While I believe that Leninism is not entirely, 100% authoritarian, that is, that there are some truly liberatory and democratic impulses, I believe these impulses are far outweighed by those that point toward and imply state capitalism. Moreover, these latter are so strong that they distort the democratic impulses themselves, rather than merely overshadowing them. For example, the advocacy of a classless and stateless society in *The State and Revolution* is turned into its opposite by Lenin’s conception of how to achieve it, e.g., through building a strong centralized state modeled after the German postal system.

Even though most of the series focused on the state capitalist elements in Leninism, it is probably worth summarizing my views of them. I believe that of the various tendencies within Leninism that point toward state capitalism, the most important are three:

First is the fact that although Leninism advocates the establishment of a stateless society, it not only proposes to use the state to achieve this goal, it sees the use of the state as the *main way* to accomplish this. Not least, although this state is said to be a proletarian state, a dictatorship of the proletariat, it is to be structured, with relatively

minor exceptions, along hierarchical and bureaucratic, that is, capitalistic, principles. Given this, is it any wonder that the outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 was not classless, stateless societies, but monstrous, class divided, state-dominated, social systems?

The second state capitalist tendency within Leninism that I believe to be decisive is its advocacy of coercive, ruthless methods. While some kind of armed force/coercion is inevitable in almost any revolution, Lenin almost revels in it: the need to be “ruthless toward our enemies,” “not to shrink from the most ruthless measures,” to “shoot and shoot and shoot some more.” Since morality lies within, is immanent in, history, that is, morality finds its fruition in the outcome of history (as Marx, following Hegel, argues), there is no need to act morally, there *is* no morality, in the sphere of politics. But outside of Marxian/Hegelian (or any other comparable) metaphysics, how can moral neutralism lead to a moral society? It can’t and hasn’t.

The third fundamental state capitalist tendency in Leninism, and tying all three together, is Lenin’s belief in determinism and absolute knowledge. Physical and social/historical reality is absolutely determined, Marxism represents true knowledge of this reality (it ever increasingly approaches this reality), the Bolshevik faction/ party holds the only correct interpretation of Marxism—these are fundamental tenets of Bolshevik thinking. And they point directly toward the establishment of a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat in the name of the proletariat itself. If the Bolsheviks alone understand Marxism, then only they have true proletarian socialist consciousness; they are the spiritual representatives of the proletariat. When the proletariat disagrees with the Bolshevik Party, it has come under the influence of non-proletarian classes; it no longer is the true proletariat. With this idea firmly engraved in their minds, the Bolsheviks’ suppression of all opposition parties and the outlawing of opposition factions even within the Bolshevik Party was almost inevitable.

This last factor looms even larger when it is realized that this attitude, this total belief that they and only they represent the proletariat — history, morality and truth — was fundamental to the mentality of the Bolsheviks. It created a psychological and moral culture—a ruthless, party-oriented fanaticism—that engulfed everything and drained of all content even the formally democratic aspects of Bolshevik theory. It was from this culture that a man like Stalin emerged, and it is because of this culture that the Bolshevik Party was not able to stop him. While Stalin is of the past, the possibility of new Stalins remains because the intellectual/moral culture of Leninism remains what it has always been.

These three tendencies (along with the others discussed in previous articles), explain what I believe to be the fundamental problem with the strategy and tactics the Bolsheviks pursued after the October Revolution. This was a failure to maintain, a failure even to *try* to maintain, what I call the united front character of the Russian Revolution.

The Russian Revolution, including the February Revolution and the one in October, had a united front character. By this I mean that like all popular revolutions, it was the

outcome of more or less distinct movements of different classes, groups and political organizations that joined forces to overthrow an oppressive regime and social order. The main classes were the workers and the peasants. Many different nationalities, e.g., Ukrainians, White Russians, Finns, Georgians, etc., etc., fought for freedom from Great Russian rule. Various political organizations were involved.

While this was obviously true of the February Revolution, it was also true of the October “Bolshevik” Revolution. While workers and soldiers (mostly peasants in uniform) carried out the revolution in the cities, the peasants, intensifying an uprising that had begun during the summer, carried out the insurrection in the countryside, running out the landlords, burning their estates and seizing the land. (The importance of this part of the struggle is not always recognized.)

The revolution also entailed the continuation of the revolt of the oppressed nationalities. And the organized political forces that led the revolution, insofar as it was led at all, consisted of not only the Bolshevik Party, but the left wing of the Social Revolutionary Party (the “Left SR’s”), and various other left socialist and anarchist organizations.

Although it is not clear whether the revolutionary forces could have held out, given the revolution’s isolation, the poverty of the country, etc., the key to their survival, it seems to me now, lay in the maintenance of the revolution’s united front character, that is, its character of being a kind of coalition of different classes, nationalities, and organizations. This would have meant working out certain rules for political functioning in the soviets, workers’ councils, and other mass organizations. Most important, it would have required a commitment on the part of the major political parties, particularly the Bolsheviks, not to try to squeeze out or suppress the other organizations.

Unfortunately, the Bolsheviks did not pursue such a policy. They didn’t even try to pursue it. From virtually the very beginning, the Bolsheviks worked to concentrate as much political power in their hands as possible. Although they maintained the formal united front with the Left SR’s for seven or eight months, it seems to me that they expected this alliance to fall apart at some point and made little effort to keep it together.

The first major dispute between the Bolsheviks and the Left SR’s was over the signing of a peace treaty with the Germans and Austrians in the late winter of 1918. In the political debates within the Bolshevik Party over signing a treaty (the party almost split over the issue), little or no consideration was given, by Lenin or anyone else, over what the impact would be on the Left SR’s, who opposed signing a treaty. In fact, in Lenin’s speeches and writings on the question, he virtually assumes that the Left SR’s are irrelevant and that it is only a matter of time before the alliance breaks down.

The Left SR’s were pretty sectarian themselves, however, and since the whole question of whether to sign the treaty is problematical, how the Bolsheviks behaved on this issue doesn’t prove a great deal. But a lot more can be said about the way the Bolsheviks related to the peasants in the late spring and early summer of 1918.

As we noted above, the October Revolution was the outcome of a dual struggle, carried out by the workers (about three million), on the one hand, and the peasants (many millions), on the other. The Bolsheviks tried to cement this alliance right after the October insurrection by decreeing that the land belonged to the peasants. (They really had no choice. The peasants had seized the land themselves and the Bolsheviks had almost no organization or base of support in the countryside.)

It seems to me that the only potential guarantee for the revolutionary regime to survive was to maintain the alliance between the workers and the peasants. But, beginning in June of 1918, the Bolsheviks, under the guise of “bringing the revolution to the countryside,” launched a broadside attack on the peasants. In the belief that the kulaks (the better-off peasants, wealthy enough to hire other peasants as laborers), were hoarding grain from the cities threatened with starvation, the Bolsheviks led armed detachments of workers out to the villages to seize supposedly hoarded grain by force. The Bolsheviks also believed that there was a substantial layer of poor peasants (peasants who did not have enough land and who, as a result had to hire themselves out as laborers to the kulaks) who would support the Bolshevik policy. But in fact, after the land seizures of late 1917, almost all the peasants were so-called middle peasants (peasants who had enough land to maintain themselves and their families, but who were not wealthy enough to hire outside help). There were virtually no kulaks or poor peasants.

The Bolsheviks’ policy, as it turned out, was not to “bring the class struggle to the countryside,” but an outright assault on the vast majority of peasants and a severing of the alliance between the workers in the cities and the peasants in the countryside. It was this tactic that finally broke the Bolsheviks’ alliance with the Left SR’s and gave the counterrevolutionary forces (at that point virtually defeated) a mass base of support.

The result was a bloody civil war that lasted over two and a half years, virtually destroyed the Russian economy, and devastated the countryside. When the Bolsheviks finally won (the peasants preferred them, who at least let them keep the land, to the White counterrevolutionaries who, when they conquered a territory, took it away), they were hated by almost everybody.

It has sometimes been argued that the Bolsheviks had no choice but to seize the grain because the people in the cities were starving and had nothing to sell to the peasants in exchange for the grain. But the answer to this is that in 1921, *after* the civil war, *after* the country was laid waste, when the cities had even *less* to offer the peasants in exchange for the grain, the Bolsheviks, at Lenin’s urging, adopted the New Economic Policy (NEP) that allowed the peasants the right to trade grain freely, after they had paid a “tax in kind” to the state. Had this policy been pursued in 1918, much if not most of the destruction of the civil war would have been avoided! The counterrevolutionary forces would have been without a substantial base of support.

In my view, the Bolsheviks’ course was not just an error. It flowed logically out of the Bolsheviks’ basic outlook and politics, particularly the state capitalist tendencies

mentioned above. The Bolsheviks' main concern after the October Revolution was not to maintain the united front character of the revolution. Their main interest was to consolidate as much political power in their hands as possible and to hold onto it by any means necessary, whether or not such means undermined the popular democratic character of the revolution itself.

Since, in their view, the working class is the only consistently revolutionary class, since only the Bolsheviks, with the only true interpretation of Marxism, really represent the working class, since the chief political task is the seizure and maintenance of state power, and since brutal methods are not only allowed but preferred, the Bolsheviks, after the October Revolution, subordinated every other concern to one—to maintain their hold over the state.

I used to believe that the main reason the Bolsheviks did what they did was the result of external factors, particularly the poverty of the country, the fact that there were no successful workers' revolutions in the more economically developed countries, etc. I now believe that had there been such revolutions, the outcome, at least in Russia, would not have been much different than it was. The country would not have been destroyed and perhaps Bolshevik rule would have been more benign. But Russia would still have been ruled by the Bolsheviks and the social system that would have been established would be state capitalism, not a libertarian socialism. This is because the fundamental, underlying politics of the Bolsheviks, particularly the focus on using the state and their belief that they possessed absolute knowledge of history, society and politics, were state capitalist.

It is one thing to analyze and criticize Leninism, however, it is another to come up with a new set of political ideas, one that avoids the regressive tendencies of the past. This new task that the Revolutionary Socialist League faces is made a bit feasible if we recognize one fundamental characteristic of the history and evolution of our organization. This is the fact that while our politics have evolved, the underlying set of values that our politics have been meant to represent have remained the same, or to be more accurate, have evolved at a far slower pace. To put it perhaps a bit simplistically, I still believe, and I hope the RSL still believes, that world capitalism is both an unjust and dangerous system that needs to be, and can only be, eliminated by an international revolution carried out by the vast majority of working and oppressed people. The goal of this revolution is to set up a democratic and egalitarian social system, a society governed directly and democratically by the members of the formerly oppressed classes, that has eliminated the extremes of wealth characteristic of previous social systems and in which the state and other authoritarian institutions have been eliminated.

Up until two years or so ago, I believed that Lenin's interpretation, theory and practice, of Marxism represented an embodiment of this ideal that was both loyal to the ideal and also represented a practical means of achieving it. I did not see Leninism as perfect, but given the alternatives, as I understood them, it seemed to offer the best foundation upon which to elaborate a consistent set of politics.

Such an elaboration is what I think the RSL has tried to do over the last 15 years. In short, we sought to develop an interpretation of Leninism (we never accepted anyone else's) that both represented our fundamental ideals and yet stayed within the formal bounds of Leninism.

I don't think this was all wrong, totally inconsistent or ridiculous. It is easy to look back after you've been through some experiences and say that what we used to believe was silly. But that type of thinking ignores the very process of learning that has enabled one to transcend the earlier ideas.

Given where we were coming from (in the sense of coming out of the student movement of the 1960s), and the fact that there was no significant organized libertarian trend (either revolutionary democratic socialist or anarchist/anti-authoritarian), our political orientation and evolution make a lot of sense. And our politics were, I still believe, the best around. Perhaps if we had been political geniuses we would have been able to come up with a totally new set of politics that went way beyond the political material that we had to work with. But virtually no set of ideas evolves this way; even the greatest of intellectual achievements is synthesized out of previous currents.

With the benefit of hindsight, I think our main theoretical error was to misread Lenin in a revolutionary democratic direction. We tended to overemphasize those elements in Lenin's outlook and practice (which do exist) that point in a democratic direction and underplay or explain away the authoritarian elements.

For example, we gave greater weight to *The State and Revolution* than it actually had for the Bolsheviks themselves. We also tended to overlook or downplay those aspects of that work that are authoritarian.

While this was, I now think, a misinterpretation of Leninism, it was not totally without merit, methodologically speaking. Again, given where we were coming from and what the apparent alternatives were, to try to "bend" the framework of our formal politics to accommodate an increasingly consistent libertarian instinct is quite logical, even prudent. Eventually, however, one must resolve contradictions that have become ever more glaring. One must make some "large" decisions. This is how I think we should look at our political evolution.

If the RSEs history is seen in this light, I think certain things follow: One, the way to proceed is not to throw everything up for grabs and try to develop a set of politics totally from scratch. There are a lot of things we have long believed and which I still believe to this day.

As I mentioned above in a different form, I don't think capitalism is a fair or very viable system. I don't think it can be reformed. I think humanity needs and ought to try to establish a truly democratic, cooperative and egalitarian social system.

If we sit down and think through the implications and ramifications of these few sentences, I think we'll soon realize how much of our previous politics we in fact retain. I would certainly describe them differently than we have in the past and place ourselves differently in terms of historical political currents. But if we look for it, I think we will see a great deal of continuity in our political thinking and evolution. I, for one, am

not ready to become a Christian socialist or a pacifist, even though I believe we have things to learn from and should be willing to work with people in these currents.

The second point I think we should keep in mind as we redefine ourselves is that we should resist moving to the right. Right now the political climate in the United States and internationally is conservative, although that is beginning to change.

(One of the reasons for this conservatism is that previous radicalizations were based on ideologies, such as the various forms of Leninism, that were in fact authoritarian and hence ultimately conservative. The radicalizations thus laid the basis for their own demise.)

In such a period, a political current like ours, especially when it seeks to redefine itself, comes under great but often invisible pressure to move right. This rightward pressure can affect a political tendency in a number of ways. Since in periods like the one we are in, radical and revolutionary ideas in general are in small favor, there is a lot of pressure to discard maximal, “utopian” visions and to advocate piecemeal reforms. Since so few people today believe that a global classless and democratic society is possible, it sometimes seems easier to agree with people on the need for some “realistic” changes. In short, in times such as these there is a lot of pressure to become reformist, to lessen one’s revolutionary opposition to capitalism (as well as state capitalism). I think we should resist this.

Given the crisis of AIDS, there is also a strong pull to become more conservative on sexual/gender questions and related issues that are generally perceived as “civil libertarian.”

Lastly, given the quiescence of the working class, especially the poorest layers of especially oppressed groups (Latins, Blacks, women, gays, the physically afflicted), it is easy to get influenced by the (usually self-centered) fads of the middle class (New Age idiocy, an obsession with personal health, the assault on smokers). Whatever individuals think or however they want to live their lives, we should resist having such concerns shift our focus away from the basic source of social ills, capitalism, and the struggle to overthrow it.

The chief way to resist the pressure toward the right, in my opinion, is to move the organization to the left. This is also consistent with our reevaluation of Leninism. In my view, the problem with Leninism is not that it is too radical, too revolutionary. It’s that *it is not radical or revolutionary enough*. It makes *too many* compromises with capitalism, embodies *too many* capitalist ways of thinking and acting to be a truly revolutionary force.

For example, although it claims to want to abolish the state in the long run, it seeks to build it up and strengthen it in the short. It claims to want to build a society that is democratic and cooperative, but emphasizes methods that are authoritarian and coercive.

Most important, while it claims to wish to establish a truly free society, it believes that its ideology, its interpretation of Marxism, represents the sole correct interpreta-

tion of history (and everything else), thus rejecting the ultimate foundation of freedom, the right to think and believe differently—intellectual and spiritual freedom.

I think the way to proceed in redefining ourselves politically is three-fold. First, we should elaborate a vision of freedom, to develop our conception of what a truly democratic, cooperative and egalitarian society might look like, (including alternative solutions to various problems).

In fact, we have done this throughout our history (e.g., our achievements in the area of gender and sexual liberation), although we have not always been conscious of what this has meant. More recently, we have more consciously developed our vision of a libertarian society. We should continue to develop our ideas in this area and to publicize them in various ways.

This elaboration of a vision of a free society is quite definitely anti-Marxist. In opposition to the so-called Utopian Socialists, Marx and Engels refused to elaborate a vision of the future society. This was primarily because, in their view, the future society would emerge out of the class struggle: that society, to use philosophical jargon, is immanent in history. This view was closely linked to Marx and Engels' belief that history is determined and that the establishment of socialism is "historically necessary," in the sense of being inevitable. If it is, why bother to elaborate a vision?

Today, I no longer believe this. I do not believe history is determined and even if it is, I don't believe we can know what it is that will happen. In other words, I don't believe there is absolute knowledge. Moreover, if history were determined and socialism inevitable, the result would not be freedom, because inevitability, historical necessity, does not result in freedom but enslavement to the historically necessary. A free society can only be possible if there is the possibility of choice, of humanity choosing to be free rather than enslaved or annihilated.

The result of all this, it seems to me, is that socialists who believe in a libertarian socialism, must believe in freedom, must believe that there is choice in history, that history is not determined or "necessary." Socialism can only happen if the majority of humanity decide to want such a society and consciously and democratically set out to build it. The job of socialists, therefore, is to try to convince workers and other oppressed people that they should fight to establish a libertarian socialism. Essential to this is to develop a vision of such a society that shows, as concretely as possible, how such a society could be run, and how various problems bequeathed to us by capitalism might be solved.

The second part of redefining ourselves is to think through our strategy, tactics, organizational principles and methods and modify them so that they are consistent with our vision. In my opinion, the main change that this involves vis-a-vis our former conception is in the tactic of the united front. To Leninists, the united front, along with the corresponding tactic of critical support, is meant to win over the base of a rival political organization and to discredit and destroy the rival political leadership. In other words, it's a policy of trying to stab some people in the back. In some cases, e.g., reformist bureaucrats, this is warranted. But the Bolsheviks believed that only

they represented the true interests of the workers and therefore any rival organization, no matter how revolutionary, was ultimately an agent of the bourgeoisie.

Today, since we no longer believe in absolute truth and that we, by ourselves, have access to it, we should see the united front as a way to work together with other organizations and individuals, to engage in a dialogue with them, and to seek to learn from them. Perhaps we will learn more from them than vice versa.

Lastly, and flowing from the above, we should look for organizations, groups and individuals who share our overall vision (defined relatively broadly), and seek to develop on-going relations with them, trying to build greater theoretical and practical unity over time. This may well mean substantial changes in the form of our organization.

I personally believe that most such groups and people will be found in the anarchist/libertarian milieu rather than in the Marxist or social democratic milieus. The latter are too burdened with statism. the belief in the inherent progressiveness of nationalized property and state planning and various other baggage that points toward state capitalism

A basic methodological rule of thumb is that our political work, theoretical and practical, should avoid being determined by abstract political categories. Just because some groups or persons define themselves differently than we do or use a different political terminology should not be a basis for rejecting entering into a dialogue and joint work with them.

Or, conversely, just because people define themselves as we do and use the same language should not mean we automatically agree Intellectual categories, especially political ones, can be misleading and intellectually crippling. For years, we called ourselves (Marxist-Leninist) Trotskyists, but did not agree with the fundamental values, let alone the less important things, of the groups that called themselves Trotskyists. This should be a lesson for us.

In this light, I don't see what I have been proposing that the organization try to do as a drastic "turn" or reorientation of our politics. I see it as a kind of continuation of the political search that has defined our existence from the very beginning. This search—a search for a road to freedom—has taken us across the boundaries of traditional political categories. The search has been consistent and, in fact, more or less in the same direction. It just hasn't let itself be determined, or at least not for long, by other people's categories.

Once, we were Marxists and Leninists, but not Trotskyists. For a while we were Trotskyists who thought Trotsky was wrong, insufficiently libertarian, about Russia. Now, in my opinion, we have passed the line that demarcates Trotskyism and Leninism into something else, something that we need to define We should let other people remain imprisoned by their categories and continue to determine our own, to *be* our own.

I think the main thing that has changed, the main thing that we have learned, is that there is no absolute knowledge. Before, we looked for some kind of system, some kind of ideology, that answered all questions. Now we know that that doesn't exist and

that systems and ideologies that claim to embody absolute knowledge, to answer all the questions, are inherently dangerous.

Today, we know that the (relative, changing) truth can only be found through a dialogue, a discussion among different groups and individuals. Humanity can only solve its problems if it can discuss them, talk about them and arrive at democratic decisions, Lenin, following Marx (who in turn followed Hegel), subsumed dialogue in the dialectic of history (which eventually arrives at socialism) and an absolute knowledge of that history, Marxism

Although Lenin was subjectively for freedom, he helped snuff it out, because he believed that historical truth was embodied in the Bolshevik Party. We have to recognize that only a dialectic that never ceases, a dialogue among human beings, can lead to freedom.

— Texts Written by Vanguardists

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The Foundations of Leninism by Stalin

Source: *Works* Volume 6, pages 71–196. <marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/foundations-leninism/>

Published: Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow: 1953

Online Version: Marxists Internet Archive Archive, May 2008

Transcription: Victor Barraza

HTML: Victor Barraza, Salil Sen, and Mike B.

Dedicated to the Lenin Enrollment
J.V. Stalin

Introduction

The foundations of Leninism is a big subject. To exhaust it a whole volume would be required. Indeed, a whole number of volumes would be required. Naturally, therefore, my lectures cannot be an exhaustive exposition of Leninism; at best they can only offer a concise synopsis of the foundations of Leninism. Nevertheless, I consider it useful to give this synopsis, in order to lay down some basic points of departure necessary for the successful study of Leninism.

