

V.I. LENIN

50p

and the October Revolution. By Andrew Hornung and
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LENIN

"The Russian revolutionary movement will be victorious as a movement of workers. There is and can be no alternative."

What astonishment must have registered in that vast, backward prison block of progress that was 19th century Russia, at these words of George Plekhanov spoken in 1889. For Russia in those days was a country with a tiny working class numbering about 1 million, while there were over one hundred million peasants. It was this vast peasant mass that had been looked to as the revolutionary class by the then dominant revolutionary organisation, Narodnaya Volya (Narodniks).

Lenin was then only 19. He had already read Marx's Capital and begun to ground himself seriously in its scientific method. Born in the provincial town of Simbirsk, into the family of a schools administrator, Lenin was no stranger to revolutionary ideas other than Marxism. His brother Alexander had been hanged in 1887 for planning the assassination of the Tsar. He had been a member of the Narodnik organisation.

But if the execution of his brother sharpened Lenin's sense of injustice, it was not the views or the methods of the Narodniks that influenced him, but those of Marx, Engels and Plekhanov. The first things Lenin wrote were directed at countering Narodnaya Volya's faith in the peasantry with Marxism's scientific theory of the central historical role of the working class. Whereas the

Narodniks saw the peasantry -- "the People" -- as a single mass, Lenin used detailed studies to show the differentiation within these masses, how out of 'the People' was crystallising the proletariat, the modern working class.

system

He also criticised the tactics of the Narodniks, who sent out heroic and isolated revolutionaries with guns and bombs to act in the name of 'the People' and assassinate the hated representatives of Tsarist tyranny. What he had to say in the course of fighting these terrorist tactics is particularly instructive for us today. "We have never rejected terrorism on principle, nor can we do so. ... The point is however, terror is advocated (by the Narodniks) not as one of the operations the army in the field must carry out in close connection and in complete harmony with the whole system of fighting, but as an individual attack, completely separated from any army whatsoever. In view of the absence of a central revolutionary organisation, terror cannot be anything but that."

This was the period when the new Russian working class, recently driven into the factories from the countryside, revolted against their conditions and against Tsarist tyranny, with wave upon wave of mass, illegal strikes. Even the savage Tsarist repression failed

to quell the movement of the workers, which was spontaneous and lacking in any stable organisation. Trade unions were of course illegal.

There were also groups of 'intellectuals' who had imported the ideas of Marxism into Russia from Western Europe. These turned eagerly to the task of aiding the proletarian movement and to the task of fusing a revolutionary Marxist consciousness with the actual movement of the working class. In turning towards these tasks, Lenin emerged in the 1890s as one of the foremost of the younger generation of the Russian Marxists.

illegal

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

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

After a period in jail Lenin was sent into exile in Eastern

Siberia. Here he was joined by his comrade Nadezhda Krupskaya. They were married in 1896.

Neither jail nor exile meant silence or inactivity. This was a period of intense political study, the monument to which is the massive work, 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia'.

Iskra

But he was cut off from the working class, and unable to carry out the urgent task of building a working class revolutionary organisation. From the time of his release in 1900 he concentrated his entire energy on this.

His first idea was to break with the isolated 'Circle work', in which scattered groups of Marxist propagandists existed more or less independently of each other throughout Russia. In order to do this a paper, an all Russian paper, needed to be founded, which would act as an organiser and centraliser for the whole Social Democratic Movement (Marxism was called Social Democracy until 1914). This centralism was to prefigure the unification and ideological independence of the working class.

Again he travelled abroad, realising that the paper would have to be produced outside Russia owing to the close police supervision there of their every move. At the end of 1900 this work bore its first fruit with the appearance of 'Iskra' (The Spark), and then in the January of the following year a journal, 'Zarya' (Dawn) was produced.

Now he set about that work that was to lead to a breakthrough in Marxist thinking and in its practical effects was to become one of his most important and most characteristic contributions to

Marxism as a revolutionary force: the organisation of the Russia workers' revolutionary drive into a fighting party. Although an attempt to found a party had been made in 1898 while he was in exile, it had collapsed almost immediately when nearly all the delegates to the founding conference were arrested soon after it.

party

The period from 1894 to the first Congress of the Party in 1898 had been, in Lenin's own words, one in which Social Democracy appeared "as a social movement, as a rising of the masses of the people and as a political party". Even the Zubatov 'unions' — so called because they were 'unions' organised by the Police Chief Zubatov — strikes, even general strikes, in large cities, so great was the spontaneous will to struggle of the working class.

