



Lenin and the Russian Revolution

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Who was Lenin? In 1917 he led the workers of the Tsarist Russian Empire to make the most profound revolution in history. He was the leader of the Russian Bolshevik Party, without which party those workers would have been defeated.

Of Karl Marx's fate at the hands of his alleged followers in the early socialist movement, Lenin wrote that it was often the fate of revolutionaries that after their deaths their names were made into legends to console the oppressed, while their ideas — their real politics, what they had stood for in life — were thrown out and replaced by something else. Something very like that happened to Lenin himself. It happened to him almost immediately after his death. The bureaucracy which ruled the USSR mummified his poor physical remnants, built a great "Lenin Mausoleum" and created an obscene national shrine around the mummy.

Lenin had stood for maximum working class democracy. The rulers who made him — and Marx — into a holy icon of their pidgin-Marxist state religion, proceeded in the decades after his death to build an anti-socialist totalitarian state on the groaning backs of the people of the USSR.

Lenin had liberated the many oppressed nationalities of the Tsarist empire; Stalin put them back under the control of Great Russian chauvinist jailers and oppressors. Lenin had stood for the international socialist revolution: Stalin tried to build "socialism" in backward Russia, substituting "socialism in one country" for Lenin's programme of international socialism. Lenin had defended the right of independent trade unions to exist in the USSR: everywhere Stalinists ruled and still rule, such organisations of the working class are systematically and brutally rooted out.

At every important point the Stalinists, who lyingly called and still call themselves Leninists, radically cut away what Lenin had really stood for, and adopted anti-working-class policies — the very opposite of those which Lenin spent his life fighting for.

Now that Stalinism has fallen in the USSR and Eastern Europe, we have the inverse process. Lenin, who spent his last crippled years fighting incipient Stalinism, is scapegoated for the discredited despotic system which rose up on the defeat of his last struggle, a struggle continued after Lenin's death by Trotsky and others.

This pamphlet is offered to the reader as an introduction to what Lenin — the man who led the greatest working class revolution so far — really did in his life, what he said and what he fought for and against.

The contents were published as a pamphlet in 1987, based on articles in the weekly *Socialist Organiser* in 1982 (nos. 108-113). They have been slightly edited for this reprinting. The 1982 text was adapted from a series of articles in the paper *Workers' Fight* in 1974.

Lenin

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BEGINNING OF BOLSHEVISM

“The Russian revolutionary movement will be victorious as a movement of workers. There is and can be no alternative.” What astonishment must have registered in that vast, backward prison house of nations and peoples, that permafrost block on progress, that was 19th century Russia, at these words of George Plekhanov, spoken in 1889.

For Russia in those days was a country with a tiny working class numbering about one million, while there were over a hundred million peasants. It was this vast peasant mass that had been looked to as the revolutionary class by the then dominant revolutionary organisation, Narodnaya Volya (Narodniks). Plekhanov’s words expressed the historic perspective of Marxism on the working class, and were a rejection of the views of the Narodniks.

Lenin was then only 19. He had already read Marx’s *Capital* and begun to ground himself seriously in its scientific method. Born in the provincial town of Simbirsk, into the family of a schools administrator, Lenin was no stranger to revolutionary ideas other than Marxism. His brother Alexander had been hanged in 1887 for planning the assassination of the Tsar. Alexander had been a member of the Narodnik organisation. But if the execution of his brother sharpened Lenin’s sense of injustice, it was not the views or the methods of the Narodniks that influenced him, but those of Marx, Engels and Plekhanov.

The first things Lenin wrote were directed at countering Narodnaya Volya’s faith in the peasantry with Marxism’s scientific theory of the central historic role of the working class. Whereas the Narodniks saw the peasantry — “the People” — as a single mass, Lenin used detailed studies to show the differentiation within these masses, how out of “the People” was crystallising the proletariat, the modern working class. He also criticised the tactics of the Narodniks, who sent out heroic and isolated revolutionaries with guns and bombs to act in the name of “the People” and assassinate the hated representatives of Tsarist tyranny.

What he had to say in the course of fighting these terrorist tactics is particularly instructive for us today. “We have never rejected terrorism on principle, nor can we do so... The point is however, terror is advocated (by the Narodniks) not as one of the operations the army in the field must carry out in close connection and in complete harmony with the whole system of fighting, but as an individual attack, completely separated from any army whatsoever. In view of the absence of a central revolutionary organisation, terror cannot be anything but that”.

This was the period when the new Russian working class, recently driven into the factories from the countryside, revolted against their conditions and against Tsarist tyranny, with wave upon wave of mass, illegal strikes. Even the savage Tsarist repression failed to quell the movement of the workers, which was spontaneous and lacking in any stable organisation. Trade unions were of course illegal. There were also groups of “intellectuals” who had imported the ideas of Marxism into Russia from Western Europe. These turned eagerly to the task of aiding the proletarian movement and to the task of fusing a revolutionary Marxist consciousness with the actual movement of the working class. In turning towards these tasks, Lenin emerged in the 1890s as one of the foremost of the younger generation of Russian Marxists.

In 1895 Lenin travelled abroad to contact the émigré Emancipation of Labour Group and learn about developments in the west European labour movement. The Emancipation of Labour Group comprised the oldest generation of Russian Marxists, like Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich and Deutsch, and was the powerhouse of Russian Marxist analysis and propaganda.

With them, he arranged for the publication of a miscellany, *Rabotnik* (Worker). Returning to Russia, he arranged for its illegal distribution, and in the autumn of 1895 set up in St Petersburg the League for the Emancipation of the Working Class and arranged for the publication of a new illegal paper, *Rabochye Dyelo*. But just as the proofs of the paper were finally being checked, Lenin and most of the other members of the League were arrested.

After a period in jail Lenin was sent into exile in Eastern Siberia. Here he was joined by his comrade Nadezhda Krupskaya. They were married in 1896.

Neither jail nor exile meant silence or inactivity. This was a period of intense political study, the monument to which is the massive work *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. But he was cut off from the working class, and unable to carry out the urgent task of building a working class revolutionary organisation. From the time of his release in 1900 he concentrated his entire energy on this.

His first idea was to break with the isolated “circle work”, in which scattered groups of Marxist propagandists existed more or less independently of each other throughout Russia. In order to do this, a paper, an all-Russian paper, needed to be founded, which would act as an organiser and centraliser for the whole Social Democratic movement (Marxism was called Social Democracy until 1914). This centralism was to prefigure the unification and ideological independence of the working class. Again he travelled abroad, realising that the paper would have to be produced outside Russia owing to the close police supervision there of every move. At the end of 1900 this work bore its first fruit with the appearance of *Iskra* (The Spark), and then in January of the following year a journal, *Zarya* (Dawn), was produced. Now he set about that work that was to lead to a breakthrough in Marxist thinking, and in its practical effects was to become one of his most important and most characteristic contributions to Marxism as a revolutionary force: the organisation of the Russian workers’ revolutionary drive into a fighting party.

Although an attempt to found a party had been made in 1898 while he was in exile, it had collapsed almost immediately when nearly all the delegates to the founding conference were arrested soon after it. The period from 1894 to the first Congress of the Party in 1898 had been, in Lenin’s own words, one in which Social Democracy appeared “as a social movement, as a rising of the masses of the people, and as a political party”. Even the Zubatov “unions” — so-called because they were “unions” organised by the police chief Zubatov — led strikes, even general strikes, in large cities, so great was the spontaneous will to struggle of the working class.

But if Social Democracy appeared now as “a political party”, it was a political party in the sense of a broad range of people having common characteristics and acting more or less together. Lenin understood that what was wanted was something that broke out of the scattered, restricted work of the Marxist educational and leaflet-distributing circles and became a factor on the national political scene, enabling the working class in turn to unite organisationally and ideologically. This party had to combine the features of an organisationally secure unity capable of escaping the secret police and of a politically trained and unified group capable of directing struggles surely and single-mindedly.

The period of the rise of working-class struggle in the 90s was, however, also the period of the rise of the theory of “economism”, the view that economic, trade-union struggles of workers were in themselves an adequate basis for the political struggle of the working class, leaving the sphere of the political struggle to the domination of the bourgeoisie. All Marxists then agreed that the first revolution in Russia would be a bourgeois revolution. The “economist” approach meant surrendering the working class in politics to the leadership of that bourgeoisie, while the socialists concentrated on trade unionism and general propaganda.

