

ON A NEW DEFENCE OF LENIN

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LATE IN 2006 THE *ECONOMIC and Political Weekly* (XLI 29) opened its pages to a number of papers on the Maoist Movement in India. Among these papers one by the CPI (M) theoretician Yechury stands out for its ideological-theoretical thrust which invites some discussion. Yechury writes : 'For Marxists - *ism* is the ideological construct that provides both theory and praxis (sic). For a given historical stage Marx'sm is the world outlook which provides the philosophical and ideological analysis and the consequent revolutionary theory and praxis (sic) for the overthrow of capitalism and the realisation of human emancipation. As capitalism developed beyond the times and work of Marx to the stage of imperialism, Lenin provided the philosophical and theoretical construct by extending and applying Marxism to capitalism which had reached the stage of imperialism. In so far as imperialism is the last stage of capitalism, the prospect of any further isms simply does not arise'.

Let us try to make sense of this rather complex argument. The author speaks of Marx's *philosophical* and *ideological* analysis (p. 3170; our emphasis). However in the published texts of Marx (and Engels) this eminent theoretician, we submit, will not find any such statement. Not only that. For Marx and Engels ideology was not at all a complimentary term which they would like to own. Marx had no ideological analysis. Indeed, Marx did not set out to create a new ideology as opposed to bourgeois ideology, what he and Engels did was to found new materialism (cf. Marx's tenth thesis on Feuerbach), and Marxism, based on materialistic and, therefore, scientific method as precisely to demystify all ideologies including the ideological representations of abstract natural science which excludes historical process—by revealing how conditions of real life give rise to these intellectual representations (the expressions within quotation marks are from *Capital*, vol. 1, chapter on Machinery and Big Industry). His theoretical work is in the realm of science, not ideology, aimed to revolutionize science and to lay down scientific foundation (letter to Kugelmann 28. 12. 1862). What Marx was doing was the exact opposite of creating false consciousness or the inverted representation of reality which is what ideology is all about. Marx underlined that in all ideology human beings and their relations appear to stand on their head, as in a *camera obscura* (*German Ideology*). Years later, again, Engels wrote to Mehring : 'ideology is a process which is carried out by the so-called thinker, of course consciously, but with a *false consciousness* (14.07.1893). It is ironical that the proclaimed disciples of Marx denigrated only what they called bourgeois ideology as opposed to which they posited and glorified a new proletarian ideology'.

LENIN'S ENRICHMENT OF MARX : THEORY (I)

In what way Lenin extended and applied Marx(ism) by his philosophical and theoretical construct? Our theoretician does not offer much argument here. Let us try to see what this progress consists of. As regards Marx's philosophy it could only be what Marx himself called materialism or what Engels called materialist conception of history first appearing (1845) in a dense form in what Engels would later baptise. (Theses on Feuerbach) where it is called new materialism as opposed to old materialism culminating in Feuerbach. How did Lenin extend and apply this philosophy? Lenin's philosophical work consists almost exclusively of his *Materialism and Emperiocriticism* (1909) and posthumously published *Philosophical Notebooks*. Persons infinitely more qualified than

this scribe. A Pannekoek, revolutionary, astronomer-mathematician and K Korsch, revolutionary, philosopher have convincingly argued in 1930s that Lenin's materialism far from extending Marx's materialism in fact was many steps backward in comparison. By incomprehension and enormous distortion particularly of the texts of Mach and Avenarius on the new developments in science, Lenin's materialism-almost exclusively aimed at settling score with his political opponents in his Party-drew less on the materialism of Marx and Engels than on the bourgeois materialism of Holbach and Feuerbach with an admixture of Hegel's idealist dialectic.