But if they appeared now as 'a political party', it was a political party in the old sense: in the sense of a unified group having common characteristics and acting more or less together. Lenin understood, however, that what was wanted was a 'party of a new type': something that broke out of the scattered, restricted work of the Marxist educational and leaflet distributing circles and became a factor on the national political scene, enabling the working class in turn to unite organisationally and ideologically.

This 'party of a new type' had to combine the features of an organisationally secure unit capable of escaping detection by the secret police and of a politically trained and unified group capable of directing struggles surely and singlemindedly.

The period of the rise of working class struggle in the nineties was, however, also the period of the rise of the theory of 'economism', the view that economic, trade union struggles of workers were in themselves an adequate basis for the political struggle of the working class, leaving the sphere of the political struggle to the domination of the bourgeoisie. The inevitable separation between 'economic struggle' and 'political struggle' that this entailed made economism the at first unwitting and later conscious ally of the revisionism that had just reared its head in Germany. The revisionists wanted to transform Social Democracy from a movement to overthrow capitalism into one aiming to achieve mere reforms.

link

In the famous book *What Is to Be Done*, Lenin outlined the theory of the organisation and role of the party. Published in 1902, this book developed ideas already set out in 'Where to Begin' (1901) and 'Letter to a Comrade in St. Petersburg'.

The book showed how a central revolutionary organisation based on a scientific programme could both link together the fragmented struggles of the working class and also link the struggles of that class on a whole series of fronts and around a great variety of objectives. It would do this by forging out of these disparate struggles an organisational and ideological unity which would be a crystal of the true character of the proletariat.

This struggle to protect the purity of the proletarian character of the revolutionary movement was concentrated within the revolutionary party. But it had a clear relationship

to the movement outside. "The stronger our Party organisations are consisting of real Social Democrats, and the less wavering and instability there is within the Party, the broader, the more varied, the richer and more fertile will be the influence of the Party on the elements of the working class masses surrounding it and guided by it." In backward, semi Asiatic Russia, however, where the peasantry, the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie of both the town and the countryside, as well as the working class, were oppressed classes, there was a great danger that the working class movement would fall under the domination of these far more numerous classes.

The struggle against false ideas, developing in and around the workers' movement, had to be coupled with an equally determined struggle against the external class influences.

theory

With the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903, came an even greater sharpening of differences within the RSDLP. Ranged against Lenin were all those who understood a 'party' to be, as in the old sense of the word, simply the same side. Such a conception was entirely inadequate to the founding of a 'party' whose practice and programme was based on an underlying scientific theory, whose members would have to be steeled, dedicated and politically trained. Lenin had to fight against many of his one time collaborators to establish his ideas.

He won, but his victory was shortlived: though his Bolshevik (majority) faction triumphed over the Mensheviks (minority) at the

Congress, the defection of Plekhanov soon afterwards to Menshevism put Lenin in the minority. He resigned from the Editorial Board of *Iskra*.

Thus began a long and bitter struggle in which he fought not only his close collaborators of the previous period such as Martov and Potresov, but also his teacher Plekhanov. He began to build up a faction that was finally to emerge in 1912 as the Bolshevik Party. The split in 1903, is referred to in vulgar Stalinist legend as already exhibiting in fully developed form all the distinguishing traits of both Bolshevism and Menshevism, traits which led the two factions to line up on different sides of the class barricades in the revolution of 1917. In reality it was no more than the prefigurement. A whole series of experiences, struggles, reunifications, new splits and the interchange of personnel was necessary before the final crystallisation of the two tendencies.

storm

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

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

On January 22nd 1905 thousands of workers, dressed in their Sunday best and carrying religious ikons, marched to the Tsar's Winter

Palace in St. Petersburg to present a petition to ask for "amnesty, civil liberties, higher wages, the gradual granting of land to the peasantry and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly." Led by the priest Gapon these "unfortunate reviled slaves" as they called themselves, proceeded peacefully towards the man they saw as their protector, the Tsar. Suddenly the Cossacks were unleashed against them. Over 1,000 were slaughtered and over 2,000 injured.