Expounding the foundations of Leninism still does not mean expounding the basis of Lenin's world outlook. Lenin's world outlook and the foundations of Leninism are not identical in scope. Lenin was a Marxist, and Marxism is, of course, the basis of his world outlook. But from this it does not at all follow that an exposition of Leninism ought to begin with an exposition of the foundations of Marxism. To expound Leninism means to expound the distinctive and new in the works of Lenin that Lenin contributed to the general treasury of Marxism and that is naturally connected with his name. Only in this sense will I speak in my lectures of the foundations of Leninism.

And so, what is Leninism?

Some say that Leninism is the application of Marxism to the conditions that are peculiar to the situation in Russia. This definition contains a particle of truth, but not the whole truth by any means. Lenin, indeed, applied Marxism to Russian conditions,

and applied it in a masterly way. But if Leninism were only the application of Marxism to the conditions that are peculiar to Russia it would be a purely national and only a national, a purely Russian and only a Russian, phenomenon. We know, however, that Leninism is not merely a Russian, but an international phenomenon rooted in the whole of international development. That is why I think this definition suffers from one-sidedness.

Others say that Leninism is the revival of the revolutionary elements of Marxism of the forties of the nineteenth century, as distinct from the Marxism of subsequent years, when, it is alleged, it became moderate, non-revolutionary. If we disregard this foolish and vulgar division of the teachings of Marx into two parts, revolutionary and moderate, we must admit that even this totally inadequate and unsatisfactory definition contains a particle of truth. This particle of truth is that Lenin did indeed restore the revolutionary content of Marxism, which had been suppressed by the opportunists of the Second International. Still, that is but a particle of the truth. The whole truth about Leninism is that Leninism not only restored Marxism, but also took a step forward, developing Marxism further under the new conditions of capitalism and of the class struggle of the proletariat.

What, then, in the last analysis, is Leninism?

Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. To be more exact, Leninism is the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general, the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular. Marx and Engels pursued their activities in the pre-revolutionary period, (we have the proletarian revolution in mind), when developed imperialism did not yet exist, in the period of the proletarians' preparation for revolution, in the period when the proletarian revolution was not yet an immediate practical inevitability. But Lenin, the disciple of Marx and Engels, pursued his activities in the period of developed imperialism, in the period of the unfolding proletarian revolution, when the proletarian revolution had already triumphed in one country, had smashed bourgeois democracy and had ushered in the era of proletarian democracy, the era of the Soviets.

That is why Leninism is the further development of Marxism.

It is usual to point to the exceptionally militant and exceptionally revolutionary character of Leninism. This is quite correct. But this specific feature of Leninism is due to two causes: firstly, to the fact that Leninism emerged from the proletarian revolution, the imprint of which it cannot but bear; secondly, to the fact that it grew and became strong in clashes with the opportunism of the Second International, the fight against which was and remains an essential preliminary condition for a successful fight against capitalism. It must not be forgotten that between Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and Lenin, on the other, there lies a whole period of undivided domination of the opportunism of the Second International, and the ruthless struggle against this opportunism could not but constitute one of the most important tasks of Leninism.

I. The Historical Roots of Leninism

Leninism grew up and took shape under the conditions of imperialism, when the contradictions of capitalism had reached an extreme point, when the proletarian revolution had become an immediate practical question, when the old period of preparation of the working class for revolution had arrived at and passed into a new period, that of direct assault on capitalism.

Lenin called imperialism “moribund capitalism.” Why? Because imperialism carries the contradictions of capitalism to their last bounds, to the extreme limit, beyond which revolution begins. Of these contradictions, there are three which must be regarded as the most important.

The *first contradiction* is the contradiction between labour and capital. Imperialism is the omnipotence of the monopolist trusts and syndicates, of the banks and the financial oligarchy, in the industrial countries. In the fight against this omnipotence, the customary methods of the working class—trade unions and cooperatives, parliamentary parties and the parliamentary struggle—have proved to be totally inadequate. Either place yourself at the mercy of capital, eke out a wretched existence as of old and sink lower and lower, or adopt a new weapon—this is the alternative imperialism puts before the vast masses of the proletariat. Imperialism brings the working class to revolution.

The *second contradiction* is the contradiction among the various financial groups and imperialist Powers in their struggle for sources of raw materials, for foreign territory. Imperialism is the export of capital to the sources of raw materials, the frenzied struggle for monopolist possession of these sources, the struggle for a re-division of the already divided world, a struggle waged with particular fury by new financial groups and Powers seeking a “place in the sun” against the old groups and Powers, which cling tenaciously to what they have seized. This frenzied struggle among the various groups of capitalists is notable in that it includes as an inevitable element imperialist wars, wars for the annexation of foreign territory. This circumstance, in its turn, is notable in that it leads to the mutual weakening of the imperialists, to the weakening of the position of capitalism in general, to the acceleration of the advent of the proletarian revolution and to the practical necessity of this revolution.

The *third contradiction* is the contradiction between the handful of ruling, “civilised” nations and the hundreds of millions of the colonial and dependent peoples of the world. Imperialism is the most barefaced exploitation and the most inhumane oppression of hundreds of millions of people inhabiting vast colonies and dependent countries. The purpose of this exploitation and of this oppression is to squeeze out super-profits. But in exploiting these countries imperialism is compelled to build these railways, factories and mills, industrial and commercial centers. The appearance of a class of proletarians, the emergence of a native intelligentsia, the awakening of national consciousness, the growth of the liberation movement—such are the inevitable results of this “policy.” The growth of the revolutionary movement in all colonies and dependent countries without exception clearly testifies to this fact. This circumstance is of importance for

the proletariat inasmuch as it saps radically the position of capitalism by converting the colonies and dependent countries from reserves of imperialism into reserves of the proletarian revolution.

Such, in general, are the principal contradictions of imperialism which have converted the old, "flourishing" capitalism into moribund capitalism.

The significance of the imperialist war which broke out ten years ago lies, among other things, in the fact that it gathered all these contradictions into a single knot and threw them on to the scales, thereby accelerating and facilitating the revolutionary battles of the proletariat.

In other words, imperialism was instrumental not only in making the revolution a practical inevitability, but also in creating favourable conditions for a direct assault on the citadels of capitalism.

Such was the international situation which gave birth to Leninism.

Some may say: this is all very well, but what has it to do with Russia, which was not and could not be a classical land of imperialism? What has it to do with Lenin, who worked primarily in Russia and for Russia? Why did Russia, of all countries, become the home of Leninism, the birthplace of the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution?

Because Russia was the focus of all these contradictions of imperialism.

Because Russia, more than any other country, was pregnant with revolution, and she alone, therefore, was in a position to solve those contradictions in a revolutionary way.

To begin with, tsarist Russia was the home of every kind of oppression-capitalist, colonial and militarist-in its most inhuman and barbarous form. Who does not know that in Russia the omnipotence of capital was combined with the despotism of tsarism, the aggressiveness of Russian nationalism with tsarism's role of executioner in regard to the non-Russian peoples, the exploitation of entire regions-Turkey, Persia, China-with the seizure of these regions by tsarism, with wars of conquest? Lenin was right in saying that tsarism was "military-feudal imperialism." Tsarism was the concentration of the worst features of imperialism, raised to a high pitch.

To proceed. Tsarist Russia was a major reserve of Western imperialism, not only in the sense that it gave free entry to foreign capital, which controlled such basic branches of Russia's national economy as the fuel and metallurgical industries, but also in the sense that it could supply the Western imperialists with millions of soldiers. Remember the Russia army, fourteen million strong, which shed its blood on the imperialist fronts to safeguard the staggering profits of the British and French capitalists.

Further, Tsarism was not only the watchdog of imperialism in the east of Europe, but, in addition, it was the agent of Western imperialism for squeezing out of the population hundreds of millions by way of interest on loans obtained in Paris and London, Berlin and Brussels.

Finally, tsarism was a most faithful ally of Western imperialism in the partition of Turkey, Persia, China, etc. Who does not know that the imperialist war was waged

by tsarism in alliance with the imperialists of the Entente, and that Russia was an essential element in that war?

That is why the interests of tsarism and of Western imperialism were interwoven and ultimately became merged in a single skein of imperialist interests.

Could Western imperialism resign itself to the loss of such a powerful support in the East and of such a rich reservoir of manpower and resources as old, tsarist, bourgeois Russia was without exerting all its strengths to wage a life-and-death struggle against the revolution in Russia, with the object of defending and preserving tsarism? Of course not.

But from this it follows that whoever wanted to strike at tsarism necessarily raised his hand against imperialism, whoever rose against tsarism had to rise against imperialism as well; for whoever was bent on overthrowing tsarism had to overthrow imperialism too, if he really intended not merely to defeat tsarism, but to make a clean sweep of it. Thus the revolution against tsarism verged on and had to pass into a revolution against imperialism, into a proletarian revolution.

Meanwhile, in Russia a tremendous popular revolution was rising, headed by the most revolutionary proletariat in the world, which possessed such an important ally as the revolutionary peasantry of Russia. Does it need proof that such a revolution could not stop half-way, that in the event of success it was bound to advance further and raise the banner of revolt against imperialism?

That is why Russia was bound to become the focus of the contradictions of imperialism, not only in the sense that it was in Russia that these contradictions were revealed most plainly, in view of their particularly repulsive and particularly intolerable character, and not only because Russia was a highly important prop of Western imperialism, connecting Western finance capital with the colonies in the East, but also because Russia was the only country in which there existed a real force capable of resolving the contradictions of imperialism in a revolutionary way.

From this it follows, however, that the revolution in Russia could not but become a proletarian revolution, that from its very inception it could not but assume an international character, and that, therefore, it could not but shake the very foundations of world imperialism.

Under these circumstances, could the Russian Communist confine their work within the narrow national bounds of the Russian revolution? Of course not. On the contrary, the whole situation, both internal (the profound revolutionary crisis) and external (the war), impelled them to go beyond these bounds in their work, to transfer the struggle to the international arena, to expose the ulcers of imperialism, to prove that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable, to smash social-chauvinism and social-pacifism, and, finally, to overthrow capitalism in their own country and to forge a new fighting weapon for the proletariat—the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution—in order to facilitate the task of overthrowing capitalism for the proletarians of all countries. Nor could the Russian Communist act otherwise, for only this path offered the chance of producing

certain changes in the international situation which could safeguard Russia against the restoration of the bourgeois order.

That is why Russia became the home of Leninism, and why Lenin, the leader of the Russian Communist, became its creator.

The same thing, approximately, “happened” in the case of Russia and Lenin as in the case of Germany and Marx and Engels in the forties of the last century. Germany at that time was pregnant with bourgeois revolution just like Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Marx wrote at that time in the Communist Manifesto :

“The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilisation, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.”¹

In other words, the centre of the revolutionary movement was shifting to Germany.

There can hardly be any doubt that it was this very circumstance, noted by Marx in the above-quoted passage, that served as the probable reason why it was precisely Germany that became the birthplace of scientific socialism and why the leaders of the German proletariat, Marx and Engels, became its creators.

The same, only to a still greater degree, must be said of Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Russia was then on the eve of a bourgeois revolution; she had to accomplish this revolution at a time when conditions in Europe were more advanced, and with a proletariat that was more developed than that of Germany in the forties of the nineteenth (let alone Britain and France); moreover, all the evidence went to show that this revolution was bound to serve as a ferment and as a prelude to the proletarian revolution. We cannot regard it as accidental that as early as 1902, when the Russian revolution was still in an embryonic state, Lenin wrote the prophetic words in his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* :

“History has now confronted us (i.e., the Russian Marxists-J. St.) with an immediate task which is the *most revolutionary* of all the *immediate* tasks that confront the proletariat of any country,” and that ... “the fulfilment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but also (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat” (see Vol. IV, p. 382).

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (*Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow 1951, p. 61).

In other words, the centre of the revolutionary movement was bound to shift to Russia.

As we know, the course of the revolution in Russia has more than vindicated Lenin's prediction.

Is it surprising, after all this, that a country which has accomplished such a revolution and possesses such a proletariat should have been the birthplace of the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution?

Is it surprising that Lenin, the leader of Russia's proletariat, became also the creator of this theory and tactics and the leader of the international proletariat?

II. Method

I have already said that between Marx and Engels on the one hand, and Lenin, on the other, there lies a whole period of domination of the opportunism of the Second International. For the sake of exactitude I must add that it is not the formal domination of opportunism I have in mind, but only its actual domination. Formally, the Second International was headed by "faithful" Marxists, by the "orthodox"-Kautsky and others. Actually, however, the main work of the Second International followed the line of opportunism. The opportunists adapted themselves to the bourgeois because of their adaptive, petty-bourgeois nature; the "orthodox," in their turn, adapted themselves to the opportunists in order to "preserve unity" with them, in the interests of "peace within the party." Thus the link between the policy of the bourgeois and the policy of the "orthodox" was closed, and, as a result, opportunism reigned supreme.

This was the period of the relatively peaceful development of capitalism, the pre-war period, so to speak, when the catastrophic contradictions of imperialism had not yet become so glaringly evident, when workers' economic strikes and trade unions were developing more or less "normally," when election campaigns and parliamentary groups yielded "dizzying" successes, when legal forms of struggle were lauded to the skies, and when it was thought that capitalism would be "killed" by legal means-in short, when the parties of the Second International were living in clover and had no inclination to think seriously about revolution, about the dictatorship of the proletariat, about the revolutionary education of the masses.

Instead of an integral revolutionary theory, there were contradictory theoretical postulates and fragments of theory, which were divorced from the actual revolutionary struggle of the masses and had been turned into threadbare dogmas. For the sake of appearances, Marx's theory was mentioned, of course, but only to rob it of its living, revolutionary spirit.

Instead of a revolutionary policy, there was flabby philistinism and sordid political bargaining, parliamentary diplomacy and parliamentary scheming. For the sake of

appearances, of course, “revolutionary” resolutions and slogans were adopted, but only to be pigeonholed.

Instead of the party being trained and taught correct revolutionary tactics on the basis of its own mistakes, there was a studied evasion of vexed questions, which were glossed over and veiled. For the sake of appearances, of course, there was no objection to talking about vexed questions, but only in order to wind up with some sort of “elastic” resolution.

Such was the physiognomy of the Second International, its methods of work, its arsenal.

Meanwhile, a new period of imperialist wars and of revolutionary battles of the proletariat was approaching. The old methods of fighting were proving obviously inadequate and impotent in the face of the omnipotence of finance capital.

It became necessary to overhaul the entire activity of the Second International, its entire method of work, and to drive out all philistinism, narrow-mindedness, political scheming, regency, social-chauvinism and social-pacifism. It became necessary to examine the entire arsenal of the Second International, to throw out all that was rusty and antiquated, to forge new weapons. Without this preliminary work it was useless embarking upon war against capitalism. Without this work the proletariat ran the risk of finding itself inadequately armed, or even completely unarmed, in the future revolutionary battles.

The honour of bringing about this general overhauling and general cleansing of the Augean stables of the Second International fell to Leninism.

Such were the conditions under which the method of Leninism was born and hammered out.

What are the requirements of this method?

Firstly, the *testing* of the theoretical dogmas of the Second International in the crucible of the revolutionary struggle of the masses, in the crucible of living practice—that is to say, the restoration of the broken unity between theory and practice, the healing of the rift between them; for only in this way can a truly proletarian party armed with revolutionary theory be created.

Secondly, the *testing* of the policy of the parties of the Second International, not by their slogans and resolutions (which cannot be trusted), but by their deeds, by their actions; for only in this way can the confidence of the proletarian masses be won and deserved.

Thirdly, the *reorganisation* of all Party work on new revolutionary lines, with a view to training and preparing the masses for the revolutionary struggle; for only in this way can the masses be prepared for the proletarian revolution.

Fourthly, *self-criticism* within the proletarian parties, their education and training on the basis of their own mistakes; for only in this way can genuine cadres and genuine leaders of the Party be trained.

Such is the basis and substance of the method of Leninism.

How was this method applied in practice?

The opportunists of the Second International have a number of theoretical dogmas to which they always revert as their starting point. Let us take a few of these.

First dogma: concerning the conditions for the seizure of power by the proletariat. The opportunists assert that the proletariat cannot and ought not to take power unless it constitutes a majority in the country. No proofs are brought forward, for there are no proofs, either theoretical or practical, that can bear out this absurd thesis. Let us assume that this is so, Lenin replies to the gentlemen of the Second International; but suppose a historical situation has arisen (a war, an agrarian crisis, etc.) in which the proletariat, constituting a minority of the population, has an opportunity to rally around itself the vast majority of the labouring masses; why should it not take power then? Why should the proletariat not take advantage of a favourable international and internal situation to pierce the front of capital and hasten the general denouement? Did not Marx say as far back as the fifties of the last century that things could go “splendidly” with the proletarian revolution in Germany were it possible to back it by, so to speak, a “second edition of the Peasant War” 1? Is it not a generally known fact that in those days the number of proletarians in Germany was relatively smaller than, for example, in Russia in 1917? Has not the practical experience of the Russian proletarian revolution shown that this favourite dogma of the heroes of the Second International is devoid of all vital significance for the proletariat? Is it not clear that the practical experience of the revolutionary struggle of the masses refute and smashes this obsolete dogma?

Second dogma: the proletariat cannot retain power if it lacks an adequate number of trained cultural and administrative cadres capable of organising the administration of the country; these cadres must first be trained under capitalist conditions, and only then can power be taken. Let us assume that this is so, replies Lenin; but why not turn it this way: first take power, create favourable conditions for the development of the proletariat, and then proceed with seven-league strides to raise the cultural level of the labouring masses and train numerous cadres of leaders and administrators from among the workers? Has not Russian experience shown that the cadres of leaders recruited from the ranks of the workers develop a hundred times more rapidly and effectually under the rule of the proletariat than under the rule of capital? Is it not clear that the practical experience of the revolutionary struggle of the masses ruthlessly smashes this theoretical dogma of the opportunists too?

Third dogma: the proletariat cannot accept the method of the *political* general strike because it is unsound in theory (see Engels’s criticism) and dangerous in practice (it may disturb the normal course of economic life in the country, it may deplete the coffers of the trade unions), and cannot serve as a substitute for parliamentary forms of struggle, which are the principal form of the class struggle of the proletariat. Very well, reply the Leninists; but, firstly, Engels did not criticise every kind of general strike. He only criticised a certain kind of general strike, namely, the *economic general*

*strike advocated by the Anarchists*² in place of the political struggle of the proletariat. What has this to do with the method of the *political* general strike? Secondly, where and by whom has it ever been proved that the parliamentary form of struggle is the principle form of struggle of the proletariat? Does not the history of the revolutionary movement show that the parliamentary struggle is only a school for, and an auxiliary in, organising the extra-parliamentary struggle of the proletariat, that under capitalism the fundamental problems of the working-class movement are solved by force, by the direct struggle of the proletarian masses, their general strike, their uprising? Thirdly, who suggested that the method of the political general strike be substituted for the parliamentary struggle? Where and when have the supporters of the political general strike sought to substitute extra-parliamentary forms of struggle for parliamentary forms? Fourthly, has not the revolution in Russia shown that the *political* general strike is a highly important school for the proletarian revolution and an indispensable means of mobilising and organising the vast masses of the proletariat on the eve of storming the citadels of capitalism? Why then the philistine lamentations over the disturbance of the normal course of economic life and over the coffers of the trade unions? Is it not clear that the practical experience of the revolutionary struggle smashes this dogma of the opportunists too?

And so on and so forth.

This is why Lenin said that “revolutionary theory is not a dogma,” that it “assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement” (*“Left-Wing” Communism*³); for theory must serve practice, for “theory must answer the questions raised by practice” (*What the “Friends of the People” Are*⁴), for it must be tested by practical results.

As to the political slogans and the political resolutions of the parties of the Second International, it is sufficient to recall the history of the slogan “war against war” to realise how utterly false and utterly rotten are the political practices of these parties, which use pompous revolutionary slogans and resolutions to cloak their anti-revolutionary deeds. We all remember the pompous demonstrations of the Second International at the Basle Congress,⁵ at which it threatened the imperialist with all the horrors of insurrection if they should dare to start a war, and with the menacing slogan “war against war.” But who does not remember that some time after, on the very eve of the war, the Basle resolution was pigeonholed and the workers were given a new slogan-to exterminate each other for the glory of their capitalist fatherlands? Is it not clear that revolutionary slogans and resolutions are not worth a farthing unless backed by deeds? One need only contrast the Leninist policy of transforming the imperialist war into

² This refers to the statement by Karl Marx in his letter to Frederick Engels of April 16, 1856 (see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow 1951, p. 412).

³ My italics — J. V. Stalin.

⁴ See Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feurbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow 1951, p. 338).

⁵ See V.I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 14

civil war with the treacherous policy of the Second International during the war to understand the utter baseness of the opportunist politicians and the full grandeur of the method of Leninism.

I cannot refrain from quoting at this point a passage from Lenin's book *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, in which Lenin severely castigates an opportunist attempt by the leader of the Second International, K. Kautsky, to judge parties not by their deeds, but by their paper slogans and documents:

"Kautsky is pursuing a typically petty-bourgeois, philistine policy by pretending ... *that putting forward a slogan* alters the position. The entire history of bourgeois democracy refutes this illusion; the bourgeois democrats have always advanced and still advance all sorts of 'slogans' in order to deceive the people. The point is to *test their sincerity, to compare their words with their deeds*, not to be satisfied with idealistic or charlatan *phrases*, but to get down to *class reality*" (see Vol. XXIII, p. 377).

