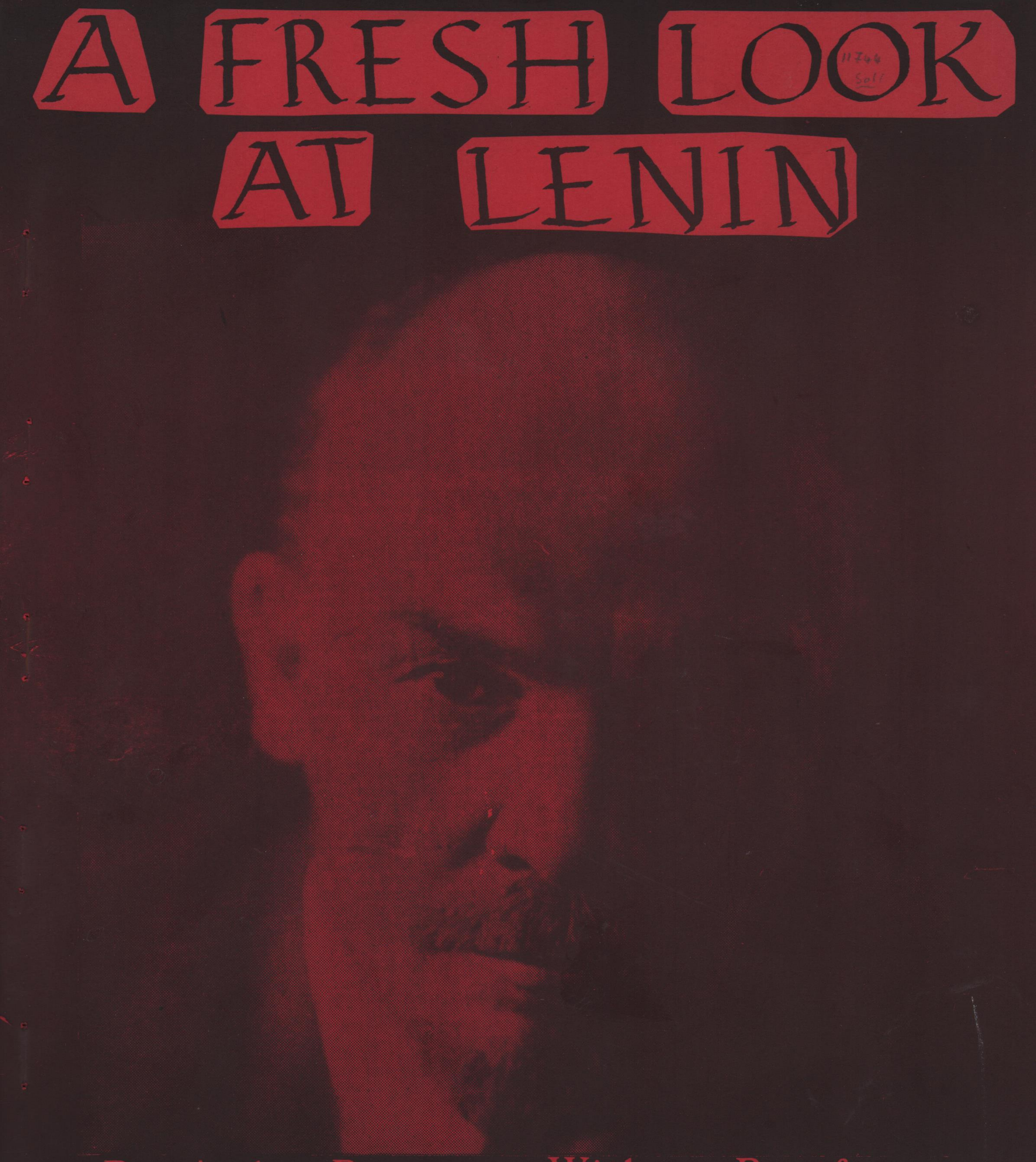
A FRESH LOOK AT LENIN



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INTRODUCTION

The Russian revolution was a great disaster for the socialist movement. Initially, of course, it was a powerful shot in the arm for socialists everywhere. Previously they had been talking about the possibility of a socialist society (though, admittedly, they tried hard and long to prove it a sientific certainty). Now, for the first time, they were able to point to the reality. Socialism had arrived in Russia and now it only remained to imitate it elsewhere. But as time passed it became increasingly obvious that something had gone wrong with the revolution. Instead of being the inspiring image of our own future, Russia gradually turned into a squalid class-ridden dictatorship. As purge followed purge, and bureaucrats allocated themselves the best food and housing, the socialist movement in the West floundered as it sought for explanations for what had gone wrong in Russia.

There were, of course, and still are, those who found the idea that socialism did really exist so attractive that they could not believe the evidence of decay. People who wrote glowing articles on the mechanisation of agriculture (1) whilst old Bolsheviks screamed in cellars. People who to this day will not believe the 'stories' of 'petit bourgeois' cynics. These people are like the flat earth society, or fanatics of the Bermuda Triangle. Those who want to believe enough will find ways of ignoring all the evidence. Arguing with such people is therefore an unnecessary exertion.

However, amongst those socialists who do wish to maintain some contact with reality, the debate continues to rage over what went wrong. Why should a revolution led by dedicated Marxists have produced a degenerate state where officials are dedicated to the secure position and the foreign currency shops? Two explanations seem to be the most plausible. The first, put forward by Trotsky, and his subsequent followers, comes down to this: no amount of dedication on behalf of the communists could offset the dreadful weight of the material handicaps. In such a backward country, beset by civil war on all sides, with its proletarian flower destroyed in battle, degeneration was unavoidable. Perhaps if Lenin had lived, or if Trotsky had replaced him at the helm, things might have been different - but such things were not to be. As Tony Cliff puts it:

'Lenin certainly did not call for a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, even less for that of a bureaucratised party over a decimated proletariat. But fate - the desperate condition of a revolution in a backward country besieged by world capitalism - led to precisely this.'(2)

And, as Trotsky tells us, it was this 'fate' (3) that necessitated a second revolution to rid Russia of the bureaucratic usurpers.

'The proletariat of a backward country was fated to accomplish the first socialist revolution. For this historic privilege, it must, according to

all evidences, pay with a second supplementary revolution - against bureaucratic absolutism.' (4)

Thus, according to the Trotskyists, it was hard material factors such as the backwardness and isolation of the young Soviet state which resulted in the tragic degeneration of the revolution. An alternative explanation of events in Russia is provided by the anarchists who see the prime cause of the revolution's failure in the flase ideology of the Bolsheviks. Their argument has the great advantage that it was not constructed to explain events after they took place but was formulated before and during the revolution. Anarchists had always gone in for dire predictions of what would happen if the Marxists attempted to take over the state instead of smashing it at the first opportunity. The theory was that Marxists did not represent the working class at all; they represented no-one but themselves - a new class of intellectuals. This class might mouth revolutionary slogans during the period of its coming to power (just as the bourgeoisie had done) but once it had gained control of the state it would quickly drop all pretence and institute a dictatorship more reprehensible than what had gone before. Bakunin himself had said, in 1872, that the Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat:

'...would be the rule of scientific intellect, the most autocratic, the most despotic, the most arrogant and the most contemptuous of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of genuine or sham savants, and the world will be divided into a dominant minority in the name of science, and an immense ignorant majority.' (5)

This argument was taken up by a number of the anarchists in Russia at the time of the revolution. Whilst some anarchists throughout the world were for co-operating with the Bolsheviks, (6) others like Sergven (7) were positive that, though the Bolsheviks did not set out to create a new class system, this was precisely what they were achieving. Sergven recorded in 1918 that:

'The proletariat is gradually being enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has risen a new class of administrators - a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia. Isn't this merely a new class system looming on the revolutionary horizon?' (8)

And he was quite sure of the cause of this enserfment:

'We do not mean to say ... that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power.' (9)

In other words, unless centralised state power is destroyed on the eve of the revolution that revolution is doomed to create a new class system which very probably will be worse than that which it replaced.

Thus the two most plausible explanations for the failure of the revolution seem to be directly opposed to one another. On the one hand we have the

Trotskyists who, being Marxists, see the cause of the failure in the 'material circumstances' such as Russian backwardness and the civil war. The Bolsheviks had, it appears, understood Marxism and applied it correctly and yet were faced with events beyond their control which conspired to defeat them. Consequently the revolutionary theory and party structure put forward by Lenin remain, according to this school of thought, adequate to this day. On the other hand we have the anarchists, who argue that it was precisely this revolutionary theory and party structure which were the cause of the bureaucratisation of Russia.

I find neither argument entirely satisfying. It is undoubtedly true that the Bolsheviks did face difficult conditions when they assumed power in a backward country. But this will, at least according to Lenin, always be the case. He informs us that:

'...those who believe that socialism can be built at a time of peace and tranquility are profoundly mistaken: it will everywhere be built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine.' (10)

This stands to reason. Revolution by its very nature involves disruption and civil war (though not necessarily famine). If a party organised on Bolshevik lines cannot withstand a period of disruption without degenerating into a bureaucratic monolith then clearly such a form of party organisation must be avoided at all costs. Moreover, if a party organised on Bolshevik lines cannot successfully lead a revolution in a backward country with a small proletariat then perhaps the Mensheviks were right all along. The alternative for Marxists would appear to be clear - either they accept the outrageously timid conclusion of the Mensheviks and admit that revolutions cannot be made in backward countries or they recognise that the Trotskyist explanation of the degeneration of the Russian revolution just won't do.

The anarchist explanation, at its most crude, is similarly unsatisfying. Are we really to believe that the Bolshevik party were en masse only interested in revolution for the sole purpose of getting their grubby hands on state power so that they could institute the rule of a new class? It is only necessary to look at the record to see that the vast majority of these people were motivated by a conviction that they were building socialism rather than by such naked self-interest. (11) One has merely to consider the foul experiences of Lenin's life, particularly in the years after the 1905 revolution to see that such notions are suspect. (12) Nevertheless there is one fundamental strength to the anarchist case. It points to errors in the theory and practice of Bolshevism itself, it says that no matter how honest the Bolsheviks may have been they could still have been objectively speaking taitors to the workers. It turns our attention to the undoubted truth (or at least it ought not to be doubted by anyone with the least semblance of an open mind) that the theories of those who lead Russia from workers control to Stalinism must be suspect.

It is these theories which I propose to put to the test in this pamphlet. It is too often taken for granted that we know what the Bolsheviks stood for and what they set out to do. Unfortunately many commonly held ideas

about what the Bolsheviks intended to create in Russia don't survive close analysis. Before we can discover what went wrong in Russia we need to know from their own mouths exactly what the Bolsheviks proposed to do on coming to power. Exactly what was the party structure put forward by them? What form should the revolution take according to them? What kind of society did they set out to create and why did they fail?

In order to answer these questions I believe it is particularly useful to take a fresh look at the ideas of the unquestioned leader of the Bolsheviks, V.I. Lenin, in the period before the October revolution. In particular I am interested in his stated ideas on the kind of economy, state and party structure which he considered appropriate for Russia. (13) For it is in his writings on these subjects that we find some fascinating insights into the thinking (14) of the leader of the first ever revolution to be made by people calling themselves socialists. Moreover we find some insights into why that revolution failed.

CHAPTER 1

If we listen to certain academics we would end up believing that Lenin was aiming to create an anarchist society in Russia. One particular pamphlet by Lenin, 'The State and Revolution', which was written in 1917, is cited as evidence of his anarchist stance. According to Adam Ulam for instance:

That unfortunate pamphlet is almost a straightforward profession of anarchism.' (1)

Payne even seems genuinely afraid of the 'primitive radicalism' of the book and he thinks that:

'... there is nothing in the least amusing in The State and Revolution, with its primitive, anarchist vision of a world saved from perdition by the total destruction of all authority.' (2)

The 'total destruction of all authority' certainly sounds like good anarchist stuff of the cloak and bomb variety and indeed there were anarchists at the time who felt that the Bolsheviks as a whole were moving strongly towards anarchism in 1917. For instance, an anarchist called Solntsev felt that the 'comrade Bolsheviks' had retreated step by step from Marxism and was confident that this process would continue. As he put it:

'We haven't the slightest doubt that the hour is not far off when the Bolsheviks will finally abandon their obsolete position and come over and fight alongside the anarchists.' (3)

Even amongst those who had recently been Bolsheviks themselves there were some who were sure that Lenin had gone over to the anarchists. The ex-Bolshevik Goldenberg, for instance, wrote:

'Lenin has now made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years - the throne of Bakunin!' (4)

Unfortunately there is no evidence whatsoever to support the contention that Lenin was adopting an anarchist position in 1917. He himself would have been grossly insulted by the suggestion. He says in State and Revolution itself that anarcho-syndicalism is 'but the twin brother of opportunism' (5) A strange statement indeed if we are to take Lenin as an anarchist! In fact Lenin remained firmly within the Marxist, rather than the anarchist, tradition throughout 1917. He went out of his way to back up much of what he said by lengthy quotes from Marx and Engels. He was quite opposed to the anarchist notion that the state must be instantly destroyed. He argued that instead the special repressive force of the state must be used to crush the power of the bourgeoisie, just as the bourgoisie had previously

used it to crush the proletariat. According to him:

'... 'the special repressive force' for the suppression of the proletariat by the bougeoisie, of millions of toilers by handfuls of the rich, must be replaced by a 'special repressive force' for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the Proletariat)' (6)

Whereas the old state had been used to control the vast majority of the population, the new state would find it necessary to exercise its repressive powers over a small minority of the population. Consequently the new proletarian state would have a much easier task and would begin to wither away immediately. He wrote that:

'...according to Marx the proletariat needs only a state that is withering away, i.e. a state so constituted that it begins to wither away immediately, and cannot tut wither away.' (7)

And when Lenin says 'according to Marx' he takes it as self-evident that he himself agrees with the statement which follows.

There is then, according to Lenin, a quite clear period of transition before the emergence of a fully communist society. At first the proletariat captures state power and institutes the dictatorship of the proletariat but rapidly the state is found to be superfluous in more and more areas and a stateless, fully communist society is achieved. He describes the nature of both the communist society and the transition period in some detail in State and Revolution. It is only when he is describing the communist society that Lenin's statements sound anything like anarchism. In this society subordination, violence and the state itself will no longer exist. When it has been created:

'...the need for violence against people in general, for <u>subordination</u> of one man to another, and of one section of the population to another, will vanish altogether since people will <u>become accustomed</u> to observing the elementary conditions of social life <u>without violence</u> and <u>without subordination</u>.' (8)

At this stage in the evolution of human society, as people accustom themselves to behaving in a socialist manner, there will be no need for law or government.