The inevitable separation between “economic struggle” and “political struggle” that this entailed made economism the at first unwitting, and later conscious, ally of the revisionism that had just reared its head in Germany. The revisionists wanted to transform Social Democracy from a movement to overthrow capitalism into one aiming merely to achieve reforms.

In the famous book *What Is To Be Done*, Lenin outlined a “first draft”, so to speak, of the theory of the organisation and role of the party. Published in 1902, the book developed ideas already set out in *Where To Begin* (1901) and *Letter To A Comrade In St Petersburg*. The book showed how a central revolutionary organisation based on a scientific programme could both link together the fragmented struggles of the working class and also link the struggles of that class on a whole series of fronts and around a great variety of objectives. It would do this by forging out of these disparate struggles an organisational and ideological unity which would be a crystal of the true character of the proletariat. The struggle to protect the purity of the

proletarian character of the revolutionary movement was concentrated within the revolutionary party. But it had a clear relationship to the movement outside. “The stronger our Party organisations, consisting of real Social Democrats, the less wavering and instability there is within the Party, the broader, the more varied, the richer and the more fertile will be the influence of the Party on the elements of the working-class masses surrounding it and guided by it”.

In backward, semi-Asiatic Russia, however, where the peasantry, the bourgeoisie, and the petty bourgeoisie of both the town and the countryside, as well as the working class, were oppressed classes, there was a great danger that the working-class movement would fall under the domination of these far more numerous classes. The struggle against false ideas developing in and around the workers’ movement had to be coupled with an equally determined struggle against external class influences.

With the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903 came a sharpening of differences within the RSDLP. Ranged against Lenin were all those who understood a “party” to be nothing more than an assembly of people who were on the same side. Such a conception was entirely inadequate to the founding of a “party” whose practice and programme was based on an underlying scientific theory, whose members had to be steeled, dedicated, and politically trained. Lenin had to fight against many of his one-time collaborators to establish his ideas. He won, but his victory was short-lived: though his Bolshevik (majority) faction triumphed over the Mensheviks (minority) at the Congress, the defection of Plekhanov soon afterwards to Menshevism put Lenin in the minority on the Editorial Board of *Iskra*, which was the decisive party committee outside Russia. He resigned from the Editorial Board.

Thus began a long and bitter struggle in which he fought not only his close collaborators of the previous period such as Martov and Potresov, but also his teacher Plekhanov. He began to build up a faction that was finally to emerge in 1912 as the Bolshevik Party. The split in 1903 is referred to in vulgar Stalinist legend as already exhibiting in fully developed form all the distinguishing traits of both Bolshevism and Menshevism, traits which led the two factions to line up on different sides of the class barricades in the revolution of 1917.

In reality it was no more than their prefigurement. A whole series of experiences, struggles, reunifications, new splits and the interchange of personnel was necessary before the final crystallisation of the two tendencies.

Many of the active workers in Russia rallied to Lenin against the “anarchic” behaviour of the émigré Menshevik intellectuals who had overturned the conference decisions. The debates of this period were anticipations of the burning problems of the revolution. “The approach of the great storm was felt everywhere. All classes were in a state of ferment and preparation”.

FLOW AND EBB OF REVOLUTION

After living in Munich and London, Lenin was in Geneva when the revolutionary storm actually broke in Russia.

On 22 January 1905 thousands of workers, dressed in their Sunday best and carrying religious icons, marched to the Tsar’s Winter Palace in St Petersburg to present a petition to ask for “amnesty, civil liberties, higher wages, the gradual granting of land to the peasantry and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly”. Led by the priest Gapon, these “unfortunate reviled slaves”, as they called themselves, proceeded peacefully towards the man they saw as their protector, the Tsar. Suddenly the Cossacks were unleashed against them. Over 1,000 were slaughtered and over 2,000 injured.

Strikes immediately spread throughout Russia, drawing in the soldiers, the sailors, and the peasantry. Throughout 1905 mass revolutionary struggles engulfed Russia. Although the liberal bourgeoisie seems to have gained control of the movement, strikes broke out once again towards the end of 1905, and it was this massive upheaval that created the first Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.

The soviets were councils set up by the workers to draw the threads of the different struggles together and

Soldiers' demonstration in support of the Bolsheviks

unify them, to link the factory organisations, to combine the employed and the unemployed, and in short to be the "parliament" of the working class — not, however, one resting on a sham democracy with elections every five years, but on a real democracy knowing the right of workers to recall the deputies to the Soviet and at will elect new ones. Quickly the Soviet in St Petersburg became (with Leon Trotsky as its chairman) the focus of the strength and power of the working class, and an alternative authority to the Tsarist state. It was to the Soviet that the working class looked for leadership and organisation. Into it were channelled the energy and aspirations of the class.

The Russian workers had improvised the form of democratic self organisation which the working class needs as it begins to rouse itself and challenge the ruling class's power in society. Soviets reappeared in the 1917 Revolution. After the First World War soviets sprang into existence in East Europe and Germany. In 1956 the great working-class uprising in Budapest against Stalinism could find no better form of self organisation in a struggle for power than the workers' council. At Gdansk in 1980 the workers created a powerful soviet-style "parliament". This universality proves that the soviet, invented in 1905, was not merely a Russian or an ephemeral form of proletarian organisation, but the necessary form for overcoming the atomisation of the proletariat and simultaneously the best organisational network for democratic working-class rule in society.

In St Petersburg the Bolsheviks did not at first know how to evaluate this new form of organisation. But Lenin, though he could not then know their full historical significance, quickly grasped the soviets' importance in the struggle of the working class, and could not wait to get to St Petersburg himself to see and direct events from close at hand. Moving first to Finland, he arrived towards the end of the year in St Petersburg.

Once again, Lenin's unshakeable sense of the concrete led him to translate what he saw into an answer to the question, "what is to be done?" And once again the answer was in terms of party organisation. Here was an opportunity "to develop our activities in the most extensive and audacious manner". But first the party had to develop many legal aspects of work while maintaining an underground apparatus. It had also to open its doors, hitherto rigorously guarded against easy entry, to the recruitment of thousands of workers and ensure that workers took leading positions on all the committees. This was no reversal of the view that consciousness and system were the fundamentals of the revolutionary party — on the contrary, it was precisely because in the previous three years the Bolsheviks had achieved this that they could now recruit without any danger of dilution. "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic", declared Lenin in the first article he wrote on returning, adding, "and more than ten years' work by Social Democracy has done much to transform this spontaneity into consciousness".

Here and elsewhere, he introduced essential qualifications and modifications into the ideas of *What Is To Be Done?*, developing those ideas in the light of the experience of the working-class struggle. The party, Lenin realised, must not be like a priest reciting sacred and unchanging texts. It must always be the organised richness of the experience of the working class, given sense and direction through the science of Marxism.

By 1906, especially after the defeat of the Moscow insurrection in December 1905, the storm was dying

down. Soon Tsarism was victorious and most of the revolutionary leaders were once again forced into exile, Lenin himself going to live in Paris. Everywhere there was "demoralisation, split, discord, renegacy", with "mysticism serving as a cloak for counter-revolution". It was now, in this period of black reaction, with the revolutionaries increasingly isolated, that the lessons of the 1905 Revolution were drawn and the political tendencies in the working-class movement were hammered into their final shape. And now too the Bolshevik Party, which was to lead the proletariat to victory within a decade of the decisive defeat of 1907, was forged.

Lenin summed up what happened after Tsarism had defeated the 1905 revolution: "Victorious Tsarism is compelled speedily to destroy the remnants of the pre-bourgeois, patriarchal mode of life in Russia. Russia's development along bourgeois lines marches forward with remarkable rapidity... Revolutionary parties must complete their education. They have learned how to attack. Now they must learn... how to retreat properly".

But for the revolutionaries, to learn to retreat, to face the situation of massive depression in the aftermath of defeat, to adopt tactics appropriate to this new situation, to go down again into the underground after the open work possible during the revolution — this was indeed difficult. Reorientation and re-education of the revolutionaries proved a bitter task to accomplish, specially against the background of defeat and demoralisation.

The whole period was for Lenin taken up with a battle on two fronts, against both ultra-right and ultra-left tendencies. In the heat of the revolution the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had reunited. After the defeat new divisions emerged. A section of the Mensheviks became open reformists, and a section of the Bolsheviks reduced themselves to ultra-left posturing, which threatened, no less than the reformist Mensheviks, to make the revolutionary tasks impossible.