Strikes immediately spread throughout Russia, drawing in the soldiers, the sailors and the peasantry. Throughout 1905 mass revolutionary struggles engulfed Russia.

Soviet

Although the liberal bourgeoisie seemed to have gained control of the movement, strikes broke out once again towards the end of 1905, and it was this massive upheaval that created the first Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

The soviets were councils set up by the workers to draw the threads of the different struggles together and unify them, to link the factory organisations, to combine the employed and the unemployed and in short to be the 'parliament' of the working class. Not, however, one resting on a sham democracy with elections every five years, but on a real democracy knowing the right of the workers to recall the deputies to the Soviet and at will elect new ones. Quickly the Soviet in St. Petersburg became (with Leon Trotsky as its chairman) the focus of the strength and power of the working class, and an alternative authority to the Tsarist state. It was to the

Soviet that the working class looked for leadership and organisation. Into it was channelled the energy and aspirations of the class.

The Russian workers had improvised the form of democratic self organisation which the working class needs as it begins to rouse itself and challenge the ruling class's power in society. Soviets

reappeared in the 1917 October Revolution. After World War I soviets sprang into existence in East Europe and Germany. In 1956 the great working class uprising in Budapest against Stalinism could find no better form of self organisation in a struggle for power than the workers' council. This universality proves that the soviet, invented in 1905, was not merely a Russian or an ephemeral form of proletarian organisation, but the necessary form for overcoming the atomisation of the proletariat and simultaneously the best organisational network for democratic working class rule in society.

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

Once again, Lenin's unshakeable sense of the concrete led him to translate what he saw into an answer to the question 'what is to be done'. And once again the answer was in terms of party organisation.

work

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

The party, Lenin realised, must not be like a priest reciting sacred and unchanging texts, it must always be the organised richness of the experience of the working class given sense and direction through the science of Marxism.

By 1906, especially after the defeat of the Moscow insurrection in December 1905, the storm was dying down. Soon Tsarism was victorious and most of the revolutionary leaders were once again forced into exile, Lenin himself going to live in Paris.

Everywhere there was "demoralisation, split, discord, renegacy" with "mysticism serving as a cloak for counter revolution". It was now, in this

period of black reaction with the revolutionaries increasingly isolated, that the lessons of the 1905 Revolution were drawn and the political tendencies in the working class movement were hammered into their final shape.

And now too the Bolshevik Party, which was to lead the proletariat to victory within a decade of the decisive defeat of 1907, was forged.

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

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

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

ultra-left

The Bolshevik ultra lefts were known as the 'otzovists' (recallists),

and led by Bogdanov, Alexinski and Lunacharski. The Social Democrats had successfully boycotted the undemocratic Tsarist Duma (parliament) during the revolution, when mass struggle provided its own alternative. Now, in retreat, it became necessary to change tactics, to learn to utilise even a reactionary undemocratic Tsarist parliament for socialist propaganda. Lenin, in alliance at first with the Menshevik section of the party, advocated such use of the Duma. Eventually he overcame the at first almost unanimous Bolshevik resistance; the continued revolutionary depression made the need for change increasingly obvious. Except to the hard core 'otzovists'. Their ultra leftism, threatening to reduce the revolutionary party to self isolation and unrealism, was linked with a retreat into mysticism. They tried to develop socialism as a sort of religion! Eventually they were expelled from the Bolshevik faction.

legal

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

Lenin wanted to make the fullest use of all possibilities for legal work, such as in the Duma and the unions, but never to limit either the activity or the propaganda of the workers' party to what Tsarism permitted. That would have been to surrender the ideological, political and organisational independence of the working class.

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

"The proletariat is revolutionary only insofar as it is conscious of and gives effect to (the) idea of the hegemony of the proletariat. ... To preach to the workers that what they need is 'no hegemony but a class party (the slogan of Livitski, a liquidationist) means to betray the cause of the proletariat to the liberals; it means preaching that Social-Democratic labour policy should be replaced by a liberal labour policy."