As regards Lenin's theory, here again we see not an enrichment of Marx but rather an impoverishment, be it in the sphere of Marx's critique of political economy as regards, for example, the concept of private ownership of means of production or the concept of competition of capital (as opposed to the bourgeois economists' free competition) or in the sphere of politicians' treatment of State for example, most certainly in his conceptualization of socialist revolution and of socialism (communism) following it (on this more below). It must be said that the brochure on imperialism which the theoreticians of Marx'sm-Lenin'sm uphold as a genial contribution of Lenin was very modestly presented by its author himself as a popular outline which is what it is. There is not much that is original, Lenin's own, here. He had liberally drawn on some of the important writings of the epoch which had new things to say on the then phase of capitalism adding his own *political* edge to the work. Compared to any of Marx's work in the critique of political economy, this is rather a poor performance. It could be shown, on a careful reading of Marx's texts, that, excepting for the new empirical data, most of the theoretical content of what is called imperialism is contained in the corpus of Marx's critique, pregnant with remarkable prognostic following from his discovery of the law of motion of capital. It is not without reason that a number of readers of Marx today, not necessarily Marxist, consider Marx, far from being limited to the 19th century, to be the economist of the twenty first century. Let us now move to the consequence of Marx's analysis namely, revolutionary theory and praxis for the overthrow of capitalism and the realisation of human freedom (Yechury, p. 3170). After stressing Lenin's contributory additions to Marx's work on capitalism Yechury does not mention what role this 'consequence' plays in Lenin's hands. We may be allowed to assume, quite in keeping with Yechury's overall Marxist-Leninist framework here, that in this realm, too, Lenin had his additive contribution(s). Even though Yechury might take this as obvious, requiring no explicit discussion, for us it is anything but obvious and has to be demonstrated. In other words, in what way did Lenin extend and apply Marx's work on this problem? We submit that this is the fundamental question in as much as it is Leninism which has historically determined the path for revolution and socialism for the whole communist movement- abstracting from the modifications it underwent in specific historical circumstances (Mao stressed the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism). Indeed, with all their sectarian quarrels all communists (with infinitely few exceptions) consider themselves as followers of Lenin (all have descended from Lenin's Great Coat), to paraphrase a famous saying about Gigol's contribution to Russian literature). Consequently, we may be allowed to look into this matter more closely. We first try to offer the readers the essentials-in a nutshell-Marx's position on revolution and socialism based on his own texts before we try to see to what extent Lenin's position on the same question relates to Marx's, abstracting from their respective historical-social specificities. This is a discussion at a broad general level.

MARX ON REVOLUTION AND SOCIALISM

In Marx a socialist revolution-as a social revolution-is the dissolution of the old society or a change in society's economic foundation constituted by the totality of the relations of production

(See the prefaces to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859). It is not the so-called seizure of power by the oppressed class (es), least of all by a group (Party) in their name. Secondly, the dissolution of the old social relations of production cannot be a momentary event (cf. the phrasevictory of the October socialist revolution). , it is secular, epochal. It is in this sense that Marx speaks of the beginning of the epoch of social revolution (preface 1859), and of the revolutionary Transformation period between capitalism and communism (socialism) (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875) during which revolution continues through a series of historic processes transforming circumstances and individuals (*The Civil War in France*, 1871). This is the famous transition period under the absolute, unmeditated, political rule of the proletariat as a class (that is, not by a group in its name). A radical social revolution (like the socialist revolution) is a product of history not of nature or individuals' arbitrary will. These historical conditions are not only the existence of capitalism's grave diggers occupying at least a significant position in society (see Marx's critical remarks on *Bakunin's book Stateism and Anarchy*, 1874), but also the universal development of productive forces along with the socialization of labour and production. And capital the most dynamic mode of production in human evolution (see the *Manifesto* of 1848) itself creates, by its own inherent logic, these weapons of self-destruction. Given these conditions socialist revolution begins when capital reaches a stage where the productive forces it has generated including the greatest productive force, the working class (see Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847) can no longer advance on the basis of the existing (social) relations of production, requiring regime change. Socialist revolution itself is seen as an immense emancipatory project-workers' self-emancipation (The emancipation of the working class is the task of the *workers themselves* Marx 1864. Our emphasis). Its very first step is the elevation of the proletariat as the ruling class and, therewith the conquest of democracy to resulting from the autonomous movement of the *immense majority in the interest of the immense majority* (*Manifesto*, 1848, our emphasis). Corresponding exactly to this emancipatory-perspective is Marx's idea of the role of the working class in the socialist revolution. He already wrote in the 1840s that the "proletariat can and must liberate itself (*The Holy Family*, 1845) and that "the consciousness of a profound revolution, the communist consciousness, arises from this class (itself)" (*German Ideology*, 1846). Again in the "Provisional Rules" of the International (1864) he famously affirmed : "The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves". Marx put the matter succinctly in a letter (February 2, 1865) to Schweitzer : "The working class is either revolutionary or it is nothing". Years later, in the Preface to the fourth German edition of the *Manifesto*, Engels neatly summed up Marx's ideas: "For the final victory of the ideas laid down in the *Manifesto* Marx counted only and singularly (*einzig und allein*) on the *intellectual development of the working class* as it necessarily had to come out of the united action and discussion". (our emphasis).

