

Lenin and the New Wave of Marxism

Leninism, a Marxian Science

By Manuel Gomez

TWO or three years ago, a bourgeois journalist—I believe it was Isaac Don Levine—published a book which he called “The Revival of Marxism.” Whoever the author was, he was enough of an observer to note the plain fact that we are living in a period of world upheaval; and in such a period the revolutionary teachings of Karl Marx come naturally into their own. In every country on earth, workers are studying the Marxian doctrines and finding their application in struggle. They are looking beyond the old “marked passages” too. It is an outstanding characteristic, one which will have momentous consequences for the proletarian revolution, that the “revival of Marxism” takes place under the aegis of the living accomplishments of Soviet Russia and the Communist International.

Of course it is incorrect to speak of a “revival” of Marxism, for Marxism has never been dead. It is merely that the world crisis of capitalism has brought to the forefront of the fighting labor movement the consistent champions of orthodox Marxism, against the distortions and systematic “watering down” practised by the leaders of the Second International. These are the men whose activity has featured this new wave of Marxism. The present ascendancy of Marxian influence is the product of objective conditions—but it is significant that the outstanding Marxian spokesman of the period is not Kautsky or Hilferding or Otto Bauer, but Lenin.

Comrade Lenin was nothing if not a Marxist. He used to say that Marx was a fosterfather whom he adopted early in life, adding... “and I have never had occasion to be ashamed of the relationship.” Lenin knew Marx’s writings as only a few men have known them. And he was an orthodox Marxist in the sense of the living revolutionary theory; not in the sense of the dead letter. This is everywhere apparent: not only in his bold reliance upon Marxian fundamentals but even in the minutest details, as evidenced in all the activities of the Russian Communist Party—the Bolsheviks.

Leninism is not therefore some modern “corrective” of Marxism; nor is there anything in Leninism which does not have its origin in Marxism. We often hear Leninism spoken of as “Marxism in action.” But this definition is worse than meaningless. It presupposes that the Marxism of Marx was not “Marxism in action”—a conception which may be comforting to certain latter day “Marxian” saints, but which does not square with the life history of the man who was deported by three bourgeois governments, who founded the First International and who was in active contact with the work of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Yet “Leninism” is not an idle word, reflecting a contemporary flare for Russian nomenclature. Marxism and Leninism are not just two names for the same thing. Leninism is something with quite a definite content of its own. It is in fact a distinct science, under the general head of Marxism. It is Marxism in the final stage of capitalism.

The lines of the Marxian analysis continue to hold good; they are reinforced from day to day by fresh proofs. However,

there have been changes in the tempo of revolutionary development within capitalist society which Marx could not possibly have foreseen. The tempo of the revolutionizing process shifted, and shifted again. The unmistakable signs of the final stage of capitalism did not appear until a relatively high degree of capitalist development had been reached, involving society in a complex maze of changing relationships, which offer a necessary starting point for new lines of proletarian strategy. These new factors cannot be properly gauged or made use of except in the light of the Marxian science of Leninism. Their interpretation and the resulting tactics and strategy of struggle constitute a legitimate addition to Marxism, which should not be misunderstood or minimized. Everything that is distinctive in the Communist program is based upon it.

The World of Marx's Time.

Marx lived between 1818 and 1863. Mazzini, Bismarck and John Bright were his contemporaries. The wars of those days were, for the most part, national wars for the establishment of national bourgeois states. In the sphere of commerce and industry, textiles were dominant, which means that the needs of the textile industry were a primary political consideration. England was of course the classic example of capitalist development, and it is worthy of note that this England was famous as the home of free competition, free trade and “insular” foreign policy. As to the course of empire, even Disraeli, by no means a “little Englander,” was able to remark: “Colonies are millstones around the neck of the mother country.”

After 1848 the capitalist class was definitely in the ascendancy everywhere in Europe, but it was a class that was relatively unused to power and to all appearances incapable of withstanding serious opposition from below. The emergence of a distinct proletarian grouping, which was to be clearly noted as far back as the first sorties of 1848, gave ground for belief that the reign of the capitalists was to be brief; the deep-rooted contradictions of capitalism, plainly discerned by Marx, seemed to be moving toward an early culmination.

Instead of collapsing capitalism appeared to acquire equilibrium. But temporary stabilization could not do away with its contradictions, which were at once the basis of its existence and its inevitable doom.

