

OPEN LETTER TO A LENINIST

You debate with others as to which Leninist faction is the true heir, you - and all the others - assume that only the Leninist road to socialism can succeed, and refuse to contemplate any alternative. You fling round the words "anarchist", "syndicalist", "Councillist" KAPDist or Bordigist [ultra] "Left Communists" as terms of abuse, but show no signs of actually knowing what these currents say. *As a syndicalist one gets used to all sorts of views, which are in fact totally incompatible with anarcho-syndicalism, being attributed to us.*

Your endless debate is confined to the finer points of Leninist history, (the disparaging remarks about anarchists etc., being merely used to punctuate this history), but you fail to notice the most elementary facts of that history.

1. Lenin proposed the Bolshevik form of organisation because of the peculiar nature of Tsarist Russian society; he did not consider it suitable for all countries. He did not - when he first proposed it - say it was a road to Socialism; (and he never subsequently claimed that it achieved Socialism); he proposed it as a way of achieving a capitalist revolution in Russia.
2. The organisation he so proposed concentrated power in the hands of the leadership, the developed comrades whose experience and grasp of theory fitted them for the purpose; and it claimed - initially for the party - but then for the leadership the right to dominate workers, against the latter's subjective judgements. Trotsky, very rightly, then argued that the party leadership would stand in the same position vis a vis the rank and file as the Capitalists did to the worker; that surplus value in terms of both propaganda, organisation and theory, would all be alienated from the rank and file, and that the party would become a repository of dead labour. Regrettably Trotsky later disowned that work.
3. As said, Lenin's aim was to achieve capitalism, he believed that Russia's Capitalists were too craven to take power on their own behalf and so he wished the workers to take power on their own behalf and so he wished the workers to take power in their stead; it would be a workers' power that restricted itself to furthering the development of capitalism. When Trotsky, adopting Parvus theory of "Permanent Revolution", to Russian conditions suggested that the workers' revolution could start within the capitalist one taking over as the revolutionary force as soon as capitalism triumphed. Lenin predicted that such a policy could lead only to bizarre tyranny. Even Trotsky for all that he played a dominant role in the 1905 Petrograd Soviet, did not see the Soviet as the natural basis of workers' power, and did not see the connection between Soviets and Permanent Revolution.

4. However when 1917 came, The February Revolution opening up new opportunities, neither the party nor the masses behaved as Lenin had predicted; in his words "The party masses were 10,00 times more revolutionary than the party leadership, and the non-party masses 10,00 times more revolutionary than the party masses".

In other words the revolutionary leadership was a break on the spontaneity of the revolutionary rank and file, and the revolutionary rank and file a break on that of the ordinary workers and peasants.

So much so that the Bolshevist headquarters were picketed by non-party Socialists and ordinary workers, demanding that the party pursue a more revolutionary policy.

5. From April until October Lenin turned his former theories both of what sort of power the party wished to achieve and of party organisation on their head.

He berated the Party's "Internal Leadership" for the timidity, for their prolonged co-operation with capitalist and reformist parties.

He encouraged the party masses to disobey the edicts of their leaders, and, contrary to all party rules, he appealed directly to non-party socialists and workers.

It is hardly surprising that the Internal Leadership expelled him, he had flouted the rules he, himself, had laid down.

"Treason doth never prosper, for an it prosper, none dare call it treason", - certainly as the revolution won, the record has it only that the internal leadership tried to expel Lenin; the fact is that it went through all stages necessary under the party rules to expel Lenin and those party members, (undoubtedly a minority), who obeyed the party rules and leadership, regarded Lenin as expelled.

The Revolution was made by the Soviets, Soviets influenced by revolutionaries outside the Bolshevik Party and by dissident Bolsheviks (of whom by then Trotsky was one), who obeyed Lenin rather than the official Internal Leadership, it was denounced - just before it happened - by that leadership.

6. "All Power to the Soviets" the slogan and strategy that mobilised the masses and won the revolution was first advanced by Anarchists & Maksimalists; was taken up by the Mezhraiontii, by the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and only then by Lenin and his followers amongst the Bolshevik rank and file.

Thus the triumph of the October revolution does not prove the case for a Bolshevik party, it proves exactly the opposite, when it comes to the crunch a party on Bolshevik lines, (even such a party as created by Lenin himself) handicaps the revolution. The revolution can only win if Leninists abandon Leninism!

7. Lenin however, after the triumph of the Soviet Revolution, reverted to his former theories, the Revolution must be confined to being a Capitalist one.