Now socialism, which in Marx is perfectly equivalent to communism, simply being an alternative name for the society after capital which Marx also calls a society of free and associated producers or a union of free individuals based on associated Mode of Production (AMP as opposed to the capitalist mode of production CMP). After the workers have in course of the transformation period, largely eliminated (though not yet all the vestiges of) the existing elements of the old society such as classes, private ownership of the means of reduction, state, commodity production, wage labour, but carrying over all the acquisitions of the capitalist area new mode of production comes

into existence—the *Associated Mode of Production* (AMP) the basis of the new society, society of free and associated producers as opposed to all the earlier modes. Corresponding to the AMP there is a new mode of appropriation of the conditions of production, collective appropriation by society (of producers) itself, totally different from earlier private appropriation either household/corporate republic (state) where the ownership in either form had appeared to the producers as an oppressive configuration autonomously standing against the producers. Similarly, the mode of distribution in the new society corresponds to the new mode of production. Here, with the collective appropriation of the conditions of production and directly social labour, neither the allocation of labour time (across the different branches of production as well as between society's necessary and disposable labour time) nor the distribution of society's total product with regard to reserves and requirements of enlarged reproduction as well as personal consumption need to be mediated by money-commodity-wage form the enslaving elements of the old society. The producers after being separated from the conditions of production their own creation under capital are now (re)united with them at a higher level, and, with the mutual alienation between individuals of the earlier era eliminated, there is now the unmediated union of individuals who are all simple producers (after ceasing to be proletarians). Individuals cease to be subject to personal dependences (as under pre-capitalism) as well as to material (objective) dependences (as under capitalism) and as universally developed social individuals, again free individuality. In as much as the proletariat constitutes the immense majority, being at the same time the lowest class in society in the least antagonist social form. The rest of society is naturally emancipated along with the proletariat. The humanity enters its history leaving its pre-history behind. (This is a gist terribly compressed- based on various texts of Marx's written over decades, too numerous to mention here).

LENIN'S ENRICHMENT : THEORY (II)

Let us now see in what way Lenin extended and developed Marxism as regards Marx's Revolutionary theory and praxis, a consequence of Marx's philosophical and ideological (sic) analysis. First we discuss, in this context, Lenin's theoretical contribution and then his practice.

Lenin's revolutionary theory concerns more the demands of the present than the course of the revolution in the future. In other words, Lenin's preoccupation-almost obsession is theoretically speaking, the seizure of state power by the proletariat. As his oft-repeated famous saying goes: the question of power is the fundamental question of every revolution Following Marx and Engels he also spoke-mostly before October-of the need of destroying the old state machinery and replacing it by a state which in reality is no state in the proper sense of the term where there will be no bureaucracy or standing army and holders of all posts will be universally freely elected and subject to recall at all times. This is what the proletarian power is supposed to be after the seizure of power. Here of course there is nothing which could be called Lenin's own idea, Now all this amounts to, what the 1848 *Manifesto* calls, only the first step in the worker revolution (the idea of the need for smashing the existing state machinery, absent in the *Manifesto's* first edition, was emphasized in the prefaces to its second edition particularly in light of the Parisian workers' action under the 1871 Commune).

Lenin's own contributions to the theory of revolution follow from this central point of Leninism, seizure of power. We could discern three : first, the notion of communist (originally social democratic) Party, considered party of the working class practising in theory- democratic centralism (one complementing the other), and organized as the general staff of the revolution under whose leadership the "working class should (or

must) act (1904); secondly, the extreme importance of revolutionary consciousness of the working class who, incapable of developing such consciousness on its own, needs its importation from outside of the class effected by the radicalized intelligentsia who, as professional revolutionaries organized in the Party, would be leading the labouring masses to revolution; It is precisely, in the third place, with the seizure of power in view that he advanced the thesis that, contrary to what Marx and Engels had thought, socialist revolution could take place and had taken place in a backward capitalist country given the weakness of the bourgeoisie, owing to the uneven development of capitalism under imperialism though it would not be able to maintain its socialism unless it is aided by victorious revolution in advanced capitalist countries (1915, 1918). Now, as regards Lenin's own contributions to revolutionary theory-the essentials (in our opinion) given here in a terribly shortened form-how could one take them as extension and advancement of Marx's original position? Our submission is that far from extending and advancing Marx's original position Lenin's contributions constitute a movement backwards. The first two contributions completely negate workers' *self-emancipation* which occupies the central place in Marx's and Engels's perspective of proletarian (socialist) revolution, while the third flies in the face of the materialist conception of history, magisterially exposed by Marx in his famous Preface of 1859, but already appearing in his compositions of late 1840s. Let us discuss.