There is no need to mention the fear the parties of the Second International have of self-criticism, their habit of concealing their mistakes, of glossing over vexed questions, of covering up their shortcomings by a deceptive show of well-being which blunts living thought and prevents the Party from deriving revolutionary training from its own mistakes—a habit which was ridiculed and pilloried by Lenin. Here is what Lenin wrote about self-criticism in proletarian parties in his pamphlet "*Left-Wing*" *Communism*:

"The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it *in practice* fulfils its obligation towards its *class* and the toiling *masses*. Frankly admitting a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the circumstances which gave rise to it, and thoroughly discussing the means of correcting it—that is the earmark of a serious party; that is the way it should perform its duties, that is the way it should educate and train the *class*, and then the *masses*" (see Vol. XXV, p. 200).

Some say that the exposure of its own mistakes and self-criticism are dangerous for the Party because they may be used by the enemy against the party of the proletariat. Lenin regarded such objections as trivial and entirely wrong. Here is what he wrote on this subject as far back as 1904, in his pamphlet *One Step Forward*, when our Party was still weak and small:

"They (i.e., the opponents of the Marxists-J. St.) gloat and grimace over our controversies; and, of course, they will try to pick isolated passages from my pamphlet, which deals with the defects and shortcomings of our Party, and to use them for their own ends. The Russian Social-Democrats are already steeled enough in battle not to be perturbed by these pinpricks and to

continue, in spite of them, their work of self-criticism and ruthless exposure of their own shortcomings, which will unquestionably and inevitably be overcome as the working-class movement grows" (see Vol. VI, p. 161).

Such, in general, are the characteristics features of the method of Leninism.

What is contained in Lenin's method was in the main already contained in the teachings of Marx, which, according to Marx himself, were "in essence critical and revolutionary."⁶ It is precisely this critical and revolutionary spirit that pervades Lenin's method from beginning to end. But it would be wrong to suppose that Lenin's method is merely the restoration of the method of Marx. As a matter of fact, Lenin's method is not only the restoration of, but also the concretisation and further development of the critical and revolutionary method of Marx, of his materialist dialectics.

2. This refers to Frederick Engels's article "The Bakuninists at Work" (see F. Engels, "Die Bakunisten an der Arbeit" in *Der Volksstaat*, No. 105, 106, and 107, 1873).

3. V.I. Lenin, "*Left-Wing*" Communism, an Infantile Disorder (see *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 31, p. 9).

4. V.I. Lenin, What the "*Friends of the People*" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats (see *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 1, pp. 278–79).

5. The Basle Congress of the Second International was held on November 24–25, 1912. It was convened in connection with the Balkan War and the impending threat of a world war. Only one question was discussed: the international situation and joint action against war. The congress adopted a manifesto calling upon the workers to utilise their proletarian organization and might to wage a revolutionary struggle against the danger of war, to declare "war against war."

6. See Karl Marx, Preface to the Second German Edition of the first volume of *Capital*, (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow 1951, p. 414).

III. Theory

From this theme I take three questions:

- a) the importance of theory for the proletarian movement;
- b) criticism of the "theory" of spontaneity;
- c) the theory of the proletarian revolution.

1) *The importance of theory*. Some think that Leninism is the precedence of practice over theory in the sense that its main point is the translation of the Marxist theses into deeds, their "execution"; as for theory; it is alleged that Leninism is rather unconcerned

⁶ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, (see Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Appendix). (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow 1951.)

about it. We know that Plekhanov time and again chaffed Lenin about his “unconcern” for theory, and particularly for philosophy. We also know that theory is not held in great favour by many present-day Leninist practical workers, particularly in view of the immense amount of practical work imposed upon them by the situation. I must declare that this more than odd opinion about Lenin and Leninism is quite wrong and bears no relation whatever to the truth; that the attempt of practical workers to brush theory aside runs counter to the whole spirit of Leninism and is fraught with serious dangers to the work.

Theory is the experience of the working-class movement in all countries taken in its general aspect. Of course, theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice gropes in the dark if its path is not illumined by revolutionary theory. But theory can become a tremendous force in the working-class movement if it is built up in indissoluble connection with revolutionary practice; for theory, and theory alone, can give the movement confidence, the power of orientation, and an understanding of the inner relation of surrounding events; for it, and it alone, can help practice to realise not only how and in which direction classes are moving at the present time, but also how and in which direction they will move in the near future. None other than Lenin uttered and repeated scores of times the well-known thesis that:

*“Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”*⁷
(see Vol. IV, p. 380).

Lenin, better than anyone else, understood the great importance of theory, particularly for a party such as ours, in view of the vanguard fighter of the international proletariat which has fallen to its lot, and in view of the complicated internal and international situation in which it finds itself. Foreseeing this special role of our Party as far back as 1902, he thought it necessary even then to point out that:

“The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory” (see Vol. IV, p. 380).

It scarcely needs proof that now, when Lenin’s prediction about the role of our Party has come true, this thesis of Lenin’s acquires special force and special importance.

Perhaps the most striking expression of the great importance which Lenin attached to theory is the fact that none other than Lenin undertook the very serious task of generalising, on the basis of materialist philosophy, the most important achievements of science from the time of Engels down to his time, as well as of subjecting to comprehensive criticism the anti-materialistic trends among Marxists. Engels said that “materialism must assume a new aspect with every new great discovery.”⁸ It is well

⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (see *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 22, pp. 173–290)

⁸ My italics — J. V. Stalin.

known that none other than Lenin accomplished this task for his own time in his remarkable work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.⁹ It is well known that Plekhanov, who loved to chaff Lenin about his “unconcern” for philosophy, did not even dare to make a serious attempt to undertake such a task.

2) *Criticism of the “theory” of spontaneity, or the role of the vanguard in the movement.* The “theory” of spontaneity is a theory of opportunism, a theory of worshipping the spontaneity of the labour movement, a theory which actually repudiates the leading role of the vanguard of the working class, of the party of the working class.

The theory of worshipping spontaneity is decidedly opposed to the revolutionary character of the working class movement; it is opposed to the movement taking the line of struggle against the foundations of capitalism; it is in favour of the movement proceeding exclusively along the line of “realisable demands, of demands “acceptable” to capitalism; it is wholly in favour of the “line of least resistance.” The theory of spontaneity is the ideology of trade unionism.

The theory of worshipping spontaneity is decidedly opposed to giving the spontaneous movement a politically conscious, planned character. It is opposed to the Party marching at the head of the working class, to the Party raising the masses to the level of political consciousness, to the Party leading the movement; it is in favour of the politically conscious elements of the movement not hindering the movement from taking its own course; it is in favour of the Party only heeding the spontaneous movement and dragging at the tail of it. The theory of spontaneity is the theory of belittling the role of the conscious element in the movement, the ideology of “khvostism,” the logical basis of *all opportunism*.

In practice this theory, which appeared on the scene even before the first revolution in Russia, led its adherents, the so-called “Economists,” to deny the need for an independent workers’ party in Russia, to oppose the revolutionary struggle of the working class for the overthrow of tsarism, to preach a purely trade-unionist policy in the movement, and, in general, to surrender the labour movement to the hegemony of the liberal bourgeoisie.

The fight of the old *Iskra* and the brilliant criticism of the theory of “khvostism” in Lenin’s pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* not only smashed so-called “Economism,” but also created the theoretical foundations for a truly revolutionary movement of the Russian working class.

Without this fight it would have been quite useless even to think of creating an independent workers’ party in Russia and of its playing a leading part in the revolution.

But the theory of worshipping spontaneity is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon. It is extremely widespread—in a somewhat different form, it is true—in all parties of the Second International, without exception. I have in mind the so-called

⁹ J. V. Stalin refers to the following articles written by V.I. Lenin in 1905: “Social-Democracy and a Provisional Revolutionary Government,” from which he cites a passage; “The Revolutionary Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry”; and “On a Provisional Revolutionary Government” (see V.I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 8, pp. 247–63, 264–74, 427–47).

“productive forces” theory as debased by the leaders of the Second International, which justifies everything and conciliates everybody, which records facts and explains them after everyone has become sick and tired of them, and, having recorded them, rests content. Marx said that the materialist theory could not confine itself to explaining the world, that it must also change it.¹⁰ But Kautsky and Co. are not concerned with this; they prefer to rest content with the first part of Marx’s formula.

Here is one of the numerous examples of the application of this “theory.” It is said that before the imperialist war the parties of the Second International threatened to declare “war against war” if the imperialists should start a war. It is said that on the very eve of the war these parties pigeonholed the “war against war” slogan and applied an opposite one, viz., “war for the imperialist fatherland.” It is said that as a result of this change of slogans millions of workers were sent to their death. But it would be a mistake to think that there were some people to blame for this, that someone was unfaithful to the working class or betrayed it. Not at all! Everything happened as it should have happened. Firstly, because the International, it seems, is “an instrument of peace,” and not of war. Secondly, because, in view of the “level of the productive forces” which then prevailed, nothing else could be done. The “productive forces” are “to blame.” That is the precise explanation vouchsafed to “us” by Mr. Kautsky’s “theory of the productive forces.” And whoever does not believe in that “theory” is not a Marxist. The role of the parties? Their importance for the movement? But what can a party do against so decisive a factor as the “level of the productive forces”?...

One could cite a host of similar examples of the falsification of Marxism.

It scarcely needs proof that this spurious “Marxism,” designed to hide the nakedness of opportunism, is merely a European variety of the selfsame theory of “khvostism” which Lenin fought even before the first Russian revolution.

It scarcely needs proof that the demolition of this theoretical falsification is a preliminary condition for the creation of truly revolutionary parties in the West.

3) *The theory of the proletarian revolution.* Lenin’s theory of the proletarian revolution proceeds from three fundamental theses.

First thesis: The domination of finance capital in the advanced capitalist countries; the issue of stocks and bonds as one of the principal operations of finance capital; the export of capital to the sources of raw materials, which is one of the foundations of imperialism; the omnipotence of a financial oligarchy, which is the result of the domination of finance capital—all this reveals the grossly parasitic character of monopolistic capitalism, makes the yoke of the capitalist trusts and syndicates a hundred times more burdensome, intensifies the indignation of the working class with the foundations of capitalism, and brings the masses to the proletarian revolution as their only salvation (see Lenin, *Imperialism*¹¹).

¹⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The First Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*, (see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow 1951, p. 102).

¹¹ My italics — J. V. Stalin.

Hence the first conclusion: intensification of the revolutionary crisis within the capitalist countries and growth of the elements of an explosion on the internal, proletarian front in the “metropolises.”

Second thesis : The increase in the export of capital to the colonies and dependent countries; the expansion of “spheres of influence” and colonial possessions until they cover the whole globe; the transformation of capitalism into a world system of financial enslavement and colonial oppression of the vast majority of the population of the world by a handful of “advanced” countries—all this has, on the one hand, converted the separate national economies and national territories into links in a single chain called world economy, and, on the other hand, split the population of the globe into two camps: a handful of “advanced” capitalist countries which exploit and oppress vast colonies and dependencies, and the huge majority consisting of colonial and dependent countries which are compelled to wage a struggle for liberation from the imperialist yoke (see *Imperialism*).

Hence the second conclusion: intensification of the revolutionary crisis in the colonial countries and growth of the elements of revolt against imperialism on the external, colonial front.

Third thesis: The monopolistic possession of “spheres of influence” and colonies; the uneven development of the capitalist countries, leading to a frenzied struggle for the redivision of the world between the countries which have already seized territories and those claiming their “share”; imperialist wars as the only means of restoring the disturbed “equilibrium”—all this leads to the intensification of the struggle on the third front, the inter-capitalist front, which weakens imperialism and facilitates the union of the first two fronts against imperialism: the front of the revolutionary proletariat and the front of colonial emancipation (see *Imperialism*).

Hence the third conclusion: that under imperialism wars cannot be averted, and that a coalition between the proletarian revolution in Europe and the colonial revolution in the East in a united world front of revolution against the world front of imperialism is inevitable.

Lenin combines all these conclusions into one general conclusion that “*imperialism is the eve of the socialist revolution*”¹² (see Vol. XIX, p. 71).

The very approach to the question of the proletarian revolution, of the character of the revolution, of its scope, of its depth, the scheme of the revolution in general, changes accordingly.

Formerly, the analysis of the pre-requisites for the proletarian revolution was usually approached from the point of view of the economic state of individual countries. Now, this approach is no longer adequate. Now the matter must be approached from the point of view of the economic state of all or the majority of countries, from the point of view of the state of world economy; for individual countries and individual national economies have ceased to be self-sufficient units, have become links in a single chain

¹² My italics — J. V. Stalin.

called world economy; for the old “cultured” capitalism has evolved into imperialism, and imperialism is a world system of financial enslavement and colonial oppression of the vast majority of the population of the world by a handful of “advanced” countries.

Formerly it was the accepted thing to speak of the existence or absence of objective conditions for the proletarian revolution in individual countries, or, to be more precise, in one or another developed country. Now this point of view is no longer adequate. Now we must speak of the existence of objective conditions for the revolution in the entire system of world imperialist economy as an integral whole; the existence within this system of some countries that are not sufficiently developed industrially cannot serve as an insuperable obstacle to the revolution, if the system as a whole or, more correctly, *because* the system as a whole is already ripe for revolution.

Formerly, it was the accepted thing to speak of the proletarian revolution in one or another developed country as of a separate and self-sufficient entity opposing a separate national front of capital as its antipode. Now, this point of view is no longer adequate. Now we must speak of the world proletarian revolution; for the separate national fronts of capital have become links in a single chain called the world front of imperialism, which must be opposed by a common front of the revolutionary movement in all countries.

Formerly the proletarian revolution was regarded exclusively as the result of the internal development of a given country. Now, this point of view is no longer adequate. Now the proletarian revolution must be regarded primarily as the result of the development of the contradictions within the world system of imperialism, as the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front in one country or another.

Where will the revolution begin? Where, in what country, can the front of capital be pierced first?

Where industry is more developed, where the proletarian constitutes the majority, where the proletariat constitutes the majority, where there is more culture, where there is more democracy—that was the reply usually given formerly.

No, objects the Leninist theory of revolution, *not necessarily where industry is more developed*, and so forth. The front of capital will be pierced where the chain of imperialism is weakest, for the proletarian revolution is the result of the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link; and it may turn out that the country which has started the revolution, which has made a breach in the front of capital, is less developed in a capitalist sense than other, more developed, countries, which have, however, remained within the framework of capitalism.

In 1917 the chain of the imperialist world front proved to be weaker in Russia than in the other countries. It was there that the chain broke and provided an outlet for the proletarian revolution. Why? Because in Russia a great popular revolution was unfolding and at its head marched the revolutionary proletariat, which had such an important ally as the vast mass of the peasantry, which was oppressed and exploited by the landlords. Because the revolution there was opposed by such a hideous representative of imperialism as tsarism, which lacked all moral prestige and was deservedly

hated by the whole population. The chain proved to be weaker in Russia, although Russia was less developed in a capitalist sense than, say France or Germany, Britain or America.

Where will the chain break in the near future? Again, where it is weakest. It is not precluded that the chain may break, say, in India. Why? Because that country has a young, militant, revolutionary proletariat, which has such an ally as the national liberation movement—an undoubtedly powerful and undoubtedly important ally. Because there the revolution is confronted by such a well-known foe as foreign imperialism, which has no moral credit and is deservedly hated by all the oppressed and exploited masses in India.

It is also quite possible that the chain will break in Germany. Why? Because the factors which are operating, say, in India are beginning to operate in Germany as well; but, of course, the enormous difference in the level of development between India and Germany cannot but stamp its imprint on the progress and outcome of a revolution in Germany.

Lenin said that :

“The West-European capitalist countries will consummate their development toward socialism ... not by the even ‘maturing’ of socialism in them, but by the exploitation of some countries by others, by the exploitation of the first of the countries to be vanquished in the imperialist war combined with the exploitation of the whole of the East. On the other hand, precisely as a result of the first imperialist war, the East has definitely come into revolutionary movement, has been definitely drawn into the general maelstrom of the world revolutionary movement” (see Vol. XXVII, pp. 415–16)

Briefly: the chain of the imperialist front must, as a rule, break where the links are weaker and, at all events, not necessarily where capitalism is more developed, where there is such and such a percentage of proletarians and such and such a percentage of peasants, and so on.

That is why in deciding the question of proletarian revolution statistical estimates of the percentage of the proletarian population in a given country lose the exceptional importance so eagerly attached to them by the doctrinaires of the Second International, who have not understood imperialism and who fear revolution like the plague.

To proceed. The heroes of the Second International asserted (and continue to assert) that between the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the proletarian revolution there is a chasm, or at any rate a Chinese Wall, separating one from the other by a more or less protracted interval of time, during which the bourgeoisie having come into power, develops capitalism, while the proletariat accumulates strength and prepares for the “decisive struggle” against capitalism. This interval is usually calculated to extend over many decades, if not longer. It scarcely needs proof that this Chinese Wall “theory” is totally devoid of scientific meaning under the conditions of imperialism, that it is and can

be only a means of concealing and camouflaging the counter-revolutionary aspirations of the bourgeoisie. It scarcely needs proof that under the conditions of imperialism, fraught as it is with collisions and wars; under the conditions of the “eve of the socialist revolution,” when “flourishing” capitalism becomes “moribund” capitalism (*Lenin*) and the revolutionary movement is growing in all countries of the world; when imperialism is allying itself with all reactionary forces without exception, down to and including tsarism and serfdom, thus making imperative the coalition of all revolutionary forces, from the proletarian movement of the West, to the national liberation movement of the East; when the overthrow of the survivals of the regime of feudal serfdom becomes impossible without a revolutionary struggle against imperialism—it scarcely needs proof that the bourgeois-democratic revolution, in a more or less developed country, must under such circumstances verge upon the proletarian revolution, that the former must pass into the latter. The history of the revolution in Russia has provided palpable proof that this thesis is correct and incontrovertible. It was not without reason that Lenin, as far back as 1905, on the eve of the first Russian revolution, in his pamphlet *Two Tactics* depicted the bourgeois-democratic revolution and the socialist revolution as two links in the same chain, as a single and integral picture of the sweep of the Russian revolution :

“The proletariat must carry to completion the democratic revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and to paralyse the instability of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population in order to crush by force the resistance of the bourgeoisie and to paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Such are the tasks of the proletariat, which the new Iskra-ists present so narrowly in all their arguments and resolutions about the sweep of the revolution” (see Lenin, Vol. VIII, p. 96).

There is no need to mention other, later works of Lenin’s, in which the idea of the bourgeoisie revolution passing into the proletarian revolution stands out in greater relief than in *Two Tactics* as one of the cornerstones of the Leninist theory of revolution.

Some comrades believe, it seems, that Lenin arrived at this idea only in 1916, that up to that time he had thought that the revolution in Russia would remain within the bourgeois framework, that power, consequently, would pass from the hands of the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry into the hands of the bourgeoisie and not of the proletariat. It is said that this assertion has even penetrated into our communist press. I must say that this assertion is absolutely wrong, that it is totally at variance with the facts.

I might refer to Lenin’s well-known speech at the Third Congress of the Party (1905), in which he defined the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, i.e., the victory of the democratic revolution, not as the “organisation of ‘order’” but as the “organisation of war” (see Vol. VII, p. 264).

Further, I might refer to Lenin's well-known articles "On a Provisional Government" (1905),¹³ where, outlining the prospects of the unfolding Russian revolution, he assigns to the Party the task of "ensuring that the Russian revolution is not a movement of a few months, but a movement of many years, that it leads, not merely to slight concessions on the part of the powers that be, but to the complete overthrow of those powers"; where, enlarging further on these prospects and linking them with the revolution in Europe, he goes on to say :

"And if we succeed in doing that, then ... then the revolutionary conflagration will spread all over Europe; the European worker, languishing under bourgeois reaction, will rise in his turn and will show us 'how it is done'; then the revolutionary wave in Europe will sweep back again into Russia and will convert an epoch of a few revolutionary years into an epoch of several revolutionary decades ... " (*ibid.*, p. 191).

I might further refer to a well-known article by Lenin published in November 1915, in which he writes :

"The proletariat is fighting, and will fight valiantly, to capture power, for a republic for the confiscation of the land ... for the participation of the 'non-proletarian masses of the people' in liberating *bourgeois* Russia from *military-feudal* 'imperialism' (=tsarism). And the proletariat will immediately¹⁴ take advantage of this liberation of bourgeois Russia from tsarism, from the agrarian power of the landlords, not to aid the rich peasants in their struggle against the rural worker, but to bring about the socialist revolution in alliance with the proletarians of Europe" (see Vol. XVIII, p. 318).

Finally, I might refer to the well-known passage in Lenin's pamphlet *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, where, referring to the above-quoted passage in *Two Tactics* on the sweep of the Russian revolution, he arrives at the following conclusion :

"Things turned out just as we said they would. The course taken by the revolution confirmed the correctness of our reasoning. *First*, with the 'whole' of the peasantry against the monarchy, against the landlords, against the medieval regime (and to that extent the revolution remains bourgeois, bourgeois-democratic.) *Then*, with the poor peasants, with the semi-proletarians, with all the exploited, *against capitalism*, including the

¹³ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 22, and Vol. II, p. 420, Moscow 1951).

¹⁴ All italics mine— J. V. Stalin.

rural rich, the kulaks, the profiteers, and to that extent the revolution becomes a *socialist* one. To attempt to raise an artificial Chinese Wall between the first and second, to separate them by anything else *than* the degree of preparedness of the proletariat and the degree of its unity with the poor peasants, means monstrously to distort Marxism, to vulgarise it, to replace it by liberalism” (see Vol. XXIII, p. 391).

That is sufficient, I think.

Very well, we may be told; but if that is the case, why did Lenin combat the idea of “permanent (uninterrupted) revolution”?

Because Lenin proposed that the revolutionary capacities of the peasantry be “exhausted” and that the fullest use be made of their revolutionary energy for the complete liquidation of tsarism and for the transition to the proletarian revolution, whereas the adherents of “permanent revolution” did not understand the important role of the peasantry in the Russian revolution, underestimated the strength of the revolutionary energy of the peasantry, underestimated the strength and ability of the Russian proletariat to lead the peasantry and thereby hampered the work of emancipating the peasantry from the influence of the bourgeois, the work of rallying the peasantry around the proletariat.