The Bolshevik ultra-lefts were known as the "otzvoists" (recallists), and led by Bogdanov, Alexinski and Lunarcharski. The Social Democrats had successfully boycotted the democratic Tsarist Duma (parliament) during the revolution, when mass struggle provided its own alternative. Now, in retreat, it became necessary to change tactics, to learn to utilise even a reactionary undemocratic Tsarist parliament for socialist propaganda.

Lenin, in alliance at first with the Menshevik section of the party, advocated such use of the Duma. Eventually he overcame the at first almost unanimous Bolshevik resistance; the continued revolutionary depression made the need for change increasingly obvious.

Except to the hard-core "otzvoists". Their ultra-leftism, threatening to reduce the revolutionary party to self-isolation and unrealism, was linked with a retreat into mysticism. They tried to develop socialism as a sort of religion. Eventually they were expelled from the Bolshevik faction.

The Menshevik reformists, the "Liquidators", unlike the otzvoists who were their mirror opposites, wanted to confine themselves entirely to open work within Tsarist legality, liquidating the underground party. Legal trade unions were now possible, and on this basis they increasingly argued, in effect, for the creation of a working-class party of reforms.

Lenin wanted to make the fullest use of all possibilities for legal work, such as in the Duma and the

unions, but never to limit either the activity or the propaganda of the workers' party to what Tsarism permitted. That would have been to surrender the ideological, political and organisational independence of the working class.

Once again, an apparently technical question of organisation represented really crucial issues, as the eventual evolution of the liquidators into full-blown reformists demonstrates.

"The proletariat is revolutionary only insofar as it is conscious of and gives effect to (the) idea of the hegemony of the proletariat. To preach to the workers that what they need is 'not hegemony but a class party' (the slogan of Livitski, a liquidationist) means to betray the cause of the proletariat to the liberals; it means preaching that Social Democratic labour policy should be replaced by liberal labour policy". (By a "class party", the liquidationists meant a party sociologically working class and narrowly confined to bread-and-butter working class issues within existing society).

The struggle on both fronts culminated for Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Prague conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party at the beginning of 1912. Together with a group of "Pro-Party Mensheviks", the Bolsheviks decisively cut off the Liquidators. Thereafter the RSDLP was essentially the old Bolshevik faction.

Now, after years of depression and isolation, the Russian labour movement began to revive, particularly after the shooting of striking workers on the Lena Goldfields. In 1912 Lenin moved from Paris to Cracow (in Russian-ruled Poland), to be as near as possible to the struggle in Russia. The Bolsheviks began to reap the rewards of their combination of legal and illegal work. In 1912 they began to publish *Pravda* as a legal daily paper.

WAR AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Much of Lenin's theoretical work at this time was focused on the national and colonial question. One of Lenin's major contributions to Marxism was his clarification of this. Russia had rightly been called the "prison house of nations", with non-Russian nationalities outnumbering Russians in the Tsar's empire. What policy should Russian Marxists adopt towards Russia's subject nations?

They took a "consistently democratic" stand, advocating self-determination for nations and for fragments of peoples who felt nationally oppressed. The preservation of existing state boundaries was no concern of the working class.

Lenin insisted that the road to international working class unity lay through the fullest rights of nations to a separate existence at will. National oppression poisoned the relations of workers in both the oppressed and oppressor nations. It was imperative that the revolutionary party of the oppressor nation accept and fight for the national rights of the oppressed nations. Conversely, the revolutionary parties of the workers of the oppressed nations and peoples would oppose the chauvinism and narrow national exclusiveness of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of their nations, fighting in this way for international working class unity.

In contrast to this, the Marxists of that other prison house of nations, the Austrian Empire, redefined the right to self-determination of nations as the right to mere cultural freedom within the borders of the existing state, which were regarded as sacrosanct. Lenin pointed out that this policy of "cultural national autonomy" merely perpetuated nationalism, and in no way helped international working class unity.

Lenin wrote a number of pamphlets and articles to combat the Austrians on the right and also an ultra-left tendency personified by Rosa Luxemburg, who maintained that, for example, recognition of Poland's right to self-determination was a futile and retrograde step because Poland and Russia had been economically integrated.

This question eventually fused with the problem of the world-wide struggle against imperialism. Lenin demonstrated that it was precisely in the period of the highest stages of capitalism that there would be a whole wave of wars of national liberation against imperialism. He argued that revolutionaries everywhere, and especially those in the imperialist countries, must support the oppressed nations and stand for their right to break out of the empires which oppressed them and set up their own states.

Admitting that political independence would be limited by the imperialist world economic relations now dominant, Lenin argued that the answer to the economic domination of imperialism was workers' revolution on a world scale, but consistent democracy on the national question was an irreplaceable part of the

programme of socialism. His writings of that time are full of denunciations of those who did not understand that the right of nations to self-determination would still be a vital issue even after the socialist revolution.

In future decades, when the Stalinist USSR, with about half its population non-Russians, became the largest prison-house of nations on earth, and the lack of national self-determination became a dominating feature of life in countries like Poland, the national question became once again one of the most explosive issues in Russia and Eastern Europe. Lenin's policy on the national question became an essential part of the answer to Stalinism there.

The national question took on new sharpness as the First World War loomed. Lenin had participated in the congresses of the international socialist movement, though he had concentrated heavily on Russian affairs. Now, in 1914, when the World War broke out, the whole international socialist movement splintered into nationalist sections. Instead of the international brotherhood of the working class against war to which the International had repeatedly pledged itself, the outbreak of war produced fratricidal slaughter.

The same artillery fire that lit up the corpse-littered battlefields now highlighted the real situation within the international labour movement, which had become rotten with careerism and reformism. Social Democrats became "social chauvinists" overnight, supporting their national governments in the war. Jules Guesde, a leader of the French socialists, even became Minister of War.

Russia was one of the few countries where the majority of socialists did not spring to "defend the fatherland", though even here a social chauvinist wing emerged, headed by Plekhanov.

For Lenin the most crushing and unexpected blow was the fate of German Social Democracy, which also supported the imperialist war. This party, representing over four million voters, went over massively to chauvinism. What shocked Lenin was the fact that Karl Kautsky, the revered "Pope of Marxism", and the man whom Lenin had regarded as his teacher for the previous two decades, refused to echo the words of the revolutionary left, led by Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: "The enemy is at home! Turn the imperialist war into a civil war". Instead, he began to rationalise for the renegades.

Kautsky's betrayal, masked by chatter about disarmament conferences, drew from Lenin a number of brilliant articles which exposed the social chauvinists, including those who had been pillars of "Marxist orthodoxy" during the debates with the "revisionists" like Bernstein.

Now Lenin turned to a complete examination of the whole of the preceding period of the Marxist labour movement. He set about digging down to the very roots of the rotteness that had corrupted both the theory and practice of the parties of the Second International.

He bitterly rejected and combated the shallow programme of the Kautskys that after the war they should "reconstruct the Second International".

He exposed how the daily life of the Second International parties had led them gradually to accommodate and intermesh with the bourgeois state, much as the liquidators had tended to in Russia. He reworked his way through the whole literature of Marxism, relating it to the whole experience of the class struggle.

He uncovered and, in a series of famous pamphlets like *The State and Revolution* (1917), proved that the "orthodox" Marxists like Kautsky had for years falsified, vulgarised and bowdlerised the real teachings of Marxism on the state, the class struggle and the proletarian revolution. Implacably Lenin struggled to understand, expose and eliminate from the labour movement the baseness, loathsomeness and vileness of social-chauvinism and "Kautskyism".

This was the only way to cleanse the labour movement and rebuild a working class international on firmer foundations. Gradually, small groups of revolutionaries began to make contact and prepare the revival. A conference of revolutionary socialists was held in Zimmerwald in Switzerland in 1915, and another in Kienthal in 1916.

While the ravages of war seemed to stifle all political life, its very barbarism and the conditions it imposed on the working masses both at the front and at home provided the leaven for revolution. As Engels, predicting the world war as long before as 1887, had said: "Eight to ten million soldiers will mutually massacre one another and in so doing devour the whole of Europe ... Only one result is absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the ultimate victory of the working class."

In Russia at the outbreak of war what had been a

growing movement of the working class was suddenly stifled. The Bolshevik deputies in the Duma were arrested for opposing the war. But within a short period, the collapse, the slaughter, the famine of the war revived the movement of opposition of the working class.

On 22 February 1917 a wage dispute at the giant Putilov works in Petrograd sparked off a lock-out which within the week had generated a mass movement of striking workers, supported by mutinying troops and sailors. On 23 February the international women's day demonstrations flowed over into city-wide demonstrations. Slogans demanding higher wages were soon replaced by ones demanding "Bread", "Down with the autocracy", and "Down with the war".