Marx analyzed the entire capitalist order as a system feeding upon surplus value, or “unpaid labor,” which the bourgeoisie is able to exact as a toll upon the producers because of its monopoly of the means of production. He showed how all the accumulating inconsistencies of this system find expression in a growing intensification of the class struggle between capitalists and proletarians, and he proved conclusively that the workers are destined to be “the grave-diggers of capitalism.”

Ours is the good fortune to live in an age when the expropriators are being expropriated. Under the leadership of

the Russian Communist Party, the Russian workers have already taken the decisive step in the accomplishment of their historic mission as predicated by Marx. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, covering one-sixth of the surface of the globe, stands as a fundamentally anti-capitalist wedge in the system of world capitalist states.

Lenin was the theoretician and strategist and guiding spirit of the Russian Revolution. Despite his death, he remains the theoretician and strategist and guiding spirit of the world revolution today. He was a Marxist, a great Marxist; and being a Marxist, he created the science of Leninism.

Lenin's world, the world of our own time, presents many important contrasts from the world of Marx. It is a world which the Marxian analysis anticipated but which Marx did not expect to take shape in its full and definitive integration, because he believed the process of capitalist development would be interrupted by the social revolution long before.

Our World; the World of Lenin

Capitalism has become world capitalism, reaching to the very ends of the earth. It is capitalism grown desperate at the inadequacy of its own confines.

Lenin counted among his contemporaries Clemenceau, Kaiser "Bill" and J. P. Morgan. The classic country of capitalism is no longer England, but the United States, with its huge accumulation of capital, and its war-hungry iron and steel industry, which has become, as Comrade Pavlovitch puts it, "the central industrial star, around which, like planets around the sun, there revolve many important branches of the capitalist economy of the biggest states." Free competition appears only as a survival, existing precariously as the plaything of gigantic trusts, cartels and syndicates. Free trade is an outworn dogma even in England.

No longer do capitalist statesmen look disdainfully upon the idea of colonial expansion. Since Marx's death, the empires of the world have increased in extent by nearly 175 per cent. Capitalist policy has become imperialist policy, culminating in devastating imperialist wars. The world war of 1914-18, resulting in the sudden release of deep-going revolutionary forces for the overthrow of capitalism, was the inevitable consequence.

This modern world is the center of Lenin's theories.

Kautsky, Hilferding and the other dignified apostles of Marxism had gone on wearing their halos in smug unconcern, simply repeating Marxian formulas. They distorted much but they added nothing. Every once in a while they put forward a half-hearted defense of Marx's law of increasing pauperization. Marxism was to them a house into which one could go and pull down all the shades. They had no desire whatever to face the new issue, which kept crowding upon the workers; they had no thought of taking active advantage for the proletarian revolution of every contingency that accompanied the evolution of capitalism; their one preoccupation was to escape from struggle. Consequently they could not appreciate the importance of reviewing and revising policy to meet every new phenomenon that arises, of periodically taking a fresh estimate of the entire objective situation and fitting it boldly into the general Marxian scheme. Hilferding undoubtedly stumbled upon some striking economic characteristics of imperialism, without ever touching the heart of the problem—and without of course laying the basis for any revolutionary program of action against capitalism. Lenin approached the

question dialectically. He was not satisfied to explain the immediate cause of imperialistic foreign policy. He analyzed the whole of present-day capitalist economy in all its phases, and found it to be the economy of imperialism, the final stage of capitalism.

Imperialism As a Capitalist Necessity

Imperialism had first presented itself not as a permanent crisis within capitalism but as a way out of crisis. In the home countries the evolution of capitalism would otherwise have long since run its course, its processes choked by huge accumulations of undigestible capital, its machinery disorganized by the absence of a sufficient market for mass commodity production, its working class impoverished and driven to revolt. Capitalism could to continue to exist only by conquering the whole world.

The scramble for colonies, protectorates, spheres of influence, etc., was not something that originated in the brain of an irresponsible war lord. It evolved naturally, as an inseparable phase of an evolving system of economy, based upon large-scale monopolistic industry, finance capital, the export of capital, intensified competition on the world market, and war.