Because Lenin proposed that the revolution *be crowned* with the transfer of power to the proletariat, whereas the adherents of “permanent” revolution wanted *to begin* at once with the establishment of the power of the proletariat, failing to realise that in so doing they were closing their eyes to such a “minor detail” as the survivals of serfdom and were leaving out of account so important a force as the Russian peasantry, failing to understand that such a policy could only retard the winning of the peasantry over to the side of the proletariat.

Consequently, Lenin fought the adherents of “permanent” revolution, not over the question of uninterruptedness, for Lenin himself maintained the point of view of uninterrupted revolution, but because they underestimated the role of the peasantry, which is an enormous reserve of the proletariat, because they failed to understand the idea of the hegemony of the proletariat.

The idea of “permanent” revolution should not be regarded as a new idea. It was first advanced by Marx at the end of the forties in his well-known *Address* to the *Communist League* (1850). It is from this document that our “permanentists” took the idea of uninterrupted revolution. It should be noted that in taking it from Marx our “permanentists” altered it somewhat, and in altering it “spoilt” it and made it unfit for practical use. The experienced hand of Lenin was needed to rectify this mistake, to take Marx’s idea of uninterrupted revolution in its pure form and make it a cornerstone of his theory of revolution.

Here is what Marx says in his *Address* about uninterrupted (permanent) revolution, after enumerating a number of revolutionary-democratic demands which he calls upon the Communists to win :

“While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians.”¹⁵

In other words:

a) Marx did not at all propose *to begin* the revolution in the Germany of the fifties with the immediate establishment of proletarian power—*contrary*, to the plans of our Russian “permanentists.”

b) Marx proposed only that the revolution *be crowned* with the establishment of proletarian state power, by hurling, step by step, one section of the bourgeoisie after another from the heights of power, in order, after the attainment of power by the proletariat, to kindle the fire of revolution in every country—and everything that Lenin taught and carried out in the course of our revolution in pursuit of his theory of the proletarian revolution under the conditions of imperialism was *fully in line* with that proposition.

It follows, then, that our Russian “permanentists” have not only underestimated the role of the peasantry in the Russian revolution and the importance of the idea of hegemony of the proletariat, but have altered (for the worse) Marx’s idea of “permanent” revolution and made it unfit for practical use.

That is why Lenin ridiculed the theory of our “permanentists,” calling it “original” and “fine,” and accusing them of refusing to “think why, for ten whole years, life has passed by this fine theory.” (Lenin’s article was written in 1915, ten years after the appearance of the theory of the “permanentists” in Russia. See Vol. XVIII, p. 317.)

That is why Lenin regarded this theory as a semi-Menshevik theory and said that it “borrows from the Bolsheviks their call for a resolute revolutionary struggle by the proletariat and the conquest of political power by the latter, and from the Mensheviks the ‘repudiation’ of the role of the peasantry” (see Lenin’s article “Two Lines of the Revolution,” *ibid.*).

This, then, is the position in regard to Lenin’s idea of the bourgeois-democratic revolution passing into the proletarian revolution, of utilising the bourgeois revolution for the “immediate” transition to the proletarian revolution.

To proceed. Formerly, the victory of the revolution in one country was considered impossible, on the assumption that it would require the combined action of the proletarians of all or at least of a majority of the advanced countries to achieve victory

¹⁵ My italics — J. V. Stalin.

over the bourgeoisie. Now this point of view no longer fits in with the facts. Now we must proceed from the possibility of such a victory, for the uneven and spasmodic character of the development of the various capitalist countries under the conditions of imperialism, the development within imperialism of catastrophic contradictions leading to inevitable wars, the growth of the revolutionary movement in all countries of the world—all this leads, not only to the possibility, but also to the necessity of the victory of the proletariat in individual countries. The history of the revolution in Russia is direct proof of this. At the same time, however, it must be borne in mind, that the overthrow of the bourgeoisie can be successfully accomplished only when certain absolutely necessary conditions exist, in the absence of which there can be even no question of the proletariat taking power.

Here is what Lenin says about these conditions in his pamphlet “*Left-Wing*” *Communism* :

“The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions, and particularly by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follow: it is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; it is essential for revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the ‘*lower classes*’ *do not want* the old way, and when the ‘upper classes’ *cannot carry on in the old way*, -only then can revolution triumph. This truth may be expressed in other words: *revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters)*.¹⁶ It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes should be passing through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics ... weakens the government and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow it rapidly” (see Vol. XXV, p, 222)

But the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and establishment of the power of the proletariat in one country does not yet mean that the complete victory of socialism has been ensured. After consolidating its power and leading the peasantry in its wake the proletariat of the victorious country can and must build a socialist society. But does this mean that it will thereby achieve the complete and final victory of socialism, i.e., does it mean that with the forces of only one country it can finally consolidate socialism and fully guarantee that country against intervention and, consequently, also against restoration? No, it does not. For this the victory of the revolution in at least several

¹⁶ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 22, and Vol. II, p. 382).

countries is needed. Therefore, the development and support of the revolution in other countries is an essential task of the victorious revolution. Therefore, the revolution which has been victorious in one country must regard itself not as a self-sufficient entity, but as an aid, as a means for hastening the victory of the proletariat in other countries.

Lenin expressed this thought succinctly when he said that the task of the victorious revolution is to do “the utmost possible in one country for the development, support and awakening of the revolution *in all countries*,” (see Vol. XXIII, p. 385).

These, in general, are the characteristic features of Lenin’s theory of proletarian revolution.

[8 My italics — J. V. Stalin.

IV. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

From this theme I take three fundamental questions :

a) the dictatorship of the proletariat as the instrument of the proletarian revolution;
b) the dictatorship of the proletariat as the rule of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie;

c) Soviet power as the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat,

1) *The dictatorship of the proletariat as the instrument of the proletarian revolution.* The question of the proletarian dictatorship is above all a question of the main content of the proletarian revolution. The proletarian revolution, its movement, its sweep and its achievements acquire flesh and blood only through the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the instrument of the proletarian revolution, its organ, its most important mainstay, brought into being for the purpose of, firstly, crushing the resistance of the overthrown exploiters and consolidating the achievements of the proletarian revolution, and secondly, carrying the revolution to the complete victory of socialism. The revolution can defeat the bourgeoisie, can overthrow its power, even without the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the revolution will be unable to crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie, to maintain its victory and to push forward to the final victory of socialism unless, at a certain stage in its development, it creates a special organ in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat as its principle mainstay.

“The fundamental question of every revolution is the question of power” (*Lenin*). Does this mean that all that is required is to assume power, to seize it? No, it does not. The seizure of power is only the beginning. For many reasons, the bourgeoisie that is overthrown in one country remains for a long time stronger than the proletariat which has overthrown it. Therefore, the whole point is to retain power, to consolidate it, to make it invincible. What is needed to attain this? To attain this it is necessary to carry

out at least three main tasks that confront the dictatorship of the proletariat “on the morrow” of victory:

a) to break the resistance of the landlords and capitalists who have been overthrown and expropriated by the revolution, to liquidate every attempt on their part to restore the power of capital;

b) to organise construction in such a way as to rally all the working people around the proletariat, and to carry on this work along the lines of preparing for the elimination, the abolition of classes;

c) to arm the revolution, to organise the army of the revolution for the struggle against foreign enemies, for the struggle against imperialism.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is needed to carry out, to fulfill these tasks.

“The transition from capitalism to communism,” says Lenin, “represents an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch has terminated, the exploiters inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this *hope* is converted into *attempts* at restoration. And after their first serious defeat, the overthrown exploiters—who had not expected their overthrow, never believed it possible, never conceded the thought of it—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 have been deprived, on behalf of their families, who had been leading such a sweet and easy life and whom now the ‘common herd’ is condemning to ruin and destitution (or to ‘common labour...’). In the train of the capitalist exploiters follow the broad masses of the petty bourgeoisie, with regard to whom decades of historical experience of all countries testify that they vacillate and hesitate, one day marching behind the proletariat and the next day taking fright at the difficulties of the revolution; that they become panic-stricken at the first defeat or semi-defeat of the workers, grow nervous, rush about, snivel, and run from one camp into the other” (see Vol. XXIII, p. 355).

The bourgeoisie has its grounds for making attempts at restoration, because for a long time after its overthrow it remains stronger than the proletariat which has overthrown it.

“If the exploiters are defeated in one country only” says Lenin, “and this, of course, is the typical case, since a simultaneous revolution in a number of countries is a rare exception, they *still* remain *stronger* than the exploited” (*ibid.*, p. 354)

Wherein lies the strength of the overthrown bourgeoisie?

Firstly, “in the strength of international capital, in the strength and durability of the international connections of the bourgeoisie” (see Vol. XXV, p. 173).

Secondly, in the fact that “for a long time after the revolution the exploiters inevitably retain a number of great practical advantages: they still have money (it is impossible to abolish money all at once); some moveable property—often fairly considerable; they still have various connections, habits of organisation and management, knowledge of all the ‘secrets’ (customs, methods, means and possibilities) of management, superior education, close connections with the higher technical personnel (who

live and think like the bourgeoisie), incomparably greater experience in the art of war (this is very important), and so on, and so forth” (see Vol. XXIII, p. 354)

Thirdly, “in the *force of habit*, in the strength of *small production*. For, unfortunately, small production is still very, very widespread in the world, and small production *engenders* capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale”... for “the abolition of classes means only not only driving out the landlords and capitalists—that we accomplished with comparative ease—it also means *abolishing the small commodity producers*, and they *cannot be drive out*, or crushed; we *must live in harmony* with them, they can (and must) be remoulded and re-educated only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organizational work (see Vol. XXV, pp.173 and 189).

That is why Lenin says :

“The dictatorship of the proletariat is a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a *more powerful enemy*, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased *tenfold* by its overthrow,”

that “the dictatorship of the proletariat is a stubborn struggle—bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative—against the forces and traditions of the old society” (*ibid.*, pp. 173 and 190).

It scarcely needs proof that there is not the slightest possibility of carrying out these tasks in a short period, of accomplishing all this in a few years. Therefore, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition from capitalism to communism, must not be regarded as a fleeting period of “super-revolutionary” acts and decrees, but as an entire historical era, replete with civil wars and external conflicts, with persistent organisational work and economic construction, with advances and retreats, victories and defeats. The historical era is needed not only to create the economic and cultural prerequisites for the complete victory of socialism, but also to enable the proletariat, firstly, to educate itself and become steeled as a force capable of governing the country, and, secondly, to re-educate and remould the petty-bourgeois strata along such lines as will assure the organisation of socialist production.

Marx said to the workers :

“You will have to go through fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and international conflicts,” Marx said to the workers, “not only to change existing conditions, but also to change yourselves and to make yourselves capable of wielding political power” (see K. Marx and F. Engels, *Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 506).

Continuing and developing Marx’s idea still further, Lenin wrote that:

“It will be necessary under the dictatorship of the proletariat to re-educate millions of peasants and small proprietors, hundreds of thousands of office employees, officials and bourgeois intellectuals, to subordinate them all to the proletarian state and to proletarian leadership, to overcome their bourgeois habits and traditions,” just as we must “-in a protracted struggle waged on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat-re-educate the proletarians themselves, who do not abandon their petty-bourgeois prejudices at one stroke, by a miracle, at the bidding of the Virgin Mary,

at the bidding of a slogan, resolution or decree, but only in the course of a long and difficult mass struggle against the mass petty-bourgeois influences" (see Vol. XXV, pp. 248 and 247).

2) *The dictatorship of the proletariat as the rule of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie.* From the foregoing it is evident that the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a mere change of personalities in the government, a change of the cabinet," etc., leaving the old economic and political order intact. The Mensheviks and the opportunists of all countries, who fear dictatorship like fire and in their fright substitute the concept "conquest of power" for the concept of dictatorship, usually reduce the "conquest of power" to a change of the "cabinet," to the accession to power of a new ministry made up of people like Scheidemann and Noske, MacDonald and Henderson. It is hardly necessary to explain that these and similar cabinet changes have nothing in common with the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the conquest of real power by the real proletariat. With the MacDonalds and Scheidemanns in power, while the old bourgeois order is allowed to remain, their so-called governments cannot be anything else than an apparatus serving the bourgeoisie, a screen to conceal the ulcers of imperialism, a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie against the revolutionary movement of the oppressed and exploited masses. Capital needs such governments as a screen when it finds it inconvenient, unprofitable, difficult to oppress and exploit the masses without the aid of a screen. Of course, the appearance of such governments is a symptom that "over there" (i.e., in the capitalist camp) all is not quite "at the Shipka Pass"; nevertheless, governments of this kind inevitably remain governments of capital in disguise. The government of a MacDonald or a Scheidemann is as far removed from the conquest of power by the proletariat as the sky from the earth. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a change of government, but a new state, with new organs of power, both central and local; it is the state of the proletariat, which has arisen on the ruins of the old state, the state of the bourgeoisie.

The dictatorship of the proletariat arises not on the basis of the bourgeois order, but in the process of the breaking up of this order, after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, in the process of the expropriation of the landlords and capitalists, in the process of the socialisation of the principal instruments and means of production, in the process of violent proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a revolutionary power based on the use of force against the bourgeoisie.

The state is a machine in the hands of the ruling class for suppressing the resistance of its class enemies. *In this respect* the dictatorship of the proletariat does not differ essentially from the dictatorship of any other class, for the proletarian state is a machine for the suppression of the bourgeoisie. But there is one *substantial* difference. This difference consists in the fact that all hitherto existing class states have been dictatorships of an exploiting minority over the exploited majority, whereas the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dictatorship of the exploited majority over the exploiting minority.

Briefly: *the dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule-unrestricted by law and based on force-of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, a rule enjoying the sympathy and support of the labouring and exploited masses* (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*).

From this follow two main conclusions:

First conclusion: The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be “complete” democracy, democracy for all, for the rich as well as for the poor; the dictatorship of the proletariat “must be a state that is democratic *in a new way* (for the proletarians and the non-propertied in general) and dictatorial *in a new way* (against¹⁷ the bourgeoisie)” (see Vol. XXI, p. 393). The talk of Kautsky and Co. about universal equality, about “pure” democracy, about “perfect” democracy, and the like, is a bourgeois disguise of the indubitable fact that equality between exploited and exploiters is impossible. The theory of “pure” democracy is the theory of the upper stratum of the working class, which has been broken in and is being fed by the imperialist robbers. It was brought into being for the purpose of concealing the ulcers of capitalism, of embellishing imperialism and lending it moral strength in the struggle against the exploited masses. Under capitalism there are no real “liberties” for the exploited, nor can there be, if for no reason than that the premises, printing plants, paper supplies, etc, indispensable for the enjoyment of “liberties” are the privilege of the exploiters. Under capitalism the exploited masses do not, nor can they ever, really participate in governing the country, if for no other reason than that, even under the most democratic regime, under conditions of capitalism, governments are not set up by the people but by the Rothschilds and Stinneses, the Rockefellers and Morgans. Democracy under capitalism is *capitalist* democracy, the democracy of the exploiting minority, based on the restriction of the rights of exploited majority and directed against this majority. Only under the proletarian dictatorship are real liberties for the exploited and real participation of the proletarians and peasants in governing the country possible. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, democracy is *proletarian* democracy, the democracy of the exploited majority, based on the restriction of the rights of the exploiting minority and directed against this minority.

Second conclusion: The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot arise as the result of the peaceful development of bourgeois society and of bourgeois democracy; it can arise only as the result of the smashing of the bourgeois state machine, the bourgeois army, the bourgeois bureaucratic apparatus, the bourgeois police.

“The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes,” say Marx and Engels in a preface to the *Communist Manifesto*. The task of the proletarian revolution is “...no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, *but to smash it*...this is the preliminary condition for every real people’s revolution on the continent,” says Marx in his letter to Kugelmann in 1871. 2

¹⁷ *Selskosooyouz*-the All-Russian Union of Rural Co-operatives-existed from August 1921 to June 1929.

Marx's qualifying phrases about the continent gave the opportunists and Mensheviks of all countries a pretext for clamouring that Marx had thus conceded the possibility of the peaceful evolution of bourgeois democracy into a proletarian democracy, at least in certain countries outside the European continent (Britain, America). Marx did in fact concede that possibility, and he had good grounds for conceding it in regard to Britain and America in the seventies of the last century, when monopoly capitalism and imperialism did not yet exist, and when these countries, owing to the particular conditions of their development, had as much as yet no developed militarism and bureaucracy. That was the situation before the appearance of developed imperialism. But later, after a lapse of thirty or forty years, when the situation in these countries had radically changed, when imperialism had developed and had embraced all capitalist countries without exception, when militarism and bureaucracy had appeared in Britain and America also, when the particular conditions for peaceful development in Britain and America had disappeared—then the qualification in regard to these countries necessarily could no longer hold good.

“Today,” said Lenin, “in 1917, in the epoch of the first great imperialist war, this qualification made by Marx is no longer valid. Both Britain and America, the biggest and the last representatives in the whole world of Anglo-Saxon ‘liberty’ in the sense that they had no militarism and bureaucracy, have completely sunk into all-European filthy, bloody morass of bureaucratic-military institutions which subordinate everything to themselves and trample everything underfoot. Today, in Britain and in America, too, ‘the preliminary condition for every real people’s revolution’ is the *smashing*, the *destruction* of the ‘ready-made state machinery’ (perfected in those countries, between 1914 and 1917, up to the ‘European’ general imperialist standard)” (see Vol. XXI, p. 395).

In other words, the law of violent proletarian revolution, the law of smashing of the bourgeois state machine as a preliminary condition for such a revolution, is an inevitable law of the revolutionary movement in the imperialist countries of the world.

Of course, in the remote future, if the proletariat is victorious in the principal capitalist countries, and if the present capitalist encirclement is replaced by a socialist encirclement, a “peaceful” path of development is quite possible for certain capitalist countries, whose capitalists, in view of the “unfavourable” international situation, will consider it expedient “voluntarily” to make supposition concessions to the proletariat. But this supposition applies only to a remote and possible future. With regard to the immediate future, there is no ground whatsoever for this supposition.

Therefore, Lenin is right in saying:

“The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a *new one*” (see Vol. XXIII, P. 342)

3) *Soviet power as the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat*. The victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat signifies the suppression of the bourgeoisie, the smashing of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution of proletarian democracy

for bourgeois democracy. That is clear. But by means of what organisation can this colossal work be carried out? The old forms of organisation of the proletariat, which grew up on the basis of bourgeois parliamentarism, are inadequate for this work-of that there can hardly be any doubt. What, then, are the new forms of organisation of the proletariat that are capable of serving as the gravediggers of the bourgeois state machine, that are capable not only of smashing this machine, not only of substituting proletarian democracy for bourgeois democracy, but also of becoming the foundation of the proletarian state power?

This new form of organisation of the proletariat is the Soviets.

Wherein lies the strength of the Soviets as compared with the old forms of organisation?

In that the Soviets are the most *all-embracing* mass organisations of the proletariat, for they and they alone embrace all workers without exception.

In that the Soviets are the *only* mass organisations which unite all the oppressed and exploited, workers and peasants, soldiers and sailors, and in which the vanguard of the masses, the proletariat, can, for this reason, most easily and most completely exercise its political leadership of the mass struggle.

In that the Soviets are the *most powerful organs* of the revolutionary struggle of the masses, of the political actions of the masses, of the uprising of the masses-organs capable of breaking the omnipotence of finance capital and its political appendages.

In that the Soviets are the *immediate* organisations of the masses themselves, i.e., they are *the most democratic* and therefore the most authoritative organisations of the masses, which facilitate to the utmost their participation in the work of building up the new state and in its administration, and which bring into full play the revolutionary energy, initiative and creative abilities of the masses in the struggle for the destruction of the old order, in the struggle for the new, proletarian order.

Soviet power is the union and constitution of the local Soviets into one common state organisation, into the state organisation of the proletariat as the vanguard of the oppressed and exploited masses and as the ruling class-their union in the Republic of the Soviets.

The essence of Soviet power consists in the fact that these most all-embracing and most revolutionary mass organisations of precisely those classes that were oppressed by the capitalist and landlords are now the "*permanent and sole* basis of the whole power of the state, of the whole state apparatus"; that "precisely those masses which even in the most democratic bourgeois republics," while being equal in law, "have in fact been prevented by thousands of tricks and devices from taking part in political life and from enjoying democratic rights and liberties, are now drawn unfailingly into *constant* and, moreover, *decisive* participation in the democratic administration of the state". 3 (see Lenin, Vol. XXIV, p. 13).

That is why Soviet power is a *new form* of state organisation, different in principle from the old bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary form, a *new type* of state, adapted not to the task of exploiting and oppressing the labouring masses, but to

the task of completely emancipating them from all oppression and exploitation, to the tasks facing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Lenin is right in saying that with the appearance of Soviet power “the era of bourgeois-democratic parliamentarism has drawn to a close and a new chapter in world history-the era of proletarian dictatorship-has been opened.”

Wherein lies the characteristic features of Soviet power?

In that Soviet power is the most all-embracing and most democratic state organisation of all possible state organisations while classes continue to exist; for, being the arena of the bond and collaboration between the workers and the exploited peasants in their struggle against the exploiters, and basing itself in its works on this bond and on this collaboration. Soviet power is thus the power of the majority of the population over the minority, it is the state of the majority, the expression of its dictatorship.

In that Soviet power is the most internationalist of all state organisations in class society, for, by destroying every kind of national oppression and resting on the collaboration of the labouring masses of the various nationalities, it facilitates the uniting of these masses into a single state union.