Already in his *Anti-Proudhon* (1847) and in *Manifesto* (1848) Marx calls the proletariat itself as the revolutionary class. Later in 1864 before the *International* he famously affirms that the emancipation of the working classes, must be conquered by the working classes themselves.

One year later in a letter to his friend-which we mentioned above-he writes that the working class is either revolutionary or it is nothing. A few years later in the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital* vol. 1 Marx explicitly speaks of the historical profession (Beruf, also mission) of the working class to be the revolutionizing of the capitalist mode of production. It follows that the professional revolutionaries (in common parlance Party wholetimers), by definition outside the ranks of the workers, are of no use for the revolution and really are misleaders of the revolution, leading only a parasitical existence. As regards revolutionary or communist consciousness we find in *German Ideology* the affirmation that the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, communist consciousness comes from the working class itself. Indeed, if the whole class is revolutionary revolutionary consciousness must have its genesis in the revolutionary class itself. Lenin in his classic brochure of 1902 where he advances his thesis-taken over from Kautsky with acknowledgement-remarkably mixes up two separate notions : theory and consciousness. The long extract from Engels, which he cites in defense of his own position, speaks only of theory as a necessity for the workers and nowhere mentions revolutionary (communist or social democratic) consciousness (to be imported to the workers from outside). Indeed the Parisian communards with their auto-generated revolutionary consciousness were not particularly distinguished for theory. Hardly anybody knew even Marx's name. And that was certainly not a factor of their defeat if we read carefully at least the analyses of Marx and Engels about the *Commune*, not to speak of the accounts by its authentic historians (like the great Lissagaray). In Russia too both 1905 and, specially, 1917 (February) revolutionary uprisings of the laboring masses independently of any party and in fact far more revolutionary (in Marx's original sense) than even the party of the professional revolutionaries, and spontaneously, on their own, building organs of self rule (the Soviets) almost completely innocent of (Marx's) theory and requiring no import of revolutionary consciousness by the professional revolutionaries was a telling refutation of Lenin's thesis. To his credit Lenin was honest enough to largely recognize this truth

(once in 1906 and another time in 1918) in the face of overwhelming evidence without of course going to the extent of admitting that both the events refuted his own fundamental thesis. However we should note that such statements made for the occasion are rather aberrations in relation to Lenin's general line. Thus, quite in keeping with his earlier position he blamed to a large extent the insufficiency of consciousness and organization of the proletariat for coming to power of the bourgeoisie and hence insisted on the necessity of "protracted work to enlighten the proletariat with consciousness (spring, 1917) (in the standard English version the prefix class is added to consciousness which is absent in the original Russian). We cannot but add here that producers' self-emancipation was again on the revolutionary agenda-much to the horror of the Marxist-Leninists in the movements of laborers' collectives in Spain in 1936-1937 and of workers' councils in Hungary in 1956, both crushed by the hostile counter revolutionary forces.

Let us now take up Lenin's third contribution mentioned above-possibility (and comparative easiness) of proletarian (socialist) revolution starting in the relatively backward countries contrary to what Marx (and Engels) had foreseen (as Lenin himself had explicitly observed). Let us recall first Marx's materialist position which he exposed in a masterly way in the preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1959). (The posthumous *German Ideology* of late 1840s offers the first detailed expose of the subject). Here is the relevant part :

A social formation does not go out of existence before all the productive forces which it is capable of containing have developed and new higher relations of production do not appear before its material conditions of existence have been hatched within the womb of the old society itself. Hence humanity always sets only the tasks which it can fulfil (rise), since a closer consideration will always show that the tasks themselves only arise where the material conditions of their fulfilment already exist or at least are in the process of being formed.

We have already referred to Marx's position on the material and subjective conditions of a socialist revolution—advanced level including socialization of the productive forces as well as the industrial (that is, productive) proletariat occupying at least a significant position in society.