The leadership of the movement was quickly taken over by the leaders of the left in the old Duma, Kerensky, Chkheidze and Skobolev. The Soviet that had been so important in the revolution of 1905 was reborn.

And, as a symbolic portent of the coming situation of dual power, it met in the Tauride Palace (the parliamentary buildings) on the 27th, the day the Tsar dissolved the Duma.

A Provisional Government was soon called into office with Prince Lvov as Prime Minister. But on the same day the Soviet issued its Order No. 1 urging the setting up of more Soviets, particularly in the army and navy, and instructing workers, soldiers and sailors not to obey any orders unless countersigned by the Soviet.

Lenin arrived in Russia, in Petrograd itself, in April. He was greeted by Chkheidze, then the chairman of the Soviet, who warned Lenin about the dangers of disunity now that the democratic revolution could be fulfilled. But Lenin ignored these pompous, yet anxious words.

He turned to the people gathered around and announced: "Dear comrades, soldiers and workers. The piratical imperialist war is beginning to become a civil war throughout Europe... The Russian revolution accomplished by you has prepared the way and opened up a new epoch. Long live the world-wide socialist revolution."

The Bolshevik leaders there at the Finland Station to meet him were shocked at what Lenin had said. Some of them must have thought he had gone mad or — as indeed he had — gone over to Trotsky's view that the Russian revolution must take the course of combining the democratic and socialist revolutions under the leadership of the working class.

Lenin, who had the marvellous capacity to combine concrete analysis and realism in every situation with rigid adherence to principle, had seen the possibilities of full proletarian victory. Really, he merely developed previously worked-out ideas on the motive forces of the Russian Revolution to their logical conclusion.

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

Both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had believed that the revolution possible in Russia was a bourgeois revolution like that of France in 1789. They differed in that the Mensheviks deduced mechanically that the revolution would be led by the big bourgeoisie.

Concrete as ever in analysis, Lenin insisted that the bourgeoisie would not, and did not wish to, carry out the bourgeois transformation of Russia in a revolutionary way — as opposed to the "Prussian road" of a slow transformation front above in alliance with the landowners. One reason was their intense fear of the working class, especially after the experience of 1905. Therefore the bourgeois revolution would have to be made by the peasantry in alliance with the working class.

Trotsky agreed with the Bolsheviks, but argued that such a worker peasant alliance, led by the working class, could not stop at completing the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, but would go on to carry through working class socialist measures. It was inconceivable that the working class could take power and yet not look to its own class interests and concerns.

To the argument that Russia was not ripe for socialism, was too backward, etc., Trotsky replied that the revolution would not finish even with workers' victory in Russia: that would be the starting point in a linked chain of proletarian revolutions which would lead to the workers' conquest of power in the advanced capitalist countries. This was the theory of Permanent Revolution.

Slowly, step by step, Lenin had arrived at the same position as Trotsky. And he had done more than Trotsky. He had built a party that, once he had rearmed it to understand the new possibilities, would be able to ensure that the perspective of workers' power in Russia was more than a mere possibility.

The Bolshevik leaders who resisted Lenin were relapsing into a neo-Menshevism because of inertia and uncritical repetition of yesterday's formulae without reference to today's realities. "The truth is concrete", insisted Lenin. Marxism was a method for analysis of the world, not dogmas and sacred texts.

Once again the party had to be shaken up. In a short time Lenin shook it up rallying the working-class rank and file against the "old Bolshevik" leaders.

In May, Leon Trotsky arrived in Russia. He had spent a brief exile in the USA and, attempting to return to Russia on the outbreak of revolution, had been arrested at sea by the British navy and interned for a number of months.

Trotsky had joined the Martov faction of the RSDLP in 1903. He had soon broken with the Mensheviks and stood alone between the factions for a number of years. In 1912, he had abortively attempted to resist the definitive rupture of relations within the RSDLP.

Fundamentally, he had failed to appreciate the tremendous constructive work that Lenin was accomplishing and had tended, from the vantage point of his theory of Permanent Revolution, to regard both Menshevism and Bolshevism as equally inadequate, though Bolshevism less so.

Almost immediately on his return to Russia, Trotsky started to work with the Bolsheviks, understanding that without the leadership of the Bolshevik party the theoretical projections of Permanent Revolution could not be made reality. He recognised that without the revolutionary party constructed by Lenin over years of struggle, the perspective of socialist revolution could not have been made reality, and the working class would be defeated. He joined the Bolshevik party that July.

Soon Lenin and Trotsky had instilled into the Bolshevik party an understanding of the real possibilities at hand. The Bolshevik party adopted the direct goal of the taking of power by the Russian working class at the head of the peasantry.

"We don't need a parliamentary republic, we don't need bourgeois democracy, we don't need any government except the Soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies".

These Soviets were a higher form of democracy — "an organisation of workers (and) the embryo of workers' government", said Lenin. They raised the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets", although the Bolsheviks still lacked a majority in the soviets.

The economic dislocation became worse; the Provisional Government refused to distribute the lands of the aristocracy; it refused to discontinue the war; deserters drifted back to their homes in droves, bringing to the countryside the radicalism within the army. Both the soil and the seeds were being prepared for the victory of Bolshevism.

But in July the Bolsheviks faced repression from the Provisional Government. Lenin was ridiculously smeared in the press as being a German agent and once again had to go into hiding, while Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders were arrested.

On their release in September, however, the government's situation had deteriorated. That month it faced an attempted right wing military coup by General Kornilov. The prestige and membership of the Bolsheviks also grew by leaps and bounds. Trotsky was elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in September.

In June Lenin had told the first All-Russian Congress of Soviets that the Bolsheviks were prepared to take power. Now, in October, the Bolsheviks organised the working class in the taking of power from the Provisional Government on the first morning of the Second Congress. Rapid developments at the front and at home had turned June's "ridiculous remark" into the blazing reality of October's victory.

The world's first workers' state had been established. Lenin, opening the October Congress of Soviets, said very simply: "Comrades, we will now proceed to construct the socialist order".

The October insurrection was in fact organised and led by Leon Trotsky. But Lenin was the recognised leader of the Revolution. He became the first Chairman of the Council of Soviets. Here again his actions exemplified what was a constant theme in his life, the dialectical combination of "the strictest discipline, truly iron discipline in our party" and his confidence and reliance on the creativity of the masses. "We must be guided by experience; we must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses..."

The Bolsheviks, who had a majority in the Soviets, became the builders of the new state and the foremost fighters for its defence. It was at first a truly democratic state, with democratic rule by the working class exercised through the network of soviets, at the apex of which was the Supreme Soviet.

**Trotsky, Lenin
and Kamenev
in 1919**

In the struggle for power the Bolshevik programme and the needs of the masses had been summed up in the slogan "Land, Peace and Bread". Now, in relation to the war the Bolshevik slogan was "Peace without annexations". But revolutionary Russia, bled white by war and famine and with the remnants of the Tsarist Army simply useless, did not have the strength to impose this peace programme. German imperialism was able to impose a robbers' peace on the new workers' state.

The Bolsheviks were forced to make a retreat, giving massive territorial concessions to the Germans in the forced treaty of Brest Litovsk, signed in February 1918. This was the first of many retreats the Bolsheviks were forced to make in their isolation. The revolution in Europe still had not broken out. The Bolshevik Party experienced the sharpest factional division on this question. The majority around Bukharin advocated an immediate revolutionary war. Lenin advocated immediate peace, making the necessary concessions to Germany.

Trotsky favoured an attempt to dramatise to the workers of Europe and especially to those who had been told that the Bolsheviks were German agents, the forced character of the concessions the Bolsheviks were having to make to the Germans, but he recognised, with Lenin, that concessions were unavoidable.

Consequently, using the slogan "neither peace nor war", he dragged out the negotiations at Brest Litovsk as long as possible until the Germans launched a new onslaught on the workers' state. Lenin, who had been in a small minority on the Central Committee, now gained the majority against the Bukharin faction for immediate peace, with the support of Trotsky and his allies.

Lenin had faced the situation with brutal realism. Most significant, however, is that in the heat of the argument he insisted on proclaiming his opinion that if necessary the Russian revolution should be willing to sacrifice itself and face defeat in order to hasten the German revolution.

All eyes were now on Germany. The revolution did break out in Europe, beginning towards the end of 1918. A revolutionary wave swept Europe, brushing the monarchies from power in Austria and Germany and putting the right-wing Social Democracy in power.