Pravda

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

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

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

nations

Lenin insisted that the road to international working class unity lay through the fullest rights of nations to a separate existence.

will. National oppression poisoned relations of workers in the oppressed and oppressor nations. It was imperative that the revolutionary party of the oppressor nation accept and fight for the national rights of the oppressed nations.

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

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

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

Lenin had participated in the congresses of the international socialist movement, though he had concentrated heavily on Russian affairs. Now, in 1914, when the World War broke out, the whole international socialist movement splintered into nationalist sections. Instead of the international brotherhood of the working class against war to which the International had repeatedly pledged itself, the outbreak of war produced fratricidal slaughter. The same artillery fire that lit up the corpse littered battlefields now highlighted the real situation within

the international labour movement, which had become rotten with reformism and careerism. Social Democrats became "social chauvinists" overnight, supporting their national governments in the war. Jules Guesde, a leader of the French socialists, even became Minister of War.

Kautsky

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

For Lenin the most crushing and unexpected blow was the fate of German Social Democracy, which also supported the imperialist war. This party, that represented over 4 million voters, went over massively to chauvinism. What shocked Lenin was the fact that Karl Kautsky, the revered "Pope of Marxism", refused to echo the words of the revolutionary left, led by Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht: "The enemy is at home! Turn the imperialist war into a civil war". Instead, he began to rationalise for the renegades.

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

the state

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

He exposed how the daily life of the parties had led them gradually

to accomodate and intermesh with the bourgeois state, much as the liquidators had tended to in Russia. He reworked his way through the whole literature of Marxism, relating it to the whole experience of the class struggle. He uncovered and, in a series of famous pamphlets like *The State and Revolution* (1917), proved that the 'orthodox' Marxists like Kautsky had for years falsified, vulgarised and bowdlerised the real teachings of Marxism on the state, the class struggle and the proletarian revolution. Implacably Lenin struggled to expose, understand and eliminate from the labour movement the 'baseness, loathsomeness and vileness of social chauvinism and "Kautskyism"'.

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

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

february

In Russia at the outbreak of war what had been a growing movement of the working class was suddenly stifled. The Bolshevik Deputies in the Duma were arrested for opposing the war. But within a short period the collapse,

the slaughter, the famine of the war revived the movement of opposition of the working class.

On February 22nd a ~~war~~ dispute at the giant Putilov works in Petrograd sparked off a lockout which within the week had generated a mass movement of striking workers supported by mutineering troops and sailors. The slogans demanding higher wages were soon replaced by ones demanding "Bread", "Down with the Autocracy" and "down with the War".

The leadership of the movement was quickly taken over by the leaders of the Left in the old Duma, Kerensky, Chkheidze and Skobelev. The Soviet that had been so important in the revolution of 1905 was reborn. And, as a symbolic portent of the coming situation of dual power, it met in the Tauride Palace (the parliamentary buildings) on the 27th, the day the Tsar dissolved the Duma.

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

Lenin arrived in Russia, in Petrograd itself, in April. He was greeted by Chkheidze, then the Chairman of the Soviet, who warned Lenin about the danger of demerity now that the democratic revolution could be fulfilled. But Lenin had 'not heard' these pompous, yet anxious words. He turned to the people gathered around and announced: "Dear Comrades, soldiers and workers, The pitatical imperialist war is beginning to become a civil war throughout Europe. ... The Russia revolution accomplished by you has prepared the way and opened up a new epoch. Long live the world wide socialist revolution!"

The Bolshevik leaders there at the Finland Station to meet him were shocked at what Lenin had said. Some of them must have

thought he had gone mad — or become a Trotskyist.

Lenin, however, who had the marvellous capacity to combine concrete analysis and realism in every situation with rigid adherence to principle, had seen the possibilities of full proletarian victory. Really, he merely developed previously worked out ideas on the motive forces of the Russian Revolution to their logical conclusion. Both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had believed that the revolution possible in Russia was a bourgeois revolution like that of France in 1789. They differed in that the Mensheviks believed that it would be led by the big bourgeoisie and, concrete as ever in analysis, Lenin insisted that the bourgeoisie were too feeble for this task and therefore the bourgeois revolution would have to be made by the peasantry in alliance with the working class.