Marx had indeed faulted Bakunin for not understanding anything of the social revolution, since for him the latter is economic conditions do not exist (1874). Lenin's position completely setting aside the appropriate economic conditions (in Marx's sense) of socialist revolution concentrates exclusively on the easiness or difficulty of seizure of power and naturally directs his attention to the weakest link—a weak bourgeoisie-facilitating the seizure of power purely, it seems, in a military sense. And against the Menshevik internationalist Sukhanov who had raised the question of appropriate material (pre) conditions of socialism Lenin quite naturally referred to a famous expression of the great bourgeois military figure Napoleon that one first engages one-self in a battle then sees what happens. To what extent this applies to a proletarian revolution with all its emancipatory implications leading to socialism is not clear. Below we will try to see how this non-materialist position affected Lenin's *political practice*.

Still remaining in the realm of theory we try to see Lenin's extension and development of Marx's ideas of the society succeeding capital. Earlier we tried to give a thumbnail sketch of Marx's *tableau* of this society called by him by various names (mostly taken over from the great Utopian socialists): socialism, communism, association or (re)union of free individuals, republic of labour. Totally unlike Marx, Lenin makes a distinction between socialism and communism equating them, respectively with the first and the second phase of communism (following Marx Lenin could have as well distinguished between the first and the second phase of socialism). Corresponding to this distinction Lenin distinguishes between two transitions : the first from capitalism to socialism, the

second from socialism to communism. Naturally, this distinction, too, nowhere appears in Marx. The distinctions in question, apparently merely terminological and innocuous looking, had far reaching consequences which were far from innocuous. These became convenient instruments for legitimizing and justifying the ideology and every act of the Party-State from 1917 onwards in the name of (building) socialism, which was stressed as the need for the immediate future, and thus shelving all the vital aspects of Marx's immense emancipatory project of the post-capitalist society off to the Greek calends of never-never land of communism thereby metamorphosing Marx's project of socialism (communism) into an unalloyed Utopia.

Again Lenin conceives socialism not so much in terms of new relations of production based on a new mode of production (the associated mode as opposed to the capitalist mode in Marx) as in terms of juridical form of ownership of the means of production which in Marx's materialism arises from production relations and has no independent existence. So socialism differentiates itself from capitalism not as a different mode of production called by Marx also communist mode of production (same as associated mode of production) to which correspond socialist relations of production-marked by free individuality as opposed to capitalist relations of production marked by wage slavery (this latter appears in socialist dress in Lenin, see below).

Against the private ownership uniquely in the sense of private ownership of separate individuals (the term separate, does not appear in the English translation) of capitalism there would be common or social ownership of socialism. Here again Lenin is several steps backward compared to Marx. Marx had already shown on the basis of his close observation of capitalism's development how its forms of ownership changed in response to the needs of capital accumulation. The ownership form of which Lenin speaks was the initial form of capitalist ownership. However, in course of capital's development the requirements of capital's accumulation dictated a change in the ownership form from individual to collective capitalist ownership which signified abolition of private ownership within the capitalist mode of production itself, as Marx clearly noted (see *Capital*, vol3, particularly, not exclusively, ch. 27 in Engels's edition; in the newly published integral manuscript it is chapter 5). Similarly, social ownership in Lenin (for socialism) does not mean society's ownership that is, direct appropriation by society itself. It is rather the state ownership where the state is by supposition working class state. This identification of state ownership with ownership by whole society is, again, absent from Marx's texts. Indeed, far from social ownership being identical with (working class) state ownership, socialism- even in its Leninist identification with Marx's lower phase of communism excludes not only individual private ownership of the means of production but also (working class) state ownership, inasmuch as the first phase of the Association arrives on the historical scene only at the end of the transformation period coinciding with the end of the proletariat and its political rule (estate if you like). The mode of appropriation becomes for the first time directly social. This is the real social ownership which Marx envisages.

The scope of distribution in socialism is much narrower in Lenin compared to what we find in Marx. He is not concerned with the (optimum) allocation of society's resources or of total labor (time) including the problem of economy of time and division of time between labor time and free time with far reaching emancipatory consequences for the associated producers.

Lenin is almost exclusively concerned with the distribution of the means of consumption among the society's individuals. Here he follows literally Marx's marginal Notes (1875) discussed above. At the same time Lenin takes liberty with Marxist text. Referring to what Marx calls (remaining) bourgeois right in the lower phase of the Association (Lenin's socialism), Lenin envisages equality of labor and wage for the