Revolutionary workers' governments were established briefly in Hungary and Bavaria. In 1919 and 1920, the Italian state virtually collapsed, with the working class seizing the factories. But everywhere the revolution was defeated. Everywhere it was demonstrated negatively that the work Lenin had successfully accomplished, the building of a hard revolutionary party, was irreplaceable if the revolution of the proletariat was to be victorious.

The existence of the Bolshevik party had alone made the October revolution possible in Russia, a revolution made in the belief that Russia was the first link in a necessary chain of proletarian revolutions throughout Europe.

The lack of similar parties in Europe led to the defeat of the proletarian revolutions that erupted as the Marxists had expected, in the wake of the First World War.

This in turn led to the isolation of the one successful revolution, embattled Russia. And from this isolation came, from the middle of 1918, tremendous difficulties for the Bolsheviks and ultimately the Stalinist counter-revolution.

FOUNDING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

The victory in Russia in 1917 had been very easy, almost bloodless. The difficulties began afterwards.

Civil war erupted. From 1918, to the internal enemies in arms against the revolution were added the armies of intervention sent by no fewer than 14 states to extinguish the proletarian revolution in Russia.

The Soviet state was forced to defend itself and to build up from scratch a new, Red Army. This was accomplished under the leadership of Trotsky, Commissar for War, and the workers' state fought a long war in which civil war was inextricably linked with war against intervention.

In July 1918, the Left Social Revolutionaries, a peasant-based party which had initially formed a coalition government with the Bolsheviks, assassinated the German ambassador — trying to force Russia into a revolutionary war with Germany — and attempted a coup d'état, using their positions in the Cheka (special revolutionary police). On 30 August the Bolshevik leader Uritsky was killed, and a right SR militant, Dora Kaplan, shot Lenin, failing to kill him, but injuring him very seriously.

In response the Bolsheviks launched a Red Terror. The Cheka, a revolutionary police, was used to fight counter-revolution. No mercy was shown to the enemies of the workers' state.

The Bolsheviks, who had begun by abolishing the death penalty, now did not hesitate at summary execution of counter-revolutionaries. Steeped in the history of revolutionary struggles, they understood that the proletarian revolution, in those conditions, though it aimed at building a society where violence against people would be unthinkable, a socialist society, needed arms and ruthlessness to prevent a counter-revolutionary bloodbath.

Later writers on Stalinism, such as, for example Solzhenitsyn, have confused the ruthlessness of the revolutionary working class with the later counter-revolutionary butchery of Stalinism. Thus in Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* the list of crimes begins in 1918 and runs all through the Stalinist period. In reality, there is no continuity.

Whatever mistakes may have been made, the Red Terror of the revolutionary years was the violence of workers and peasants in revolt against capitalism, directed against the bourgeoisie and their agents and presumed agents. The Stalinist terror was the violence of an uncontrolled and self-serving bureaucratic caste, in defence of its own privileged position, against the working population in general and genuine Communists in particular.

There is as much difference between the two as between the violence of a slave against his or her master, and the violence of the master against the slave.

In March 1919, the work bore fruit which the Bolsheviks had begun when the Second International collapsed. A new, Communist, International was founded in Moscow.

Russia, the burning heart of the world proletarian revolution, the object of hate and fear on the part of the world's bourgeoisie, combined its attempt to break out of encirclement with the attempt to establish a world party of the proletariat on firm political foundations.

In the fire of the revolutionary upsurge then flaring in Europe, the new International attempted to

build revolutionary parties out of the debris or hulks of the old Second International parties and, more importantly, out of the newly revolutionised proletarian masses.

At the first Congress of the Communist International no major party was represented except the Russian. The real foundation congress was the Second, in 1920.

The organisation had gained mass support in Italy, France and Germany. It was becoming clear that there would have to be a long struggle and not, as sometimes appeared in 1919, a quick victory throughout Europe.

The International turned its attention to the task of remoulding and rebuilding the European labour movement on revolutionary organisational and political foundations. All the great issues of communist politics were discussed at the Second, Third and Fourth Congresses (those held before Lenin's death).

The national and colonial question, the revolutionary party, the question of the united front of workers' organisations, trade unionism and revolutionary politics, and the question of women. Far from Moscow issuing orders, as it was to do later, the future and conduct of the Soviet state itself was seen as a subject for discussion and deliberation by the world communist movement.

The struggle for Bolshevism had meant an irreconcilable battle against all those tendencies weakening the proletariat as a revolutionary force. The new world party of the proletariat was to be built in the same way — founded on a Marxism now enriched with the fundamental experiences of the struggle against Bernsteinian revisionism, social chauvinism, and the Kautsky centre, and enriched also with the experience of the victorious workers' revolution in Russia.

From the Second World Congress in 1920, an increasing part of the basis of the Comintern was the analysis of the experience of the defeats suffered by the revolution in Europe.

The complex interaction between revolutionary victory in Russia, whose precondition was the existence of Lenin's party, and the defeat of the European revolution, because of the absence of such parties, now manifested itself within the victorious revolution.

During the years of civil war and intervention, the Russian economy had been devastated. The working class, always a small part of the population, had been virtually uprooted from its social role and transformed into the personnel of the new state and the new army, or dispersed to the villages to try to avoid starvation. The soviets were reduced to shells during the civil war and the Red Terror.

A system known as War Communism had been in operation. Essentially this had been a system of direct state seizure and distribution of goods.

The peasantry were willing to allow the direct state appropriation of their produce so long as the threat of counter-revolution and the restoration of the landlords loomed over their heads. But the end of the Civil War inevitably led to intensified frictions and tensions, and to peasant rebellions.

The peasants' ambivalence towards the revolution which gave them the land, but also appropriated their produce was well expressed in the widespread peasant support for the "Bolshevik" Trotsky, military leader against the landlords' armies, and hatred of the "dirty Jew" Lenin, leader of the 'Communists' who sent out the expropriation squads from the towns.

In 1921, the Bolsheviks reacted to this, and to the prospect of a period in which the Russian workers' state would be an isolated revolutionary outpost, by introducing the "New Economic Policy".

This was essentially a policy of limited restoration of free market relations under the strict regulation and control of the workers' state. But this in turn led, by the middle '20s, to a large scale degeneration of the state itself, raising it to a degree of independence in which it balanced between the newly licensed merchants and traders and rich peasants on the one hand and the working class on the other.

The harmful effects on the Bolshevik party of these developments, rooted as they were in the extremely backward conditions of Russia, made worse by civil war, were already visible by the early '20s. They took the form of growing bureaucratism within the Bolshevik party — the transformation of an increasingly dominant section, which had a power base in the state apparatus, into a stifling bureaucracy. J V Stalin, a second rank leader of the revolution, and from 1922 holder of the newly-created position of general secretary of the party, personified this bureaucracy and led it to mastery of Soviet society.

The bureaucracy of the Soviet state crystallised from a section of the revolutionary party, tired and demoralised by Russia's isolation. It grounded itself in mate-

rial privileges, and the preservation and extension of those privileges quickly became its first rule of existence.

Its domination was made easier because at the 10th Party congress in March 1921 party democracy had been severely curtailed and organised factions banned. Simultaneously all parties were banned, even those like the Martov Mensheviks who now accepted the revolution and were a Soviet opposition.

Intended as temporary measures to aid the party through the dangerous period of transition to the New Economic Policy, these bans became permanent and ultimately shaded off into the Stalinist ice age in which nobody but the "Great Leader" himself dared utter an independent word.

In opposition to the bureaucracy there crystallised out of the old Bolshevik party a determinedly revolutionary section, dedicated to maintaining the revolutionary perspectives of the party and fighting for a restoration of party democracy and later of soviet democracy.

Lenin was one of the first in the field against the bureaucracy.

RESISTING THE STALINIST COUNTERREVOLUTION

In 1922 Lenin suffered a stroke which paralysed him almost totally for a period. After a brief recovery, he suffered another stroke on 7 March 1923. He never recovered, though there were periods in which he was able to dictate notes.

In this period he fought his last battle, against growing bureaucratism and in defence of working class democracy.

On his deathbed he became increasingly aware that things were not going well, and alarmed by the growing power of the bureaucracy. He had, he said, the uncanny sensation of turning a steering wheel which no longer had any control over the vehicle.

Initiative from below was being stifled. The Workers' Inspectorate, far from being a genuine organ of working class supervision, had become merely one more source of bureaucratic power for Stalin.