'Under socialism <u>all</u> will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing.' (9)

All this highly desirable stuff is however firmly placed in the future. On the eve of the revolution, and during the period which follows it, society will lock very different.

It is this part of the theory that is of particular interest to latter-day socialists. Lenin wrote about the nature of the transitional society on numerous occasions in 1917. Since he favoured a takeover of power this was clearly an issue of immediate importance to him. It is also important for us,because it is in these writings that we can discover what Lenin intended

to do once the revolution had succeeded. If we wish to know why the revolution was such a disastrous failure then obviously it is important to know what direction this key figure thought the revolution ought to take.

The first thing that strikes the reader is the extreme degree of democracy which Lenin thought to be possible in a proletarian state. He believed that democracy would be introduced '...as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable...' (10) during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This democracy was not thought of as being of the old bourgeois type but would be much more thoroughgoing than anything which had previously been experienced.

'All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall at any time, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary 'workmen's wages' - these simple and 'self-evident' democratic measures, while completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism.' (11)

This presents a very different picture of Lenin's thought to that which is commonly put forward. Whilst some academics want us to believe that Lenin suffered a temporary fit of anarchist allegiance in 1917, others would have it that he had dictatorial ambitions from his youth. What, for example, are we to make of the comments of John Keep when he boldly states that:

'Lenin held - quite reasonably, as one may think - that ordinary working men would never make the kind of revolution he wanted if they were left to their own resources, but had to be cajoled or coerced into doing so.' (12)

If Lenin held that ordinary working men could never make a revolution then how could he have believed that a few simple democratic measures would serve as a bridge leading to socialism? We are further told by Keep that since Lenin thought that the proletariat were no use as an engine of social progress he found it necessary to substitute for them:

'...a small elite of professional revolutionaries, possessed of superior theoretical insight and practical experience, who for this reason were well fitted to provide leadership for the workers.' (13)

This is a common accusation and an important one. Both right-wing academics and anarchists with the most excellent left-wing credentials are inclined to think that Lenin was at heart an authoritarian who believed in the dictatorship of the party and not of the proletariat. This accusation is based on the evidence of a book written in 1902, called 'What is to Be Done?' in which Lenin says some very strange things for a socialist. (14)
It appears, from what Lenin says here, that the working class are a bit dumb really and are only capable of understanding certain limited areas of struggle such as the struggle for higher wages. As the quote usually goes:

'...the working class is able to develop only trade union consciousness...'

They have to be led by the wiser party members if they are to engage in more

significant struggles and make the revolution. That at least is what it appears that Lenin is saying here. Unfortunately for us what he is actually saying here is rather more complex.

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'What is to be Done?' was written primarily as an attack upon what is known as economism (the theory that abstract 'politics' are foreign to the working class and that socialists should concentrate on bread and butter issues such as wages and conditions if they wished to make a revolution). In the course of this attack Lenin wrote at length upon how the consciousness of the working class develops and the role of the party in developing this consciousness. He further set out in some detail the type of party organisation which was appropriate to Russia.

His theory was that the workers were driven by their own experience to fight their employers by forming trade unions and by forcing the government to pass laws which would ease the trade union struggle. Without outside help, though, their struggle would not go beyond these limits. As the full quote goes:

'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.'15

Lenin emphasised this when he wrote:

'Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers <u>only from without</u>, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers.' (16)

But this does not mean that Lenin thought that the workers were incapable of thinking of anything more wideranging than the struggle against their employers. He considered it of vital importance that they should be taught to go further. It was the task of the Social Democrats (the old name for the Russian socialists) to convert the workers' spontaneous urge to become involved in trade union politics into a much wider understanding of the nature of capitalism. According to Lenin:

'The task of the Social-Democrats ... is not exhausted by political agitation on an economic basis; their task is <u>to convert</u> trade-unionist politics into Social-Democratic political struggle, <u>to utilise</u> the sparks of political consciousness which the economic struggle generates among the workers, for the purpose of <u>raising</u> the workers to the level of <u>Social Democratic</u> political consciousness' (17)

If it was to make this change in working class consciousness the party would have to train leaders who would teach the masses how to conduct the political struggle. As he puts it:

'...the masses will never learn to conduct the political struggle until we

help to train leaders for this struggle, both from among the enlightened workers and from the intellectuals.' (18)

This assigns a major role to the party, for without it there can be no political struggle and hence no revolution. If this is true then it follows that the nature of the party is of vital importance. According to Lenin, the party in autocratic Russia should be made up primarily of professional revolutionaries.(19) At the head of the organisation there had to be a stable group of leaders who would maintain continuity. The existence of this organisation would not do away with the need for mass working class activity - on the contrary, Lenin thought that it would enable the masses to participate in the political struggle with the minimum of risk since they would be acting under the direction of experienced revolutionaries who would be trained as thoroughly as the police. (20) He summarised his ideas in the following words:

'I assert: 1). that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organisation of leaders maintaining continuity; 2). that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously into the struggle, which forms the basis of the movement and participates in it, the more urgent the need for such an organisation, and the more solid this organisation must be (for it is much easier for all sorts of demagogues to side track the more backward sections of the masses); 3). that such an organisation must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; 4). that in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organisation to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organisation; and 5). the greater will be the number of people from the working class and from the other social classes who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it.' (21)

Thus the purpose of Lenin's organisation of professional revolutionaries was not, as he saw it, to restrict the participation of the workers, it was to provide the workers with the leadership which Lenin felt they must have if they were to achieve their full potential. The masses could not however choose their own leaders as matters stood in Russia because an election could not be held wihtout publicity and publicity would produce arrests. As he says:

'Only an incorrigible utopian would have a broad organisation of workers, with elections, reports, universal suffrage, etc., under the autocracy.' (22)

The party's representatives in each district would therefore have to be appointed from the centre.

The picture which emerges from the book 'What is to be Done?' is that the party was according to Lenin, a supremely important agent in the revolutionary process. Without the party the revolution could not be made. Without strong stable leadership the party itself would be ineffective. When he had succeeded in putting into practice many of the ideas of 'What is to be Done?' he declared that:

'Now we have become an organised Party, and this impies the establishment of authority, the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher ones.' (23)

This conviction that lower Party bodies were subject to the authority of higher ones was to remain central to Lenin's thinking throughout his life. When combined with an equally strong conviction that the democratic election of these higher bodies would be, so long as the autocracy was in existence, a 'useless and harmful toy' this was a highly dangerous position. The revolution becomes a fragile flower dependent upon the leadership of a few talented men of no-one's choosing but themselves. In his own words:

'...without the 'dozen' tried and talented leaders (and talented men are not born by the hundreds), professionally trained, schooled by long experience, and working in perfect harmony, no class in modern society can wage a determined struggle.' (24)

This is a grotesque statement for a socialist to make. It has all the overtones of the smug Tory confidence that some were born to lead and others were made to follow. It shows a marked lack of faith in the ability of the 'masses' to organise for themselves and to make the revolution. The whole revolution becomes dependent not on the actions of workers but on the correct guidance of a small clique of professional revolutionaries.

Here we have an apparently wholly different picture of Lenin's thought to that which we gain by reading 'State and Revolution'. That book gave us an image of him as a supreme democrat with great faith in the abilities of the masses. 'What is to be Done?' gives us the image of an incorrigible authoritarian prepared to dispense with democracy at the drop of a hat and with much less faith in the abilities of the masses. It would seem that either Lenin was being inconsistent or he had undergone a complete change of heart.

In fact there is much less contradiction than there appears to be at first sight. Lenin was rather less of an authoritarian than a superficial reading of 'What is to be Done?' would suggest and much more of one than a hasty look at 'State and Revolution' would lead us to believe. He makes it quite clear in 'What is to be Done?' that he is strongly in favour of the introduction of party democracy once the party was legal and could meet in the open. He praises the German Social-Democrats for their use of party democracy to ensure that the right leaders are in the right place. In Germany he said:

'"Natural selection" by full publicity, election, and general control provides the assurance that, in the last analysis, every political figure will be "in his proper place", do the work for which he is best fitted by his powers and abilities, feel the effects of his mistakes on himself, and prove before all the world his ability to recognise mistakes and to avoid them.' (25)

What he is saying then is that, when conditions permitted it to be implemented, party democracy would exert a highly beneficial influence over the leading figures in the party. In the meantime, unfortunately, it would have to be

put aside in favour of secrecy or else the Tsarist police would have a field day.

The idea that a trained centralised leadership would reduce the degree of infiltration by the police is in fact contradicted by the evidence from Russia. Police agents penetrated the highest party bodies of the Bolsheviks. In 1910 a secret police agent became head of the party's Moscow district organisation. The party's paper had from its foundation in 1912 two police agents on the editorial staff. One of them, Roman Malinovsky, became the leader of the party in the Duma (the weak Russian parliament) and a member of the party's Central Committee. Only the 1917 revolution finally exposed Malinovsky. One can only conclude that a federal structure of autonomous groups of revolutionaries would have been far more difficult to penetrate and would have had much less disastrous consequences. After all when, as happened to the Bolsheviks, a complete list of subscribers and contributors to the party's paper is passed to the police by a member of the party's Central Committee, one can only conclude that a centralised party apparatus proved a positive danger. (26) If the masses need guidance from wise party leaders; if the masses cannot elect these leaders because of the need for secrecy; and if the lower party bodies are to follow the istructions of these leaders, then what happens when the highest party bodies are penetrated by the police? Clearly the danger is that once the centre of a centralised party is penetrated then the whole organisation and all its contacts is open to the scrutiny of the police.

Despite these dangers Lenin never abandoned the idea that centralisation was the most efficient method of revolutionary organisation. He did however begin to realise that he had gone too far in stressing the importance of correct party leadership as against the natural inclinations of the proletariat. Under the influence of the upsurge of revolutionary activity in 1905 he began to change his emphasis. Now he was asserting that:

'The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic...'

But he could not avoid adding the rider:

'...and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness.' ((27)

The first part of this statement shows that the experience of the 1905 revolution had increased his faith in the workers' potential for self-learning of socialism. The second part shows that he still felt the party had a major role to play in aiding the learning process. However, since the 1905 revolution had enabled the party to come out more into the open, he now advocated that the party should be much more democratic, writing that:

'...the time has come, or, in any case, is coming, when the elective principle can be applied in the Party organisation not in words only, but in deeds, not as a fine sounding but hollow phrase, but as a really new principle which really renovates, extends and strengthens Party ties.' (28)

His actions in 1905 would seem to show that when he had talked about introducing democratic practices as soon as a change of regime made it practical he may well have meant what he said. He later boasted about the speed with which his party had adopted a democratic legal structure in 1905 (though it should be pointed out that even after 1905 he emphasised the importance of not liquidating the illegal organisation.) (29)
As he claimed in an article written in 1917, even the disruption caused by the continuing Bolshevik/Menshevik split had not been allowed to slow down the implementation of democracy:

'Despite the split, the Social-Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organisation with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organised members.' (30)

In the same article Lenin expressed reservations about the interpretation that had been (and still is) put on some of his comments in 'What is to be Done?' He stated that he found it necessary to 'exaggerate' in that book so that he could get across the message that what was needed was an organisation of professional revolutionaries. (31) He complained that what he had written could not be taken out of its context. (32) He described 'What is to be Done?' as 'controversial' (33) and said that he never had any intention of elevating his comments about the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness to the level of special principles. (34) Clearly then it would be wrong to over-emphasise the importance of Lenin's ideas as expressed in 'What is to be Done?' and on the basis of that book alone to accuse him of substituting the party for the class. (35) He had shown that he did believe in <u>a form</u> of party democracy when he considered that conditions made it possible. He had stressed that his comments about spontaneity and consciousness were not to be treated as special principles. He was to go even further. By 1910 he had come to the conclusion that the workers were turned into socialists by the experience of life itself. As he put it:

'The very conditions of their lives make the workers capable of struggling and impel them to struggle. Capital collects the workers in great masses in big cities, uniting them, teaching them to act in unison. At every step the workers come face to face with their main enemy - the capitalist class. In combat with this enemy the worker becomes a <u>socialist</u>, comes to realise the necessity of a complete abolition of all poverty and all oppression.' (36)

Now this is very different to the analysis given in 'What is to be Done?' (37) Then he seemed to be arguing that without the work of the party the workers would never get beyond trade union consciousness. Here he seems to be arguing that workers achieve socialist consciousness without the aid of the party. If this is true we might, with some justification, wonder what there is left for the party to do. But Lenin was always convinced that the party had an important role to play. In the same passage he tells us how the party must act in order to prepare for the next revolution:

'In order to prepare such an onslaught we must draw the most backward

sections of the workers into the struggle, we must devote years and years to persistent, widespread, unflagging propaganda, agitation and organisational work, building up and reinforcing all forms of proletarian unions and organisations.' (38)

Thus Lenin still had an extensive list of tasks for the party and he remained convinced of the party's educational and organisational importance right up until his death in 1924. Even in his supposedly most anarchist book, 'State and Revolution', he spoke of the importance of the party's position. There he wrote that:

'By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organising the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organising their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.' (39)

But though Lenin was still allocating an important (40) role to the party in 1917 his emphasis on the relative importance of party and class would seem to have changed. In 1902, when he wrote 'What is to be Done?' he was saying that the class could not achieve socialist consciousness without the party. By 1910 he was saying that the 'very conditions of life' of the workers turned them into socialists and taught them to act in unison. However, at all times he talked of the importance both of the correct party leadership and of the spontaneous striving of the working class towards socialism. His emphasis on one or the other changed as circumstances seemed to him to dictate that one or the other should be considered more important but neither of the two elements was ever completely dropped. Thus as Tony Cliff likes to put it, Lenin 'bent the stick' one way and then the other. According to Cliff, in 'What is to be Done?' Lenin had, so to speak, 'bent the stick':

'...right over to mechanical over emphasis on organisation...' (41)

He had done so, Cliff argues, because in the chaotic conditions of the Russian socialist movement at the turn of the century the most important thing was to coordinate centrally the work of the various small cells operating independently, often in isolated areas. Later when what the party needed was new blood, we are told by Cliff, he bent the stick in the opposite direction emphasising the need for the proletarian elements in the party to impose discipline on the intelligentsia. (42)

Now this is important. If we accept it, and much of the evidence suggests that we must, then we have accepted that Lenin was capable of swinging between two positions on the vitally important question of party and class. Though there was, up until October 1917, a clear and steady shift in Lenin's thought on the subject in the direction of placing more faith in the self-activity of the workers, he was always likely to decide that the needs of the moment had changed, that the stick needed to be bent the other way, and then he might revert to his former opinions.