citizens, now transformed into hired employees of the state (*sluzhashchikh po naimu*) where, further, the enforcement of bourgeois right would, according to him, necessitate the presence of the bourgeois state. This is indeed a strange reading of Marx's text with serious implications. First, the transformation of the producing citizens into hired employees of the state receiving wage as remuneration would simply mean that the citizens instead of being wage laborers of private enterprises, they are now wage laborers of the state (calling the state a workers' state does not change the character of citizens' labor as wage labor). In the same text which Lenin (mis) reads, Marx denounces wage system as a system of slavery. In fact the distribution of the means of consumption through labor tokens has nothing to do with their distribution through wage remuneration. As regards hired labor let us recall that in his inaugural Address to the International Marx opposes hired labor to associated labor. (One would indeed look in vain in any text of Marx even the slightest hint of *hired* labor with wage remuneration under the absurd workers' state (in socialism) In fact Marx calls the state employing productive wage labor capitalist (see *Capital*, vol. 2, ch. 3; Marginal Notes on Wagner and Anti-Bakunini for more precision).

Continuing with the problem of distribution of the means of consumption in socialism (Marx's lower phase of the Association) Lenin refers to the not yet superseded bourgeois right (Marx) in this connection and insists on the need of the existence of bourgeois state to enforce this right.

This latter is Lenin's own gloss and is nowhere to be found in Marx's extant texts. In fact the antagonistic relation between state and freedom (essence of the union of free individuals) was a constant in Marx at least beginning with his polemic with Ruge right up to his last theoretical writing (also a polemic). But why should in any case the enforcement of bourgeois right require a state, and that, too, a bourgeois state in a society which arises only after the last form of political power held by the proletariat has evaporated along with the proletariat itself after a long revolutionary transformation period. 'Even with bourgeois right remaining Marx envisages society itself, not any special political apparatus undertaking the task of distributing the means of consumption in the very first phase of the Association. Even when Marx speculates on what kind of transformation will the state type (*Statesween*) undergo in communism, he immediately adds the meaning of this speculation: which social functions will be left there that are analogous to the present day state functions. First note that this speculation about the future of state functions applies to communism as such, not simply to its first phase which is Lenin's concern in the context of bourgeois state enforcing the bourgeois right.

This speculation about the analogy of present day state functions for communism no more signifies the existence of state in communism (at any stage) than the parallelism with equality of commodity exchange for distribution in the lower stage of communism signifies the existence of commodity production in the first stage of the Association (as many readers of Marx think). Indeed, Lenin's logic is baffling. Inasmuch as the lower phase is inaugurated only after the transformation period when, after it has destroyed the bourgeoisie and its state, the proletariat disappears along with its own estate, the existence of bourgeois state in this phase would signify, in the absence of the bourgeoisie (Lenin's assumption), that the (no longer proletarian) workers would themselves recreate the bourgeois state after having liquidated their own. (The discussion on Lenin's socialism given above is almost exclusively based on his unfinished work *The State and Revolution* 1917).

LENIN(ISM)'S ENRICHMENT OF MARX (ISM): PRACTICE

Finally let us leave the realm of theory and consider the extension and development (of Marx) effected by Lenin in his political practice. Here of course Lenin is not alone. Here the political practice refers to the practice of the Bolshevik party under the dominant leadership of Lenin, though, it must be said, he could be, and not infrequently was, freely contested by his party comrades as equals (inside the party, that is) pretty unthinkable with his successor. Our discussion concerns the events of 1917 in Russia and their aftermath.

Now, when people speak of the Russian Revolution mostly they have in mind the Bolshevik seizure of power in October, 1917 and the new regime issued from it. However, from an emancipatory perspective the Revolution starting in February 1917 was of far greater historical importance. The beginning 'moment' of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was February 1917, initiated and dominated entirely by Russia's toilers without any party guidance, had all the basic features of the great popular revolutions of the past such as those of 1789-93 and 1871 in France. Targeting mainly the pre-capitalist social order, this revolution started out as an immense democratic mass movement in an open-ended, plural revolutionary process which the different political parties increasingly tried to bring under control advancing their own agenda as the agenda of the toilers. As Trotsky writes in his justly famous monumental history: "The February revolution was begun from below, overcoming the resistance of its own revolutionary organizations, the initiative being taken on their own accord by the most oppressed and downtrodden part of the proletariat, ...nobody summoned the masses from above to insurrection" (1987, vol. 1 : 102)

Contentwise a bourgeois democratic revolution in process, the February upsurge, given its spontaneous mass character marked by open-ended plurality, had, it appears, the potential to go over, at a later stage given appropriate material conditions to an authentic socialist revolution (in Marx's sense) if the involved toiling masses had been allowed unfettered freedom through their (own) self-administering organs to continue their march forward. The Bolshevik seizure of power, putting a brake on the process, destroyed the democratic part of the revolution derogatively called "notorious democratism" (Lenin) and accelerated the bourgeois part, the pace of which would of course be dwarfed under Lenin's successor with an unprecedented accumulation drive under the slogan textually taken over from Lenin (September 1917) of "catching up and surpassing" the advanced capitalist countries.