On the national question, too, "great Russian chauvinism" was restoring itself to power within the new social structures. Stalin and Dzherzhinsky had conducted a savage campaign against the Georgian Bolsheviks, accusing them of nationalism. Lenin knew where the malignant nationalism lay — in the great Russian chauvinism of the central state apparatus.

He resolved to conduct a struggle against the bureaucracy, in favour of the maligned Georgian Bolsheviks and the rights of the Georgian people within the Soviet system. But Lenin the activist was reduced to Lenin the dictator of notes, unable even to write them himself. These notes became his testament.

On 4 January 1923 he wrote: "Stalin is too rude and this defect...becomes intolerable in a general secretary. That is why I suggest that the comrades think over a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing somebody else differing in all respects from Comrade Stalin by one single advantage — that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and considerate to the comrades, less officious, etc.

"I think that from the point of view of assuring against a split and from the point of view of what I wrote above of the mutual relations between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a detail, or it is a detail which can acquire decisive importance."

Stalin was not removed and in any case he was not himself the new bureaucracy, merely its personification.

No political issue so clearly epitomises the profoundly revolutionary and democratic spirit of Lenin and the Bolsheviks as their policy on the national question. True, they had (rightly) not hesitated to subordinate the national rights of the Poles in 1920 to the needs, as they saw them, of the workers' revolution.

But for most of the long-oppressed nationalities and peoples of the Tsarist empire, the workers' revolution meant liberation, a tearing down of that Bastille of the nations. The revolutionary effects of Bolshevik policy on oppressed nationalities and peoples was felt as far away as among the Blacks in the USA.

The fate of the national minorities under the Stalinist bureaucratic counter-revolution graphically summed up what that counter-revolution meant, and will do to illustrate what happened in every area of society.

It was one of the most savage ironies of history. While the Austrian prison house of nations had been shattered into fragments, the Bolshevik policy of self-determination had preserved the unity of most of the former Tsarist empire — unity on the basis of freedom of the component nations and peoples.

Now the Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration began systematically to convert the free association of Soviet

peoples created in the fires of revolution and civil war back into a prison house for the non-Great Russians. Stalin rebuilt the walls and institutions of national oppression. They systematic bureaucratisation of the party and the state apparatus, bureaucratically centralised and unified throughout the "Soviet Union", inevitably meant that the constitutional rights of the nations and peoples became a fiction.

The political and ideological degeneration of the bureaucracy injected the poison of Russian chauvinism into the state structure. By the mid-'20s, the Stalinist faction was already using anti-semitism within the Party against the Trotskyist opposition which continued the anti-bureaucratic offensive of Lenin.

The progressive impulse of the revolutionaries' policy on the national question could still be felt throughout the 1920s, especially in the least developed Eastern regions. But by the early 1930s the Stalinists were able to turn on its head the central teaching on the national question of the revolution and of Lenin.

They now proclaimed that the national problem in the USSR was no longer the poison of Great Russian chauvinism, but "nationalist deviations" among the peoples long oppressed by that chauvinism.

For over 60 years a majority of the people of the USSR had national oppression superimposed on the social oppression experienced by all the population. Whole nations were deported. The Ukraine, a nation of 50 million, the biggest oppressed nation in the world, was made subject to systematic national and cultural oppression, sometimes more savage, sometimes less. The last large-scale purge there began in the 1970s.

There were few states on earth more alien to Lenin's programme on the national question than the Stalin-Khrushchev-Brezhnev USSR - the one where the production of pictures and statues of Lenin, stylised to fit a vulgar Stalinist caricature, was a major industry.

On 21 January 1924 Lenin died. Within a short time all that he stood for had become a dead letter in the Communist movement.

Stalin and his friends used the occasion of Lenin's death to organise the so-called "Lenin levy", a swamping of the revolutionary core of the party by a mass of raw, often careerist, recruits.

At the end of 1923 the Left Opposition, led by Trotsky, had taken up the same struggle as Lenin. Within a year of Lenin's death, the bureaucracy had differentiated itself from his programme by proclaiming a programme that lie would have mocked, that there could be socialism in one country. Thus they started on the road to abandoning the struggle for international proletarian revolution.

Over years and decades they were to redefine the very basis of socialism, the self-liberation of the working class, to comply with their own authoritarian police-state rule. The notions of liberty and democracy, and much else that the socialist working class takes over from the great liberation movements of the past, were excised from their state socialism, and an authoritarianism previously associated with the Right inserted in their place. Lenin's properly bitter denunciations of the reformists' parliamentary fetishism were construed as absolute renunciation of democracy and endorsement of bureaucratic tyranny.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition were very soon the only forces still standing on Lenin's programme. The bureaucracy gained control of the young parties of the Comintern, many of them still in the process of formation. In time they were transformed into parties like the Communist Parties which ignominiously collapsed in the early 1990s.

Within little more than ten years of Lenin's death, almost the entire generation of Bolshevik revolutionaries were murdered by the totalitarian state with Stalin at its head.

Lenin, safely dead, was mummified and made into an icon by the Stalinist state. As if foreseeing it, Lenin had written, with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in mind:

"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise

them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it."

The impossibility even for Stalin of destroying Lenin's published works — which for us remain the real Lenin — now led to endless scholastic reinterpretations of them, quite alien to the spirit of Lenin and the spirit of Marxism.

The Russian Revolution led by way of the Stalinist political counterrevolution to the savagely tyrannical rule of a vast bureaucratic caste which subjected the working class of the USSR and Eastern Europe to unparalleled social and political expression. In conditions of Russian backwardness and the isolation of the revolution, many of the worst features of class society were grafted onto the collectivised property initially established by the workers' revolution.

Does the historical fate of the Russian workers' revolution endorse in retrospect the verdict of those scholastic Marxists like Karl Kautsky who condemned Lenin and the Bolsheviks as adventurists — people who took a leap in the dark?

It is best to let the splendid revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg answer that question. Luxemburg was an ardent supporter of the Russian Revolution, but also a sharp critic of the policy of the Bolsheviks. She differed with them on their land policy and on their national policy. She criticised the Red Terror and argued that the Bolshevik Revolution could and should have been won with less repression and more democracy than the Bolsheviks felt they could foster after the outbreak of civil war in mid-1918.

She wrote against the Kautskys: "That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political farsightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies..."

"Surely nothing can be further from (Lenin's and Trotsky's) thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of events, should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist policy towards which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order".

But: "Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary farsightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution, it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism."

The Bolsheviks, socialists, proletarian revolutionaries, and consistent Marxists, were absolutely right to seize power, to base themselves on the perspective of the international socialist revolution. It was not their fault that the working class was everywhere defeated in the advanced countries of Europe and that the Russian Revolution was isolated and subsequently degenerated.

If a group of old Bolsheviks, led by Stalin, finally betrayed the revolution, they could only feel secure in that work when they had slaughtered almost the entire membership of the revolutionary party that Lenin had built.

If the European labour movement had had more of Bolshevism in it, then the Russian Bolshevik-led revolution would not have led to Stalinism but to the inauguration of the liberation of the working class at least of Europe.

Their method, their programme, and their spirit is today still the only serious working-class answer to capitalism. It was the only working-class to the Stalinist system which came to rule over one third of the globe, before most of it collapsed into market capitalism amidst economic chaos and mass pauperisation.

These articles have traced the outline of Lenin's political activities. Let the writer Maxim Gorky, a friend of Lenin though not always an uncritical one — he opposed the October insurrection, and very bitterly criticised the Red Terror — have the last word on Lenin's character and motives.

"I have never met ... nor do I know of, any man who hated, loathed and despised so deeply and strongly as Lenin all unhappiness, grief and suffering ... Lenin was exceptionally great, in my opinion, precisely because of this feeling in him of irreconcilable, unquenchable hostility towards the sufferings of humanity, his burning faith that suffering is not an essential and unavoidable part of life, but an abomination which people ought and are able to sweep away."

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Lenin: the practical theoretician

BY KARL RADEK

Written on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Russian Communist Party (1923)

LIKE everything else in nature, Lenin was born, has developed, has grown. When Vladimir Ilyitch once observed me glancing through a collection of his articles, written in the year 1903, which had just been published, a sly smile crossed his face, and he remarked with a laugh: "It is very interesting to read what stupid fellows we were!"