CHAPTER 2

We have seen that early in his career Lenin displayed a dangerous lack of faith in the ability of the workers to self-learn socialism. We have also seen that there are some important question marks about his attitude to democracy within the party. But it would be too easy and too simple to casually accept an image of Lenin as the dictatorial head of an absolutely undemocratic party in the years prior to the 1917 revolutions. The evidence suggests a more complex picture. He had expressed more and more faith in the consciousness of the working class as he got older until by 1917 he seemed content to place a large part of the fate of the revolution at the 'mercy' of their democratic decisions. His most elitist statements about the workers being only able to achieve trade union consciousness unaided were, he was claiming, deliberate exaggerations, made in order to get his point across.

It is at this point that some would like the account to end as the new democratic Lenin enters the lists of the great revolutionary heroes. But caution is necessary. Just as we could not write him off as an autocrat on the strength of one book written in specific circumstances so we cannot put him down as a supreme democrat without looking a little more carefully at what he wrote in 1917. To establish that Lenin was committed to workers' democracy is in itself inadequate. Democracy can take many forms. We have to establish what kind of democracy Lenin believed in, or in other words, what form the proletarian state would adopt, before we can come to grips with his ideas.

According to Lenin the central authority of the proletarian state was to be the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies (1) because this organisation would represent the interests of the proletarians. He described the Soviet of Workers Deputies as:

'...an organisation of the workers, the embryo of a workers' government, the representative of the interests of the entire mass of the poor section of the population i.e., of nine-tenths of the population, which is striving for peace bread and freedom.' (2)

The Soviets, he argued, provided an armed force of workers and peasants which was not divorced from the people but very closely bound up with them. The Soviet state apparatus would enable the most class conscious section of the oppressed to lead the whole mass of the oppressed in the job of creating a socialist society. As he put it, this apparatus:

'...provides an organisational form for the vanguard, i.e. for the most class-conscious, most energetic and most progressive section of the oppressed class, the workers and peasants, and so constitutes an apparatus by means

of which the vanguard of the oppressed classes can elevate, train, educate, and lead the entire vast mass of these classes, which has up to now stood completely outside of political life and history.' (3)

Thus class conscious workers would, he thought, lead society in the 'right' direction by means of the Soviets but whilst this vanguard of the proletariat would provide the leadership for the oppressed at first, everyone would soon learn to govern themselves. Indeed the very development of capitalism, as he saw it, had in a number of the most advanced countries prepared the way for the workers to begin to govern themselves as soon as capitalism was overthrown. Lenin argued that:

'The development of capitalism ... creates the preconditions that enable really "all" to take part in the administration of the state. Some of these preconditions are: universal literacy, which has already been achieved in a number of the most advanced capitalist countries, then the"training and disciplining" of millions of workers by the huge, complex, socialised apparatus of the postal service, railways, big factories, large-scale commerce, banking, etc., etc.

Given these economic preconditions, it is quite possible, after the overthrow of the capitalists and the bureaucrats, to proceed immediately, overnight, to replace them in the control over production and distribution, in the work of keeping account of labour and products, by the armed workers, by the whole of the armed population.' (4)

It is important to note here that Lenin speaks of the ability of all the people to participate in the work of state administration being conditional on them being able to read and on them having been trained and disciplined by working for a large advanced firm. As he was later to write:

'An illiterate person stands outside politics, he must first learn his ABC. Without that there can be no politics; without that there are rumours, gossip, fairy-tales and prejudices, but no politics.' (5)

The economic preconditions he describes were certainly not present in Russia. The literacy rate was, for instance, around the 20-25% mark (6) which means that he was to exclude up to 80% of the population from politics. However, in 1917 he was convinced that even in Russia the workers could quickly learn the art of distributing products equitably. In an article specifically geared to the question of revolution in Russia he wrote that:

'Power to the Soviets means the complete transfer of the country's administration and economic control into the hands of the workers and peasants, to whom nobody would dare offer resistance and who, through practice, through their own experience, would soon learn how to distribute the land, products and grain properly.' (7)

The important point here is that the workers do not yet know how to administer the country, in his scenario, but they will be quick to learn the art of

equitable distribution under the guidance of their most advanced elements. Lenin in fact pours scorn on the very idea that workers can simply take over and run the state. In an article written only a month before the October revolution entitled 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' he claims that unskilled labourers are incapable of running the state, saying:

'We are not utopians. We know that an unskilled labourer or a cook cannot immediately get on with the job of state administration.' (8)

This is significant. It means that the job of state administration was to be restricted to those who were, according to him, capable of doing it - namely the class conscious workers. (9) Those incapable of running the state were he argued to be trained for the task as rapidly as possible by their more qualified comrades. As Lenin puts it:

'We demand that training in the work of state administration be conducted by class-conscious workers and soldiers and that this training be begun at once, i.e., that a beginning be made at once in training all the working people, all the poor, for this work.' (10)

The important words here are the ones which Lenin himself emphasises. (11) The period of transition to socialism will be a time when a beginning will be made on the training of the masses in the art of government. In the meantime Lenin thought that the work of state administration would be carried out by the more advanced elements of the class. Thus state administration will be in the hands of the class conscious leaders of the oppressed because not every worker (and indeed the majority of them) is yet ready, in Lenin's opinion, to participate in the job of government. As he puts it in 'State and Revolution':

'We want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and "foremen and accountants"' (12)

The reference to foremen is highly revealing. Lenin was committed to workers' control over industry and yet here he is talking about foremen being indispensible during the first phase of the transition to socialism. The idea of workplace democracy with foremen may seem strange to libertarians but it is not all that uncommon an idea. After all the so-called industrial democracy of West Germany maintains exactly that structure. Surely though Lenin must have had something more radical in mind than the kind of window dressing that later developed in West Germany when he talked of workers' control? Certainly he did;but he saw no conflict between the continued existence of foremen and of subordination on the one hand and the disappearance of 'bossing' on the other. He came to this strange conclusion by maintaining that whilst subordination would still be necessary it would be subordination to foremen who had been hired by a proletarian state. According to him:

'Capitalism simplifies the functions of "state" administration, it makes it possible to cast "bossing" aside and to confine the whole matter to the organisation of the proletarians (as the rul ing class) which will hire "workers,

foremen and accountants" in the name of the whole of society.

We are not utopians, we do not "dream" of dispensing at once with all administration, with all subordination.' (13)

Though the ordinary worker would require training before being up to the job of running the state he or she was quite capable of keeping the closest possible check on the officials who had the necessary skills. Indeed it was, he felt, essential that workers should constantly check up on all officials and keep account of everything that went on in the Soviet state. Lenin argued that:

'...workers' control can become the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious accounting of the production and distribution of goods.' (14)

Here we can quite clearly see how restricted, how conservative even, Lenin's conception of workers' control was. He was not in favour of workers' management (that is to say, workers actually running things themselves); he had, we have seen, declared this to be utopian at this historical stage. What he was insisting on was the need for checking up from below and accounting for everything which was done by those who had the necessary skills to run the state. Workers' control for Lenin meant workers' accounting not workers' self-management. It is therefore quite wrong to accuse the Bolsheviks of failing to introduce workers' self-management into Russia after the revolution since their leader, at least, never intended to do so. He never doubted for a second that it would be necessary to have state officials, foremen and technicians. (15) The workers would exert the fullest possible control over these people but they would not be able to replace them until they had been trained. Anything more would be, Lenin was convinced, utopian at this stage.

Despite the conservatism of Lenin's interpretation of workers' control he did take the matter very seriously. Just how seriously can be seen by the fact that he proposed shooting any official who tried to avoid workers' accounting by deceiving the workers. He argued that a genuinely revolutionary government:

'...would immediately pass a law abolishing commercial secrecy, compelling contractors and merchants to render accounts public, forbidding them to abandon their field of activity without the permission of the authorities, imposing the penalty of confiscation of property and shooting for concealment and for deceiving the people, organising verification and control from below, democratically, by the people themselves, by unions of workers and other employees, consumers etc.' (16)

Officials would be kept under control with strict discipline and the state would back up the workers' authority. Furthermore many of the state officials would themselves be workers. Consequently, he argued, the nature of state officials would have completely changed. According to him:

'A beginning can and must be made at once, overnight, to replace the specific "bossing" of the state officials by the simple functions of "foremen and

accountants", functions which are already fully within the ability of the average town dweller and can well be performed for "workmen's wages".

We the workers, shall organise large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "foremen and accountants" (of course with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees).' (17)

Here again we find the same themes being raised by Lenin. A beginning is to be made in replacing state officials but only a beginning. Iron discipline is to be established to control the officials whom the workers themselves will instruct. All officials are to be paid modest salaries and to be immediately revocable. What is particularly interesting is that these were precisely the measures which he set out to implement after the October revolution. There is no direct contrast between Lenin's statements about the nature of the Soviet state before the revolution and what he claimed to be putting into practice afterwards. There is only a highly significant shift of emphasis.

We have seen that before the revolution he referred frequently to the existence of foremen and that he talked of subordination as being indispensible at this stage. We have also seen that he was committed to the workers beginning to take over the running of the state and their being trained for this task whilst keeping the closest possible check on everything that their representatives do. These two elements - subordination and democracy - remained central to his thinking after the revolution. However now the emphasis began to shift or to be more accurate, after the revolution Lenin was voicing more clearly ideas which he had always adhered to. In March 1918 he wrote that whilst democracy was important once work was over, the efficient running of industry required that during working hours there should be subordination. He asserted:

'We must learn to combine the "public meeting" democracy of the working people - turbulent, surging, overflowing its banks like a spring flood - with iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work.' (18)

In the same article he stressed the vital need for the proletariat to recruit the help of various kinds of experts, just as he did before the revolution, but now he was saying that without these experts socialism would never be reached. He stated that:

'Without the guidance of experts in the various fields of knowledge, technology and experience, the transition to socialism will be impossible, because socialism calls for a conscious mass advance to greater productivity of labour compared with capitalism, and on the basis achieved by capitalism.' (19)

However, he did not abandon his conviction that every worker must learn how to govern and be drawn into the work of the state. (20) In March 1918 he told

the 7th Congress of the Russian Communist Party that:

'All citizens must take part in the work of the courts and in the government of the country. It is important for us to draw literally all working people into the government of the state. It is a task of tremendous difficulty. But socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it themselves.'

The message here is almost identical to what he was advocating in 1917. Everyone must become involved in the task of state administration but not everyone is yet ready. The vanguard of the proletariat must, he says, educate the masses and once again he stresses the importance of the Soviets as organs which give the vanguard the maximum authority. He told the 7th Congress that:

'...Soviet power is a new type of state without a bureaucracy, without police, without a regular army, a state in which bourgeois democracy has been replaced by a new democracy, a democracy that brings to the fore the vanguard of the working people, gives them legislative and executive authority, makes them responsible for military defence and creates state machinery that can re-educate the masses' (22)

There is no sharp break between what Lenin was saying before the October revolution and what he said and did immediately afterwards. All the important features of the proletarian state are prefigured in theory. Before the revolution he had talked of the need for authority and subordination. Before the revolution he had been convinced that foremen and technical experts could not be dispensed with instantaneously. After the revolution he still wrote about the need for workers' accounting and control. After the revolution he continued to speak of the need for the whole population to be taught how to govern. The revolution did not cause a sudden shift in Lenin's beliefs. He did not believe in workers' management before the revolution and then switch to believing in the need for discipline and authority afterwards. Both before and after the revolution Lenin saw no conflict between the continued existence of subordination and the creation of workers' accounting and 'control'.

What did happen was that the emphasis changed slightly and the stick was bent the other way. It was no longer possible to misunderstand his attitude towards subordination because he began to press the need for it with increasing frequency and in increasingly strident tones. He tells us in March 1918 that:

'It has to be learnt that it is impossible to live in modern society without machines, without discipline - one has either to master modern techniques or be crushed.'(23)

The alternatives are, he says, either accept discipline or suffer eternal slavery. According to him:

'The last war has been a bitter, painful, but serious lesson for the Russian people. It has taught them to organise, to become disciplined, to obey, to establish a discipline that will be exemplary. Learn discipline from the Germans;

for if we do not, we, as a people, are doomed, we shall live in eternal slavery.' (24)

He makes the point that whilst the Russian people must obey the will of a single person at work this, in his opinion, in no way conflicts with their right to choose and replace leaders. As he puts it:

'The masses must have the right to choose responsible leaders for themselves. They must have the right to replace them, the right to know and check each smallest step of their activity. They must have the right to put forward any worker without exception for administrative functions. But this does not at all mean that the process of collective labour can remain without definite leadership, without precisely establishing the responsibility of the person in charge, without the strictest order created by the single will of that person. Neither railways nor road transport, nor large-scale machinery and enterprises in general can function correctly without a single will linking the entire working personnel into an economic organ operating with the precision of clockwork.' (25)

Consequently:

'There is, therefore, absolutely no contradiction in principle between Soviet (that is, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals.' (26)

It should be made clear that he is talking about dictatorial powers being given to elected managers or managers appointed by a Soviet state and not to government leaders. Nevertheless this is a frightening statement, coming from the lips of a socialist. The leaders of industry must have, according to Lenin, unquestioned obedience and dictatorial authority during working hours. (27) The directors of Ford's have been trying to achieve this for fifty years. Workers' control means, in Lenin's restricted definition, that the workers will elect the manager, check up on him or her (probably him) and keep account of everything that the manager does; whilst this manager has absolute authority during working hours. It is but a small step from this to strengthen the dictatorial authority of the managers and turn workers' control into a sham.

Lenin simply did not see the danger or at best felt that incompetence was a bigger threat to the Soviet state than the emerging managerial elite. In his mind ordinary Russian workers could not manage large-scale industry on their own - this had to be done by experts. In his mind there was no conflict between the existence of foremen and the existence of workers' control. In his mind workers' control meant workers electing their own boss, workers checking or workers keeping accounts and not workers doing away with the bosses and taking control of their own lives. Lenin once wrote:

'If the words "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" are written on a factory, as in America, the factory does not cease to be hell for the workers and a paradise for the capitalists.' (28)

We might add that if the workers are allowed to elect their boss and to check

up on him then the factory does not cease to be hell for the workers and paradise for the bosses. Only when workers' self-management is established does this cease to be the case. Only when workers actually run things for themselves and make their own decisions about what happens in the factory is real industrial democracy established. Both before and after the revolution Lenin felt that this was beyond the abilities of the ordinary worker. They had to rely on the skills of elected officials, he believed. The way was consequently open for these elected officials to establish their control over the workers instead of vica versa.