When Lenin asserted that power is the fundamental question of all revolutions he was obviously thinking in the period preceding October in terms of his party gaining power.

In a famous justification of the Bolshevik monopoly of power Lenin already asserted before the seizure of power that if 130, 000 landowners could rule Russia then so could 240, 000 Bolsheviks.

During this period, while loudly proclaiming publicly "all power to the Soviets" (except for a while in summer) Lenin in his private communication with the party leaders showed utter distrust if not disdain for the soviet power this vehicle of "formal" democracy and persevered in his attempt to persuade the leadership that the party must "alone" ignoring the Soviets, seize power and that "it would be naive to wait for a formal majority for the Bolsheviks." "It would be ruinous or a formality to wait for the wavering vote of October 25," he added, "the people have the right and the duty to resolve such questions not by vote, but by force." "It was Lenin alone, it seems, who had the "right" and the "duty" to determine this right and this duty for the people. Ultimately, Lenin, by the threat of resignation from the leadership, succeeded in rallying the majority in the central committee for an immediate seizure of power, independently of and in fact behind the back of the workers' already established organs of self-rule, the Soviets. In the event, far from inaugurating a socialist revolution as a self-emancipatory act of the

laboring masses themselves, "conquering democracy" through the "autonomous movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority," as the *Communist Manifesto* says, October 1917 saw the seizure and monopolisation of power by a tiny minority the Bolsheviks initially supported by a section of the urban industrial working class (itself an infinitely small minority of the country's total labouring population) under the leadership of a group of radicalized non-proletarian intelligentsia, the professional revolutionaries who by definition were far removed from all material production-the locus of capital exploitation of its grave diggers and were totally uncontrolled by and unaccountable to the laboring people at large whom they claimed (on whose authority one could only surmise) to represent and lead. Thus though power was seized in the name of the working class, it was not the working class, through its own elected-and-subject-to-recall representatives, which seized power. Seizing the power before the Second Congress of the Soviets could meet, the Party leadership placed the congress before a fait accompli. Trotsky told the Congress : "A party was needed which would wrench the power from the hands of the counter revolution and say to you (Congress): here is the power and you've got to take it. (Trotsky 1987, Vol. 3: 339). Similarly the 'Provisional Government was dismissed not by the Soviet Congress, the highest representative body, not even by the Petrograd soviet, but by the so-called 'military revolutionary committee' where all excepting one, were Bolsheviks by a decree drawn up not by its president (a non-Bolshevik) but by Lenin himself (Ferro 1980 : 181). Years later Trotsky in his famous History asserted : The Bolsheviks saw it their mission to stand at the head of the people the Bolsheviks were the people (1987, vol. 3; our emphasis). Carrying this logic to the extreme Trotsky declared in his Diary in Exile : If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petrograd in 1917 there would have been no October Revolution, which factually could be correct but would at the time show the stark reality of the October seizure of power, passing for a proletarian revolution establishing a proletarian dictatorship(Even those Marxist Leninists who wrongly refuse Trotsky's legitimate role in the October Revolution next only to Lenin's would one could be sure, accept Trotsky's statement without Trotsky's own name in it and containing only Lenin's name).

This 'preemptive strike' by the Bolsheviks in the name of the proletarian revolution had fatal consequences. By this single act the Bolsheviks immediately deprived the Congress of Soviets and the Petrograd soviet all rights of paternity (maternity) and all legitimacy regarding the founding act of the new order (Ferro 1980 : 182). An undisputed authority of the history of the Russian Soviets observed : The October revolution was prepared and accomplished under the slogan all power to the soviets. However an examination of the historical reality shows that only a fraction of the workers, soldiers and peasants deputies wanted the seizure of power. The majority of the Soviets and masses represented by them of course greeted the fall of the Provisional Government, but refused to have a Bolshevik hegemony (Anweiler 1958 : 258-59). In fact, as Anweiler pertinently remarked : 'The amalgamation of the new soviet power with the Bolshevik insurrection was fatal for the Soviets themselves. From that moment on the Soviets served as the cover to the Bolshevik party dictatorship and played increasingly the role of party henchmen, a role which originally was far from theirs and contradicted their (very) nature (ibid 242)'.