With the centralization and concentration of industry, the capitalistic control over the state power became simplified. Whereas thousands of individual capitalists all competing with one another, could give political expression to their common class interests on a national scale only through some sort of parliamentary or "democratic" state form, Morgan, Rockefeller and their clique can use much more direct means. Lenin pointed out that there exists today, in every important capitalist country, a small "financial oligarchy" which exercises a virtual dictatorship over the life of the community; democracy is an obvious sham. Thus the government becomes a much more responsive, a more flexible, instrument in the hands of the real rulers.

Conscious revolutionary activity depends, above all, on an understanding of the nature and function of the state. Marx and Engels had both proved that the state is a weapon—a means of oppression in the interests of a ruling class. During the long "period of peaceful development of capitalism," when the many competing capitalists were actually interested in the Constitution, parliament, free press, etc., the teachings of Marx and Engels were easily obscured. Opportunistic distorters of Marx found it possible to pose as orthodox Marxists; an emasculated pseudo-Marxism appeared, shot through and through with petty-bourgeois ideology, carrying with it the inference that the state is some sort of impartial mediator, representative of no special class and standing out from and above society. Lenin, living in the age of imperialism, was able to pierce this fraud as with a rapier. Notwithstanding the many lengthy quotations from Marx and Engels, **The State and Revolution** is one of the most widely read of Lenin's writings, largely because the reader sees so much in support of its thesis in the everyday life around him.

Increasing centralization of the governmental apparatus has paralleled centralization of economic power. Repressive action against the workers has become open, unequivocal, brazen. All the state machinery was used to break the great coal strike of 1922, which President Harding proclaimed to be "a menace to the public welfare." No more flagrant and brutal violation of workers' "rights" was ever experienced



PEN-SKETCH OF LENIN.

than in the railway shopmen's strike of the same year, when Judge Wilkerson issued his blanket injunction and the entire Burns-Daugherty Department of Justice was turned loose upon the workers. During this strike troops were called out in 13 states. Side by side with this strike-breaking activity go wholesale arrests in disregard of the "rights" of free speech and freedom of assembly. The vicious "anti-syndicalist" laws are typical. When the workers, on their part, turn to legislation for relief the sham of capitalist democracy is manifest. Such laws as may be forced through Congress are vitiated in the interpretation, as for instance the Clayton Act. And at the end of the long road of legalism there sits the Supreme Court, ever ready with a Danbury Hatters decision, a Coronado decision or a Child Labor decision.

The responsiveness of the state machinery to the desires of the ruling financial oligarchy is a necessary feature of imperialistic foreign policy. The state becomes an agency for securing concessions and opening up fields of profitable investment abroad. For the export of capital to proceed uninterruptedly the government must be ready to "protect American interests in Mexico," to "see that Cuba meets her obligations," to "insist upon a real open door in China." If Morgan's heavy international loans are endangered it may even be necessary to go to war. Workers must be made soldiers to fight and die for Morgan. In this the capitalists have the assistance of a section of the workers themselves—the upper crust, the labor aristocracy, represented by the

cynical trade union bureaucracy, which has been systematically corrupted by the sharing of super-profits wrung from the exploited colonial and semi-colonial territories.

Capitalism found a temporary escape from the apocalypse of its contradictions by plunging into imperialism. But, as Marx had proved, the contradictions are fundamental. Lenin shows that the "escape" has only given rise to new and more serious contradictions. Decay of the productive forces under monopoly, disintegration of the capitalist class, intensification of the class struggle, and war, were some of the fruits. Competition on a national scale has been succeeded by competition on the world market, with the national states functioning as huge militarized trusts. In discussing the advent of imperialism I pointed out that a stage had been reached in the evolution of capitalism where it could not continue to exist except by conquering the world. The conquest is complete. In his epoch-making book on **Imperialism, the Final Stage of Capitalism**, Lenin shows that between 1876 and 1914 four great powers acquired a colonial empire of 14,100,000 square kilometers, with a population of approximately 100,000,000. The entire territory of the earth has been parceled out. Yet capitalism has now reached a point where no single one of the ruling capitalist empires can continue to exist except by conquering the world. This is the greatest of all the contradictions which imperialism has conjured up.

From Theory to Action

Lenin did not study economic contradictions for amusement, but in order to make use of them for the struggle against capitalism. Against the background of the general Leninist analysis, all the characteristic features of Leninist strategy stand out in bold relief. Alliance with the exploited colonial and semi-colonial peoples, alliance with the peasantry, neutralization of certain petty-bourgeois and "de-classed" elements—even the Leninist policy with regard to the trade union movement, can be largely explained from it.