CHAPTER 3

We saw in the last chapter that Lenin thought that the introduction of Soviet rule and the dictatorship of the proletariat were one and the same thing. Through the Soviets the class conscious workers would train the masses in the art of government and lead them in the direction of socialism. (1) But one very important element in his thinking remains to be considered, namely - what role, if any, would the party play in this Soviet government? Would the Soviets contain one party or many? Would the dictatorship of the proletariat be identified with the government of one particular party or would all parties simply cease to exist once the power of the bourgeoisie had been smashed and state power captured by the armed proletariat?

We have seen that early in his career Lenin attached greater importance to correct party leadership rather than the spontaneous actions of the masses as a factor leading to the revolution. We have also seen that he came to have more and more faith in the ability of the proletariat to do the right thing even without guidance. By 1917 the emphasis was definitely on trusting to the natural socialist impulses of the masses rather than to wise leadership from experienced revolutionaries. For instance, after the revolt of the reactionary general Kornilov had been put down largely by the spontaneous actions of workers and soldiers, Lenin advised socialists to trust the initiatives of the people, saying:

'Don't be afraid of the people's initiative and independence. Put your faith in their revolutionary organisations, and you will see <u>in all</u> realms of state affairs the same strength, majesty and invincibility of the workers and peasants as were displayed in their unity and their fury against Kornilov.' (2)

His trust in the initiative of the masses did not however mean that there was no need for the Bolshevik party. For Lenin the interests of party and class were identical. The Bolsheviks were the party of the proletariat, according to him, and it was natural that a proletarian revolution would put power in their hands. In October 1915, for instance he had talked of, '...what the party of the proletariat would do if the revolution placed power in its hands...' He then refered to this as, '...victory of the proletariat in Russia...' (3) He made no distinction between the two because they were, as far as he was concerned, identical. When the proletariat overthrew the bourgeoisie it would place power in the hands of its representatives - the Bolsheviks. Indeed it is wrong to talk of Lenin seeing the Bolsheviks as representatives of the proletariat; the two were, in his opinion, indissolubly linked. There was no difference between party rule and the dictatorship of the proletariat. As he said in September 1917:

'Our party, like any other political party, is striving after political

domination for itself. Our aim is the dictatorship of the revolutionary proletariat.' (4)

Furthermore Lenin maintained that his party would have no right to exist unless it was prepared to take power. In the same month he wrote:

'I still maintain that a political party - and the party of the advanced class in particular - would have no right to exist, would be unworthy of the name of party, would be a nonentity in any sense, if it refused to take power when opportunity offers.' (5)

It is important to note that here, only a month before the revolution, Lenin is talking about his party being ready to take power. Lenin wanted the dictatorship of the proletariat and this meant, as he saw it, the domination of his party. However, it should be made clear that this was his ultimate objective. He did not set out with a single minded endeavour to launch a coup d'etat which would place his party in power. Indeed in the first months of the revolution he was not in favour of his party taking sole power immediately. (6) He felt at this time that there was a chance of the revolution developing peacefully and argued that so long as they had a minority in the Soviets the Bolsheviks should concentrate on trying to persuade the Soviets to take power. In the famous April Theses he wrote:

'As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.' (7)

He was prepared for his party to battle it out with other parties within the Soviets which were, he pointed out, dominated by peasants and soldiers or, in other words by what he considered to be petit bourgeois elements. (8) Through this battle the masses would test out the various parties and learn the merits of revolutionary socialism. By this means a peaceful transition to socialism had become possible. There would be no need for an uprising because the masses not the capitalists had the rifles. What was needed was persuasion not force. (9)

However, by July he felt the situation had changed and the Soviets no longer had the power to take over state power. (10) Before July the Soviets had been free of all coercion. In his own words:

'The Soviets were delegations from the mass of free - i.e., not subject to external coercion - and armed workers and soldiers. What really mattered was that arms were in the hands of the people and that there was no coercion of the people from without. This is what opened up and ensured a peaceful path for the progress of the revolution.' (11)

But from the third to the sixth of July something happened to change all that. A near spontaneous uprising took place which was put down by the government. The Bolsheviks were blamed for the uprising, Trotsky was arrested and Lenin

went into hiding. There is no need for us to go into the details of the uprising here (12) but it did result in a marked strengthening of the Provisional Government and an increasing conservatism in the Soviets. Kerensky describes this as:

'...a healthy process of decrease in the political importance of the Soviets in the State.' (13)

Lenin took a rather dimmer view of the matter and stated that now a new revolution was essential. According to him:

'Now after the experience of July 1917, it is the revolutionary proletariat that must independently take over state power. Without that the victory of the revolution is impossible.' (14)

Yet this revolution would not place sole power in the hands of the Bolsheviks if it followed the path which Lenin was now describing. It would place power in the hands of rejuvenated Soviets which would be as different from the ones which Kerensky had emasculated in July as chalk form cheese. He argued that:

'Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present Soviets, not organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the Soviets.' (15)

Lenin was, then, clearly prepared to see power pass into the hands of the Soviets because he was convinced that this would eventually lead to the masses coming over to the Bolsheviks. He had, however, become convinced in July that the Social-Revolutionary and Menshevik parties were participants in a counter-revolution. Now what was needed was a new revolution which would transfer power to the proletariat and leave these parties behind. In other owrds:

'The aim of the insurrection can only be to transfer power to the proletariat, supported by the poor peasants, with a view to putting our Party programme into effect.' (16)

Lenin was, though, to change his position again before the October revolution for, with the Kornilov revolt, the balance of forces in Russia changed once again. There was a widespread belief (17) that the government had secretly backed Kornilov's military revolt and this, combined with an upsurge in mass involvement in events as the revolt was spontaneously crushed, considerably weakened the authority of the government to the benefit of the Soviets. Indeed if Kerensky is to be believed then the Kornilov revolt was the prime cause of the Bolshevik victory in October. (18) After the revolt Lenin felt sure enough of eventual success to propose that the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries should form a government which would be responsible to the Soviets. In other words all power was, he suggested, to pass to the Soviets but the Bolsheviks' opponents were to form the government. The Bolsheviks would even refrain from demanding the immediate transfer of power to the proletariat and poor peasants.(19)) He was convinced that his party would be able in time to win over the Soviet

to its own side. The Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries refused the offer and within a month he was saying that they should be thrown out of the Soviets. As he put it:

'The Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, even after the Kornilov revolt, refused to accept our compromise of peacefully transferring the power to the Soviets (in which we then had no majority); they have again sunk into the morass of filthy and mean bargaining with the Cadets. Down with the Mensheviks and Sccialist-Revolutionaries! Struggle against them ruthlessly. Expel them ruthlessly from all revolutionary organisations.' (20)

Now, he said, an insurrection was essential if the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" was to become a reality. In early October he wrote that:

'...now, at least since the middle of September, this slogan ... has become equivalent to a call for insurrection.' (21)

Once power had passed into the hands of the Soviets then the peaceful struggle of parties inside them would enable the people to test the programmes of the various parties and decide on the best one. In late September he wrote:

'By seizing full power, the Soviets could still today - and this is probably their last chance - ensure the peaceful development of the revolution, peaceful elections of deputies by the people, and a peaceful struggle of parties inside the Soviets; they could test the programmes of the various parties in practice and power could pass peacefully from one party to another.' (22)

This is the type of Soviet state that Lenin tried to establish. He wanted domination for his own party, the party of the proletariat as he saw it, but was prepared to win it by convincing people rather than by force of arms if this was at all possible. Time and time again he offered to let the people see which parties represented their own interests by seeing how they acted within the Soviets. (23) He complained shortly after the October revolution that:

'...we wanted a coalition Soviet government. We did not exclude anyone from the Soviet.' (24)

But whilst he was quite prepared to share power and even to leave the choice of government to the masses if circumstances made this possible he was quite clear about his ultimate objectives. He believed in the dictatorship of the proletariat and was convinced that his own party was the party of that class. If circumstances made it necessary then this party must be prepared, Lenin thought, to take power on its own. As he said of his party in June:

'It is ready to take over full power at any moment.' (25)

Once the Bolsheviks had gained a majority in the Soviets this became a practical possibility and by September he was making this crystal clear, saying:

'The Bolsheviks, having obtained a majority in the Soviet of Workers' and

Soldiers' Deputies in both capitals, can and must take state power into their own hands.' (26)

And in an article with the revealing title 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' he argued that:

'...no power on earth can prevent the Bolsheviks, if they do not allow themselves to be scared and if they succeed in taking power, from retaining it until the triumph of the world socialist revolution.' (27)

Lenin drew no distinction between this - the coming to power of a particular party - and the coming to power of the proletariat as a class. Throughout his various switches of strategy in 1917 he remained convinced that his ultimate objective must be the coming to power of that class and consequently of his party. To his mind the two were interwoven. The interests of Party and class were one. He was therefore in a very poor position to recognise a steadily deepening divergence in interests between the two. And when the dictatorship of the proletariat is identified with the rule of a particular party then what is to prevent that party from dictating to the proletariat?

CHAPTER 4

So far I have restricted myself to an examination of what sort of political institutions Lenin set out to create in Russia. This is, in isolation, a rather abstract exercise which Lenin would have objected to strongly. For him it was the stage of development of the productive forces which decided which political institutions were appropriate. To talk of political institutions without knowing what stage the productive forces had reached would be, in his opinion, an empty sham. Consequently, unless we establish what stage of development he thought they had reached in 1917 we cannot understand the form which he argued the dictatorship of the proletariat should take in Russia. Furthermore, almost everything he tried to do after the revolution was determined by ideas he had worked out in the sphere of economics during the war. Indeed, as he saw things, the very possibility of a socialist revolution in backward Russia only existed because the development of the productive ofrces on a worldwide scale had ushered in an era of proletarian revolutions. To ignore what he wrote about the stage of development of the productive forces would therefore be to leave a huge gap in our knowledge of his intentions on coming to power.

For many years lenin had insisted that to argue for an immediate socialist revolution in Russia was utopian. Russia was a backward country and right across the board Russian Marxists were convinced that this meant the revolution would have two stages. First the bourgeoisie would take power and this would lead to a rapid extension of capitalism. Only when the bourgeoisie had built up large-scale industry would the time come for the proletariat to establish its own (temporary) dictatorship. During the revolution of 1905 he warned against the 'persistent illusion' that the revolution then taking place would <u>not</u> be a bourgeois revolution. (1) Purely socialist demands were still a matter for the future, instead the workers should put forward economic and political demands which could be satisfied within the framework of capitalism. (2) In other words the revolution should be given the widest possible sweep but the overthrow of capitalism was not a possibility at this stage.

This theory was maintained with notable tenacity by Russian Marxists. The Mensheviks, for example, were so convinced that capitalism should not be overthrown that many of them spent the entire period of the 1917 revolution trying to shore up capitalism! (3) They consequently lost what little support they had. They were not, however, the only ones who clung to the notion that socialism was impossible in a backward country. Lenin himself never abandoned this belief (though he did not draw the same outrageously timid conclusions from the idea). In early 1917 he wrote in a letter of farewell to the workers of Switzerland (which precious few of them read!):

'Russia is a peasant country, one of the most backward of European countries. Socialism cannot triumph there directly and immediately.' (4)

On his arrival in Russia he continued to make the same point when he explained to his critics that his April Theses were not to be taken as an argument for an immediate socialist revolution in Russia. Instead the contrary was true:

'I not only do not "build" on the "immediate transformation" of our revolution into a socialist one, but I actually warn against it, when in Thesis No. 8, I state: "It is not our immediate task to 'introduce' socialism"...' (5)

Indeed it was, according to Lenin, the height of absurdity to be in favour of 'introducing' socialism. (6) Such a position would ignore the harsh realities of Russia's stage of economic development, he thought. As he put it:

'Operating as it does in one of the most backward countries in Europe amidst a vast population of small peasants, the proletariat of Russia cannot aim at immediately putting into effect socialist changes.'

This was written in late April 1917 only six months before Lenin was to lead what has always been considered to be the world's first socialist revolution. He was not to allow Russia's backwardness to restrict his militancy in the way that many Mensheviks did. Socialism itself might not be a possibility but decisive steps could be taken in that direction. He poured scorn on the Menshevik position, saying:

'Accept the rule of capital because "we" are not yet ripe for socialism, the Mensheviks tell the peasants, substituting, incidentally, the abstract question of "socialism" in general for the concrete question of whether it is possible to heal the wounds inflicted by the war without decisive steps towards socialism.' (8)

Lenin answered this latter question with a resounding "no", for genuine socialists would, he thought, be prepared to take steps towards socialism whilst quite clearly realising that the actual achievement of socialism in backward Russia was not yet possible. As he put it:

'We cannot be revolutionary democrats in the twentieth century and in a capitalist country if we fear to advance towards socialism.' (9)

The reader might well be forgiven for wondering what the difference is between introducing socialism and taking decisive steps towards it. There is though an important difference. In the first case the economic prerequisites for socialism already exist; in the latter case significant areas of the economy have still not been fully developed by capitalism. Lenin clearly believed throughout his life that the latter was the case in Russia. Whatever steps could be taken towards socialism would be taken, but the level of technology meant to him that there were definite limits to what could be done. As he wrote in September 1917:

'It is impossible in twentieth century Russia, which has won a republic and democracy in a revolutionary way, to go forward without advancing towards socialism, without taking steps towards it (steps conditioned and determined

by the level of technology and culture: large-scale machine production cannot be "introduced" in peasant agriculture nor abolished in the sugar industry).' (10)

Russia could not make a socialist revolution on its own, in his opinion, but it could, by taking steps towards socialism, begin a process that would lead to the creation of socialism on a worldwide basis. Advancing towards socialism in Russia would be an inspiration which would spark off revolution elsewhere.