Trotsky agreed with the Bolsheviks, but argued that such a workers and peasants alliance, led by the working class, could not stop at completing the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, but would go on to carry through working class socialist measures. To the argument that Russia was not ripe for socialism, was too backward, etc., Trotsky replied that the revolution would not finish even with workers' victory in Russia. It would be the starting point in a linked chain of proletarian revolution which would lead to the workers' conquest of power in the advanced capitalist countries. This was the theory of Permanent Revolution.

inertia

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

The Bolshevik leaders who resisted Lenin were lapsing into a

neo Menshevism because of inertia and uncritical repetition of yesterday's formulae without reference to today's realities. Once again the party had to be shaken up.

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

Trotsky had joined the Martov faction of the RSDLP in 1903. He had broken with the Mensheviks and stood alone between the factions for a number of years. In 1912 he had abortively attempted to resist the definitive rupture of relations within the RSDLP. Fundamentally, he had failed to appreciate the tremendous constructive work that Lenin was accomplishing and had tended, from the vantage point of his theory of Permanent Revolution, to regard both Menshevism and Bolshevism as equally inadequate.

Almost immediately on his return to Russia, Trotsky started to work with the Bolsheviks, finally understanding that without the leadership of the Bolshevik Party his theory of Permanent Revolution was only one of a number of possibilities in the situation. He joined the Bolshevik Party that July.

Soon Lenin and Trotsky had instilled into the Bolshevik Party an understanding of the real possibilities at hand "We don't need a parliamentary republic, we don't need bourgeois democracy, we don't need any government except the Soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies." These Soviets were "an organisation of workers (and) the embryo of workers' government", said Lenin. The need was to raise the slogan of "All Power to the Soviets", although the Bolsheviks still lacked a majority in the soviets.

power

The economic dislocations became worse; the Provisional Government refused to distribute

The peace and war factions had been equally divided. Trotsky ultimately voted with Lenin, giving a majority of one to those favouring immediate peace.

Realism

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

All eyes were now on Germany. The revolution did break out in Europe, beginning towards the end of 1918 a revolutionary wave swept Europe, brushing the monarchies from power in Austria and Germany and putting the right wing Social Democracy in power. Revolutionary workers' governments were established briefly in Hungary and Bavaria. In 1919 and '20, the Italian state virtually collapsed, with the working class seizing the factories. But everywhere the revolution was defeated. Everywhere it was demonstrated negatively that the work Lenin had successfully accomplished, the building of a hard revolutionary party, was irreplaceable if the revolution of the proletariat was to be victorious.

The existence of the Bolshevik party had made revolution possible in Russia, a revolution made in the belief that Russia was the first link in a necessary chain of proletarian revolutions throughout Europe. The lack of similar parties in Europe led to the defeat of the proletarian revolutions that erupted, as the Marxists had expected, in the wake of world war I. This in turn led to the isolation — which by 1921 had become apparent — of the one successful revolution, embattled Russia. And from this isolation came, from the middle of 1918, tremendous difficulties for the Bolsheviks.

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

The difficulties began afterwards. Civil war erupted. In 1918 and afterwards, to the internal enemies in arms against the revolution, were added the armies of intervention sent by no less than 14 states to extinguish the proletarian revolution in Russia. The Soviet State was forced to defend itself and to build up from scratch a new, Red, Army.

This was accomplished under the leadership of Trotsky, Commissar for War, and the workers' state fought a long war in which civil war was inextricably linked with international war.

Internally the main enemy of the Bolsheviks proved to be the SRs, the Social Revolutionaries, a peasant party which had initially formed a coalition government with the Bolsheviks, organised a rebellion. An SR militant, Dora Kaplan, shot Lenin failing to kill him, but injuring him very seriously.

In response the Bolsheviks launched a Red Terror. A special organisation, the 'Cheka', a revolutionary police, was set up to fight counter revolution. No mercy was shown to the enemies of the workers' state. The Bolsheviks, who had begun by abolishing the death penalty, now did not hesitate at summary execution of counter revolutionaries. Steeped in the history of revolutionary struggles, they understood that the proletarian revolution, in these conditions, though it aims at building a society where violence against people will be unthinkable, a socialist society, needed arms and ruthlessness to prevent a counter revolutionary bloodbath.