But I do not here intend to compare the shape of Lenin's skull at the age of 10, 20 or 30 with the skull of that man who presided over the sessions of the Central Committee of the Party or the Council of Peoples' Commissars. Here it is not a question of Lenin as leader, but as a living human being. P. B. Axelrod, one of the fathers of Menshevism, who hates Lenin from the bottom of his soul — Axelrod's case is an excellent example of how love can change to hate — related, in one of the philippics with which he sought to convince me of the harmfulness of Bolshevism in general and of Lenin in particular, how Lenin went abroad for the first-time, and how he went walking and bathing with him.

"I felt at that time," said Axelrod, "that here was a man who would become the leader of the Russian Revolution. Not only was he an educated Marxist — there were many of these — but he knew what he wanted to do and how it was to be done. There was something of the smell of Russian earth about him."

Pavel Borisovitch Axelrod is a bad politician, he does not smell of the earth. He is one who reasons at home in his own study, and the whole tragedy of his life consists of the fact that at a time when there was no labour movement in Russia, he thought out the lines upon which such a labour movement should develop, and when it developed on different lines, he was frightfully offended, and today he continues to roar with rage at the disobedient child. But people often observe in others that which is lacking in themselves, and Axelrod's words with regard to Lenin grasp with unsurpassable acuteness precisely those characteristics which make Lenin a leader.

It is impossible to be a leader of the working class without knowing the whole history of the class. The leaders of the labour movement must know the history of the labour movement; without this knowledge there can be no leader, just as nowadays there can be no great general who could be victorious with the least expenditure of force unless he knew the history of strategy.

The history of strategy is not a collection of recipes as to how to win a war, for a situation once described never repeats itself. But the mind of the general becomes practised in strategy by its express study; this study renders him elastic in war, permits him to observe the dangers and possibilities which the empirically trained general cannot see. The history of the labour movement does not tell us what to do, but it makes it possible to compare our position with situations which have already been experienced by our class, so that in various decisive moments we are enabled to see our path clearly, and to recognise approaching danger.

But we cannot get to know the history of the labour movement properly without being thoroughly acquainted with the history of capitalism, with its mechanism in all its economic and political phenomena. Lenin knows the history of capitalism as do but few of Marx's pupils. It is no mere knowledge of the written word — here Comrade Riazanov could give him five points start — but he has thought out Marx's theory as no one else has done.

Let us, for instance, take the small pamphlet which he wrote at the time of our conflict with the trade union movement; in it he calls Bukharin a syndicalist, an eclectic, and a great sinner in numerous other respects. This polemical pamphlet contains a few lines devoted to the differences between dialectics and eclectics, lines which are not cited in any collection of articles on historical materialism, but which say more about it than whole chapters from much longer books. Lenin has independently grasped and thought out the theory of historical materialism as no one else has been able to do, for the reason that he has studied it with the same object in view by which Marx was actuated when creating the theory.

Lenin entered the movement as the embodiment of the Will to Revolution, and he studied Marxism, the evolution of capitalism, and the evolution of Socialism,

ment" were in reality only speeches on the necessity of the Russian labour movement subordinating itself to the Russian bourgeoisie.

Today it is most interesting to read the controversy on the famous first paragraph of the Party Statutes, the paragraph which led to the split of the Social Democratic Party into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. At that time Lenin's demand, that only the members of illegal organisations were to be counted as party members, appeared highly sectarian. But what was the real point in question? Lenin sought to prevent the confused ideas of certain intellectuals from determining the policy of the labour party.

Before the first revolution, any malcontent of a physician or lawyer who happened to have read Marx styled himself a social democrat, although at bottom he was only a Liberal. Even when they entered an illegal organisation, even when they had broken with their petty bourgeois way of living, history shows many intellectuals to have remained Liberals at the bottom of their souls. But the limitation of the Party to such persons as were willing to face the dangers of belonging to an illegal organisation had undoubtedly the advantage of lessening the danger of bourgeois ascendancy in the labour party, and permitted the revolutionary ray emanating from the working class to penetrate the party organisations, however much filled with intellectual elements.

But in order to be able to grasp this, in order to be even prepared to split the Party on this account, it was necessary to be as closely bound up with Russian realities as was Lenin, in his capacity of Russian Marxist and Russian revolutionist. And if this was not fully clear to many a good Marxist in the years 1903 and 1904, it became clear enough from the moment when Axelrod began to mix up the class struggle of the proletariat against the Russian bourgeoisie with the famous agrarian campaign, that is, with the appearance of workers at liberal banquets for the double purpose of: getting to know the bourgeoisie, and of becoming filled with hate against the capitalist class, which, as is well known, had never seen the working class except at the banquet; moreover, the capitalists were to be thus educated into a comprehension of the necessity of furthering general national interests.

Lenin's way of knowing Russian actuality is another point in which he differs from all others who have stretched out their hands towards the sceptre of leadership over the Russian proletariat. Not only does he know Russian actuality, he sees and feels it as well.

At every turning point in the history of the Party, and especially at the moment when we seized power, and the fate of 150 million people hung on the decisions of the Party, I have always been amazed at Lenin's store of what the English call "common sense." It may be remarked that when we are speaking of a human being of whom we are convinced that his like will not recur for a century, it is but a poor compliment to praise his common sense. But it is just in this that his greatness as a politician lies. When Lenin has to decide on an important question, he does not think of abstract historical categories, he does not think of ground rents, of surplus values, of absolutism or liberalism. He thinks of Sobakevitch, of Gessen, of Sydor from the Tver Province, of the Putilov worker, of the policeman on the street, and he thinks of the effect of the measure on the Mujik Sydor and on the workman Onufria, as bearers of the revolution.

And I shall never forget my talk with Ilyitch before the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk peace. Every argument which we brought up against the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk rebounded from him like peas from a wall. He employed the simplest argument: A war cannot be conducted by a party of good revolutionists who, having seized their own bourgeoisie by the throat, is not capable of closing a bargain with the German bourgeoisie. The Mujik must carry on the war.

"But don't you see that the Mujik voted against the war?" Lenin asked me. "Excuse me, when and how did he vote against it?" "He voted with his feet, he is running away from the front." And for him that settled the matter. That we would not be able to agree with German imperialism, this Lenin knew as well as everybody else, but when he spoke in favour of the Brest pause for breath, he did not conceal from the masses for a single moment the sufferings which were bound to follow. But it was no worse than the immediate breakdown of the Russian Revolution; it gave us a shadow of hope, a pause for breath, if only for a few months, and this was the decisive moment. It was necessary that the Mujik should touch with his hands the earth which the revolution had given him; it was nec-

Lenin

from the point of view of their revolutionary significance. Plekhanov was a revolutionist too, but he was not possessed by the Will to Revolution, and despite his great importance as a teacher of the Russian Revolution, he could only teach its algebra and not its arithmetic.

Herein lies the point of transition from Lenin the theorist to Lenin the politician. Lenin combined Marxism with the general working class strategy, but at the same time he applied it concretely to that strategic task involving the fate of the Russian working class. It may be said that at the Army Staff Academy he studied not only Clausewitz, Moltke, and their like, but he studied at the same time, as no one else in Russia, the territory of the future Russian proletarian war. Herein lies the whole of Lenin's genius: his utmost intensity of intimate contact with his field of activity.

I must take some other opportunity of debating why so great a mind as that of Rosa Luxemburg was not capable of understanding the correctness of Lenin's principles on the origin of Bolshevism; I can only outline the fact. Rosa Luxemburg did not grasp concretely the economic and political difference between the fighting conditions of the Russian proletariat and those of the proletariat of Western Europe.

Therefore she inclined to Menshevism in the year 1904. Menshevism, regarded historically, was the policy of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, and of those strata of the proletariat most closely related to the petty bourgeoisie. Regarded methodologically, Menshevism was an attempt at transferring the tactics of the West European labour movement to Russia.

If we read an article by Axelrod or Martov on the independence of development in the working class, "which has to learn to stand on its own feet," it appears exceedingly plausible and striking to anyone who has grown up in the Western European labour movement. I remember very well that when I became acquainted with Russian social democratic polemics during the first revolution, but was not yet familiar with concrete Russian actuality, I could not comprehend how anybody could deny such elementary truths. This magnificent plan lacked nothing except the pre-requisites for the application of its tactics, and to-day it is historically proved that all the speeches delivered by the Mensheviks on the "independence of the labour move-

essary that he be confronted with the danger of losing this earth, for then he would defend it.