In that Soviet power, by its very structure, facilitates the task of leading the oppressed and exploited masses by the vanguard of these masses-by the proletariat, as the most united and most politically conscious core of the Soviets.

“The experience of all revolutions and of all movements of the oppressed classes, the experience of the world socialist movement teaches us,” says Lenin, “that the proletariat alone is able to unite and lead the scattered and backward strata of the toiling and exploited population” (see Vol. XXIV, p. 14). The point is that the structure of Soviet power facilitates the practical application of the lessons drawn from this experience.

In that Soviet power, by combining legislative and executive power in a single state organisation and replacing territorial electoral constituencies by industrial units, factories and mills, thereby directly links the workers and the labouring masses in general with the apparatus of state administration, teaches them how to govern the country.

In that Soviet power alone is capable of releasing the army from its subordination to bourgeois command and of converting it from the instrument of oppression of the people which it is under the bourgeois order into an instrument for the liberation of the people from the yoke of the bourgeoisie, both native and foreign.

In that “the Soviet organisation of the state alone is capable of immediately and effectively smashing and finally destroying the old, i.e., the bourgeois, bureaucratic and judicial apparatus” (*ibid*)

In that the Soviet form of state alone, by drawing the mass organisations of the toilers and exploited into constant and unrestricted participation in state administration, is capable of preparing the ground for the withering away of the state, which is one of the basic elements of the future stateless communist society.

The Republic of Soviets is thus the political form, so long sought and finally discovered, within the framework of which the economic emancipation of the proletariat, the complete victory of socialism, must be accomplished.

The Paris Commune was the embryo of this form; Soviet power is its development and culmination.

That is why Lenin says:

“The Republic of Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’, and Peasants’ Deputies is not only the form of a higher type of democratic institution...but is the *only* 4 form capable of ensuring the most painless transition to socialism” (see Vol. XXII, p. 131).

V. The Peasant Question

From this theme I take four questions :

- a) the presentation of the question;
- b) the peasantry during the bourgeois-democratic revolution;
- c) the peasantry during the proletarian revolution;
- d) the peasantry after the consolidation of Soviet power.

1) *The presentation of the question.* Some think that the fundamental thing in Leninism is the peasant question, that the point of departure of Leninism is the question of the peasantry, of its role, its relative importance. This is absolutely wrong. The fundamental question of Leninism, its point of departure, is not the peasant question, but the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the conditions under which it can be achieved, of the conditions under which it can be consolidated. The peasant question, as the question of the ally of the proletariat in its struggle for power, is a derivative question.

This circumstance, however, does not in the least deprive the peasant question of the serious and vital importance it unquestionably has for the proletarian revolution. It is known that the serious study of the peasant question in the ranks of Russian Marxists began precisely on the eve of the first revolution (1905), when the question of overthrowing tsarism and of realising the hegemony of the proletariat confronted the Party in all its magnitude, and when the question of the ally of the proletariat in the impending bourgeois revolution became of vital importance. It is also known that the peasant question in Russia assumed a still more urgent character during the proletarian revolution, when the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of achieving and maintaining it, led to the question of allies for the proletariat in the impending proletarian revolution. And this was natural. Those who are marching towards and preparing to assume power cannot but be interested in the question of who are their real allies.

In this sense the peasant question is part of the general question of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and as such it is one of the most vital problems of Leninism.

The attitude of indifference and sometimes even of outright aversion displayed by the parties of the Second International towards the peasant question is to be explained not only by the specific conditions of development in the West. It is to be explained

primarily by the fact that these parties do not believe in the proletarian dictatorship, that they fear revolution and have no intention of leading the proletariat to power. And those who are afraid of revolution, who do not intend to lead the proletarians to power, cannot be interested in the question of allies for the proletariat in the revolution—to them the question of allies is one of indifference, of no immediate significance. The ironical attitude of the heroes of the Second International towards the peasant question is regarded by them as a sign of good breeding, a sign of “true” Marxism. As a matter of fact, there is not a grain of Marxism in this, for indifference towards so important a question as the peasant question on the eve of the proletarian revolution is the reverse side of the repudiation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is an unmistakable sign of downright betrayal of Marxism.

The question is as follows: Are the revolutionary potentialities latent in the peasantry by virtue of certain conditions of its existence *already exhausted*, or not; and if not, *is there any hope, any basis*, for utilising these potentialities for the proletarian revolution, for transforming the peasantry, the exploited majority of it, from the reserve of the bourgeoisie which it was during the bourgeois revolutions in the West and still is even now, into a reserve of the proletariat, into its ally?

Leninism replies to this question in the affirmative, i.e., it recognises the existence of revolutionary capacities in the ranks of the majority of the peasantry, and the possibility of using these in the interests of the proletarian dictatorship.

The history of the three revolutions in Russia fully corroborates the conclusion of Leninism on this score.

Hence the practical conclusion that the toiling masses of the peasantry must be supported in their struggle against bondage and exploitation, in their struggle for deliverance from oppression and poverty. This does not mean, of course, that the proletariat must support *every* peasant movement. What we have in mind here is support for a movement or struggle of the peasantry which, directly or indirectly, facilitates the emancipation movement of the proletariat, which, in one way or another, brings grist to the mill of the proletarian revolution, and which helps to transform the peasantry into a reserve and ally of the working class.

2) *The peasantry during the bourgeois-democratic revolution*. This period extends from the first Russian revolution (1905) to the second revolution (February 1917), inclusive. The characteristic feature of this period is the emancipation of the peasantry from the influence of the liberal bourgeoisie, the peasantry’s *desertion* of the Cadets, its *turn* towards the proletariat, towards the Bolshevik Party. The history of this period is the history of the struggle between the Cadets (the liberal bourgeoisie) and the Bolsheviks (the proletariat) for the peasantry. The outcome of this struggle was decided by the Duma period, for the period of the four Dumas served as an object lesson to the peasantry, and this lesson brought home to the peasantry the fact that they would receive neither land nor liberty at the hands of the Cadets; that the tsar was wholly in favour of the landlords, and that the Cadets were supporting the tsar; that the only force they could rely on for assistance was the urban workers, the proletariat. The

imperialist war merely confirmed the lessons of the Duma period and consummated the peasantry's desertion of the bourgeoisie, consummated the isolation of the liberal bourgeoisie; for the years of the war revealed the utter futility, the utter deceptiveness of all hopes of obtaining peace from the tsar and his bourgeois allies. Without the object lessons of the Duma period, the hegemony of the proletariat would have been impossible.

That is how the alliance between the workers and the peasants in the bourgeois-democratic revolution took shape. That is how the hegemony (leadership) of the proletariat in the common struggle for the overthrow of tsarism took shape-the hegemony which led to the February Revolution of 1917.

The bourgeois revolutions in the West (Britain, France, Germany, Austria) took, as is well known, a different road. There, hegemony in the revolution belonged not to the proletariat, which by reason of its weakness did not and could not represent an independent political force, but to the liberal bourgeoisie. There the peasantry obtained its emancipation from feudal regimes, not at the hands of the proletariat, which was numerically weak and unorganised, but at the hands of the bourgeoisie. There the peasantry marched against the old order side by side with the liberal bourgeoisie. There the peasantry acted as the reserve of the bourgeoisie. There the revolution, in consequences of this, led to an enormous increase in the political weight of the bourgeoisie.

In Russia, on the contrary, the bourgeois revolution produced quite opposite results. The revolution in Russia led not to the strengthening, but to the weakening of the bourgeoisie as a political force, not to an increase in its political reserve, but to the loss of its main reserve, to the loss of the peasantry. The bourgeois revolution in Russia brought to the forefront not the liberal bourgeoisie but the revolutionary proletariat, rallying around the latter the millions of the peasantry.

Incidentally, this explains why the bourgeois revolution in Russia passed into a proletarian revolution in a comparatively short space time. The hegemony of the proletariat was the embryo of, and the transitional stage to, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

How is this peculiar phenomenon of the Russian revolution, which has no precedent in the history of the bourgeois revolutions of the West, to be explained? Whence this peculiarity?

It is to be explained by the fact that the bourgeois revolution unfolded in Russia under more advanced conditions of class struggle than in the West; that the Russian proletariat had at that time already become an independent political force, whereas the liberal bourgeoisie, frightened by the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat, lost all semblance of revolutionary spirit (especially after the lessons of 1905) and turned towards an alliance with the tsar and the landlords against the revolution, against the workers and peasants.

We should bear in mind the following circumstances, which determined the peculiar character of the Russian bourgeois revolution.

a) The unprecedented concentrations of Russia industry on the eve of the revolution. It is known, for instance, that in Russia 54 per cent of all the workers were employed in enterprises employing over 500 workers each, whereas in so highly developed a country as the United States of America no more than 33 per cent of all the workers were employed in such enterprises. It scarcely needs proof that this circumstances alone, in view of the existence of a revolutionary party like the Party of the Bolsheviks, transformed the working class of Russia into an immense force in the political life of the country.

b) The hideous forms of exploitation in the factories, coupled with the intolerable police regime of the tsarist henchmen—a circumstance which transformed every important strike of the workers into an imposing political action and steeled the working class as a force that was revolutionary to the end.

c) The political flabbiness of the Russian bourgeoisie, which after the Revolution of 1905 turned into servility to tsarism and downright counter-revolution—a fact to be explained not only by the revolutionary spirit of the Russian proletariat, which flung the Russian bourgeoisie into the embrace of tsarism, but also by the direct dependence of this bourgeoisie upon government contracts.

d) The existence in the countryside of the most hideous and most intolerable survivals of serfdom, coupled with the unlimited power of the landlord—a circumstance which threw the peasantry into the embrace of the revolution.

e) Tsarism, which stifled everything that was alive, and whose tyranny aggravated the oppression of the capitalist and the landlord—a circumstance which united the struggle of the workers and peasants into a single torrent of revolution.

f) The imperialist war, which fused all these contradictions in the political life of Russia into a profound revolutionary crisis, and which lent the revolution tremendous striking force.

To whom could the peasantry turn under these circumstances? From whom could it seek support against the unlimited power of the landlords, against the tyranny of the tsar, against the devastating war which was ruining it? From the liberal bourgeoisie? But it was an enemy, as the long years of experience of all four Dumas had proved. From the Socialist-Revolutionaries? The Socialist-Revolutionaries were “better” than the Cadets, of course, and their programme was “suitable,” almost a peasant programme; but what could the Socialist-Revolutionaries offer, considering that they thought of relying only on the peasants and were weak in the towns, from which the enemy primarily drew its forces? Where was the new force which would stop at nothing either in town or country, which would boldly march in the front ranks to fight the tsar and the landlords, which would help the peasantry to extricate itself from bondage, from land hunger, from oppression, from war? Was there such a force in Russia at all? Yes, there was. It was the Russian proletariat, which had shown its strength, its ability to fight to the end, its boldness and revolutionary spirit, as far back as 1905.

At any rate, there was no other such force; nor could any other be found anywhere.

That is why the peasantry, when it turned its back on the Cadets and attached itself to the Socialist-Revolutionaries, at the same time came to realise the necessity of submitting to the leadership of such a courageous leader of the revolution as the Russian proletariat.

Such were the circumstances which determined the peculiar character of the Russian bourgeois revolution.

3) *The peasantry during the proletarian revolution.* This period extends from the February Revolution of 1917 to the October Revolution of 1917. This period is comparatively short, eight months in all; but from the point of view of the political enlightenment and revolutionary training of the masses these eight months can safely be put on a par with whole decades of ordinary constitutional development, for they were eight months of *revolution*. This characteristic feature of this period was the further of this period was the further revolutionisation of the peasantry, its disillusionment with the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the peasantry's *desertion* of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, its new turn toward a direct rally around the proletariat as the only consistently revolutionary force capable of leading the country to peace. The history of this period is the history of the struggle between the Socialist-Revolutionaries (petty-bourgeois democracy) and the Bolsheviks (proletarian democracy) for the peasantry, to win over the majority of the peasantry. The outcome of this struggle was decided by the coalition period, the Kerensky period, the refusal of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks to confiscate the landlords' land, the fight of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks to continue the war, the June offensive at the front, the introduction of capital punishment for soldiers, the Kornilov revolt.

Whereas before, in the preceding period, the basic question had been the overthrow of the tsar and of the power of the landlords, now, in the period following the February Revolution, when there was no longer any tsar, and when the interminable war had exhausted the economy of the country and utterly ruined the peasantry, the question of liquidating the war became the main problem of the revolution. The centre of gravity had manifestly shifted from purely internal questions to the main question-the war. "End the war," "Let's get out of the war"-such was the general outcry of the war-weary nation and primarily of the peasantry.

But in order to get out of the war it was necessary to overthrow the Provisional Government, it was necessary to overthrow the power of the bourgeoisie, it was necessary to overthrow the power of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, for they, and they alone, were dragging out the war to a "victorious finish." Practically, there was no way of getting out of the war except by overthrowing the bourgeoisie.

There was a new revolution, a proletarian revolution, for it ousted from power the last group of the imperialist bourgeoisie, its extreme Left wing, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and the Mensheviks, in order to set up a new, proletarian power, the power of the Soviets, in order to put in power the party of the revolutionary proletariat, the Bolshevik Party, the party of the revolutionary struggle against the

imperialist war and for a democratic peace. The majority of the peasantry supported the struggle of the workers for peace, for the power of the Soviets.

There was no other way out for the peasantry. Nor could there be any other way out.

Thus, the Kerensky period was a great object lesson for the toiling masses of the peasantry, for it showed clearly that with the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks in power the country could not extricate itself from the war, and the peasants would never get either land or liberty; that the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries differed from the Cadets only in their honeyed phrases and false premises, while they actually pursued the same imperialist, Cadet policy; that the only power that could lead the country on to the proper road was the power of the Soviets. The further prolongation of the war merely confirmed the truth of this lesson, spurred on the revolution, and drove millions of peasants and soldiers to *rally directly* around the proletarian revolution. The isolation of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks became an incontrovertible fact. Without the object lessons of the coalition period the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been impossible.

Such were the circumstances which facilitated the process of the bourgeois revolution passing into the proletarian revolution.

That is how the dictatorship of the proletariat took shape in Russia.

4) *The peasantry after the consolidation of Soviet power.* Whereas before, in the first period of the revolution, the main objective was the overthrow of tsarism, and later, after the February Revolution, the primary objective was to get out of the imperialist war by overthrowing the bourgeoisie, now, after the liquidation of the civil war and the consolidation of Soviet power, questions of economic construction came to the forefront. Strengthen and develop the nationalised industry; for this purpose link up industry with peasant economy through state-regulated trade; replace the surplus-appropriation system by the tax in kind so as, later on, by gradually lowering the tax in kind, to reduce matters to the exchange of products of industry for the products of peasant farming; revive trade and develop the co-operatives, drawing into them the vast masses of the peasantry-this is how Lenin outlined the immediate tasks of economic construction on the way to building the foundations of socialist economy.

It is said that this task may prove beyond the strength of a peasant country like Russia. Some skeptics even say that it is simply utopian, impossible, for the peasantry is a peasantry-it consists of small producers, and therefore cannot be of use in organising the foundations of socialist production.

But the sceptics are mistaken, for they fail to take into account certain circumstances which in the present case are of decisive significance. Let us examine the most important of these:

Firstly. The peasantry in the Soviet Union must not be confused with the peasantry in the West. A peasantry that has been schooled in three revolutions, that fought against the tsar and the power of the bourgeoisie side by side with the proletariat and under the leadership of the proletariat, a peasantry that has received land and peace at

the hands of the proletarian revolution and by reason of this has become the reserve of the proletariat-such a peasantry cannot but be different from a peasantry which during the bourgeois revolution fought under the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie, which received land at the hands of that bourgeoisie, and in view of this became the reserve of the bourgeoisie. It scarcely needs proof that the Soviet peasantry, which has learnt to appreciate its political friendship and political collaboration with the proletariat and which owes its freedom to this friendship and collaboration, cannot but represent exceptionally favourable material for economic collaboration with the proletariat.

Engels said that “the conquest of political power by the Socialist Party has become a matter of the not too distant future,” that “in order to conquer political power this Party must first go from the towns to the country, must become a power in the countryside” (see Engels, *The Peasant Question*, 1922 ed. 1). He wrote this in the nineties of the last century, having in mind the Western peasantry. Does it need proof that the Russian Communists, after accomplishing an enormous amount of work in this field in the course of three revolutions, have already succeeded in gaining in the countryside an influence and backing the like of which our Western comrades dare not even dream of? How can it be denied that this circumstances must decidedly facilitate the organisation of economic collaboration between the working class and the peasantry of Russia?

The sceptics maintain that the small peasants are a factor that is incompatible with socialist construction. But listen to what Engels says about the small peasants of the West:

“We are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision. We do this not only because we consider the small peasant who does his own work as virtually belonging to us, but also in the direct interest of the Party. The greater the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished. It will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production. The material sacrifices to be made for this purpose in the interest of the peasants and to be defrayed out of public funds can, from the point of view of capitalist economy, be viewed only as money thrown away, but it is nevertheless an excellent investment because it will effect a perhaps tenfold saving in the cost of the social reorganisation in general. In this sense we can, therefore, afford to deal very liberally with the peasants” (*ibid.*).

That is what Engels said, having in mind the Western peasantry. But is it not clear that what Engels said can nowhere be realised so easily and so completely as in the land of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Is it not clear that only in Soviet Russia is

it possible at once and to the fullest extent for “the small peasant who does his own work” to come over to our side, for the “material sacrifices” necessary for this to be made, and for the necessary “liberality towards the peasants” to be displayed? Is it not clear that these and similar measures for the benefit of the peasantry are already being carried out in Russia? How can it be denied that this circumstance, in its turn, must facilitate and advance the work of economic construction in the land of the Soviets?

Secondly. Agriculture in Russia must not be confused with agriculture in the West. There, agriculture is developed along the ordinary lines of capitalism, under conditions of profound differentiation among the peasantry, with large landed estates and private capitalist latifundia at one extreme and pauperism, destitution and wage slavery at the other. Owing to this, disintegration and decay are quite natural there. Not so in Russia. Here agriculture cannot develop along such a path, if for no other reason than that the existence of Soviet power and the nationalisation of the principal instruments and means of production preclude such a development. In Russia the development of agriculture must proceed along a different path, along the path of organising millions of small and middle peasants in co-operatives, along the path of developing in the countryside a mass co-operative movement supported by the state by means of preferential credits. Lenin rightly pointed out in his articles on co-operation that the development of agriculture in our country must proceed along a new path, along the path of drawing the majority of the peasants into socialist construction through the co-operatives, along the path of gradually introducing into agriculture the principles of collectivism, first in the sphere of marketing and later in the sphere of production of agriculture products.

Of extreme interest in this respect are several new phenomena observed in the countryside in connection with the work of the agricultural co-operatives. It is well known that new, large organisations have sprung up within the Selskosoyuzl, 2 in different branches of agriculture, such as production of flax, potatoes, butter, etc., which have a great future before them. Of these, the Flax Centre, for instance, unites a whole network of peasant flax growers’ associations. The Flax Centre supplies the peasants with seeds and implements; then it buys all the flax produced by these peasants, disposes of it on the market on a large scale, guarantees the peasants a share in the profits, and in this way links peasant economy with state industry through the Selskosoyouz. What shall we call this form of organisation of production? In my opinion, it is the domestic system of large-scale state-socialist production in the sphere of agriculture. In speaking of the domestic system of state-socialist production I do so by analogy with the domestic system under capitalism, let us say, in the textile industry, where the handicraftsman received their raw material and tools from the capitalist and turned over to him the entire product of their labour, thus being in fact semi-wage earners working in their own homes. This is one of numerous indices showing the path along which our agriculture must develop. There is no need to mention here similar indices in other branches of agriculture.

It scarcely needs proof that the vast majority of the peasantry will eagerly take this new path of development, rejecting the path of private capitalist latifundia and wage slavery, the path of destitution and ruin.

Here is what Lenin says about the path of development of our agriculture:

“State power over all large-scale means of production, state power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured leadership of the peasantry by the proletariat, etc.-is not this all that is necessary for building a complete socialist society from the co-operatives from the co-operatives alone, which we formerly looked upon as huckstering and which from a certain aspect we have the right to look down upon as such now, under the NEP? Is this not all that is necessary for building a complete socialist society? This is not yet the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for this building” (see Vol. XXVII, p. 392).

Further on, speaking of the necessity of giving financial and other assistance to the co-operatives, as a “new principal of organising the population” and a new “social system” under the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin continues:

“Every social system arises only with the financial assistance of a definite class. There is no need to mention the hundreds and hundreds of millions of rubles that the birth of ‘free’ capitalism cost. Now we must realise, and apply in our practical work, the fact that the social system which we must now give more than usual assistance is the co-operative system. But it must be assisted in the real sense of the word, i.e., it will not be enough to interpret assistance to mean assistance for any kind of co-operative trade; by assistance we must mean assistance for co-operative trade in which *really large masses of the population really take part*” (*ibid.*, p. 393).

What do all these facts prove?

That the sceptics are wrong.

That Leninism is right in regarding the masses of labouring peasants as the reserve of the proletariat.

That the proletariat in power can and must use this reserve in order to link industry with agriculture, to advance socialist construction, and to provide for the dictatorship of the proletariat that necessary foundation without which the transition to socialist economy is impossible.

VI. The National Question

From this theme I take two main questions:

a) the presentation of the question;

b) the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples and the proletarian revolution.

1) *The presentation of the question.* During the last two decades the national question has undergone a number of very important changes. The national question in the

period of the Second International and the national question in the period of Leninism are far from being the same thing. They differ profoundly from each other, not only in their scope, but also in their intrinsic character.