'Single-handed the Russian proletariat cannot bring the socialist revolution to a victorious conclusion. But it can give the Russian revolution a mighty sweep that would create the most favourable conditions for a socialist revolution, and would, in a sense, start it. It can facilitate the rise of a situation in which its chief, its most trustworthy and most reliable collaborator, the European and American socialist proletariat, could join the decisive battles.' (11)

This was an idea that had been an important element of Lenin's thinking since before the days of the 1905 revolution. Then he had described an entire epoch of ever deepening revolutionary upheavals. This epoch would begin with a democratic revolution in Russia; revolution there would spark off a socialist revolution in Europe and this would react back upon Russia enabling that country to advance straight to socialism. He doesn't speak of a possible uprising in Europe, he says rather that if the Russian revolution is profound enough then the European workers will rise in response. He wrote that the socialist was obliged to dream that:

'We shall succeed in 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 a few paltry concessions from the powers that be, but to the complete overthrow of those powers. And if we succeed in achieving this, then the revolutionary conflagration will spread to Europe; the European worker, languishing under bourgeois reaction, will rise in his turn and show us "how it is done", then the revolutionary upsurge in Europe will have a repercursive effect upon Russia and will convert an epoch of a few revolutionary years into an era of several revolutionary decades...'(12)

This was to become far more than a dream for Lenin. In 1917 he was to rely on the certainty that revolution in the advanced countries would break out shortly after the revolution in Russia. He flatly stated that no country could achieve socialism on its own, saying:

'The final victory of socialism in a single country is of course impossible.' (13)

This was, he thought, particularly true for a country with a backward economy. But Lenin did not allow this to prevent him from taking part in the making of a revolution because he was sure that Russia would not be alone. Again and again he preached the inevitability of European revolution. In March 1917 he said that the Russian February revolution would certainly not be the only revolution engendered by the imperialist war. (14) In September he wrote:

'Mass arrests of party leaders in free Italy, and particularly the beginning

of mutinies in the German army, are indisputable symptoms that a great turning-point is at hand, that we are on the eve of a world-wide revolution.' (15)

On October 25, the very day of the overthrow of the Kerensky regime, he penned a resolution for the Petrograd Soviet which stressed the importance to Russia of the arrival of this world revolution, saying:

'The Soviet is convinced that the proletariat of the Western European countries will help us to achieve a complete and lasting victory for the cause of socialism.' (16)

In January 1918 he made it crystal clear that he felt aid from revolutions in advanced European countries was essential not just desirable. As he put it:

'That the socialist revolution in Europe must come, and will come, is beyond doubt. All our hopes for the final victory of socialism are founded on this certainty and on this scientific prognosis.' (17)

The word 'scientific' is significant here. It means that Lenin believed it had been established as a fact with all the certainty of the laws of physics that a revolution would come in Europe. No-one could, of course, predict a definite date but there was not the slightest doubt that revolution would come sooner rather than later. He informed Kautsky in 1918 that it was obligatory for Marxists to base their tactics on the expectation of a European revolution because of the 'objective situation' brought about by the war. (18) Lenin, then, openly admitted that he based his tactics on a firm conviction that widespread revolution would break out in Europe. Since no such revolution took place we are entitled to ask why Lenin was so sure that it would.

The usual answer given is that numerous indicators showed that a revolutionary situation did exist in Europe. Events such as the mutinies in even the British army (19) and the various uprisings in Germany (20) and Eastern Europe all tend to indicate that Europe was indeed ripe for revolution. But it was not these uprsiings which gave Lenin the idea that revolution was imminent. In fact they served only to confirm Lenin in a belief he had held for some time. His conviction sprang not from observing various revolts but from studying Marxist theory and the developments in contemparary economies. It is impossible to understand Lenin's thought unless we recognise that Lenin took it for granted that Marx had established the certainty of socialism. For both Marx and Lenin it is the development of the productive forces that compels the proletariat to revolt. There is no escape from this certainty - the only question is when it will happen. Marx sets down the reasons for this certain revolt in a lengthy passage in Capital. Basically what the passage states is that competition between capitalists drives more and more of them out of business. The loosers join the ranks of the proletariat. The winners are an ever smaller group. In the massive factories owned by these few capitalists the proletariat learns discipline and unity. Eventually a well organised mass is faced with a handful of moribund capitalists. The result of this unavoidable process is the socialist revolution. Marx describes the process as follows:

'One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or

this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised labour, the entanglement of all people in the net of the world-market and this, the international character of the capitalist regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of money, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.' (21)

Thus socialism is necessary. It is not that a few people have decided this would be a better society it is rather that the very development of the productive forces makes the adoption of this form of society a necessity. The two key indicators of the degree of ripeness for revolution are the centralisation of the productive forces and the socialisation of labour. By gauging their progress the Marxist scholar ought to be able to tell when the stage has been reached for the death knell of private property to sound.

The reader might be forgiven for wondering what is the relevance of all this to Lenin's conviction that Europe was about to experience widespread revolutions. The relevance is that in the early years of the First World War Lenin gradually came to the conclusion that the centralisation of production and the socialisation of labour had reached the predicted point. In his book 'Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism' written in 1916 Lenin argued that capitalism had reached a new stage of development, during which wars over the acquisition of colonies were inevitable. (22) In this era capitalism displayed all the signs of approaching its end in exactly the manner Marx had described, and for exactly the reasons which Marx had described, namely the concentration of production and the socialisation of labour reaching extreme degrees of development.

According to Lenin, the era in which he was living was characterised by the transformation of capitalism from an essentially competitive method of production into a non-competitive monopolistic method. In other words the process which Marx had described of one capitalist killing off many competitors had gone so far that the few remaining enterprises could easily come to an agreement and carve up the markets. As he puts it:

'...at a certain stage of its development concentration itself, as it were, leads straight to monopoly, for a score or so of giant enterprises can easily

arrive at an agreement, and on the other hand, the hindrance to competition, the tendency towards monopoly, arises from the huge size of the enterprises. This transformation of competition into monopoly is one of the most important - if not the most important - phenomena of modern capitalist economy...' (23)

There were, he argued, two interlinked processes going on both of which lead to the same end. Whilst competition was driving some capitalists out of business what we would now call the economies of scale were operating to ensure that only the largest enterprises were able to compete. The net result was the establishment of monopolies in all the vital areas of the economy. The owners of these few giant firms had merged with the all important bankers to form a single group of finance capitalists who dominated over society. (24) Thus in Germany, for example, a handful of financiers were the real governors of society. According to Lenin:

'Germany is governed by not more than three hundred magnates of capital, and the number is constantly diminishing.' (25)

It is important to take what he says at face value. This is not meant to be an exaggeration nor is it a prediction. It is a statement of what already exists. He believed that in Germany things had reached such a pitch that the economic life of 66 million people was being directed and organised from one centre. (26) In all the advanced countries a similar state of affairs existed and:

'... a handful of monopolists subordinate to their will all the operations, both commercial and industrial, of the whole of capitalist society.' (27)

Since this controlling group was so small in number it was possible, he thought, for it to plan and become organised. But Lenin believed that one of the characteristic features of capitalism was that it was not organised, it was in fact the very opposite - capitalism was the anarchy of production. Hence the new era, the imperialist era, had certain features which were essentially non-capitalist. He himself highlighted this apparent contradiction when he wrote:

'Free competition is the basic feature of capitalism, and of commodity production generally; monopoly is the exact opposite of free competition, but we have seen the latter being transformed into monopoly before our eyes...' (28)

If monopoly capitalism lacks the basic feature of capitalism then it must, according to Lenin, contain certain features typical of a new social system. As he put it:

'...the old capitalism; the capitalism of free competition with its indispensable regulator, the Stock Exchange, is passing away. A new capitalism has come to take its place, bearing obvious features of something transient, a mixture of free competition and monopoly. The question naturally arises: <u>into what</u> is the new capitalism "developing"?' (29)

His answer was that capitalism was, of itself, developing all the most important economic requirements for socialism. The capitalists were being

forced to organise and to plan on a national level, production had become socialised to a very high dgree, only private expropriation held us back from the transition to socialism. Lenin stated that:

'Capitalism in its imperialist stage leads directly to the most comprehensive socialisation of production; it, so to speak, drags the capitalists against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, a transitional one from complete free competition to complete socialisation.' (30)

In other words Lenin thought that capitalism had reached its limits and it was for this reason that revolution in the advanced countries was imminent. Production was no longer the concern of isolated capitalists competing against each other in an 'anarchic' way. It was conducted on a massive planned scale by well organised workers. However ownership still rested in the hands of a few financiers. Their ownership was an anachronism which would soon be ended. He does not speak of the desirability of removing private ownership, he says rather that it inevitably will be removed because the property relations no longer correspond to the stage of development which the productive forces have reached. According to Lenin:

'When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organises according to plan the supply of primary raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three-fourths, of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when the raw materials are transported in a systematic and organised manner to the most suitable places of production, sometimes situated hundreds of thousands of miles from each other; when a single centre directs all the consecutive stages of processing the materials right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when these products are distributed according to a single plan among tens of hundreds of millions of customers ... then it becomes evident that we have socialisation of production, and not mere "interlocking"; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period ... but which will inevitably be removed.' (31)

This is an important forgotten passage of Lenin's; for what he is describing here is the economic apparatus which he thought to be typical of both advanced monopoly capitalism and socialism. Socialism is, for Lenin, planned capitalism with the private ownership removed. Capitalism has, in his opinion, provided a complete material preparation for socialism, has brought us to the stage where we are teetering on the brink of socialism, and has reached its own last stage of development. In his own words 'capitalism is ending its development' (32) and it is doing so because it has created the mechanism for socialism within itself in the form of the big banks and the trusts - the organisations which by carving up markets and controlling investments have created order out of the anarchy of production. These organisations will therefore be the core of the new society. Without them socialism would be impossible, with them it is inevitable, he believed. He wrote that:

'Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks,

syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies, and office employees' unions. Without the big banks socialism would be impossible.

The big banks are the "state apparatus" which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country-wide book keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society.' (33)

This passage contains some exceptional statements. We are told that the banks are nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. All that is required is to seize the banks from the handful of financiers who own them, unify them, increase this single bank in size and, 'Bob's your Uncle', you have your basic socialist apparatus. We are told that quantity will be transformed into quality. In other words if we aim to establish wider and wider control by an enormous bank then in some magical way the bank will be transformed from an instrument of oppression into an instrument of liberation. We are further told that the bank will be made 'even more democratic' not 'made democratic' as we might expect but made even more so. This means that the banks, as they exist under capitalism are in some way democratic, a difficult statement to comprehend but no doubt reassuring to those who work for Barclay's or Nat. West. Finally we are told that the single State Bank will provide country-wide accounting and control of production and distribution of goods. We can only conclude that workers' control and accounting will take place through the mechanism of this bank. This indeed proves to be Lenin's opinion. According to him, the banks and the trusts (which are, remember, inextricably linked) are the mechanism via which the proletariat will exercise its dictatorship. Thus he gives as an example of the socialist economic system the postal service, saying:

'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 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 over-worked and starved, one has the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is 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, forementand accountants, and pay them all, as indeed all "state" officials in general, workmen's wages.

To organise the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than a workman's wage', 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.' (34)

Here we finally get to grips with Lenin's conception of what the future economy was supposed to look like. The economic structure was to be strikingly similar to capitalism. The trusts and the banks would remain. The sole changes which these splendidly equipped mechanisms were to undergo would be that they would be made bigger and therefore better and they would be under the control of the armed proletariat. The immediate aim of the proletariat on coming to power would be to extend the control of the banks over the economy, to increase the size and number of the trusts and to use them both for the benefit of everyone instead of for their oppression. The vital question of the day would become:

'...the expropriation of the capitalists, the conversion of all citizens into workers and other employees of one huge "syndicate" - the whole state - and the complete subordination of the entire work of this syndicate to a genuinely democratic state, the state of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.'(35)

The syndicates which had previously oppressed and trodden down the masses become under Soviet rule the means for their salvation. Under capitalism the trusts bring in their wake intense miseries, the list of which seems endless. In their unavoidable search for places where capital can be profitably invested and in their drive to monopolise the sources of raw materials, the financiers have, according to Lenin, divided up the world amongst themselves, seizing and enslaving immense colonies. (36) But, as the relative strengths of the financiers in various countries changes (37) the stronger countries strive to take the colonies of the weaker. Inevitably this leads to war. (38) In the new era of capitalism peace is just an interval in periods between wars and all the misery they bring. (39) The masses remain 'half-starved and poverty-stricken' (40) in spite of the amazing technical progress which capitalism undergoes in its imperialist era. The power of the state and its burden increases, for the trusts create more and more monopolies which are protected and extended by the state until eventually the state becomes indistinguishable from the trusts it fosters. Capitalism becomes state capitalism (41), the exploitation of the working people increases, reaction and military despotism grow, profits increase at the expense of everyone bar the small group of financiers who control the state. All this, Lenin believed, results from the new conditions of monopoly capitalism and the increased control of production by the state. But once state power passes to the proletariat, Lenin thought, these very conditions become an assurance that exploitation will be destroyed for ever. Lenin described the transformation as follows:

'Under private ownership of the means of production, all these steps towards greater monopolisation and control over production by the state are inevitably accompanied by intensified exploitation of the working people, by an increase in oppression; it becomes more difficult to resist the exploiters, and reaction and military despotism grow. At the same time these steps inevitably lead to a tremendous growth in the profits of the big capitalists at the expense of sll other sections of the population. The working people for decades

to come are forced to pay tribute to the capitalists in the form of interest payments on war loans running into thousands of millions. But with private ownership of the means of production abolished and state power passing completely to the proletariat, these very conditions are a pledge of success for society's transformation that will do away with the exploitation of man by man and ensure the well-being of everyone.' (42)

Now this is important. What was once evil becomes the means for a salvation. As soon as state power changes hands the value signs change and state capitalism becomes a positive boon, according to Lenin. In fact he defined socialism in relation to state capitalism:

'For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly.' (43)

The movement of history itself was, Lenin thought, dictating the need for this transformation of state capitalist monopoly from a means of intense oppression to their efficient servant. As he put it:

'...state capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no immediate rungs.' (44)

This too is important. For Lenin history could be compared to a ladder which had to be climbed. Each stage was higher than the last. Each stage was a preparation for the next step and if this preparation was lacking then the next step could not be taken. And once a certain stage had been reached the next step forward could only lead us to socialism. This stage had been reached in the advanced countries. Lenin thought that there were no intermediate rungs between state capitalism and socialism (hence any attempt to patch up his theory by proclaiming that new stages have been reached are in direct contradiction with Lenin's own convictions). Once capitalism had reached the stage of development known as state capitalism there could be only one way forward - socialism. But it was equally true that unless capitalism had created the necessary framework then socialism was impossible. In the advanced countries all the necessary apparatus - the big banks and the trusts - was already in existence. Hence revolution was imminent there. However, in the backward countries it was a different story as these countries were not yet ready for socialism. And in Russia, which was an intermediate country, half backward and half advanced, (45) one of the prime tasks of the proletarian government would be to build up this essential apparatus. To do so in fact became an overriding objective because socialism is defined as being nothing more than state capitalism with a workers' state. (46)