Cheka

Writers on Stalinism today, especially those who do not have ready access to the real history of the revolution, as for example Solzhenitsyn, confuse the ruthlessness of the revolutionary working class with the counter revolutionary butchery of Stalinism. Thus, in 'The Gulag Archipelago', the list of crimes

the lands of the aristocracy; it refused to discontinue the war; deserters drifted back to their homes in droves, bring to the countryside the radicalism within the army. Both the soil and the seeds were being prepared for the victory of Bolshevism.

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

On their release in September, however, the Government's situation had deteriorated; the prestige and membership of the Bolsheviks grew by leaps and bounds. Trotsky was elected Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in September.

In June Lenin had told the first All Russian Congress of Soviets that the Bolsheviks were prepared to take power. Now in October, the Bolsheviks organised the working class in the taking of power from the Provisional Government on the first morning of the 2nd Congress. Rapid developments at the front and at home had turned June's "ridiculous remark" into the blazing reality of October's victory.

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

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

The Bolsheviks, who had a

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

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

The Bolsheviks were forced to make a retreat, giving massive territorial concessions to the Germans in the forced treaty of Brest Litovsk, signed in February 1918. This was the first of many retreats the Bolsheviks were forced to make in their isolation. The revolution in Europe still had not broken out. The Bolshevik party experienced the sharpest factional division on this question. The majority around Bukharin advocated an immediate revolutionary war. Lenin advocated immediate peace, making the necessary concessions to Germany. Trotsky favoured an attempt to dramatise to the workers of Europe, and especially to those who had been told that the Bolsheviks were German agents, the forced character of the concessions the Bolsheviks were having to make to the Germans, but he recognised, with Lenin, that concessions were unavoidable. Consequently, using the slogan "neither peace nor war", he dragged out the negotiations at Brest Litovsk as long as possible until the Germans launched a new onslaught on the workers' state. Lenin, who had been in a small minority on the Central Committee, now gained the majority against the Bukharin faction for immediate peace.

long as the threat of counter revolution, and the restoration of the landlords, loomed over their heads. But the end of the Civil War inevitably led to growing frictions and tensions, culminating in peasant rebellions.

In 1921, the Bolsheviks reacted to this by introducing the 'New Economic Policy'. This was essentially a policy of limited restoration of free market relations under the strict regulation and control of the workers' state. But this in turn led, by the middle '20s, to a large scale degeneration in the state itself, raising it to a degree of independence in which it balanced between the newly licensed merchants and traders and rich peasants on one hand, and the working class on the other.

N.E.P.

The harmful effects on the Bolshevik party of these developments, rooted as they were in the incredibly backward conditions of Russia, were already visible by the early '20s. They took the form of growing bureaucracy within the Bolshevik party, the transformation of an increasingly dominant section, which had a power base in the state apparatus into a stifling bureaucracy.

Like the trade union bureaucracy in Britain, the bureaucracy of the Soviet state grounded itself in material privileges. Its rule was made easier because at the 10th Party Congress in March 1921 party democracy had been severely curtailed and organised factions banned. Intended as a temporary measure to aid the party through the dangerous period of transition to the New Economic Policy, it became permanent and ultimately shaded off into the stalinist ice age in which nobody by the 'Great Leader' himself dared utter an independent word.

In opposition to the

bureaucracy there crystallised a determinedly revolutionary section, dedicated to maintaining the revolutionary perspectives of the party and fighting for a restoration of party democracy.

Stalin

Lenin was one of the first in the field against bureaucracy. In 1922 he had suffered a stroke which paralysed him almost totally for a period. After a brief recovery, he suffered another stroke, on March 7 1923, from which he never recovered, though there were periods in which he was able to dictate notes. In this period, he fought his last battle, against growing threats of bureaucratism and in defence of working class democracy.

On his deathbed he became increasingly aware that things were not going well, and alarmingly conscious of the growing power of the bureaucracy. Initiative from below was being stifled. The Workers' Inspectorate, far from being a genuine organ of working class supervision, had become merely one more source of bureaucratic power for Stalin.