Formerly, the national question was usually confined to a narrow circle of questions, concerning, primarily, “civilised” nationalities. The Irish, the Hungarians, the Poles, the Finns, the Serbs, and several other European nationalities—that was the circle of unequal peoples in whose destinies the leaders of the Second International were interested. The scores and hundreds of millions of Asiatic and African peoples who are suffering national oppression in its most savage and cruel form usually remained outside of their field of vision. They hesitated to put white and black, “civilised” and “uncivilised” on the same plane. Two or three meaningless, lukewarm resolutions, which carefully evaded the question of liberating the colonies—that was all the leaders of the Second International could boast of. Now we can say that this duplicity and half-heartedness in dealing with the national question has been brought to an end. Leninism laid bare this crying incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between European and Asiatics, between the “civilised” and “uncivilised” slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies. The national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal state problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of emancipating the oppressed peoples in the dependent countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism.

Formerly, the principle of self-determination of nations was usually misinterpreted, and not infrequently it was narrowed down to the idea of the right of nations to autonomy. Certain leaders of the Second International even went so far as to turn the right to self-determination into the right to cultural autonomy, i.e., the right of oppressed nations to have their own cultural institutions, leaving all political power in the hands of the ruling nation. As a consequence, the idea of self-determination stood in danger of being transformed from an instrument for combating annexations into an instrument for justifying them. Now we can say that this confusion has been cleared up. Leninism broadened the conception of self-determinism, interpreting it as the right of the oppressed peoples of the dependent countries and colonies to complete secession, as the right of nations to independent existence as states. This precluded the possibility of justifying annexations by interpreting the right to self-determinism as the right to autonomy. Thus, the principle of self-determinism itself was transformed from an instrument for deceiving the masses, which it undoubtedly was in the hands of the social-chauvinists during the imperialist war, into an instrument for exposing all imperialist aspirations and chauvinist machinations, into an instrument for the political education of the masses in the spirit of internationalism.

Formerly, the question of the oppressed nations was usually regarded as purely a juridical question. Solemn proclamations about “national equality of rights,” innumerable declarations about the “equality of nations”—that was the stock-in-trade of the parties of the Second International, which glossed over the fact that “equality of nations” under imperialism, where one group of nations (a minority) lives by exploiting

another group of nations, is sheer mockery of the oppressed nations. Now we can say that this bourgeois-juridical point of view on the national question has been exposed. Leninism brought the national question down from the lofty heights of high-sounding declarations to solid ground, and declared that pronouncements about the “equality of nations” not backed by the direct support of the proletarian parties for the liberation struggle of the oppressed nations are meaningless and false. In this way the question of the oppressed nations become one of supporting the oppressed nations, of rendering real and continuous assistance to them in their struggle against imperialism for real equality of nations, for their independent existence as states.

Formerly, the national question was regarded from a reformist point of view, as an independent question having no connection with the general question of the power of capital, of the overthrow of imperialism, of the proletarian revolution. It was tacitly assumed that the victory of the proletariat in Europe was possible without a direct, alliance with the liberation movement in the colonies, that the national-colonial question could be solved on the quiet, “of its own accord,” off the highway of the proletarian revolution, without a revolutionary struggle against imperialism. Now we can say that anti-revolutionary point of view has been exposed. Leninism has proved, and the imperialist war and the revolution in Russia has confirmed, that the national question can be solved only in connection with and on the basis of the proletarian revolution, and that the road to victory of the revolution in the West lies through the revolutionary alliance with the liberation movement of the colonies and dependent countries against imperialism. The national question is a part of the general question of the proletarian revolution, a part of the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The question is as follows: Are the revolutionary potentialities latent in the revolutionary liberation movement of the oppressed countries *already exhausted*, or not; and if not, is there any hope, any basis, for utilising these potentialities for the proletarian revolution, for transforming the dependent and colonial countries from a reserve of the imperialist bourgeoisie into a reserve of the revolutionary proletariat, into an ally of the latter?

Leninism replies to this question in the affirmative, i.e., it recognises the existence of revolutionary capacities in the national liberation movement of the oppressed countries, and the possibility of using these for overthrowing the common enemy, for overthrowing imperialism. The mechanics of the development of imperialism, the imperialist war and the revolution in Russia wholly confirm the conclusions of Leninism on this score.

Hence the necessity for the proletariat of the “dominant” nations to support-resolutely and actively to support-the national liberation movement of the oppressed and dependent peoples.

This does not mean, of course, that the proletariat must support *every* national movement, everywhere and always, in every individual concrete case. It means that support must be given to such national movements as tend to weaken, to overthrow imperialism, and not to strengthen and preserve it. Cases occur when the national movements in certain oppressed countries came into conflict with the interests of the

development of the proletarian movement. In such cases support is, of course, entirely out of the question. The question of the rights of nations is not an isolated, self-sufficient question; it is a part of the general problem of the proletarian revolution, subordinate to the whole, and must be considered from the point of view of the whole. In the forties of the last century Marx supported the national movement of the Poles and Hungarians and was opposed to the national movement of the Czechs and the South Slavs. Why? Because the Czechs and the South Slavs were then “reactionary peoples,” “Russian outposts” in Europe, outposts of absolutism; whereas the Poles and the Hungarians were “revolutionary peoples,” fighting against absolutism. Because support of the national movement of the Czechs and the South Slavs was at that time equivalent to indirect support for tsarism, the most dangerous enemy of the revolutionary movement in Europe.

“The various demands of democracy,” writes Lenin, “including self-determination, are not an absolute, but a *small part* of the general democratic (now: general socialist) *world* movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole, if so, it must be rejected” (see Vol. XIX, pp.257–58).

This is the position in regard to the question of particular national movements, of the possible reactionary character of these movements—if, of course, they are appraised not from the formal point of view, not from the point of view of abstract rights, but concretely, from the point of view of the interests of the revolutionary movement.

The same must be said of the revolutionary character of national movements in general. The unquestionably revolutionary character of the vast majority of national movements is as relative and peculiar as is the possible revolutionary character of certain particular national movements. The revolutionary character of a national movement under the conditions of imperialist oppression does not necessarily presuppose the existence of proletarian elements in the movement, the existence of a revolutionary or a republican programme of the movement, the existence of a democratic basis of the movement. The struggle that the Emir of Afghanistan is waging for the independence of Afghanistan is objectively a *revolutionary* struggle, despite the monarchist views of the Emir and his associates, for it weakens, disintegrates and undermines imperialism; whereas the struggle waged by such “desperate” democrats and “Socialists,” “revolutionaries” and republicans as, for example, Kerensky and Tsereteli, Renaudel and Scheidemann, Chernov and Dan, Henderson and Clynes, during the imperialist war was a *reactionary* struggle, for its results was the embellishment, the strengthening, the victory, of imperialism. For the same reasons, the struggle that the Egyptians merchants and bourgeois intellectuals are waging for the independence of Egypt is objectively a *revolutionary* struggle, despite the bourgeois origin and bourgeois title of the leaders of Egyptian national movement, despite the fact that they are opposed to socialism; whereas the struggle that the British “Labour” Government is waging to

preserve Egypt's dependent position is for the same reason a *reactionary* struggle, despite the proletarian origin and the proletarian title of the members of the government, despite the fact that they are "for" socialism. There is no need to mention the national movement in other, larger, colonial and dependent countries, such as India and China, every step of which along the road to liberation, even if it runs counter to the demands of formal democracy, is a steam-hammer blow at imperialism, i.e., is undoubtedly a *revolutionary* step.

Lenin was right in saying that the national movement of the oppressed countries should be appraised not from the point of view of formal democracy, but from the point of view of the actual results, as shown by the general balance sheet of the struggle against imperialism, that is to say, "not in isolation, but on a world scale" (see Vol. XIX, p. 257).

2) *The liberation movement of the oppressed peoples and the proletarian revolution.* In solving the national question Leninism proceeds from the following theses:

a) the world is divided into two camps: the camp of a handful of civilised nations, which possess finance capital and exploit the vast majority of the population of the globe; and the camp of the oppressed and exploited peoples in the colonies and dependent countries, which constitute the majority;

b) the colonies and the dependent countries, oppressed and exploited by finance capital, constitute a vast reserve and a very important source of strength for imperialism;

c) the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples in the dependent and colonial countries against imperialism is the only road that leads to their emancipation from oppression and exploitation;

d) the most important colonial and dependent countries have already taken the path of the national liberation movement, which cannot but lead to the crisis of world capitalism;

e) the interests of the proletarian movement in the developed countries and of the national liberation movement in the colonies call for the union of these two forms of the revolutionary movement into a common front against the common enemy, against imperialism;

f) the victory of the working class in the developed countries and the liberation of the oppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism are impossible without the formation and the consolidation of a common revolutionary front;

g) the formation of a common revolutionary front is impossible unless the proletariat of the oppressor nations renders direct and determined support to the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples against the imperialism of its "own country," for "no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations" (*Engels*);

h) this support implies the upholding defence and implementation of the slogan of the right of nations to secession, to independent existence as states;

i) unless this slogan is implemented, the union and collaboration of nations within a single world economic system, which is the material basis for the victory of world socialism, cannot be brought about;

j) this union can only be voluntary, arising on the basis of mutual confidence and fraternal relations among peoples.

Hence the two sides, the two tendencies in the national question: the tendency towards political emancipation from the shackles of imperialism and towards the formation of an independent national state—a tendency which arose as a consequence of imperialist oppression and colonial exploitation; and the tendency towards closer economic relations among nations, which arose as a result of the formation of the world market and a world economic system.

“Developing capitalism,” says Lenin, “knows two historical tendencies in the national question. First: the awakening of national life and national movements, struggle against all national oppression, creation of national states. Second: development and acceleration of all kinds of intercourse between nations, breakdown of national barriers, creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc.

“Both tendencies are a world-wide law of capitalism. The first predominates at the beginning of its development, the second characterises mature capitalism that is moving towards its transformation into socialist society” (see Vol. XVII, pp. 139–40).

For imperialism these two tendencies represent irreconcilable contradictions; because imperialism cannot exist without exploiting colonies and forcibly retaining them within the framework of the “integral whole”; because imperialism can bring nations together only by means of annexations and colonial conquest, without which imperialism is, generally speaking, inconceivable.

For communism, on the contrary, these tendencies are but two sides of a single cause—the cause of the emancipation of the oppressed people from the yoke of imperialism; because communism knows that the union of peoples in a single world economic system is possible only in the basis of mutual confidence and voluntary agreement, and that road to the formation of a voluntary union of peoples lies through the separation of the colonies from the “integral” imperialist “whole,” through the transformation of the colonies into independent states.

Hence the necessity for a stubborn, continuous and determined struggle against the dominant-nation chauvinism of the “Socialist” of the ruling nations (Britain, France, America, Italy, Japan, etc.), who do not want to fight their imperialist governments, who do not want to support the struggle of the oppressed peoples in “their” colonies for emancipation from oppression, for secession.

Without such a struggle the education of the working class of the ruling nations in the spirit of true internationalism, in the spirit of closer relations with the toiling

masses of the dependent countries and colonies, in the spirit of real preparation for the proletarian revolution, is inconceivable. The revolution would not have been victorious in Russia and Kolchak and Denikin would not have been crushed, had not the Russian proletariat enjoyed the sympathy and support of the oppressed peoples of the former Russian Empire. But to win the sympathy and support of these peoples it had first of all to break the fetters of Russian imperialism and free these people from the yoke of national oppression.

Without this it would have been impossible to consolidate Soviet power, to implant real internationalism and to create that remarkable organisation for the collaboration of peoples which is called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and which is the living prototype of the future union of peoples in a single world economic system.

Hence the necessity of fighting against the national isolationism, narrowness and aloofness of the Socialist in the oppressed countries, who do not want to rise above their national parochialism and who do not understand the connection between the liberation movement in their own countries and the proletarian movement in the ruling countries.

Without such a struggle it is inconceivable that the proletariat of the oppressed nations can maintain an independent policy and its class solidarity with the proletariat of the ruling countries in the fight for the overthrow of the common enemy, in the fight for the overthrow of imperialism.

Without such a struggle, internationalism would be impossible.

Such is the way in which the toiling masses of the dominant and of the oppressed nations must be educated in the spirit of revolutionary internationalism.

Here is what Lenin says about this twofold task of communism in educating the workers in the spirit of internationalism:

“Can such education...be *concretely identical* in great, oppressing nations and in small, oppressed nations, in annexing nations and in annexed nations?

“Obviously not. The way to the one goal-to complete equality, to the closest relations and the subsequent *amalgamation of all nations*-obviously proceeds here by different routes in each concrete case; in the same way, let us say, as the route to a point in the middle of a given page lies towards the left from one edge and towards the right from the opposite edge. If a Social-Democrat belonging to a great, oppressing, annexing nation, while advocating the amalgamation of nations in general, were to forget even for one moment that ‘his’ Nicholas II, ‘his’ Wilhelm, George, Poincare, etc., *also stands for amalgamation* with small nations (by means of annexations)-Nicholas II being for ‘amalgamation’ with Galicia, Wilhelm II for ‘amalgamation’ with Belgium, etc.-such a Social-Democrat would be a ridiculous doctrinaire in theory and an abettor of imperialism in practice.

“The weight of emphasis in the internationalist education of the workers in the oppressing countries must necessarily consist in their advocating and upholding freedom of secession for oppressed countries. Without this there can be *no* internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every Social-Democrat of an oppressing nation who *fails* to conduct such propaganda as an imperialist and a scoundrel. This is an absolute demand, even if the *chance* of secession being possible and ‘feasible’ before the introduction of socialism be one in a thousand....

“On the other hand, a Social-Democrat belonging to a small nation must emphasise in his agitation the *second* word of our general formula: ‘voluntary *union*’ of nations. He may, without violating his duties as an internationalist, be in favour of *either* the political independence of his nation or its inclusion in a neighboring state X,Y,Z, etc. But in all cases he must fight *against* small-nation narrow-mindedness, isolationism and aloofness, he must fight for the recognition of the whole and the general, for the subordination of the interests of the particular to the interests of the general.

“People who have not gone thoroughly into the question think there is a ‘contradiction’ in Social-Democrats of oppressing nations insisting on ‘freedom of *secession*,’ while Social-Democrats of oppressed nations insist on ‘freedom of *union*.’ However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any *other* road leading from the given situation to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road to this goal” (see Vol. XIX, pp. 261–62).

VII. Strategy and Tactics

From this theme I take six questions:

- a) strategy and tactics as the science of leadership in the class struggle of the proletariat;
- b) stages of the revolution, and strategy;
- c) the flow and ebb of the movement, and tactics;
- d) strategic leadership;
- e) tactical leadership;
- f) reformism and revolutionism.

1) *Strategy and tactics as the science of leadership in the class struggle of the proletariat.* The period of the domination of the Second International was mainly a period of the formation and training of the proletarian political armies under conditions of more or less peaceful development. It was the period of parliamentarism as the predominant form of the class struggle. Questions of great class conflicts, of preparing

the proletariat for revolutionary clashes, of the means of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, did not seem to be on the order of the day at that time. The task was confined to utilising all means of legal development for the purpose of forming and training the proletarian armies, to utilising parliamentarism in conformity with the conditions under which the status of the proletariat remained, and, as it seemed, had to remain, that of an opposition. It scarcely needs proof that in such a period and with such a conception of the tasks of the proletariat there could be neither an integral strategy nor any elaborated tactics. There were fragmentary and detached ideas about tactics and strategy, but no tactics or strategy as such.

The mortal sin of the Second International was not that it pursued at that time the tactics of utilising parliamentary forms of struggle, but that it overestimated the importance of these forms, that it considered them virtually the only forms; and that when the period of open revolutionary battles set in and the question of extra-parliamentary forms of struggle came to the fore, the parties of the Second International turned their backs on these new tasks, refused to shoulder them.

Only in the subsequent period, the period of direct action by the proletariat, the period of proletarian revolution, when the question of overthrowing the bourgeoisie became a question of immediate practical action; when the question of the reserves of the proletariat (strategy) became one of the most burning questions; when all forms of struggle and of organisation, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary (tactics), had quite clearly manifested themselves-only in this period could an integral strategy and elaborated tactics for the struggle of the proletariat be worked out. It was precisely in this period that Lenin brought out into the light of day the brilliant ideas of Marx and Engels on tactics and strategy that been suppressed by the opportunists of the Second International. But Lenin did not confine himself to restoring particular tactical propositions of Marx and Engels. He developed them further and supplemented them with new ideas and propositions, combining them all into a system of rules and guiding principles for the leadership of the class struggle of the proletariat. Lenin's pamphlets, such as *What Is To Be Done?*, *Two Tactics*, *Imperialism*, *The State and Revolution*, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, "*Left Wing*" *Communism*, undoubtedly constitute priceless contributions to the general treasury of Marxism, to its revolutionary arsenal. The strategy and tactics of Leninism constitute the science of leadership in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

2) *Stages of the revolution, and strategy.* Strategy is the determination of the direction of the main blow of the proletariat at a given stage of the revolution, the elaboration of a corresponding plan for the disposition of the revolutionary forces (main and secondary reserves), the fight to carry out this plan throughout the given stage of the revolution.

Our revolution had already passed through two stages, and after the October Revolution it entered a third one. Our strategy changed accordingly.

First stage. 1903 to February 1917. Objective: to overthrow tsarism and completely wipe out the survivals of medievalism. The main force of the revolution: the prole-

tariat. Immediate reserves: the peasantry. Direction of the main blow: the isolation of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie, which was striving to win over the peasantry and liquidate the revolution by a *compromise* with tsarism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the working class with the peasantry. "The proletariat, must carry to completion the democratic revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and to paralyse the instability of the bourgeoisie" (see Lenin, Vol. VIII, p.96)

Second stage. March 1917 to October 1917. Objective: to overthrow imperialism in Russia and to withdraw from the imperialist war. The main force of the revolution: the proletariat. Immediate reserves: the poor peasantry. The proletariat of neighbouring countries as probable reserves. The protracted war and the crisis of imperialism as a favourable factor. Direction of the main blow: isolation of the petty-bourgeois democrats (Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries), who were striving to win over the toiling masses of the peasantry and to put an end to the revolution by a *compromise* with imperialism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the proletariat with the poor peasantry. "The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population in order to crush by force the resistance of the bourgeoisie and to paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie" (*ibid.*).

Third stage. Began after the October Revolution. Objective: to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, using it as a base for the defeat of imperialism in all countries. The revolution spreads beyond the confines of one country; the epoch of world revolution has begun. The main force of the revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries. Main reserves: the semi-proletarian and small-peasant masses in the developed countries, the liberation movement of the colonies and dependent countries. Direction of the main blow: isolation of the petty-bourgeois democrats, isolation of the parties of the Second International, which constitute the main support of the policy of *compromise* with imperialism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the proletarian revolution with the liberation movement in the colonies and the dependent countries.

Strategy deals with the main forces of the revolution and their reserves. It changes with the passing of the revolution from one stage to another, but remains basically unchanged throughout a given stage.

3) *The flow and ebb of the movement, and tactics.* Tactics are the determination of the line of conduct of the proletariat in the comparatively short period of the flow or ebb of the movement, of the rise or decline of the revolution, the fight to carry out this line by means of replacing old forms of struggle and organisation by new ones, old slogans by new ones, by combining these forms, etc. While the object of strategy is to win the war against tsarism, let us say, or against the bourgeoisie, to carry through the struggle against tsarism or against the bourgeoisie to its end, tactics pursue less important objects, for their aim is not the winning of the war as a whole, but the winning of some particular engagements or some particular battles, the carrying

through successfully of some particular campaigns or actions corresponding to the concrete circumstances in the given period of rise or decline of the revolution. Tactics are a part of strategy, subordinate to it and serving it.

Tactics change according to flow and ebb. While the strategic plan remained unchanged during the first stage of the revolution (1903 to February 1917), tactics changed several times during that period. In the period from 1903 to 1905 the Party pursued offensive tactics, for the tide of the revolution was rising, the movement was on the upgrade, and tactics had to proceed from this fact. Accordingly, the forms of struggle were revolutionary, corresponding to the requirements of the rising tide of the revolution. Local political strikes, political demonstrations, the general political strike, boycott of the Duma, uprising, revolutionary fighting slogans-such were the successive forms of the struggle during that period. These changes in the forms of struggle were accomplished by corresponding changes in the forms of organisation. Factory committees, revolutionary peasant committees, strike committees, Soviets of workers' deputies, a workers' party operating more or less openly-such were the forms of organisation during that period.

In the period from 1907 to 1912 the Party was compelled to resort to tactics of retreat; for we then experienced a decline in the revolutionary movement, the ebb of the revolution, and tactics necessarily had to take this fact into consideration. The forms of struggle, as well as the forms of organisation, changed accordingly: instead of the boycott of the Duma-participation in the Duma; instead of open revolutionary actions outside the Duma-actions and work in the Duma; instead of general political strikes-partial economic strikes, or simply a lull in activities. Of course, the Party had to go underground that period, while the revolutionary mass organisations were replaced by cultural, educational, co-operative, insurance and other legal organisations.

The same must be said of the second and third stages of the revolution, during which tactics changed dozens of times, whereas the strategic plans remained unchanged.

Tactics deal with the forms of struggle and the forms of organisation of the proletariat, with their changes and combinations. During a given stage of the revolution tactics may change several times, depending on the flow or ebb, the rise or decline of the revolution.

4) *Strategic leadership.* The reserves of the revolution can be :

Direct: a) the peasantry and in general the intermediate strata of the population within the country; b) the proletariat of neighbouring countries; c) the revolutionary movement in the colonies and dependent countries; d) the conquests and gains of the dictatorship of the proletariat-part of which the proletariat may give up temporarily, while retaining superiority of forces, in order to buy off a powerful enemy and gain a respite; and

Indirect: a) the contradictions and conflicts among the non-proletarian classes within the country, which can be utilised by the proletariat to weaken the enemy and to strengthen its own reserves; b) contradictions, conflicts and wars (the imperialist war, for instance) among the bourgeois states hostile to the proletarian state, which can be

utilised by the proletariat in its offensive or in manoeuvring in the event of a forced retreat.