Throughout 1917 Lenin was to stress the importance of building up and using the state capitalist apparatus. In April he put forward a series of measures which would enhance the influence of the proletariat among the general population. These measures were: 1). the nationalisation of the land; 2). the merging of

all the banks into one and the establishment of a branch in every village; 3). the nationalisation of the Sugar Manufacturers Syndicate. The last two measures are clearly aimed at increasing the extent of state capitalism. According to Lenin, if all these measures were put into effect and if aid was forthcoming from the workers of advanced Western Europe (after the outbreak of their own revolution) then the transformation of Russia into a socialist society would be inevitable. (47) The potential for these measures already existed in Russia. For instance the sugar syndicate had developed into a single industrial organism on a national scale and had already been subject to state control under Tsarism. This syndicate would, Lenin argued, simply pass into the hands of the proletarian government and be controlled by the workers and peasants. It would then be possible to lower the price of sugar. (48) The sugar industry was not the only example of monopoly capitalism in Russia and therefore not the only industry where state capitalism could be made to work for the proletariat. (49) Other large syndicates such as the coal and metal syndicates could also be nationalised with ease. Where such syndicates did not exist a conscious attempt was to be made to create large well organised nationalised ones. In October Lenin stated that:

'Compulsory syndicalisation i.e. compulsory amalgamation in associations under state control - this is what capitalism has prepared the way for, this is what has been carried out in Germany by the Junkers' state, this is what can easily be carried out in Russia by the Soviets, by the proletarian dictatorship, and this is what will provide us with a state apparatus that will be universal, up-to-date and non-bureaucratic.' (50)

Lenin was thus proposing to rely on and to build up the organisational structure created by capitalism itself in order to replace capitalism. Indeed in May 1917 he went so far as to claim that:

'Control must be established over the banks, followed by a fair tax on incomes. And nothing more!' (51)

Given this attitude it is hardly surprising to find that after the October revolution Lenin continually stressed the need to extend the apparatus of state capitalism. Indeed it would not be too much to say that developing the Russian economy in the direction of state capitalism became his major concern. Obviously he still believed that this state capitalism would be under Soviet control. But, as he had said in September 1917, an advanced political system was not enough - what was needed was an advanced economic system as well. Then he had written:

'The revolution has resulted in Russia catching up with the advanced countries in a few months, as far as her political system is concerned.

But that is not enough. The war is inexorable; it puts the alternative with ruthless severity; either, perish or overtake and outstrip the advanced countries economically as well.' (52)

Now that the second revolution was a reality this is what he proceeded to aim for as a first priority.

According to Lenin, Russia in 1918 contained a great variety of socio-economic structures existing side by side. The economy contained all the following intermingled methods of production:

'1). patriarchal, i.e. to a considerable extent natural, peasant farming;
2). small commodity production (this includes the majority of those peasants who sell their grain);
3). private capitalism;
4). socialism.' (53)

Thus within the vast boundaries of Russia there existed, he thought, near subsistence farming and highly sophisticated socialist methods of production. The term Socialist Soviet Republic implied, he said, the determination of Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic system was already a socialist order. (54) The establishment of state capitalism would be a necessary step along the road to socialism. As he wrote in May 1918:

'...state capitalism would be a step forward as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic. If in approximately six months' time state capitalism became established in our Republic, this would be a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have gained a permanently firm hold and will have become invincible in our country.' (55)

Similarly he told a meeting in April 1918 that if state capitalism could be quickly achieved then this would be a victory. (56) It would be in his own words a 'salvation':

'...state capitalism would be our salvation; if we had it in Russia, the transition to full socialism would be easy, would be within our grasp, because state capitalism is something centralised, calculated, controlled and socialised, and that is exactly what we lack;' (57)

If state capitalism were to be built in Russia, his argument ran, then it would have to be copied from the most advanced country in the world - Germany. In a highly revealing passage written in May 1918 he said that:

'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.' (58)

The sole difference between state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the state capitalism of the German financiers would be that a different class would be in control of the state, according to Lenin's theory. It is worth stressing again the words which Lenin stresses here, he believed that the importance of developing state capitalism was so great that there should be no shrinking away from adopting dictatorial methods. Yet he felt there would still be a difference between state capitalism subordinated to an imperialist state and state capitalism subordinated to a proletarian state.

As he put it, in Germany:

'...we have "the last word" in modern large-scale capitalist engineering and planned organisation, subordinated to Junker-bourgeois imperialism. Cross out the words in italics* and in place of the militarist, Junker, bourgeois imperialist state put also a state, but of a different social type, of a different class content - a Soviet state, that is, a proletarian state, and you will have the sum total of the conditions necessary for socialism.' (59)

But what, we are entitled to ask, will be the difference between the two states when the proletariat ceases to control the Soviet state, becomes in fact controlled by it, and dictated to by it?

It is hardly surprising that Russia has ended up as a state capitalist paradise when we discover that Lenin himself set out to create state capitalism as his first priority. He thought state capitalism would undergo a transition after the revolution which would turn it for the first time into a humane method of production working for the people. But what was to be the difference between proletarian state capitalism and the bourgeois variety when the leader of the Soviet state began to complain, as he did, of a "mania for meetings", (60) began to feel that the people were tired and needed leading and began to press for labour discipline? What was to be the difference between proletarian and bourgeois state capitalism when the leader of the vanguard of the proletariat began once again to complain that ordinary workers could not become socialists because they had to spend so much time working? What was to ensure proletarian control over state capitalism when workers' control was replaced by Trade Union control? And what was to be the difference between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie when power was seized and retained by a single party?

In March 1918 Lenin informed the Bolshevik party that they must:

'...stand at the head of the exhausted people who are wearily seeking a way out and lead them along the true path of labour discipline, along the path of co-ordinating the task of arguing at mass meetings about the conditions of work with the task of unquestioningly obeying the will of the Soviet leader, of the dictator during the work.' (61)

In June 1918 he informed the Trade Unions that:

'It is understandable that among the broad masses of the toilers there are many (you know this particularly well; every one of you in the factories) who are not enlightened socialists and cannot be such because they have to slave in the factories and they have neither the time nor the opportunity to become socialists.' (62)

In July 1918 he told the 5th Congress of Soviets:

'...the old workers' control is already antiquated, and the trade unions are becoming the embryos of administrative bodies for all industry.' (63)

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* Here underlined.

And in May 1918 he wrote:

'Now power has been seized, retained and consolidated in the hands of a single party, the party of the proletariat...' (64)

Indeed it had but one could be forgiven for thinking that the party which had seized power was not the party of the proletariat when if suppressed the uprising of Kronstadt workers (65), when it gradually strangled criticism from within its own ranks (66) and when its leader flatly instructed the proletariat in October 1921:

'Get down to business all of you! You will have capitalists beside you, including foreign capitalists, concessionaries and leaseholders. They will squeeze profits out of you amounting to hundreds per cent; they will enrich themselves, operating alongside of you. Let them. Meanwhile you will learn from them the business of running the economy, and only when you do that will you be able to build up a communist republic.' (67)

Lenin was too much of a socialist to simply drop all talk of the workers eventually running the economy. He was too little of one to allow them to actually do so. It was to prove a dangerous fault.

CONCLUSION

We began by asking why the Russian revolution went so badly wrong. No doubt a range of factors contibuted to this failure among them the huge difficulties of building a socialist society in a backward economy in a single country. But what is disturbing is that for so many 'modern' socialists the search for an answer stops there. They have their let out clause - the failure was due to special circumstances - and they feel they can continue to hold to the theories of Lenin as though they were established truths. (1) What I hope I have shown in this pamphlet is that these theories themselves contributed in a very direct and important way to the creation of the kind of society that now exists in Russia. Theory had a major impact on practice and the practice went horribly wrong. This is not, repeat not, to say that what happened in Russia was entirely due to the eroneous theories of the Bolsheviks. No one but a crude idealist would deny that economic circumstances played their part. What is particularly worrying is that so many people to this day deny that theory played any part in the faliure of the revolution. No one but a crude economic determinist ought to deny this. To fail to analyse and ruthlessly criticise the theories of those who led Russia down the path to Stalinism is the most crass short-sightedness which can only result - as indeed it has resulted in country after country - in the socialist movement repeating its old mistakes and ending up with ever new 'socialist'dictatorships to explain away.

Having said that it does not mean that I feel we have to vilify Lenin as a person. It would be very easy to present an image of him as a supreme authoritarian; one has only to quote a few passages out of context and ignore several others and he is damned by his own mouth. Unfortunately such trickery neither convinces anyone nor gets to the heart of the matter. If Lenin had an incorrigibly dictatorial nature and it was this that had caused all the problems then matters would be simple - when the next revolution comes along you simply choose yourself an honest leader with no such ambitions. Unfortunately revolution after revolution has been carried out in this century and all of them have failed to create a fundamentally different society. There must be a reason for this and the reason lies in the theory that guides the actions of the Leninist revolutionaries.

Lenin was much more democratic and even libertarian in his theories than he has often been given credit for. He was a firm believer in the merits of democracy in its 'proper' place and commited to a form of workers' control. But to admit this is not to turn oneself into a Leninist. It is rather to realise the full danger of his ideas. They still have an attraction for many because they seem at first sight to come so close to the truth. Democracy is advocated; but a centralised party remains. Workers' control is advocated; but it is to be restricted to checking and accounting whilst the workers learn to do more and in the meantime... The need for a healthy economy is stressed but everything is to be subordinated to the drive to build it up.

To grant that Lenin was a genuine socialist, in that he believed in the merits of workers' control as he saw it, is not to be 'soft on Leninism' it is rather the opposite - it is to recognise the danger of socialists who to this day (whilst they are quite genuine and sincere people) are committed to the same ideas. Partly as a result of Lenin's committment to sacrifice everything to economic growth, partly as a result of his restricted definition of workers' control, partly as a result of his failure to see any possible divergence of interest between party and class (2) there grew up in Russia a prison for the workers instead of the proposed paradise. Latter day socialists would be well advised to take note, to avoid even the most democratic centralised party, and to sacrifice everything (including, if necessary, economic growth) rather than sacrifice full workers' self-management. As Lenin, himself, once said in a lucid moment:

'The liberation of the workers can be achieved only by the workers' own efforts,...' (3)

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Even today any traveller in Russia who leaves the cities will see that the main means of agricultural transport in the horse and cart.
2. T. Cliff, Lenin (London, 1978), Vol. 3, p. 111.
3. A strange word indeed, for Marxists to use.
4. I. Deutscher ed., The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology (New York, 1964), p. 278.
5. P. Avrich, The Russian Anarchists, (Princeton, 1967) p.93.
6. See, for instance, the reaction of the British anarchists as detailed by J. Quail, The Slow Burning Fuse (London, 1978), p.299
7. The name Sergven is probably a pseudonym for Maksimov.
8. P. Avrich, The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution, (London, 1973), p.123.
9. Ibid. p. 124
10. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works in 45 Volumes (Moscow, 1960-1970), (An English translation of the fourth Russian edition of the Sochineniya) Vol. 27 p. 517 Hereafter this edition will be referred to as C.W.
11. This is not to deny the significance of a study of the revolutionary personality and its significance for an analysis of the traditional left's authoritarianism.
12. See Krupskaya's memoirs for the sordid details: N. Krupskaya, Memories of Lenin, (London, 1970).
13. For those interested in Lenin's ideas generally by far and away the best academic book is N. Harding, Lenin's Political Thought (London, 1977).
14. For those more interested in the practice of the early Bolsheviks in power there is no better book than the excellent M. Brinton, The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control (London, 1970)

CHAPTER 1

1. A. Ulam, Lenin and the Bolsheviks (London, 1969), p.462.
2. R. Payne, Lenin (London, 1964), p.353.
3. P. Avrich, op. cit. p.102
4. M. Sukhanov, The Russian Revolution of 1917 (Oxford, 1955), p.287.
5. C.W. Vol. 25 p.422
6. Ibid. p. 397.
7. Ibid. p.402

FOOTNOTES - Ch. 1 con.

8. Ibid. p. 458.
9. Ibid. p. 488.
10. Ibid. p. 419.
11. Ibid. p. 421.
12. J. Keep in Reddaway and Shapiro (eds.), Lenin: the Man, the Theorist, the Leader, p. 136.
13. Ibid. p. 421
14. Lenin's actions when in power have also played no small part in lending credence to this interpretation.
15. C.W. Vol. 5, p. 375.
16. Idid. p. 422
17. Ibid. P. 416. Readers may be forgiven for finding themselves confused by the variety of different types of consciousness described here. Basically Lenin operated with a model of three characteristic types of consciousness. Trade union consciousness (more or less an awareness of the need to fight one's own employer) was the first stage on the route followed by political consciousness (an awareness of the need to fight alongside other classes against the state) and finally Social-Democratic political consciousness (put simply, an agreement with and understanding of the Bolshevik programme). For those interested in a full academic account of Lenin's theory of consciousness and its significance in Lenin's thought see N. Harding op. cit.
18. Ibid. p. 500.
19 Ibid. p. 452.
20. Ibid. p. 416.
21. Ibid. p. 464.
22. Ibid. 459.
23. C.W. Vol. 7, p. 367.
24. C.W. Vol. 5, p. 461.
25. Ibid. p. 478.
26. T. Cliff, Lenin (London, 1975), Vol. 1, p. 242.
27. C.W. Vol. 10, p. 32.
28. Ibid. p. 37.
29. See for instance Ibid. p. 30.
30. C.W. Vol. 13, p. 103.
31. Ibid. p. 102.
32. Ibid. p. 101
33. Ibid. p. 108
34. Ibid. p. 107.
35. This is not to suggest that there may not be evidence for such an accusation elsewhere in Lenin's writings. Much of what he wrote after 1917 provides strong evidence for such a charge.
36. C.W. Vol. 16, p. 302.
37. Though not necessarily any better as it seems a highly mechanical explanation of the development of consciousness.
38. Ibid. p. 301
39. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 404.
40. And indeed dangerously powerful.
41. Cliff, op. cit. p. 82.
42. Ibid

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2

1. Ibid. p. 463.
2. C.W. Vol. 23, p.304.
3. C.W. Vol. 26, p.103.
4. C.W. Vol. 25, p.473.
5. C.W. Vol. 33, p.78.
6. M. Florinsky, The End of the Russian Empire (New york, 1961), p. 28.
7. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 373.
8. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 113.
9. and of course the notion of class consciousness is notoriously open to interpretations of the 'those who agree with me are class conscious' variety.
10. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 113.
11. I have in fact used Lenin's own emphasis throughout.
12. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 425.
13. Ibid.
14. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 105
15. Technicians are of course useful as for the other two...
16. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 341.
17. Ibid. p. 426.
18. C.W. Vol. 27, p. 271.
19. Ibid. p. 248.
20. Though his commitment to this ideal did move further into the background as he got older with the exception, perhaps, of the last year of his life.
21. Ibid. p. 135.
22. Ibid. p. 133.
23. Ibid. p. 195.
24. Ibid. p. 106.
25. Ibid. p. 212.
26. Ibid. p. 268.
27. Ibid. p. 270.
28. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 499

CHAPTER 3

1. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 103.
2. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 370.
3. C.W. Vol. 21, p. 404.
4. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 306.
5. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 90.
6. I am not suggesting here that Lenin did not want his party to take power - what I am suggesting is that he saw more than one way of it doing so.
7. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 23.