Let us take another example. It was at the time of our defeat in the Polish war, when negotiations were taken up at Riga. At that time I went abroad, and before leaving I paid Ilyitch a visit, in order to speak with him on the differences of opinion which had arisen between us on the relations to the trade unions. Just as Lenin held the Mujik from the Riazan Province before his mental vision when deciding on the Brest peace, knowing that this Mujik was the decisive personality in the drama of war, in the same manner he placed himself in the position of the plain workman as soon as it was a question of transition from civil war to economic reconstruction, for without this plain workman no economic reconstruction is possible.

How did he put the questions to himself? The Party meetings discussed the rôle played by the trade unions in political economy; there were controversies on syndicalism and eclecticism. But what Lenin saw was the victimised workman, enduring unheard of and indescribable sufferings, and now called upon to reconstitute political economy. That the economic reconstruction was an imperative necessity, that we had to assemble all our forces, and that we had the right to call upon the working class to take part in the work, all this appeared incontestable to him, but it was a question whether we should begin with this at once, whether we should withdraw thousands of our best comrades from the army, where they had accustomed themselves to commanding, and send them back into the factories at once. Nothing would be produced by pursuing such tactics. "They must have a rest, they are very tired."

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Such was Lenin's decisive argument. He saw before him the real Russian worker, as he was in the winter of 1921, and he felt what was possible and what impossible.

Marx, in the introduction to his *Critique of Political Economy*, states that history only sets itself such tasks as it can fulfil. This means, in other words, that only he who grasps what tasks are historically capable of fulfilment at a given moment, and who does not fight for the desired, but for the possible, can become the instrument of history. Lenin's greatness lies in the fact that he never permits himself to be blinded to a reality when it is in process of transformation, by any preconceived formula, and that he has the courage to throw yesterday's formula overboard as soon as it disturbs his grasp of this reality.

Before our seizure of power, we issued, as revolutionary internationalists, the slogan of the peoples' peace against the governments' peace. And suddenly we found ourselves in the position of a Workers' Government, surrounded by peoples that had not yet succeeded in overthrowing their capitalist governments.

"How can we conclude a peace with the Hohenzollern government?" was a question put by many comrades. Lenin answered mischievously: "You are worse than hens. A hen cannot make up its mind to step over a circle drawn around it with chalk. But it can at least justify itself by the assertion that this circle was drawn by a strange hand. But we have drawn up our formula with our own hands, and now you see the formula only, and not the reality. Our formula of peace to be concluded by the peoples had for its object the awakening of the masses against the military and capitalist government. Now you want us to go to ruin, and to let the capitalist governments carry off the victory in the name of our revolutionary formula."

Lenin's greatness lies in his aiming at goals arising out of realities. In this reality he sees a powerful steed which will carry him to his goal, and he trusts himself to it.

But he never abandons himself to his dreams. This is not all. His genius contains another trait: After he has set himself a certain goal, he seeks for the means leading to this goal through reality; he is not content with having fixed his aim, he thinks out concretely and completely everything necessary for the attainment of that aim. He does not merely work out a plan of campaign, but the whole organisation of the campaign at the same time.

Our organisers, who are organisers only, have often laughed at Lenin as an organiser. Anyone seeing how Ilyitch works at home, in his room, or at the Council of Peoples' Commissars, might think it impossible to find a worse organiser. Not only has he no staff of secretaries to prepare his material, but up to now he has never even learnt to dictate to a stenographer, and gazes at the pen he is writing with, something like a Mujik from the Don district gazes at the first motor-car he sees. But show us in the whole Party one single individual capable of realising within decades this central idea on the reform of our bureaucratic apparatus, although this reform is inevitable if we do not want the Mujik, indignant against officialdom, to begin to howl.

We all know our bureaucratic apparatus, we all cry out against the scandalous state of affairs defined by Comrade Steklov (chief editor of the *Izvestia*), with all the delicacy of a semi-official organ "as slight defects of Soviet mechanism." But which one of the party leaders puts himself the question: The new economic policy has created a fresh basis for an alliance between proletariat and peasantry; how are we to prevent bureaucracy from destroying this alliance?

But the great politician of the Russian proletariat, prevented by his illness from going through his daily routine, thought of the central question of State organisation, and worked out the plan of the struggle for decades in advance. But this is only the preliminary draft, details are dependent on the confirmation of experience. But the more attention we devote to this superficial draft, the more plainly we see that in Lenin's personality the great politician and the great political organiser are combined.

How all this happened to be combined in him, God only knows. (Comrade Stefanov and the Commission for combating religion will kindly excuse.) History has her own apparatus for distilling brandy, and no Tcheka can detect her. The German bourgeoisie could not manage to unite Germany, and somewhere, on a small landed estate grange, history set one of her machines in action, and with the aid of God or the devil, that is, by molecular work, she created Bismarck, who then fulfilled the task. If we read his first reports, if we follow his policy step by step, we are obliged to ask ourselves how it was possible for a landowner to possess such an understanding for the whole of European actuality.

The same thought arises every time we think over the history of our Party, the history of the revolution, and of Lenin.

For fifteen years we looked on while this man was fighting over every comma in the resolutions, against every "ism" invented during the last twenty-five years, from Khvostism to Empiriocretism.

For Lenin every such "ism" has always been the embodiment of some real enemy, existing either in outside classes or in the working class, but in any case in reality. These "isms" were the feelers of reality, and he absorbed the whole of this reality into himself, studied it, thought it out, until the finished miracle appeared, and the underground man proved himself the most earthly man of Russian reality.

History offers no second example of such a transition from subterranean revolutionist to statesman. This combination of the characteristics of a leading theorist, politician and organiser has made Lenin the leader of the Russian Revolution. And that this leader should be the only one universally recognised as leader the human touch was required, the quality which has made Lenin the beloved hero of the Russian Revolution.

He himself tries to convince us that man requires absolute truth, which is an untruth in Ibsen's individualistic formulation. For many people the truth is deadly; it is deadly even for many classes. If the bourgeoisie were to grasp the truth about itself, and were permeated with this truth, it would be defeated already, for who can go on fighting when the truth of history tells him that he is not only condemned to death, but that his corpse will be thrown into the sewer?

The bourgeoisie is blind and dumb to its fate. But a revolutionary class needs the truth, for truth is the knowledge of reality. And it is not possible to dominate this reality without knowing it.

We form one part of this reality: the working class, the Communist Party. And it is only if we are able to judge of our power and our weakness that we can judge of the measures to be taken to ensure final victory. Lenin tells the proletariat the truth, and the truth only, however depressing it may be. When workers hear him speaking, they know that there is not a single phrase in all his speech. He helps us to inform ourselves on reality.

At one time I was living at Davos with a Bolshevik workman dying of consumption. At that time the right of self-determination of nationalities was being debated, and we Polish Communists were opposed to Lenin's views. The comrade of whom I speak, after having read my theses against Lenin, said: "What you have written is perfectly convincing to me, but whenever I have been opposed to Ilyitch, it has always turned out afterwards that I was wrong."

This is how the leading party functionaries think, and this is the reason of Lenin's authority in the Party; but the workers do not think so. They do not feel bound to Lenin because he has been in the right a thousand times, but because, if he has once been in the wrong, if a mistake has been committed under his leadership, he admitted openly: "We have made a mistake, and therefore we have been defeated here; this mistake must be made good in such and such manner."

Many have asked him why he speaks so openly of mistakes made. I do not know why Lenin does it, but the results of this course of action may be plainly seen. The workman is much too enlightened to believe in redeeming saviours any longer. When Lenin speaks of his mistakes, he hides nothing, he leads the worker into his own laboratory of thought, he makes it possible for the worker to take part in forming the final decision, and the workers see in him the leader who represents their laboratory, the embodiment of their class struggle.

A great class, itself needing absolute truth, loves with its whole heart a leader who is himself a truth-loving human being, one who tells the truth about himself. From such a leader the worker can bear any truth, even the hardest.

Human beings have faith in themselves only when they conceal nothing, when they know everything about themselves, even the most unfavourable possibilities, and yet feel that they can say: In spite of everything . . . Lenin helps the working class to a full knowledge of every decaying and decomposing element of its own existence, and yet enables it to say in the end: I am His Majesty the Proletariat, the future ruler and creator of life. This is another factor in Lenin's greatness.

On this day of the 25th anniversary of the Party, which not only bears the responsibility for the destiny of the sixth part of the globe, but which is at the same time the main lever of proletarian victory, the Russian Communists, and every revolutionist among the proletariat of every country, are filled with the thought and the wish that this Moses, who has led the slaves from the land of bondage, may pass with us into the promised land.

● From *The Communist Review*, May 1923. Text taken with thanks from www.marxists.org.