There is no need to speak at length about the reserves of the first category, as their significance is clear to everyone. As for the reserves of the second category, whose significance is not clear, it must be said that sometimes they are of prime importance for the progress of the revolution. One can hardly deny the enormous importance, for example, of the conflicts between the petty-bourgeois democrats (Socialist-Revolutionaries) and the liberal-monarchists bourgeoisie (the Cadets) during and after the first revolution, which undoubtedly played its part in freeing the peasantry from the influence of the bourgeoisie. Still less reason is there for denying the colossal importance of the fact that the principal groups of imperialists were engaged in a deadly war during the period of the October Revolution, when the imperialist, engrossed in war among themselves, were unable to concentrate their forces against the young Soviet power, and the proletariat for this very reason, was able to get down to work of organising its forces and consolidating its power, and to prepare the rout of Kolchak and Denikin. It must be presumed that now, when the contradictions among the imperialist groups are becoming more and more profound, and when a new war among them is becoming inevitable, reserves of this description will assume ever greater importance for the proletariat.

The task of strategic leadership is to make proper use of all these reserves for the achievement of the main object of the revolution at the given stage of its development.

What does making proper use of reserves mean?

It means fulfilling certain necessary conditions, of which the following must be regarded as the principal ones:

Firstly. The concentration of the main forces of the revolution at the enemy's most vulnerable spot at the decisive moment, when the revolution has already become ripe, when the offensive is going full-steam ahead, when insurrection is knocking at the door, and when bringing the reserves up to the vanguard is the decisive condition of success. The party's strategy during the period from April to October 1917 can be taken as an example of this manner of utilising reserves. Undoubtedly, the enemy's most vulnerable spot at that time was the war. Undoubtedly, it was on this question, as the fundamental one, that the Party rallied the broadest masses of the population around the proletarian vanguard. The Party's strategy during that period was, while training the vanguard for street action by means of manifestations and demonstrations, to bring the reserves up to the vanguard through the medium of Soviets in the rear and the soldiers' committees at the front. The outcome of the revolution has shown that the reserves were properly utilised.

Here is what Lenin, paraphrasing the well-known theses of Marx and Engels on insurrection, says about this condition of the strategic utilisation of the forces of the revolution:

- 1) Never *play* with insurrection, but when beginning it firmly realise that you must *go to the end*.
- 2) Concentrate a *great superiority of forces* at the decisive point, at the decisive moment, otherwise the enemy, who has the advantage of better preparation and organisation, will destroy the insurgents.
- 3) Once the insurrection has begun, you must act with the greatest *determination*, and by all means, without fail, take the *offensive*. 'The defensive is the death of every armed uprising.'
- 4) You must try to take the enemy by surprise and seize the moment when his forces are scattered.
- 5) You must strive for *daily* success, even if small (one might say hourly, if it is the case of one town), and at all costs retain the '*moral ascendancy*' (see Vol. XXI, pp. 319–20).

Secondly. The selection of the moment for the decisive blow, of the moment for starting the insurrection, so timed as to coincide with the moment when the crisis has reached its climax, when it is already the case that the vanguard is prepared to fight to the end, the reserves are prepared to support the vanguard, and maximum consternation reigns in the ranks of the enemy.

The decisive battle, says Lenin, may be deemed to have fully matured if "(1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength"; *if* "(2) all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements-the petty bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois democrats as distinct from the bourgeoisie-have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy"; *if* "(3) among the proletariat a mass sentiment in favour of supporting the most determined, supremely bold, revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow. Then revolution is indeed ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated above...and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured" (see Vol. XXV, p.229)

The manner in which the October uprising was carried out may be taken as a model of such strategy.

Failure to observe this condition leads to a dangerous error called "loss of tempo," when the Party lags behind the movement or runs far ahead of it, courting the danger of failure. An example of such "loss of tempo," of how the moment for an uprising should not be chosen, may be seen in the attempt made by a section of our comrades to begin the uprising by arresting the Democratic Conference in September 1917, when

wavering was still apparent in the Soviets, when the armies at the front were still at the crossroads, when the reserves had not yet been brought up to the vanguard.

Thirdly. Undeviating pursuit of the course adopted, no matter what difficulties and complications are encountered on the road towards the goal; this is necessary in order that the vanguard may not lose sight of the main goal of the struggle and that the masses may not stray from the road while marching towards that goal and striving to rally around the vanguard. Failure to observe this condition leads to a grave error, well known to sailors as “losing one’s bearing.” As an example of this “losing one’s bearings.” We may take the erroneous conduct of our Party when, immediately after the Democratic Conference, it adopted a resolution to participate in the Pre-parliament. For the moment the Party, as it were, forgot that the Pre-parliament was an attempt of the bourgeoisie to switch the country from the path of the Soviets to the path of bourgeois parliamentarism, that the Party’s participation in such a body might result in mixing everything up and confusing the workers and peasants, who were waging a revolutionary struggle under the slogan: “All Power to the Soviets.” This mistake was rectified by the withdrawal of the Bolsheviks from the Pre-parliament.

Fourthly. Manoeuvring the reserves with a view to effecting a proper retreat when the enemy is strong, when retreat is inevitable, when to accept battle forced upon us by the enemy is obviously disadvantageous, when, with the given relation of forces, retreat becomes the only way to escape a blow against the vanguard and to retain the reserves for the latter.

“The revolutionary parties,” says Lenin, “must complete their education. They have learned to attack. Now they have to realise that this knowledge must be supplemented with the knowledge how to retreat properly. They have to realise-and the revolutionary class is taught to realise it by its own bitter experience-that victory is impossible unless they have learned both how to attack and how to retreat properly” (see Vol. XXV, p. 177)

The object of this strategy is to gain time to disrupt the enemy, and to accumulate forces in order to later assume the offensive.

The signing of the Brest Peace may be taken as a model of this strategy, for it enabled the Party to gain time, to take advantage of the conflicts in the camp of the imperialists, to disrupt the forces of the enemy, to retain the support of the peasantry, and to accumulate forces in preparation for the offensive against Kolchak and Denikin.

“In concluding a separate peace,” said Lenin at that time, “we free ourselves as much *as it is possible at the present moment* from both warring imperialist groups, we take advantage of their mutual enmity and warfare, which hinder them from making a deal against us, and for a certain period have our hands free to advance and to consolidate the socialist revolution” (see Vol. XXII, p. 198).

“Now even the biggest fool,” said Lenin three years after the Brest Peace, can see “that the ‘Brest Peace’ was a concession that strengthened us and broke up the forces of international imperialism” (see Vol. XXVII, p. 7)

Such are the principal conditions which ensure correct strategic leadership.

5) *Tactical leadership*. Tactical leadership is a part of strategic leadership, subordinated to the tasks and the requirements of the latter. The task of tactical leadership is to master all forms of struggle and organisation of the proletariat and to ensure that they are used properly so as to achieve, with the given relations of forces, the maximum results necessary to prepare for strategic success.

What is meant by making proper use of the forms of struggle and organisation of the proletariat?

It means fulfilling certain necessary conditions, of which the following must be regarded as the principal ones:

Firstly. To put in the forefront precisely those forms of struggle and organisation which are best suited to the conditions prevailing during the flow or ebb of the movement at a given moment, and which therefore can facilitate and ensure the bringing of the masses to the revolutionary positions, the bringing of the millions to the revolutionary front, and their disposition at the revolutionary front.

The point here is not that the vanguard should realise the impossibility of preserving the old regime and the inevitability of its overthrow. The point is that the masses, the million should understand this inevitability and display their readiness to support the vanguard. But the masses can understand this only from their own experience. The task is to enable the vast masses to realise from their own experience the inevitability of the overthrow of the old regime, to promote such methods of struggle and forms of organisations as will make it easier for the masses to realise from experience the correctness of the revolutionary slogans.

The vanguard would have become detached from the working class, and the working class would have lost contact with the masses, if the Party had not decided as the time to participate in the Duma, if it had not decided to concentrate its forces on work in the Duma and to develop a struggle on the basis of this work, in order to make it easier for the masses to realise from their own experience the futility of the Duma, the falsity of the promises of the Cadets, the impossibility of compromise with tsarism, and the inevitability of an alliance between the peasantry and the working class. Had the masses not gained their experience during the period of the Duma, the exposure of the Cadets and the hegemony of the proletariat would have been impossible.

The danger of the “Otzovist” tactics was that they threatened to detach the vanguard from the millions of its reserves.

The Party would have become detached from the working class, and the working class would have lost its influence among the broad masses of the peasants and soldiers, if the proletariat had followed the “Left” Communists, who called for an uprising in April 1917, when the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had not yet exposed

themselves as advocates of war and imperialism, when the masses had not yet realized from their own experience the falsity of speeches of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries about peace, land and freedom. Had the masses not gained this experience during the Kerensky period, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries would not have been isolated and the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been impossible. Therefore, the tactics of “patiently explaining” the mistakes of the petty-bourgeois parties and of open struggle in the Soviets were the only correct tactics.

The danger of the tactics of the “Left” Communists was that they threatened to transform the Party from the leader of the proletarian revolution into a handful of futile conspirators with no ground to stand on.

“Victory cannot be won with the vanguard alone,” says Lenin. “To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle, before the whole class, before the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it...would be not merely folly but a crime. And in order that actually the whole class, that actually the broad masses of the working people and those oppressed by capital may take up such a position, propaganda and agitation alone are not enough. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, now confirmed with astonishing force and vividness not only in Russia but also in Germany. Not only the uncultured, often illiterate masses of Russia, but the highly cultured, entirely literate masses of Germany had to realise through their own painful experience the absolute impotence and spinelessness, the absolute helplessness and servility to the bourgeoisie, the utter vileness, of the government of the knights of the Second International, the absolute inevitability of a dictatorship of the extreme reactionaries (Kornilov in Russia, Kapp and Co. in Germany) as the only alternatives to a dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to turn resolutely towards communism” (see Vol. XXV, p. 228)

Secondly. To locate at any given moment the particular link in the chain of processes which, if grasped, will enable us to keep hold of the whole chain and to prepare the conditions for achieving strategic success.

The point here is to single out from all the tasks confronting the Party the particular immediate task, the fulfillment of which constitutes the central point, and the accomplishment of which ensures the successful fulfillment of the other immediate tasks.

The importance of this thesis may be illustrated by two examples, one of which could be taken from the remote past (the period of the formation of the Party) and the other from the immediate present (the period of the NEP).

In the period of the formation of the Party, when the innumerable circles and organizations had not yet been linked together, when amateurishness and the parochial

outlook of the circles were corroding the Party from top to bottom, when ideological confusion was the characteristic feature of the internal life of the Party, the main link and the main task in the chain of links and in the chain of tasks then confronting the Party proved to be the establishment of an all-Russian illegal newspaper (*Iskra*). Why? Because, under the conditions then prevailing, only by means of an all-Russian illegal newspaper was it possible to create a solid core of the Party capable to create a solid core of the Party capable of uniting the innumerable circles and organisations into one whole, to prepare the conditions for ideological and tactical unity, and thus to build the foundations for the formation of a real party.

During the period of transition from war to economic construction, when industry was vegetating in the grip of disruption and agriculture was suffering from a shortage of urban manufactured goods, when the establishment of a bond between state industry and peasant economy became the fundamental condition for successful socialist construction-in that period it turned out that the main link in the chain of processes, the main task among a number of tasks, was to develop trade. Why? Because under the conditions of the NEP the bond between industry and peasant economy cannot be established except through trade; because under the conditions of the NEP production without sale is fatal for industry; because industry can be expanded only by the expansion of sales as a result of developing trade; because only after we have consolidated our position in the sphere of trade, only after we have secured control of trade, only after we have secured this link can there be any hope of linking industry with the peasant market and successfully fulfilling the other immediate tasks in order to create the conditions for building the foundations of socialist economy.

“It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an adherent of socialism or a Communist in general,” says Lenin. “One must be able at each particular moment to find the particular link in the chain which one must grasp with all one’s might in order to keep hold of the whole chain and to prepare firmly for the transition to the next link.”...

“At the present time...this link is the revival of internal *trade* under proper state regulation (direction). Trade-that is the ‘link’ in the historical chain of events, in the transitional forms of our socialist construction in 1921–22, ‘*which we must grasp with all our might*’...” (see Vol. XXVII, p. 82)

Such are the principal conditions which ensure correct tactical leadership.

6) *Reformism and revolutionism*. What is the difference between revolutionary tactics and reformist tactics?

Some think that Leninism is opposed to reforms, opposed to compromises and to agreements in general. This is absolutely wrong. Bolsheviks know as well as anybody else that in a certain sense “every little helps,” that under certain conditions reforms in general, and compromises and agreements in particular, are necessary and useful.

“To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie,” says Lenin, “a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted, and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to refuse beforehand to manoeuvre, to utilise the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among one’s enemies, to reject agreements and compromises with possible (even though temporary, unstable, vacillating and conditional) allies-is not this ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not as though, when making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain, we were to refuse beforehand ever to move in zigzags, ever to retrace our steps, ever to abandon the course once selected and to try others?” (see Vol. XXV, p. 210).

Obviously, therefore, it is not a matter of reforms or of compromises and agreements, but of the use people make of reforms and agreements.

To a reformist, reforms are everything, while revolutionary work is something incidental, something just to talk about, mere eyewash. That is why, with reformist tactics under the conditions of bourgeois rule, reforms are inevitably transformed into an instrument for strengthening that rule, an instrument for disintegrating the revolution.

To a revolutionary, on the contrary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reforms; to him reforms are a by-product of the revolution. That is why, with revolutionary tactics under the conditions of bourgeois rule, reforms are naturally transformed into an instrument for strengthening the revolution, into a strongpoint for the further development of the revolutionary movement.

The revolutionary will accept a reform in order to use it as an aid in combining legal work with illegal work to intensify, under its cover, the illegal work for the revolutionary preparation of the masses for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

That is the essence of making revolutionary use of reforms and agreements under the conditions of imperialism.

The reformist, on the contrary, will accept reforms in order to renounce all illegal work, to thwart the preparation of the masses for the revolution and to rest in the shade of “bestowed” reforms.

That is the essence of reformist tactics.

Such is the position in regard to reforms and agreements under the conditions of imperialism.

The situation changes somewhat, however, after the overthrow of imperialism, under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under certain conditions, in a certain situation, the proletarian power may find itself compelled temporarily to leave the path of the revolutionary reconstruction of the existing order of things and to take the path of its gradual transformation, the “reformist path,” as Lenin says in his well-known article “The Importance of Gold,”¹⁸ the path of flanking movements, of reforms and conces-

¹⁸ See V.I. Lenin’s work “The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism” (*Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 33, pp. 85–92).

sions to the non-proletarian classes-in order to disintegrate these classes, to give the revolution a respite, to recuperate one's forces and prepare the conditions for a new offensive. It cannot be denied that in a sense this is a "reformist" path. But it must be borne in mind that there is a fundamental distinction here, which consists in the fact that in this case the reform emanates from the proletarian power, it strengthens the proletarian power, it procures for it a necessary respite, its purpose is to disintegrate, not the revolution, but the non-proletarian classes.

Under such conditions a reform is thus transformed into its opposite.

The proletarian power is able to adopt such a policy because, and only because, the sweep of the revolution in the preceding period was great enough and therefore provided a sufficiently wide expanse within which to retreat, substituting for offensive tactics the tactics of temporary retreat, the tactics of flanking movements.

Thus, while formerly, under bourgeois rule, reforms were a by-product of revolution, now under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the source of reforms is the revolutionary gains of the proletariat, the reserves accumulated in the hands of the proletariat consisting of these gains.

"Only Marxism," says Lenin, "has precisely and correctly defined the relation of reforms to revolution. However, Marx was able to see this relation only from one aspect, namely, under the conditions preceding the first to any extant permanent and lasting victory of the proletariat, if only in a single country. Under those conditions, the basis of the proper relations was: reforms are a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat... After the victory of the proletariat, if only in a single country, something new enters into the relation between reforms and revolution. In principal, it is the same as before, but a change in form takes place, which Marx himself could not foresee, but which can be appreciated only on the basis of the philosophy and politics of Marxism...After the victory (while still remaining a 'by-product' on an international scale) they (i.e., reforms-*J.St.*) are, in addition, for the country in which victory has been achieved, a necessary and legitimate respite in those cases when, after the utmost exertion of effort, it becomes obvious that sufficient strength is lacking for the revolutionary accomplishment of this or that transition. Victory creates such a 'reserve of strength' that it is possible to hold out even in a forced retreat, to hold out both materially and morally" (see Vol. XXVII, pp. 84-85).

VIII. The Party

In the pre-revolutionary period, the period of more or less peaceful development, when the parties of the Second International were the predominant force in the working-

class movement and parliamentary forms of struggle were regarded as the principal forms—under these conditions the Party neither had nor could have had that great and decisive importance which it acquired afterwards, under conditions of open revolutionary clashes. Defending the Second International against attacks made upon it, Kautsky says that the parties of the Second International are an instrument of peace and not of war, and that for this very reason they were powerless to take any important steps during the war, during the period of revolutionary action by the proletariat. That is quite true. But what does it mean? It means that the parties of the Second International are unfit for the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, that they are not militant parties of the proletariat, leading the workers to power, but election machines adapted for parliamentary elections and parliamentary struggle. This, in fact, explains why, in the days when the opportunists of the Second International were in the ascendancy, it was not the party but its parliamentary group that was the chief political organisation of the proletariat. It is well known that the party at that time was really an appendage and subsidiary of the parliamentary group. It scarcely needs proof that under such circumstances and with such a party at the helm there could be no question of preparing the proletariat for revolution.

But matters have changed radically with the dawn of the new period. The new period is one of open class collisions, of revolutionary action by the proletariat, of proletarian revolution, a period when forces are being directly mustered for the overthrow of imperialism and the seizure of power by the proletariat. In this period the proletariat is confronted with new tasks, the tasks of reorganising all party work on new, revolutionary lines; of educating the workers in the spirit of revolutionary struggle for power; of preparing and moving up reserves; of establishing an alliance with the proletarians of neighbouring countries; of establishing firm ties with the liberation movement in the colonies and dependent countries, etc., etc. To think that these new tasks can be performed by the old Social-Democratic parties, brought up as they were in the peaceful conditions of parliamentarism, is to doom oneself to hopeless despair, to inevitable defeat. If, with such tasks to shoulder, the proletariat remained under the leadership of the old parties, it would be completely unarmed. It scarcely needs proof that the proletariat could not consent to such a state of affairs.

Hence the necessity for a new party, a militant party, a revolutionary party, one bold enough to lead the proletarians in the struggle for power, sufficiently experienced to find its bearings amidst the complex conditions of a revolutionary situation, and sufficiently flexible to steer clear of all submerged rocks in the path to its goal.

Without such a party it is useless even to think of overthrowing imperialism, of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This new party is the party of Leninism.

What are the specific features of this new party?

1) *The Party as the advanced detachment of the working class.* The Party must be, first of all, the *advanced* detachment of the working class. The Party must absorb all the best elements of the working class, their experience, their revolutionary spirit,

their selfless devotion to the cause of the proletariat. But in order that it may really be the armed detachment, the Party must be armed with revolutionary theory, with a knowledge of the laws of the movement, with a knowledge of the laws of revolution. Without this it will be incapable of directing the struggle of the proletariat, of leading the proletariat. The Party cannot be a real party if it limits itself to registering what the masses of the working class feel and think, if it drags at the tail of the spontaneous movement, if it is unable to overcome the inertia and the political indifference of the spontaneous movement, if it is unable to rise above the momentary interests of the proletariat, if it is unable to raise the masses to the level of understanding the class interests of the proletariat. The Party must stand at the head of the working class; it must see farther than the working class; it must lead the proletariat, and not drag at the tail of the spontaneous movement. The parties of the Second International, which preach “khvostism,” are vehicles of bourgeois policy, which condemns the proletariat to the role of a tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Only a party which adopts the standpoint of advanced detachment of the proletariat and is able to raise the masses to the level of understanding the class interest of the proletariat—only such a party can divert the working class from the path of trade unionism and convert it into an independent political force.

The Party is the political leader of the working class.

I have already spoken of the difficulties of the struggle of the working class, of the complicated conditions of the struggle, of strategy and tactics, of reserves and manoeuvring, of attack and retreat. These conditions are no less complicated, if not more so, than the conditions of war. Who can see clearly in these conditions, who can give correct guidance to the proletarian millions? No army at war can dispense with an experienced General Staff if it does not want to be doomed to defeat. Is it not clear that the proletariat can still less dispense with such a General Staff if it does not want to allow itself to be devoured by its mortal enemies? But where is this General Staff? Only the revolutionary party of the proletariat can serve as this General Staff. The working class without a revolutionary party is an army without a General Staff.

The Party is the General Staff of the proletariat.

But the Party cannot be only an *advanced* detachment. It must at the same time be a detachment of the *class*, part of the class, closely bound up with it by all the fibres of its being. The distinction between the advanced detachment and the rest of the working class, between Party members and non-Party people, cannot disappear until classes disappear; it will exist as long as the ranks of the proletariat continue to be replenished with former members of other classes, as long as the working class as a whole is not in a position to rise to the level of the advanced detachment. But the Party would cease to be a party of this distinction developed into a gap, if the Party turned in on itself and became divorced from the non-Party masses. The Party cannot lead the class if it is not connected with the non-Party masses, if there is no bond between the Party and the non-Party masses, if these masses do not accept its leadership, if the Party enjoys no moral and political credit among the masses.