FOOTNOTES - Ch. 3 con.

8. Ibid. p. 48.
9. Ibid. p. 236.
10. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 185.
11. Ibid. p. 183-4.
12. Particularly as an excellent account already exists see; A. Rabinowitch, Prelude to Revolution, (1968, Indiana).
13. A. Kerensky, The Prelude to Bolshevism, (1919) p. 225.
14. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 189.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. p. 178.
17. With some justification. See the decidedly weak explanations that Kerensky offers for his actions in his book on the subject; op. cit.
18. A Kerensky, Russia and History's Turning Point, (New York, 1965), p. 356.
19. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 307.
20. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 57.
21. Ibid. p. 185.
22. Ibid. p. 68.
23. Though after October he quickly became in favour of excluding from the Soviets all parties which had shown themselves to be compromisers with the bourgeoisie. This quickly came to mean all parties which had disagreements with the Bolsheviks.
24. C.W. Vol26, p. 270.
25. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 20.
26. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 19.
27. Ibid. p. 130.

CHAPTER 4

1. C.W. Vol. 8, p.24.
2. C.W. Vol. 10, p. 77.
3. See for instance the arguments put forward by the left wing Menshevik Sukhanov in his book, The Russian Revolution of 1917 (Oxford, 1955), p. 104-5.
4. C.W. Vol. 23, p. 371.
5. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 52.
6. Ibid. p. 242.
7. Ibid. p. 311.
8. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 278.
9. Ibid. p. 356.
10. Ibid. p. 359.
11. C.W. Vol. 23, p. 372
12. C.W. Vol. 8, p. 288.

FOOTNOTES - Ch. 4 con.

13. C.W. Vol 26, p. 470.
14. C.W. Vol. 23, p. 297.
15. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 74.
16. Ibid. p. 241.
17. Ibid. p. 443.
18. C.W. Vol. 28, p. 288.
19. See D. Lamb, Mutinies: 1917-1920 available from Solidarity.
20. See Spartakism to National Bolshevism (Aberdeen Solidarity, 1970).
21. K.Marx, Capital Vol. 1 (Chicago, 1918), p. 836-7.
22. C.W. Vol. 22, p. 275-6.
23. Ibid. p. 197.
24. Ibid. p. 226.
25. Ibid. p. 216.
26. C.W. Vol. 23, p. 157-8.
27. C.W. Vol. 22, p. 214.
28. Ibid. p. 265.
29. Ibid. p. 219.
30. Ibid. p. 205.
31. Ibid. p. 303.
32. Ibid. p. 233.
33. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 106.
34. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 426-7.
35. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 470
36. C.W. Vol. 22, p. 254.
37. Which it inevitably must, see: Ibid. p. 241.
38. Ibid. 275-6.
39. Ibid. p. 295.
40. Ibid. p. 241.
41. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 240.
42. Ibid. p. 310.
43. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 358
44. Ibid. p. 359.
45. C.W. Vol. 22, p. 259.
46. A state which in theory at least begins to wither away immediately to make way for full communism.
47. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 194-5.
48. Ibid. p. 278.
49. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 357.
50. C.W. Vol. 26, p. 108.
51. C.W. Vol. 24, p. 414.
52. C.W. Vol. 25, p. 364.
53. C.W. Vol. 27, p. 335-6.
54. Ibid. p. 335.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid. p. 293.
57. Ibid. p. 294.

FOOTNOTES - Ch. 4 con.

58. Ibid. p. 340.
59. Ibid. p. 339.
60. Ibid. p. 270.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid. p. 466.
63. Ibid. p. 517. M. Brinton, op. cit., goes into this question in much more detail.
64. Ibid. p. 346.
65. See I. Mett, The Kronstadt Commune, available from Solidarity (London).
66. See A. Kollontai, The Workers' Opposition, available from Solidarity (London).
67. C.W. Vol. 33, p. 72.

CONCLUSION

1. Forgetting that, as we saw earlier, Lenin believed world revolution to be an inevitability in the then near future so the failure of that revolution to occur, at the very least, calls his theories into question.
2. As well as for a number of other reasons among which we must include the lack of any real awareness amongst the Bolsheviks of the importance of the women's movement.
3. C.W. Vol. 27, p. 491.

POSTFACE

While Lenin is certainly dead, not only does his physical presence linger on (as superstitious peasants cross themselves while filing past his floodlit, mumified corpse in Red Square) but his ideas and the by-products of his actions permeate the USSR today. There, he is venerated alongside Marx, and accorded the kind of adulation Christ receives in other countries. The Russian political structure and the ideology used to bolster it are directly related to his work.

There is another reason why we cannot ignore the USSR - Lenin's creation. Its leaders believe, and it is widely accepted throughout the rest of the world, that it is a socialist country. Not only do many 'leftists' see the USSR as 'the first workers' state' (while arguing themselves hoarse as to whether it is 'degenerated', 'deformed' or whatever) but many more - perhaps most - 'ordinary people' believe it is socialist or communist.

While the same 'ordinary people' are horrified by the persecution of dissidents, the lack of freedom of opinion, and the overwhelming power of the state bureaucracy in the USSR, many leftists (self-proclaimed socialists) either maintain an embarassed silence on such issues, or else accept that something is wrong, while declaring their willingness to fight to defend the 'workers' state' should it be attacked by the West.

For us, as socialists, the USSR must be studied. Its shortcomings must be identified and exposed. As libertarians we believe that any repression of workers in the USSR should make us ask questions about the real living content of this 'socialism' - as distinct from the theories with which it seeks to justify itself. And, since Lenin was undoubtedly both man of action and theorist, and did most to shape the USSR in his own self-image and in the image of his beliefs, we must try to understand him as well.

To do this leads immediately to two other issues: Marx (and Marxism), and the prospects for socialism today. The main aim of this pamphlet is to examine certain aspects of Lenin's thinking in the light of several of his 'key' pamphlets. Conclusions are drawn in the process about Lenin's concept of socialism, and about what happened in the USSR. These have important bearings on the issues of Marx and the prospects for socialism. In fact, we hope that our pamphlet will contribute more to the discussion of the fundamental nature of socialism than any of the recent 're-examinations' of Lenin and of the Bolsheviks - anxious as most of these are to salvage Lenin as a 'hero of socialism'.

Too many current 'assessments' of Lenin stress either that he was 'defeated by events' (particularly by the 'decimation' of the working class, and by his own illness) or that he had no socialist ideals but was simply an authoritarian, whose only intention was to create a ruthless dictatorship. Andy's position differs from both of these. He argues that even had circumstances been better

(the working class stronger, the Civil War and intervention less damaging), and that even had Lenin lived longer, the kind of society that emerged would not have been fundamentally different from the USSR of today. On the other hand, it is not simply the authoritarian aspects of Lenin's character and thinking which 'created a prison for the workers instead of the proposed paradise'. His beliefs and convictions, translated into action, moulded the Bolshevik Party. And the Party, almost inevitably, was to be the midwife of a society in its own image.

In fact, Andy argues, Lenin's views were sometimes more libertarian than he is given credit for. (This is a view not all in Solidarity would share, and the Postface will later give a different emphasis). Even if we believe that Lenin wanted mass participation in a form of planning and decision-making, it can be argued that had this happened (whatever the reasons why it didn't), the USSR would still not be on the way to socialism, because the kind of decisions workers were being asked (allowed?) to make, the 'model' of 'socialism' being aimed at fell short of what was needed for a radical break from capitalism. In other words - and this is crucial - the fundamental features of capitalism were retained by Lenin and still exist in the USSR: exploitation through wage labour, and rule by a bureaucratic class through a powerful state apparatus. All the repression and inequalities we see so clearly in the USSR today stem from these facts. If we accept this it should come as no surprise to learn that there are serious problems of labour turnover and absenteeism in Soviet industry - leading to the formulation of harsh 'anti-parasite' laws; or that problems which are usually seen as spin-offs from capitalist competition (such as pollution) are rife. To us this too is crucial since there is a widespread misconception which equates state control, nationalisation and central planning with socialism. Marx and Engels repeatedly recommend these measures, and many 'communists' see them as part of a transitional stage, as a means to an end. To us, the danger of the means becoming the end is vividly illustrated by the impact of Bolshevik ideas on developments in Russia after 1917 (see the Solidarity pamphlet 'From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy').

A typical statement by Lenin concerning the Bolshevik 'programme' proclaims 'the proletariat must first overthrow the bourgeoisie and win for itself state power, and then use that state power, that is the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an instrument of its class for the purpose of winning the sympathy of the majority of the working people'. Only then, Lenin argues in State and Revolution, will state power no longer be necessary.

Several points clearly stand out from this kind of statement: a). the elitist distinction drawn by Lenin between the 'proletariat' and the 'majority of the workers'.(Only Lenin and the Bolsheviks knew which political tendency 'truly' represented 'the proletariat'); b). the way the Bolsheviks justified their refusal to recognise the anti-Bolshevik and therefore 'anti-proletarian' verdict of the masses in the elections to the Constituent Assembly - which they promptly disbanded, calling for power to the (then Bolshevik-dominated) Soviets. T. Cliff, incidentally shares the Bolshevik's arrogance when he writes of this episode 'The Bolsheviks had to decide whether elections to the Constituent Assembly should be allowed'.; c). the beginning of a process, where taking state power in the name of the proletariat (who would then 'win over' the majority of

working people) paves the way for exercising power over the proletariat. (What regime in history, having taken power, has ever proceeded to hand it back to the people?).

It should therefore come as no surprise that within months of the October Revolution, and before the Civil War took hold (in May 1918) Lenin was arguing that the USSR needed 'state capitalism'. 'We, the party of the proletariat, have no other way of acquiring the ability to organise large-scale production on trust lines, as trusts are organised, except by acquiring it from first-class capitalist experts'. (See Lenin's Collected Works Vol. 27, p350).

By April 1918 Lenin was arguing 'We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice ... we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system ... the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will (Lenin's emphasis) of the leaders of the labour process' etc. etc. The present pamphlet examines this view in detail.

This'step back' to state capitalism ('the state management of private capitalism' in Cliff's definition) is blamed by Cliff on the collapse of industry immediately after the Revolution. Solidarity has documented in great detail the arguments that raged at the time in the USSR over 'workers' control' - (see 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control') demonstrating that the Bolsheviks were opposed all along to any 'self-management' by factories etc. While not belittling the practical problems faced by the USSR in 1917-18, we would argue that the more important factors in the growth of state power (at the expense of workers' power) were: a). Lenin's limited view of socialism as 'nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people'; b). the Bolsheviks' obsession that they alone understood the social and political conditions, and that they alone represented the workers. Note for example the arrogance of the view (C.W. Vol 29, p 559)^, 'The dictatorship of the working class is being implemented by the Bolshevik Party, the party which as far back as 1905 and even earlier merged with the entire revolutionary proletariat.'

These attitudes, and the hostile actions of the Bolsheviks (immediately after they had seized power) against anarchists and other socialist opponents, cannot be blamed on specific difficulties or 'circumstances' ... A revolution is not a tea party! Chaotic conditions were to be expected. Leninist ideology (forged of course in the extreme conditions of Tsarist repression but deemed profoundly relevant by Bolshevik parties even in advanced capitalist countries) deliberately created a gap between 'leaders'and 'led', between the Party and the people, between Commissars and workers. This inevitably started a vicious downward spiral: aloof treatment of workers led to suspicion and hostility. This in turn led to more authoritarian decrees, which led to open rebellion. Meanwhile in an attempt to control the situation, a highly centralised and repressive state apparatus was being built up.

These tendencies were detected early on, by those sharp enough and brave enough to speak out. Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg reacted strongly to the publication of 'What is to be Done?'. Trotsky, in 'Our Political Tasks' wrote: 'for the 'social democratic jacobins', for the fearless representatives of the system of

organisational substitutionalism, the immense social and political task, the preparation of the class for the government of the country, is supplanted by an organisational technical task, the preparation of the apparatus of power.' Rosa Luxemburg wrote: 'It is a mistake to believe that it is possible to substitute 'provisionally' the absolute power of a Central Committee (acting somehow by 'tacit delegation') for the yet unrealisable rule of the majority of conscious workers.' Shortly before her death, in her analysis of the Russian Revolution she was to write: 'Freedom for the supporters of the government only, freedom for the members of one party only, is no freedom at all. Freedom is always for the man who thinks differently.' (Trotsky's own behaviour later, and Rosa's iron grip on Polish Social Democracy need not detract us from the perceptiveness of their early insights).

Despite the 'lebertarian' ring of State and Revolution - written on the eve of the October events - it is worth stressing that once the bolsheviks were in power they immediately clamped down on non-Bolshevik revolutionaries and socialists.

As early as November 10, 1917 the Bolsheviks issued a decree curtailing the freedom of the press. Among the journals suppressed were the Left Menshevik Rabochaya Gazeta and the S.R. Dyelo Naroda, journals as reflective of socialist opinion as those of the Bolsheviks themselves. Another victim of Bolshevik censorship was Novaya Zhizn, published by Lenin's former colleague Maxim Gorki. In the issue for November 21, 1917 Gorki had written: 'Lenin is not an all-powerful magician, but a deliberate juggler, who has no feeling for the lives or the honour of the proletariat.'