To ensure that it remained such he imposed the dictatorship of the party over that of the Soviets. He instituted one-man management of industry taking industrial power away from the Soviets. Inevitably that meant political power was also lost.

Where the workers had taken over full ownership and control - the railways, mines and oil industry - Lenin used military force to take these away from the workers;

The military were sent to suppress Soviets in the most militant parts of Petrograd and Moscow. Rival Soviet parties were suppressed, as were factions within the Bolshevik Party, (factions which had been allowed in the revolutionary struggle against Tsarism, - *and, after all, Lenin, at a charitable construction, had led such a faction from June until October of 1917.*

This culminated in attacks on all striking workers, on all peasant Lefts, the Left Essars, the "Greens", the Makhnovists and on Kronstadt (and other such discontent amongst the revolutionary armed forces).

8. Both Trotsky's and Lenin's worst fears were implemented:

As Trotsky had said the power of the party would be substituted for that of the workers, the power of the leading cadres for that of the party, the power of the central Committee for that of the cadres the power of one man for that of the Central Committee.

As Lenin had said it created a bizarre tyranny.

No doubt the fullest expression of that evil didn't come until the time of Stalin, though Trotsky oft-repeated excuse that "a river of blood separates the party of Lenin from that of Stalin" won't wash. A similar river of blood separated the Soviets of 1917 from those of 1923.

9. By the time Lenin died, objectively, the counter-revolution was complete, even if, subjectively, the Bolshevik government remained Socialist.

Whereas in 1921/2 Lenin had defined Russia as being a workers' dominated State Capitalism, in transition to socialism, but with severe bureaucratic deformations, by his death the last vestiges of workers' domination had ended and there was no feasible prospect of a transition to Socialism.

It was, by then, was - at the most charitable assessment - a Capitalist society, tout court.

After all by taking power from the Soviets, by destroying the Vyborg Quarter's Soviet and the revolutionary groups within it, ditto in Moscow, Makhno's army, the Kronstad Soviet; Lenin had forcibly disarmed the working class.

That done it was a simple matter for Stalin to purge the party of all those who retained a belief in attacking Socialism, (a belief which was by then, pure nostalgia), of course he did this at the same time that he introduced a massive programme of nationalisation).

As Marx said - "If nationalisation equalled Socialism, Bismark would be a Socialist, and a very radical one at that, (he could have substituted William the Conqueror or Henry VIII for Bismark).

10. Lenin, having originally proposed the Bolshevik form of organisation purely because of the peculiar nature of Tsarism, after 1917, insisted that it was the only organisational form that had actually led to revolution and thenceforward promoted it as having universal application.

That was not logical, since he, himself, as we have seen, insisted that Russia had not had a socialist revolution, but had had a Capitalist one.

No doubt the reason Lenin decided that though, on the face of it, it should have followed that only in pre-capitalist societies was the Bolshevik form relevant; virtually all (if not all) capitalist powers were Imperialist, Bolshevism was seen as appropriate to the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies, and so by application to the Imperial systems (including the metropolitan countries).

That was to a large extent a rationalisation, Lenin faced with the intervention of the Imperialist powers, needed allies quickly, in order to defend Russia; and though before the Revolution, and in its early days, he had said that it would be necessary to sacrifice the Revolution in Russia in order to promote it in the West, he became in the heat of the moment ready to destroy the Socialist movements in the West, in order to create Communist parties; (in talking of destruction I am not referring to the reformist parties but to revolutionaries, see for instance Walter Kendall's "The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900 to 1921", *Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969*).

11. Wherever Stalinism has triumphed outside Russia it has been through the victory of peasant armies, never through workers' risings, (in many cases there were workers' risings in some towns, but in none of these were the representatives of the workers incorporated in the new regime).

Though Communists participated in the leadership of the peasant armies, in all cases it was as part of a Popular Front with bourgeois parties and in most the struggle was contrary to the advice or orders received from the international leadership.

So there is no evidence, beyond the Russian case, that Bolshevik organisation promotes revolution and in that case

- (a) It only won because Lenin - at the crucial moment - abandoned Bolshevism
- (b) The Revolution it promoted was a capitalist one.

12. It follows that there is no evidence that Leninism is a viable strategy and organisation to attain Socialism; (no, agreed, there's none that any other form will work - but, then, that's partly because the early Bolsheviks in the West, deliberately set out to destroy their rivals).

Also, since Capitalism in Russia, has developed more freely since 1992, it would seem that Bolshevism isn't even a particularly good way of achieving Capitalism.

Fraternally,

Laurens Otter