Recently two hundred thousand new members from the ranks of the workers were admitted into our Party. The remarkable thing about this is the fact that these people did not merely join the Party themselves, but were rather sent there by all the rest of the non-Party workers, who took an active part in the admission of the new members, and without whose approval no new member was accepted. This fact shows that the broad masses of non-Party workers regard our Party as *their* Party, as a Party *near* and *dear* to them, in whose expansion and consolidation they are vitally interested and to whose leadership they voluntarily entrust their destiny. It scarcely needs proof that without these intangible moral threads which connect the Party with the non-Party masses, the Party could not have become the decisive force of its class.

The Party is an inseparable part of the working class.

“We,” says Lenin, “are the Party of a class, and therefore *almost the whole class* (and in times of war, in the period of civil war, the whole class) should act under the leadership of our Party, should adhere to our Party as closely as possible. But it would be Manilovism and ‘khvostism’ to think that at any time under capitalism almost the whole class, or the whole class, would be able to rise to the level of consciousness and activity of its advanced detachment, of its Social-Democratic Party. No sensible Social-Democrat has ever yet doubted that under capitalism even the trade union organisations (which are more primitive and more comprehensible to the undeveloped strata) are unable to embrace almost the whole, or the whole, working class. To forget the distinction between the advanced detachment and the whole of the masses which gravitate towards it, to forget the constant duty of the advanced detachment to *raise* ever wider strata to this most advanced level, means merely to deceive oneself, to shut one’s eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks” (see Vol. VI, pp. 205–06).

2) The Party as the organised detachment of the working class. The Party is not only the *advanced* detachment of the working class. If it desires really to direct the struggle of the class it must at the same time be the *organised* detachment of its class. The Party’s tasks under the conditions of capitalism are immense and extremely varied. The Party must direct the struggle of the proletariat under the exceptionally difficult conditions of internal and external development; it must lead the proletariat in the offensive when the situation calls for an offensive; it must lead the proletariat so as to escape the blow of a powerful enemy when the situation calls for retreat; it must imbue the millions of unorganised non-Party workers with the spirit of organisation and endurance. But the Party can fulfil these tasks only if it is itself the embodiment of discipline and organisation, if it is itself the *organised* detachment of the proletariat. Without these conditions there can be no question of the Party really leading the vast masses of the proletariat.

The Party is the organised detachment of the working class.

The conception of the Party as an organised whole is embodied in Lenin's well-known formulation of the first paragraph of our Party Rules, in which the Party is regarded as the *sum total* of its organisations, and the Party member as a member of one of the organisations of the Party. The Mensheviks, who objected to this formulation as early as 1903, proposed to substitute for it a "system" of self-enrolment in the Party, a "system" of conferring the "title" of Party member upon every "professor" and "high-school student," upon every "sympathiser" and "striker" who supported the Party in one way or another, but who did not join and did not want to join any one of the Party organisations. It scarcely needs proof that had this singular "system" become entrenched in our Party it would inevitably have led to our Party becoming inundated with professors and high-school students and to its degeneration into a loose, amorphous, disorganised "formation," lost in a sea of "sympathisers," that would have obliterated the dividing line between the Party and the class and would have upset the Party's task of raising the unorganised masses to the level of the advanced detachment. Needless to say, under such an opportunist "system" our Party would have been unable to fulfil the role of the organising core of the working class in the course of our revolution.

"From the point of view of Comrade Martov," says Lenin, "the border-line of the Party remains quite indefinite, for 'every striker' may 'proclaim himself a Party member.' What is the use of this vagueness? A wide extension of the 'title.' Its harm is that it introduces a *disorganising* idea, the confusing of class and Party" (see Vol. VI, p. 211)

But the Party is not merely the *sum total* of Party organisations. The Party is at the same time a single *system* of these organisations, their formal union into a single whole, with higher and lower leading bodies, with subordination of the minority to the majority, with practical decisions binding on all members of the Party. Without these conditions the Party cannot be a single organised whole capable of exercising systematic and organised leadership in the struggle of the working class.

"Formerly," says Lenin, "our Party was not a formally organized whole, but only the sum of separate groups, and therefore no other relations except those of ideological influence were possible between these groups. *Now* we have become an organized Party, and this implies the establishment of authority, the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher Party bodies" (see Vol. VI, p. 291).

The principle of the minority submitting to the majority, the principle of directing Party work from a centre, not infrequently gives rise to attacks on the part of wavering

elements, to accusations of “bureaucracy,” “formalism,” etc. It scarcely needs proof that systematic work by the Party as one whole, and the directing of the struggle of the working class, would be impossible without putting these principles into effect. Leninism in questions of organisation is the unswerving application of these applications of these principles. Lenin terms the fight against these principles “Russian nihilism” and “aristocratic anarchism,” which deserves to be ridiculed and swept aside.

Here is what Lenin says about these wavering elements in his book *One Step Forward*:

“This aristocratic anarchism is particularly characteristic of the Russian nihilist. He thinks of the Party organisation as a monstrous ‘factory’; he regards the subordination of the part to the whole and of the minority to the majority of ‘serfdom’..., division of labour under the direction of a centre evokes from him a tragi-comical outcry against people being transformed into ‘wheels and cogs’..., mention of the organisational rules of the Party calls forth a contemptuous grimace and the disdainful...remark that one could very well dispense with rules altogether.”

“It is clear, I think, that the cries about this celebrated bureaucracy are just a screen for dissatisfaction with the personal composition of the central bodies, a fig leaf...You are a bureaucrat because you were appointed by the congress not by my will, but against it; you are a formalist because you rely on the formal decisions of the congress, and not on my consent; you are acting in a grossly mechanical way because you plead the ‘mechanical’ majority at the Party Congress and pay no heed to my wish to be co-opted; you are an autocrat because you refuse to hand over the power to the old gang”¹⁹ (see Vol. VI, pp. 310, 287).

3) *The Party as the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat.* The Party is the organised detachment of the working class. But the Party is not the only organisation of the working class. The proletariat has also a number of other organisations, without which it cannot wage a successful struggle against capital: trade unions, co-operatives, factory organisations, parliamentary groups, non-Party women’s associations, the press, cultural and educational organisations, youth leagues, revolutionary fighting organisations (in times of open revolutionary action), Soviets of deputies as the form of state organisation (if the proletariat is in power), etc. The overwhelming majority of these organisations are non-Party, and only some of them adhere directly to the Party, or constitute offshoots from it. All these organisations, under certain conditions, are absolutely necessary for the working class, for without them it would be impossible to consolidate the class positions of the proletariat in the diverse spheres

¹⁹ The ‘gang’ here referred to is that of Axelrod, Martov, Potresov and others, who would not submit to the decisions of the Second Congress and who accused Lenin of being a “bureaucrat.”-*J.St.*

of struggle; for without them it would be impossible to steel the proletariat as the force whose mission it is to replace the bourgeois order by the socialist order. But how can single leadership be exercised with such an abundance of organisations? What guarantee is there that this multiplicity of organisations will not lead to divergency in leadership? It may be said that each of these organisations carries on its work in its own special field, and that therefore these organisations cannot hinder one another. That, of course, is true. But it is also true that all these organisations should work in one direction for they serve *one* class, the class of the proletarians. The question then arises: who is to determine the line, the general direction, along which the work of all these organisations is to be conducted? Where is the central organisation which is not only able, because it has the necessary experience, to work out such a general line, but, in addition, is in a position, because it has sufficient prestige, to induce all these organisations to carry out this line, so as to attain unity of leadership and to make hitches impossible?

That organisation is the Party of the proletariat.

The Party possesses all the necessary qualifications for this because, in the first place, it is the rallying centre of the finest elements in the working class, who have direct connections with the non-Party organisations of the proletariat and very frequently lead them; because, secondly, the Party, as the rallying centre of the finest members of the working class, is the best school for training leaders of the working class, capable of directing every form of organisation of their class; because, thirdly, the Party, as the best school for training leaders of the working class, is, by reason of its experience and prestige, the only organisation capable of centralising the leadership of the struggle of the proletariat, thus transforming each and every non-Party organisation of the working class into an auxiliary body and transmission belt linking the Party with the class.

The Party is the highest form of class organisation of the proletariat.

This does not mean, of course, that non-Party organisations, trade unions, co-operatives, etc., should be officially subordinated to the Party leadership. It only means that the members of the Party who belong to these organisations and are doubtlessly influential in them should do all they can to persuade these non-Party organisations to draw nearer to the Party of the proletariat in their work and voluntarily accept its political leadership.

That is why Lenin says that the Party is “the *highest form* of proletarian class association,” whose political leadership must extend to every other form of organization of the proletariat. (see Vol. XXV, p. 194)

That is why the opportunist theory of the “independence” and “neutrality” of the non-Party organisations, which breeds *independent* members of parliament and journalists *isolated* from the Party, *narrow-minded* trade union leaders and *philistine* co-operative officials, is wholly incompatible with the theory and practice of Leninism.

4) *The Party as an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat.* The Party is the highest form of organisation of the proletariat. The Party is the principle guiding

force within the class of the proletarians and among the organisations of that class. But it does not by any means follow from this that the Party can be regarded as an end in itself, as a self-sufficient force. The Party is not only the highest form of class association of the proletarians; it is at the same time an *instrument* in the hands of the proletariat *for* achieving the dictatorship, when that has not yet been achieved and *for* consolidating and expanding the dictatorship when it has already been achieved. The Party could not have risen so high in importance and could not have exerted its influence over all other forms of organisations of the proletariat, if the latter had not been confronted with the question of power, if the conditions of imperialism, the inevitability of wars, and the existence of a crisis had not yet demanded the concentration of all the forces of the proletariat at one point, the gathering of all the threads of the revolutionary movement in one spot in order to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat needs the Party first of all as its General Staff, which it must have for the successful seizure of power. It scarcely needs proof that without a party capable of rallying around itself the mass organisations of the proletariat, and of centralising the leadership of the entire movement during the progress of the struggle, the proletariat in Russia could not have established its revolutionary dictatorship.

But the proletariat needs the Party not only to achieve the dictatorship; it needs it still more to maintain the dictatorship, to consolidate and expand it in order to achieve the complete victory of socialism.

“Certainly, almost everyone now realises,” says Lenin, “that the Bolsheviks could not have maintained themselves in power for two-and-a-half months, let alone two-and-a-half years, without the strictest, truly iron discipline in our Party, and without the fullest and unreserved support of the latter by the whole mass of the working class, that is, by all its thinking, honest, self-sacrificing and influential elements, capable of leading or of carrying with them the backwards strata” (see Vol. XXV, p. 173).

Now, what does to “maintain” and “expand” the dictatorship mean? It means imbuing the millions of proletarians with the spirit of discipline and organisation; it means creating among the proletarian masses a cementing force and a bulwark against the corrosive influence of the petty-bourgeois elemental forces and petty-bourgeois habits; it means enhancing the organising work of the proletarians in re-educating and remoulding the petty-bourgeois strata; it means helping the masses of the proletarians to educate themselves as a force capable of abolishing classes and of preparing the conditions for the organisation of socialist production. But it is impossible to accomplish all this without a party which is strong by reason of its solidarity and discipline.

“The dictatorship of the proletariat,” says Lenin, “is a stubborn struggle—bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative—against the forces and traditions of the old

society. The force of habit of millions and tens of millions is a most terrible force. Without an iron party tempered in the struggle, without a party enjoying the confidence of all that is honest in the given class without a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, it is impossible to conduct such a strategy successfully” (see Vol. XXV, p. 190).

The proletariat needs the Party *for* the purpose of achieving and maintaining the dictatorship. The Party is an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But from this it follows that when classes disappear and the dictatorship of the proletariat withers away, the Party also will wither away.

5) *The Party as the embodiment of unity of will, unity incompatible with the existence of factions.* The achievement and maintenance of the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible without a party which is strong by reason of its solidarity and iron discipline. But iron discipline in the Party is inconceivable without unity of will, without complete and absolute unity of action on the part of all members of the Party. This does not mean, of course, that the possibility of conflicts of opinion within the Party is thereby precluded. On the contrary, iron discipline does not preclude but presupposes criticism and conflict of opinion within the Party. Least of all does it mean that discipline must be “blind.” On the contrary, iron discipline does not preclude but presupposes conscious and voluntary submission, for only conscious discipline can be truly iron discipline. But after a conflict of opinion has been closed, after criticism has been exhausted and a decision has been arrived at, unity of will and unity of action of all Party members are the necessary conditions without which neither Party unity nor iron discipline in the Party is conceivable.

“In the present epoch of acute civil war,” says Lenin, “the Communist Party will be able to perform its duty only if it is organised in the most centralised manner, if iron discipline bordering on military discipline prevails in it, and if its Party centre is a powerful and authoritative organ, wielding wide powers and enjoying the universal confidence of the members of the Party” (see Vol. XXV, pp. 282–83).

This is the position in regard to discipline in the Party in the period of struggle preceding the achievement of the dictatorship.

The same, but to an even greater degree, must be said about discipline in the Party after the dictatorship has been achieved.

“Whoever,” says Lenin, “weakens in the least the iron discipline of the Party of the proletariat (especially during the time of its dictatorship), actually aids the bourgeoisie against the proletariat” (see Vol. XXV, p. 190).

But from this it follows that the existence of factions is compatible neither with the Party’s unity nor with its iron discipline. It scarcely needs proof that the existence of

factions leads to the existence of a number of centres, and the existence of a number of centres means the absence of one common centre in the Party, the breaking up of unity of will, the weakening and disintegration of discipline, the weakening and disintegration of the dictatorship. Of course, the parties of the Second International, which are fighting against the dictatorship of the proletariat and have no desire to lead the proletarians to power, can afford such liberalism as freedom of factions, for they have no need at all for iron discipline. But the parties of the Communist International, whose activities are conditioned by the task of achieving and consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, cannot afford to be “liberal” or to permit freedom of factions.

The Party represents unity of will, which precludes all factionalism and division of authority in the Party.

Hence Lenin’s warning about the “danger of factionalism from the point of view of Party unity and of effecting the unity of will of the vanguard of the proletariat as the fundamental condition for the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat,” which is embodied in the special resolution of the Tenth Congress of our Party “On Party Unity.”²⁰

Hence Lenin’s demand for the “complete elimination of all factionalism” and the “immediate dissolution of all groups, without exemption, that have been formed on the basis of various platforms,” on pain of “unconditional and immediate expulsion from the Party” (see the resolution “On Party Unity”).

6) *The Party becomes strong by purging itself of opportunist elements.* The source of factionalism in the Party is its opportunist elements. The proletariat is not an isolated class. It is consistently replenished by the influx of peasants, petty bourgeois and intellectuals proletarianised by the development of capitalism. At the same time the upper stratum of the proletariat, principally trade union leaders and members of parliament who are fed by the bourgeoisie out of the super-profits extracted from the colonies, is undergoing a process of decay. “This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the ‘labour aristocracy,’” says Lenin, “who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and, in our days, the principal *social* (not military) *prop of the bourgeoisie*. For they are real *agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement*, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class..., real channels of reformism and chauvinism” (see Vol. XIX, p.77)

In one way or another, all these petty-bourgeois groups penetrate into the Party and introduce into it the spirit of hesitancy and opportunism, the spirit of demoralization and uncertainty. It is they, principally, that constitute the source of factionalism and disintegration, the source of disorganisation and disruption of the Party from within. To fight imperialism with such “allies” in one’s rear means to put oneself in the position

²⁰ The resolution “On Party Unity” was written by V.I. Lenin and adopted by the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.), held on March 8–16, 1921 (see V.I. Lenin, *Works*, 4th Russ. ed., Vol. 32, pp. 217–21, and also *Resolutions and Decisions of C.P.S.U.(B.) Congresses, Conferences and Central Committee Plenums*, Part I, 1941, pp. 364–66).

of being caught between two fires, from the front and from the rear. Therefore, ruthless struggle against such elements, their expulsion from the Party, is a pre-requisite for the successful struggle against imperialism.

The theory of “defeating” opportunist elements by the ideological struggle within the Party, the theory of “overcoming” these elements within the confines of a single party, is a rotten and dangerous theory, which threatens to condemn the Party to paralysis and chronic infirmity, threatens to leave the Party a prey to opportunism, threatens to leave the proletariat without a revolutionary party, threatens to deprive the proletariat of its main weapon in the fight against imperialism. Our Party could not have emerged on to the broad highway, it could not have seized power and organised the dictatorship of the proletariat, it could not have emerged victorious from the civil war, if it had had within its ranks people like Martov and Dan, Potresov and Axelrod. Our Party succeeded in achieving internal unity and unexampled cohesion of its ranks primarily because it was able to in good time to purge itself of the opportunist pollution, because it was able to rid its ranks of the Liquidators and Mensheviks. Proletarian parties develop and become strong by purging themselves of opportunists and reformists, social-imperialists and social-chauvinists, social-patriots and social-pacifists.

The Party becomes strong by purging itself of opportunist elements.

“With reformists, Mensheviks, in our ranks,” says Lenin, “it is *impossible* to be victorious in the proletarian revolution, it is *impossible* to defend it. That is obvious in principle, and it has been strikingly confirmed by the experience of both Russia and Hungary... In Russia, difficult situations have arisen *many times*, when the Soviet regime would *most certainly* have been overthrown had Mensheviks, reformists and petty-bourgeois democrats remained in our Party...in Italy, where, as is generally admitted, decisive battles between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for the possession of state power are imminent. At such a moment it is not only absolutely necessary to remove the Mensheviks, reformists, the Turatists from the Party, but it may even be useful to remove excellent Communists who are liable to waver, and who reveal a tendency to waver towards ‘unity’ with the reformists, to remove them from all responsible posts...On the eve of a revolution, and at a moment when a most fierce struggle is being waged for its victory, the slightest wavering in the ranks of the Party may *wreck everything*, frustrate the revolution, wrest the power from the hands of the proletariat; for this power is not yet consolidated, the attack upon it is still very strong. The desertion of wavering leaders at such a time does not weaken but strengthens the Party, the working-class movement and the revolution” (see Vol. XXV, pp. 462, 463, 464).

IX. Style in Work

I am not referring to literary style. What I have in mind is style in work, that specific and peculiar feature in the practice of Leninism which creates the special type of Leninist worker. Leninism is a school of theory and practice which trains a special type of Party and state worker, creates a special Leninist style in work.

What are the characteristic features of this style? What are its peculiarities?

It has two specific features :

- a) Russian revolutionary sweep and
- b) American efficiency.

The style of Leninism consists in combining these two specific features in Party and state work.

Russian revolutionary sweep is an antidote to inertia, routine, conservatism, mental stagnation and slavish submission to ancient traditions. Russian revolutionary sweep is the life-giving force which stimulates thought, impels things forward, breaks the past and opens up perspectives. Without it no progress is possible.

But Russian revolutionary sweep has every chance of degenerating in practice into empty “revolutionary” Manilovism if it is not combined with American efficiency in work. Examples of this degeneration are only too numerous. Who does not know the disease of “revolutionary” scheme concocting and “revolutionary” plan drafting, which springs from the belief in the power of decrees to arrange everything and re-make everything? A Russian writer, I. Ehrenburg, in his story *The Percommon (The Perfect Communist Man)*, has portrayed the type of a “Bolshevik” afflicted with this disease, who set himself the task of finding a formula for the ideally perfect man and...became “submerged” in this “work.” The story contains a great exaggeration, but it certainly gives a correct likeness of the disease. But no one, I think, has so ruthlessly and bitterly ridiculed those afflicted with this disease as Lenin. Lenin stigmatised this morbid belief in concocting schemes and in turning out decrees as “communist vainglory.”

“Communist vainglory,” says Lenin, “means that a man, who is a member of the Communist Party, and has not yet been purged from it, imagines that he can solve all his problems by issuing communist decrees” (see Vol. XXVII, pp. 50–51).

Lenin usually contrasted hollow “revolutionary” phrasemongering with plain everyday work, thus emphasising that “revolutionary” scheme concocting is repugnant to the spirit and the letter of true Leninism.

“Fewer pompous phrases, more plain, *everyday* work...” says Lenin.

“Less political fireworks and more attention to the simplest but vital...facts of communist construction...” (see Vol. XXIV, pp. 343 and 335).

American efficiency, on the other hand, is an antidote to “revolutionary” Manilovism and fantastic scheme concocting. American efficiency is that indomitable force which neither knows nor recognises obstacles; which with its business-like perseverance brushes aside all obstacles; which continues at a task once started until it is finished, even if it is a minor task; and without which serious constructive work is inconceivable.

But American efficiency has every chance of degenerating into narrow and unprincipled practicalism if it is not combined with Russian revolutionary sweep. Who has not heard of that disease of narrow empiricism and unprincipled practicalism which has not infrequently caused certain “Bolsheviks” to degenerate and to abandon the cause of the revolution? We find a reflection of this peculiar disease in a story by B. Pilnyak, entitled *The Barren Year*, which depicts types of Russian “Bolsheviks” of strong will and practical determination who “function” very “energetically,” but without vision, without knowing “what it is all about,” and who, therefore, stray from the path of revolutionary work. No one has ridiculed this disease of practicalism so incisively as Lenin. He branded it as “narrow-minded empiricism” and “brainless practicalism.” He usually contrasted it with vital revolutionary work and the necessity of having a revolutionary work and the necessity of having a revolutionary perspective in all our daily activities, thus emphasising that this unprincipled practicalism is as repugnant to true Leninism as “revolutionary” scheme concocting.

The combination of Russian revolutionary sweep with American efficiency is the essence of Leninism in Party and state work.

This combination alone produces the finished type of Leninist worker, the style of Leninism in work.

Pravda, Nos. 96, 97, 103, 105, 107, 108, 111; April 26 and 30, May 9, 11, 14, 15 and 18, 1924

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