The Communist International's interest in India and Egypt, its working alliance with the Kuomintang party in China, thus appear not as isolated incidents but as a conscious union of forces destined to participate in the historic overthrow of capitalism. It is a practical application of the **Theses on the Colonial Question** adopted at the Second Congress of the Comintern, as presented by Lenin with some additions by Comrade Roy.

There were also **Theses on the Agricultural Question** at the Second Congress. Nor did Lenin first begin to think about the peasantry after the Russian Revolution. Otherwise the history of that revolution might have been different. Lenin's conception of the role of the peasants in the proletarian revolution constituted one of his important differences with the Mensheviks, and with nearly all the prominent pseudo-Marxians of the Second International. It is precisely on the question of the role of the peasants—the poor farmers, that is—that Leninism offers one of its most valuable contributions to the strategy of the working class movement.

Marx believed that agriculture would take the same line of development as industry: that it would be absorbed into the general capitalist system, that rapid concentration and centralization would take place, that large machine-operated farms would become the type, etc. In great part this development has actually taken place. Farming capital has become highly centralized; it is concentrated in the hands of bankers

and has in fact almost lost its separate identity in the general fusion of industrial and banking capital under the domination of the ruling finance capitalists. The small independent farmer is steadily being expropriated, becoming a virtual employe of the financial interests and a tenant on the land he once owned. The small farm persists, but what student of current economic processes can doubt that it is doomed to go? If this should occur before the overthrow of capitalism there would then be no basis for an alliance between the proletariat and the farm-owning agriculturist; there would be only the urban and rural proletariat, a more or less homogeneous class, with a simple and obvious unity of purpose in the class struggle, along the lines laid down by Marx.

However, the small farm still persists, and millions of "independent" farmers continue, nominally at least, to own their farms. But the status of the farmer has changed, in the United States probably more than anywhere else in the world. He is at the mercy of the grain elevator companies, the railroads, the great packing houses, the bankers, the grain and produce exchanges—of the whole mechanism of American finance capital centered in Wall Street. The workers in the cities are obliged to carry on a class struggle against large and small capitalists alike. But here too the real enemy is "Big Business." It is the co-existence of small farm holdings with the domination of finance-capital monopoly, and this in the period of imperialism, the final stage of capitalism, which forms the basis of the alliance between workers and poor farmers. (In predominantly peasant countries, such as Bulgaria, the basis of the alliance is of course somewhat different; there it is a question of co-ordinating the struggle against capitalism with the struggle against the remaining vestiges of feudalism.)

The consciousness that we are living in the final stage of capitalism dominated Lenin's whole attitude toward the question of the role of the peasantry. The role of the proletariat had already been laid down by Marx; the corruption of a section of the workers in the imperialist countries through their participation in a small share of super-profit could not change the essential facts of the class struggle. The task of the revolutionist was to prepare the workers for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This meant to organize the revolution. It also meant to organize the forces of the revolution—the "vanguard of the proletariat." The Russian Communist Party is a living embodiment of Leninism; for it was Lenin who formulated the role of the revolutionary working class party. Its form of organization, its ideology, its discipline, its tactics and strategy, all reflect its historic role as the conscious vanguard of the proletarian revolution.

But the class struggle is international. The three Internationals—First, Second and Third—reflect the different stages of capitalism out of which they sprung. It was no accident that Lenin founded the Third (Communist) International not as an aggregation of parties but as a world party with sections in the various countries, a "general staff of the world revolution," to use the phrase expressed at the first congress—a Russian Communist Party on a larger canvas.

War and Revolution

That was in 1919. The oft-predicted Imperialist War had swept across the world, splitting the Second International

wide open and exposing the sham Marxism of the Kautskys in all its hypocritical ugliness. Marx had given no detailed guidance for a situation such as this but the duty of real Marxists was clear. It was to oppose the war with all their might and to make use of it for the proletarian revolution. Lenin found the necessary formula. "Convert the Imperialist War into a civil war for the overthrow of capitalism!"

The slogan will live as one of Lenin's greatest.

Another of Lenin's slogans was: "All Power to the Soviets!" Lenin discovered the soviets as the form of the proletarian dictatorship. He did not create the soviets. They were thrown up by revolution, first in 1905 again in 1917. But he recognized their historic significance, and for Lenin such recognition meant unhesitating and resolute action.