Lenin had already created a secret police - the Extraordinary Commission for the Suppression of Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka). This was headed by a Polish landowner's son Feliks Dzerzhinsky. The Cheka was given carte blanche, including the power of summary executions, to deal with 'counter-revolutionaries' i.e. with anyone who opposed the Bolsheviks. It set about its work with a will. Among the earliest victims of the Cheka were the Russian anarchists who, in the spring of 1918 had been forming their own defence groups, the Black Guards. On April 12, 1918 the Cheka raided 26 anarchist centres in Moscow, killing or wounding 40 anarchists and taking 500 prisoners! Stated the Petrograd anarchist paper Burevestnik: 'The Bolsheviks have lost their senses. They have betrayed the proletariat and attacked the anarchists. They have joined the Black-Hundred generals and the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.' We disagree with the Petrograd anarchists that these actions were a product of 'loss of senses' by the Bolsheviks. On the contrary, they were perfectly consistent with the Bolshevik way of thinking.

Again, Lenin's dutiful followers (e.g. T. Cliff) maintain that circumstances - or 'fate' even! - prevented Lenin from being as tolerant as he would have wished. The Constituent Assembly, we are told, was in danger of becoming a 'bandwagon' that all sorts of 'reactionaries' would jump onto. To avoid this danger the obvious thing to do was to close it down. This despite the participation in the voting of over 40 million people: of whom around 17 million voted for the SRs, against 10 million for the Bolsheviks. We would argue that Lenin may have thought he was libertarian at heart; he may even have sounded libertarian

(at times!); but both his psychology and his philosophy were such that in practice he could not allow anyone but himself and his Party to 'lead the way'. When he did encourage 'the masses' to make decisions, these would always be within a wider structure which he controlled.

Evidence of Lenin's deep-rooted elitism is to be clearly seen in the very language he used, and the way he argued. His writing is shot through with arrogance, and with hierarchical notions and turns of phrase. Open a work by Lenin at random, and these are the sort of expressions you will find: 'we must not degrade social-democratic politics to the level of ...', 'primitve methods', 'an organisation led by the real political leaders', 'pitiful idealist nonsense', 'sheer ignorance', 'how can people having a sound mind and a good memory assert that' etc, etc. All this is surely only the verbal manifestation of how he saw and treated other people.

Another typical attitude is to see anyone who disagrees with him as not simply mistaken, but as having gone over to the opposition, as 'bourgeois'. This 'black and white' approach was of course to be emulated by Stalin, Mao, Trotsky and countless camp-followers. Millions of 'class-traitors' have been disgraced, or - more conveniently - eliminated, as a result of this kind of thinking. What effect can it possibly have on a communist leader to know that his/her actual historical existence will later be denied if he/she takes the 'wrong path'? Even today, Trotsky and many of the old Bolsheviks are not acknowledged in the USSR as having played any real part in the Revolution.

It will be seen from all this that 'particular circumstances' and the 'twists of fate' only exacerbated and intensified a repressive process which was already taking place. The real roots of these developments were in Lenin's philosophy - and in his psychological make-up.

At this point the cry is sure to go up: 'But Lenin was a Marxist, and Marxism is a philosophy of liberation!' The philosohpy can't be blamed for repression and persecution! Putting aside the view that Lenin combined Marxism with a 'voluntarism derived from Russian revolutionary traditions (since this is adequately dealt with in Rolf Theen's book 'Lenin') there are several aspects of Lenin's treatment of Marxism which we would see as responsible for the events in 1917 and after.

Lenin was never very choosy in his selection of the means to achieve a particular end - he would rationalise his actions in the name of the 'dialectic'. For example, he would talk of using state to abolish the state. T. Cliff obliges us with an excellent statement of this ('Lenin' Vol 3 p. 110-111): 'Lenin knew, like Marx and Engels before him, that the means cannot perfectly prefigure the end, that there must be a contradiction between means and ends, between the dictatorship of the proletariat and fully fledged socialism, or communism... However, with all the diversion of means from ends, unless there is a central core connecting them, the means will not lead to the supposed end.' This sounds a 'Marxist' way of thinking, and I'll leave it to Marxists to argue whether it is or not! The problem for us is how do we identify which part of the means is in contradiction with the end? And which part will prove to be the 'central core' that we'll end up with? As far as Lenin goes, this 'dialectic' enabled him

to do the opposite of what people wanted, but to convince them that it would lead to what they did want. This is no more than Orwell's 'doublethink' - a manipulative trick used time and time again by skillful politicians.

Then there is the view of socialism as a 'book-keeping and accounting' exercise, the stress on 'productivity and growth'. This, too, can be traced to Marx - who after all was a product of his times. But again the problem is: what were the practical consequences of this view? And the answer: workers were used, treated as means to ends outside of themselves (building up the national economy, shoring up a rotten parasitic bureaucracy) just as under capitalism.

We've mentioned Lenin's post-revolutionary enthusiasm for one-man management, Taylorism and 'labour discipline', and his determination to subordinate factory committees and unions to the 'party that represented the total, historical interests of the proletariat' (Cliff). It is amusing to see Cliff's balancing act as he describes the Party's domination of the unions, but argues 'the trade unions must be able to defend the living standards of the workers ... They should be both independent of the state and symbiotic with it' (Lenin, Vol. 3, p.122-3). The neglected side of the coin of course was the reaction of the workers themselves.

In March 1918, delegates from a number of factories (including the famous Putilov plant which had been in the vanguard in October) met to discuss the situation. The document they produced said: 'The factory committees ... have become obedient tools of the Soviet government. The trade unions have lost their autonomy and independence and no longer stage campaigns in defence of workers' rights. The Soviets ... seem afraid of the workers; they are not allowing new elections, they have thrown up a wall of armour around themselves and turned into mere government organisations which no longer express the opinions of the working masses'. Delegates protested against the muzzling of the press and the fact that their demands for the re-election of factory committees had been met with force. Many called for the creation of a non-Party workers' organisation.

In the summer of 1918 strikes broke out in Petrograd, Rovno, Tula, Minsk, Smolensk and Saratov. In the countryside, peasants resisted the forcible requisitioning of grain. The Bolsheviks replied with the machine guns of the Cheka. On August 30th 1918, Fanya Kaplan attempted to assassinate Lenin. The terror of the Bolsheviks had left the workers but one weapon - their own revolutionary violence. When in 1919 a Congress of non-Party workers was convened, the Bolsheviks prevented it being held by arresting all the delegates.

Finally there is yet another more fundamental aspect of Lenin's use (or misuse) of Marxism. This is his 'historical materialism'.

The subtleties of Marxist philosophy are not dwelt on much by left groups today. Sadly, most discussion of this has become utterly remote from most people. And when an attempt is made (eg. by the 'Workers' Revolutionary Party' in their lectures on Trotsky and 'dialectical materialism') the Leninist version is trotted out (forgive the pun!). Most philosophers regard Lenin as not having understood Marx's philosophy, and certainly as having contributed nothing to philosophy himself. This of course doesn't worry the WRP, since in their opinion all professional philosophers are bourgeois anyway!

Anton Pannekoek's book 'Lenin as Philosopher' deals with this question in detail. If the working class is to have a philosophy to work with (and we at least think we cannot do without) it is important to 'get it right'. The problem lies in two different interpretations of the notion of 'materialism'. Lenin's approach (as pounded out in 'Materialism and Empirio-Criticism' - great bed-time reading!) is to see materialism as a science of knowledge, a scientific philosophy, confirmed by 'natural science' (i.e. physics, chemistry etc.) and just as reliable as a natural science. We are thus moving towards a more complete and more accurate knowledge of the world - including the social world. The world, or nature, consists of 'matter', which exists independently of our minds. Knowledge is gained through our senses which reflect reality, making 'copies' or 'images' of objects.

The argument that Lenin expounds is that, for the materialist, 'sensation depends on the brain, nerves, retina etc., i.e. on matter organised in a definate way'. Hence 'consciousness without matter does not exist' and so 'The existence of matter does not depend on sensation. Matter is primary'. And 'consciousness and sensation' are therefore 'secondary'.

Lenin contrasts this view with 'idealism' which, he says, claims that objects do not exist without the mind, or that (an 'agnostic' position) 'to recognise the existence of the human mind is to transcend the bounds of experience'.

The 'black and white' approach is used again, and any attempt to explain the nature and relationship of 'mind' and 'matter' or the real world in any other way than the 'materialist' is dismissed as 'idealism - and therefore a tool of bourgeois conservatism, religion'etc. - or else it is 'pitiful nonsense'. 'Apart from these two diametrically opposed methods (viz. materialism and idealism - as he has defined them) ... there can be no third method'. These are 'two irreconcilable fundamental trends in philosophy'.

Apart from distorting his opponents' views, as Pannekoek points out, what Lenin is doing, is to reduce the real world to 'matter'. Mind, concepts, ideas, energy etc. are merely forms of matter. Thinking is a process akin to a mirror (or a camera for Cde. Healy) taking in and reflecting 'objective reality'. Matter is primary, consciousness secondary. Moreover, the future of mankind is somehow 'written in nature'. Contradictions exist in the very stuff of which we are made. These contradictions work themselves out dialectically, etc, etc.

But a different 'materialist' approach can be taken, which doesn't produce such weird results, and which is surely what Marx meant: here the 'material world' embraces our mental activity, our ideas, etc., which are obviously not matter in themselves, but which are capable of 'becoming material force' ('Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' - Marx). The essential contribution Marx made was not to take part in the debate over which is 'most real' (or which is 'primary') matter or mind. For Marx this was a sterile, purely theoretical debate: 'The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question' (Theses on Feuerbach). Again, one has the feeling that Lenin, who quotes this passage himself, didn't understand it. To him it seemed to have meant 'think and act at the same time and you will be alright!'). Marx's meaning was surely that there was a fundamental interrelation

between thinking and acting - a two-way relationship. Ideas are products of social formations, and are in a sense themselves social formations, capable of affecting the world. Thus, people in different social classes tend to hold different views; and they use these views to act on the world in their own class interests.

The beauty of Pannekoek's analysis is that he shows how these two different interpretations of 'materialism' themselves correspond to class positions. The 'middle class' materialist sees not only matter, but 'concepts, natural laws, and forces (e.g. electricity, gravity) ... as an element of nature itself (our emphasis)', which has been discovered and brought to light by science'. For Lenin, 'ideas' are part of nature, waiting to be discovered or 'proved' by 'science'. For the revolutionary, the proletarian, 'historical materialism' means that 'these (concepts, etc.) are formed out of the stuff of nature (but) primarily ... the creations of the mental labour of man(our emphasis)' or 'products which creative mental activity forms out of the substance of natural phenomena' (Pannekoek, p29).

Lenin's materialism is dubbed 'middle-class' by Pannekoek, who shows that it corresponds most closely to the materialism developed by the bourgeoisie in its fight against the church and state in feudal Europe. The need to oppose religious and spiritual explanations of reality led to an emphasis on matter as opposed to spirit. Pannekoek shows how Lenin constantly equates his opponents' views with a religious outlook.

Lenin, too, was participating in a struggle against the religious foundations of feudal Tsarism. In this he saw 'scientific' materialism as the best weapon. But, since natural science was the product of the rising bourgeoisie, a weapon forged for its use (enabling it to defeat superstition and develop technology, industry and 'scientific' economics etc.) would be inadequate for the class which was to go beyond the new (scientific) divisions of labour, the new class divisions of industrial capitlaism. Only a 'social science', argues Pannekoek, could do this. And this social science would have to see reality as a whole, to enable the working class to overcome its alienation - from itself and from nature. Subsuming 'mind' to 'matter' seems to do this, but it has unwanted consequences.

Lenin seems to have half-grasped this need to 'synthesise', to overcome the fragmentation of reality. But this came out in his obsession with 'the truth', and with centralisation, with controlling the 'whole state', with 'the party' (the fact that a 'party' means a 'part' and implies the existence of other 'parts' didn't bother him...). Above all, this attempt to grasp a philosophy to end all human ills ironically produced a 'monolithic' outlook, which was itself to cause many more ills.

For the implied passivity of our minds' 'reflecting' objective reality cannot explain different reflections registered by different people. A social approach would have led to looking at the class origins of ideas. But as Pannekoek points out 'nowhere in his book ('Materialism and Empirio-Criticism') do we find an attempt at or a trace of such an understanding.' Lenin only knew that 'practice' produced 'truth' - provided you could quote Marx to back you up. All this comes dangerously close to saying that if I succeed in defeating others with different ideas, then 'practice' has demonstrated the superiority of my ideas. Machiavelli lives!

Lastly, this 'scientific' materialsim not only gives our psychological need for liberation the backing of apparently incontravertible 'science' it also enables us to dub our opponents 'un-scientific', 'primitive', etc. Couple this with the 'passive' role allocated to minds in the achievement of 'understanding', and we see how easy it was for the Bolsheviks to treat people as objects just as capitalism does - and moreover to justify it.

It is now claimed that Lenin, in his last months, saw the way the USSR was going - in particular the 'bureaucratisation' - and began to fight it. (See M.Lewin: 'Lenin's Last Struggle'). But Lenin's proposals to deal with the phenomenon, as we might expect are purely organisational, and elitist (as Lewin admits). They do not reverse the excessive centralisation, or give more power to workers at the base. Lenin proposed merging the 'most authoritative Party body' - the Central Control Commission - with a state body: the People's Commissariat for Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (RKI). This would, in Lenin's words, 'raise the RKI to an exceptionally high level ... giving it a leadership with Central Committee rights etc.' (Lewin Appendix IX, and pp. 120-1). Incidentally, the People's Commissar in charge of the RKI from 1919 to 1922 was ... Stalin.

Lewin claims that this elitism was 'simply the result of the situation of Soviet power at the beginning of 1923 ... merely an expression of (Lenin's) adaptation to a situation in which the driving force of the regime was an elite.' This, of course, doesn't answer anything. Lenin, it is admitted 'failed to see the danger of the tendencies ... at the power summit.' Once again, the danger is assumed to be Stalin, never Lenin himself. We argue, on the contrary, that Lenin's elitism was thorough and consistent. In our view, the USSR today, where dissidents are declared insane and striking workers shot down (Novocherkassk, Dnieprodzerzhinsk) is a logical and inevitable outcome of Lenin's Bolshevism, once it got the upper hand.

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