

# TELOS

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DANIEL MASON & JESSICA SMITH, eds., *Lenin's Impact on the United States* (New York: NWR Publications, 1970). 234 pp.

It is very hard to conceive that an historical period as world-shaking as the November 1917 Revolution in Russia, a subject as overpowering as Lenin, on topics as close to home and urgent as the impact of Lenin's thought on today's black revolution, could possibly be reduced to utter boredom. Nevertheless, the *New World Review* editors have achieved the feat. By toting the current Communist propaganda line of "peaceful co-existence", and peppering the hybrid assortment of articles with statements such as: "Cyrus S. Eaton, Leading American Industrialist and Public Figure" (p. 201), they have succeeded in smothering, if not the revolutionary content of Lenin's thought, certainly its élan. Thus, an excellent, serious and exciting in-person description of "Ten Months with Lenin", by Albert Rhys Williams very nearly gets lost in this haphazard collection. Yet, had the same article accompanied Lenin's own "Letter to American Workers", followed by Pytor Travin's piece on how the letter was delivered, it would have made a lively and valuable pamphlet.

Or, had the editors wished to present, not "the line", but Lenin's thought in a comprehensive and theoretical coverage, there certainly was a wealth of material. There is no greater departure in theory and in its application to today's problems, both as it related to black Americans and the Third World, than Lenin's *Theses on the National and Colonial Questions*. Moreover, these Theses, presented in 1920, first singled out as integral to Lenin's position (and for which he asked "suggestions for amendments or additions or very brief comments not more than two pages"), "The Negroes in America", and "The Experience of the Polish Jews and the Ukrainians". The Negro question was again discussed in 1922 and had the black poet, Claude McKay, as a reporter. It is very difficult to get this report and it would have been very appropriate if the editors had presented this historical document to the American public on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth. Instead, although "Lenin and Black Americans", takes up a fairly substantial section, and blacks are represented (Claude McKay by a single paragraph), the only one who is allowed to speak theoretically on Lenin's position on the Negro as a National Question is — Herbert Aptheker! A single paragraph from Claude McKay's report to the Communist International would have shown why today's, self-styled "Marxist-Leninists" like to forget the true story of the Communist Party in the United States on this crucial question: "The situation in America today is terrible and fraught with grave dangers. It is much uglier and more terrible than was the condition of the peasants and Jews of Russia under the Czar. It is so ugly and terrible that very few people in America are willing to face it. The reformist bourgeoisie have been carrying on the battle against discrimination and racial prejudice in America. The Socialists and Communists have fought very shy of it because there is a great element of prejudice among the Socialists and Communists of America. They are not willing to face the Negro Question. In associating with the comrades of America, I have found demonstrations of prejudice on the various occasions when the white and black comrades had to get together; and this is the greatest difficulty that the Communists of America

have got to overcome — the fact that they first have got to emancipate themselves from the ideas they entertained towards the Negroes before they can be able to reach the Negroes with any kind of racial propaganda." (*Fourth Congress of the Communist International*). Abridged Report of Meetings held at Petrograd & Moscow, Nov. 7 — Dec. 3, 1922, published by the Communist Party of Great Britain, pp. 260-261.

Not only did the editors of *Lenin's Impact on the United States* miss the opportunity to quote this historical report by a black revolutionary, but they also skipped reference to the *Theses* which defined Lenin's theory of self-determination as inseparable from his internationalism both as it related to the relationship between technologically advanced and underdeveloped countries, and as demanding from even a successful revolution that it considers as primary "the subordination of the interests of the proletariat struggle in one country to the interests of the struggle on a world scale." (Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. X, p. 231)