Everyone realizes that the November Revolution in Russia was not a mere palace revolution. It was a mighty social upheaval, the greatest that the world has ever known. When the full import of this is understood it is impossible to picture Lenin as a "putchist," or a Twentieth Century Blanqui, with the Bolsheviks as a modern band of conspiratorial Blanquists acting in blind obedience to their leader. What the social-democratic fakers resent in Lenin most of all is that he was a man of action. But he was more than that, as the present article has amply shown. All of Lenin's writings and activity, the entire history of the Bolshevik party, went into the making of November. The Russian Revolution represents the triumph of Marxism. Lenin succeeded, where the pseudo-Marxists failed, because he was a great enough Marxist to add to Marx,—to grasp the full dialectic nature of Marxism and to apply it concretely even in those situations for which Marx had not provided a blueprint. Thus it was that, in the final stage of capitalism, he was able to analyze the world around him and to work out in theory and practice the postulates of the revolutionary science of Leninism, which lives after him as the guide of the world proletariat.

This is the only true Marxism. There is constant need for innovation and original perspective, and he is no Marxist or Leninist who shrinks from this task. Consider only the circumstances which surrounded the adoption of such epochal policies as "war communism" and the NEP; Lenin could not have risen to occasion after occasion if he had been afraid to innovate.

Lenin's Debt to Marx; Our Debt to Lenin.

Leninism is an addition to Marxism which does not negate, but supplements it. Leninism is the Marxism of the final stage of capitalism. For capitalism is still capitalism even in the period of imperialism. The class struggle, surplus value, the labor theory of value—all of the points of the Marxian system—form the very foundation on which the theoretical structure of Leninism rests. The dynamics of the struggle as formulated by Marx, the dialectic method, the materialistic conception of history—these remain the fundamentals of any approach to the problems confronting the international proletariat. No one understood this better than Lenin. It was as an orthodox Marxist, and he never tired of repeating it, that he worked out the doctrines which are characteristically his own:

1. Present-day capitalist economy as the economy of imperialism;

2. Currents within imperialism and the strategy and tactics of the struggle against it;
3. Reformulation of the nature and function of the state, and the necessity of violent revolution;
4. Linking up of the national liberation movements with the class struggle of the proletariat;
5. Uniting the struggles of the exploited peasantry with the struggle of the workers;
6. Role of the Communist party as the conscious vanguard of the proletariat;
7. Soviets as the form of the proletarian dictatorship;
8. Extension of the theory and practice of the proletarian dictatorship.

Who can say that these additions to Marxism will be the last? The world changes and doctrines once compatible with Marxism become outworn while the general structure of Marxism remains firm. Marx once said that in England the overthrow of capitalism might take place peaceably; if he were living today, in the epoch of imperialism, he would certainly declare that to be impossible. In the prolonged crisis of capitalism growing out of the war, with its unstable shifting from open dictatorship to "democratic pacifism" and back, with its rapid disintegrating process setting loose new forces, with the super-imperialism of the Dawes Plan—it is quite possible that new laws will be established and new points of proletarian strategy discovered. And they will go to reinforce Marxism and Leninism. As Marx wrote, "the revolution is throughgoing."

Drama for Winter Night (Fifth Avenue)

You can't sleep here,
My good man,
You can't sleep here.
This is the house of God.

The usher opens the church door and he goes out.

You can't sleep in this car, old top,
Not here.
If Jones found you
He'd give you to the cops.
Get-the-hell out now,
This ain't home.
You can't stay here.

The chauffeur opens the door and he gets out.

Lord! You can't let a man lie in the streets
like this.
Find an officer quick.
Send for an ambulance.
Maybe he is sick but
He can't die on this corner,
Not here!
He can't die here.

Death opens a door.

Yellow But Red!



NEWS NOTE.—"Ten thousand striking Japanese textile workers have declared that they will not go back to work until the boss is prepared to turn the mill over to them. Communist influence is reported to be strong among them."

Oh, God,
Lemme git by St. Peter.
Lemme sit down on the steps of your throne.
Lemme rest somewhere.
What did yuh say, God?
What did yuh say?
You can't sleep here. . . .
Bums can't stay. . . .

The man's raving.
Get him to the hospital quick.
He's attracting a crowd.
He can't die on this corner.
No, no, not here.

—Langston Hughes.