Quite appropriately accompanying the process of transformation of the Soviets from the organs of proletarian self-rule and vehicles of radical democracy into organs allowing the party elite to lead the masses (Anweiler 1958 : 303) was the methodical liquidation of the factory committees as centres of workers' self-administration. That the new power was not the (Russian) proletariat organized as the ruling class-at least in the sense of the *Manifesto* of 1848-comes out clearly from Lenin's own declarations of the period. Thus

six months after October he asserted: "We the party of the Bolsheviks conquered Russia from the rich for the poor We must now govern Russia". A few months later he added more trenchantly : "We have not till now reached the stage where the laboring masses could participate in government. The Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people, are in fact organs of government for *the working people* by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the laboring masses (emphasis in text. In the English version the words "laboring masses" of the Russian original, appear as working people as a whole). Lenin could have both proletarian rule and Party rule in Russia only by considering them as identical. By advanced section of the proletariat Lenin of course meant his Party. E H Carr, the noted historian of the Bolshevik Revolution remarks : "Lenin described the attempt to distinguish between the dictatorship of the class and the dictatorship of the party as an unbelievable and inextricable confusion of thought" (1964, 230-31). For an example of ideology in the Marxian sense of the inverted representation of reality. In April, 1918, Lenin discovered that the "Russian is a bad worker in comparison with the workers of the advanced nations. "Therefore, instead of collectively administering the affairs of the work place, through their own elected organs a practice which earlier the Bolsheviks were the foremost to champion but now denounced as "petty bourgeois spontaneity" the masses must show the "unquestioning obedience to the single will of the leaders of the labor process" and must accept "unquestioning subordination during working time to the one-person decision of the soviet directors, of the soviet dictators, elected or nominated by soviet institutions (and) provided with dictatorial powers (*diktatorskimipol-nomochiyami*). Quite consistently with this logic a whole series of measures to 'discipline' labor (besides one-person management) were adopted by the authorities; labor books, forced labor camps, Taylor system, piece wage (Carr 1963: 198-216). At the 9th party congress (1920), Lenin denounced the still "surviving notorious democratism" and characterized the "outcry against appointees" as "pernicious trash".

Before the seizure of power Lenin had stressed the need to destroy the old state machine with its bureaucracy, police and standing army and its replacement by 'commune-state' a state of a new type with all officials elected and subject to recall, armed working masses replacing the police and the standing army. He had in fact accused 'the Plekhanovs and the Kautskys' as well as the socialist revolutionaries and the Mensheviks of having "forgotten and perverted this essence of the Paris Commune". The deeds of the new regime under his leadership totally contradicted his words. Thus instead of all officers being elected and revocable, the body of appointed officials at all levels, organically linked with the new central establishment and organized hierarchically lower officials accountable only to their superiors increased with tremendous strides. Similarly there arose a special police apparatus of which the core *Tcheka*, the secret police installed five weeks after the seizure of power, grew to over a quarter million by 1921 As regards the army, with the creation of the Red Army the principle of election of officers this specific mark of one of the consequent soviet principles was abolished, the rights of soldiers' committees were done away with and erstwhile Tsarist officers most hated by the masses were placed in responsible positions in increasing numbers (Anweiler 1988: 287). Thus this much touted 'proletarian revolution' proved no exception to the general rule that Marx had famously enunciated in 1852: "all revolutions (till now) have only perfected the state machine instead of smashing it." In fact the Bolsheviks, almost total strangers to the country's majority the peasantry and totally uncontrolled by and unaccountable to the industrial proletariat on whose behalf the power was claimed to have been captured, established one of the most repressive regimes in modern history bringing under their iron heels the great mass of Russia's laboring people, culminating already in the first phase of their rule in the bloody

suppression of the most democratic self rule of the toilers after the Paris Commune of 1871 Kronstadt (1921) (Getzler 1983 : 246).

Lenin had characterized Russia in April 1917 that is, still under the much denigrated 'bourgeois democracy' as the "freest country in the world". The much vaunted 'proletarian' rule under the self-proclaimed 'Marxists' after October, far from going beyond bourgeois democracy this "acquisition of the capitalist era", to use Marx's well-known expression stepped one thousand leagues backwards and turned into one of the most repressive regimes of the twentieth century where 'democracy' and 'liberty' became terms of abuse associated with the much hated capitalism (imperialism) and anarchism. As if the *Communist Manifesto* had never been written. □□□

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