The readers of *Telos*, no doubt, are wondering about the strictly philosophical articles. There is one such — Howard Parsons' "The Influence of Lenin's Thought on U.S. Philosophers". Lest any one, however, think that "Lenin's Thought" is a pseudonym for Lenin as a philosopher, let him be assured that Professor Parsons goes to great lengths to establish that Lenin "was not an academic philosopher". (p. 197) Moreover, this is said, not so much in disparagement of philosophy as an academic discipline, as of Lenin who, although "a man of philosophic talents and interests" (p. 181) was "without any formal training". (p. 103) Naturally, the condescension toward Lenin as a philosopher is not made ostentatiously and is surrounded by praise as to how this man of philosophical "interests" "presided over the formation of a large modern state that was to become one of the dominant powers of the 20th century... Philosophers from Confucius and Plato onwards dreamed of presiding over or advising a new state. But before 1917 they had never succeeded." (p. 181) Professor Parsons we see, leaves no stone unturned to show Lenin's uniqueness in being "not a dreaming philosopher but a militant revolutionary who knew how to use philosophical ideas as a guide and weapon for achieving political power". (p. 182).

One would never guess that Lenin, as philosopher, had achieved any philosophical breakthroughs, specifically by siding with Hegel against vulgar materialists as well as against his Bolshevik co-leaders who failed "fully to understand the dialectic". And even when he mercilessly attacked Hegel for his abstruse idealism, Lenin also elatedly praised his discovery: "Movement and 'self-movement'... 'movement and life', 'the principle of every self-movement' and 'activity'... Who would believe that this is the core of 'Hegelianism', of abstract and abstruse (difficult, absurd?) Hegelianism?" (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 141). It is hard, indeed, to find out from Professor Parsons what Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks* are all about, although we are assured that his "philosophic world-outlook evolved in several stages from a more mechanistic position to a sophisticated [whatever that means, rd] and subtle dialectical one." (p. 198)

All of these abstractions, moreover, are set in an historical context that

bears no resemblance to reality. Thus, it would appear that it wasn't Trotsky who stood for world revolution as against Stalin's "socialism in one country", but American Stalinists who rejected "in 1928 ... the Trotskyites ... who argued that American capitalism was not ready for revolution". (p. 184) As if Stalin hadn't allied with U.S. imperialism and urged the dropping of the atomic bomb, the cold war is redated to "the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 ...". (p. 183) As proof of the McCarthyite 1950's which produced "a number of works ... reflecting the political anti-communism of the times" (p. 188), we are confronted with the citation of Herbert Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*. Although Professor Parsons goes out of his way to cite all works that make no more than "passing reference to Lenin" (p. 186), we find not even a "passing reference" to the very first English translation of the core of Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks: Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic*. Indeed, how could Professor Parsons have found any space for such a listing when his 20 page essay so studiously avoids any mention of Hegel? As the latest Czechoslovak underground joke puts it: "Lenin would have been a hundred now. But he didn't want to wait for this".

Raya Dunayevskaya

EUGENIO DONATO and RICHARD MACKSEY, editors, *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* (John Hopkins, 1970).

In October 1966, the Ford Foundation funded an international symposium for over "one hundred humanists and social scientists". Under the auspices of the John Hopkins Humanities Center, the leading proponents of European structuralism (which is primarily French structuralism) met with numerous American academics.

The program, an overview of structuralist thought as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon, included fifteen papers and eleven discussions from the following disciplines: anthropology, classical studies, comparative literature, linguistics, literary criticism, history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, semiology, and sociology. Eugenio Donato and Richard Macksey have edited some thirty hours of tape into this volume.

The title is problematic: what is the structuralist controversy? Is it between various tendencies within the structuralist school? Is it between structuralists and bourgeois ideologists? Or is it between structuralist and Marxists? Since there were no Marxists present (except, perhaps, Lucien Goldman) and since the bourgeois ideologists, other than the structuralists themselves, were observers, the controversy was primarily between various tendencies within the structuralist school. Richard Macksey makes all this very clear as he sketches out the historical and spatial dimensions of the conference. After some commendatory remarks about Johns Hopkins long tradition as a university of methods and a brief sketch of Charles Sanders Peirce's role in reshaping Hopkins, Macksey introduces a spatial perspective to complement the temporal perspective. The metaphoric space of the symposium is the game board; the players occupy an arbitrary space, function in an arbitrary ordering of time, and