On the National Question too, 'Great Russian chauvinism' was rearing its head. Stalin and Dzherzhinsky had conducted a savage campaign against the Georgian Bolsheviks, accusing them of nationalism. Lenin knew where the malignant nationalism lay -- in the central state apparatus.

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

On January 4th 1923 he wrote: "Stalin is too rude and this defect ... becomes intolerable in a general secretary. That is why I suggest that the comrades think over a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing somebody else differing

begins in 1918 and runs all through the Stalinist period. In reality there is no continuity. The Red Terror of the revolutionary years was the violence of workers and peasants in revolt against capitalism, directed against the bourgeoisie and their agents. The Stalinist terror was the violence of an uncontrolled and self-serving State bureaucracy, in defence of its own privileged position; against the working population in general and genuine Communists in particular.

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

In March 1919, the work the Bolsheviks had begun when the Second International collapsed at the outbreak of war, bore fruit. A new, Communist, International was founded in Moscow, Russia, the burning heart of the world proletarian revolution, the object of hate and fear on the part of the world's bourgeoisie, combined its attempt to break out of its encirclement with the attempt to found a world party of the proletariat, on firm foundations. In the fire of the revolutionary upsurge then flaring in Europe, the new International attempted to build revolutionary parties out of the debris or the hulks of the old Second International Parties, and, more importantly, out of the newly revolutionised proletarian masses.

At the First Congress of the Communist International no major party was represented, except the Russian Party. The real founding congress was the Second. The organisation had gained mass support in Italy, France and Germany. It was already clear that there would have to be a long struggle and not, as sometimes appeared in 1919, a quick victory throughout Europe. The International turned its attention to the task of remoulding and rebuilding the European labour movement on revolutionary organisational and political foundations. All the great issues of communist politics were discussed at the Second Third and Fourth

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

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

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

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

Civil War

Throughout the years of civil war and intervention, the Russian economy had been devastated. The working class, always a small part of the population, had been virtually uprooted from its social role and transformed into the personnel of the new state and the new Army. A system known as War Communism had been in operation. Essentially this had been a system of direct state distribution of goods. The peasantry were willing to allow the direct state appropriation of their produce so

in all respects from Comrade Stalin by one single advantage — that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and considerate to the comrades, less officious, etc. ... I think that from the point of view of assuring against a split and from the point of view of what I wrote above of the mutual relations between Stalin and Trotsky, it is not a detail, or it is a detail which can acquire decisive importance."

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

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

At the end of 1923 the Left Opposition, led by Trotsky, had taken up the same struggle as Lenin. Lenin's death was made the excuse by the bureaucracy for a mass recruitment of tens of thousands of careerists and time servers into the party, thus diluting it and increasingly isolating revolutionaries. As if already mocking the memory of Lenin, they named this drowning of the party "the Lenin levy"! Within less than a year after Lenin's death the bureaucracy had differentiated itself from his programme by proclaiming the possibility he had always mocked at, that there could be socialism in one country. Thus they started on the road to abandoning the struggle for the international proletarian revolution.

Trotsky and the Left Opposition were very soon the only forces still standing on Lenin's programme. The bureaucracy gained control of the young parties of the Comintern, many of them still in the process of formation. Soon they were transformed into parties like the British Communist Party of today.

Hostile

Within little more than ten years of Lenin's death, almost the entire generation of Bolshevik revolutionaries were murdered by

the totalitarian state with Stalin at its head.

Lenin, safely dead, was mummified as an icon by the Stalinist state. The impossibility even for Stalin of destroying Lenin's published works — which for us remain as the real Lenin — now led to endless academic reinterpretations of them, quite alien to the spirit of Lenin and the spirit of Marxism.

This all too brief outline has traced the outline of Lenin's political activities. Let the writer Maxim Gorky, a friend of Lenin though not always an uncritical one

he opposed the October insurrection and very bitterly criticised the Red Terror — have the last word on Lenin's character and motives: "I have never met ... nor do I know of, any man who hated, loathed and despised so deeply and strongly as Lenin all unhappiness, grief and suffering. ... Lenin was exceptionally great, in my opinion, precisely because of this feeling in him of irreconcilable, unquenchable hostility towards the sufferings of humanity, his burning faith that suffering is not an essential and unavoidable part of life, but an abomination which people ought and are able to sweep away."

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