

How to Study Lenin

by

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In the 12 volumes of Lenin's selected works, covering the period of 1894 to 1923, it is most important to take careful note of Lenin's method in his work. These volumes are, a concrete Russian application of, the three constituent elements of Marxism, namely, Dialectics, Political economy and party tasks. (1)

Volume #1 is written about the question of economics, it includes a basic article on the agrarian question in Russia at the end of the 19th century. At the same time it contains the basic work on the development of capitalism in Russia. The method of applying dialectics is very clear in the sections where he portrays the struggle with the Narodniks (friends of the people or populists) and in the final work, "The Tasks of the Social Democracy".

A further analysis of the volume will show that Lenin set for himself the following tasks: 1, the working out in terms of the Russian development the part of Vol. 3 of Capital which concerns itself with agriculture. 2, the application of the problem of Vol 2 of Capital not merely to the Russian scene, as far as economics were concerned, but also insofar as the struggle with a living movement (Narodniks) was concerned. His profound interpretation of Vol. 3—that it is not the market or the realization of surplus value that is at stake, but rather the question of production relations that ~~concerns~~ is the result not merely of his astuteness,

* Except for vol 11 and 12 which include all of the writings on Marxism in the first (11) and the agrarian question in Vol 12, the set runs chronologically. To keep the chronology complete I will include those articles on Marxism and the agrarian question in their proper order.

but also due to the fact that there existed in Russia a group of populists who said that since Russia developed at a time when the worldmarket had already been divided among the great powers. Therefore it need not have capitalism, but can skip from the Russian Ker to the Socialist Commune.

For Lenin to prove, both theoretically and practically that Russia could not escape capitalism, and that Socialism would be reached, not from the peasant commune, but from the contradictions of capitalism, meant the "appropriation" of a profound understanding of Vol 2 of Capital. Unfortunately chapter 1 of his "Development of Capitalism in Russia", which deals with the theoretical problems of Vol 2 of Capital, has been omitted from this English translation (see N.I. Oct.-Nov. Dec 1943)

In the same volume we come to the question dealing with the program of the Social Democracy. When it is seen that all of the abstract problems have the most concrete significance, and just as the application of dialectics meant the intellectual competition of Marxism(Narodnikism) so the working out of the theory of Marxism meant the actual elaboration of a practical program of the Social Democracy of that day.

For example, it is in this section(page 385) that the famous statement appears, "without a ~~knowing~~ revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement". This same article shows that as far back as 1897 Lenin thought,

- 1, That there had been enough theory, that we must now go to the masses, 2, know how to disregard boom periods and to prepare party propaganda for the coming crash(pages 386-389)
- 3, saw the intimate interlocking of politics and economics (pages 394-398)

To this volume should be added a section from Voill, which is the completion of the article "Who are the Friends of the People?" (page 283 voll)

Note how these three constituent elements of Marxism, dialectics, economics, the problems of the proletarian revolution, reappear in all the other volumes, for example-

Volume 2

- 1, The tasks of the movement assume the form of a fight against Economism("What is to be done?")
- 2, The tasks of the agrarian problem, as they are tied up with the study of the national question.
- 3, The tasks of the movement assume an even more concrete form in the sense that they do not fight merely against a movement outside the ranks of the Social Democracy, but within it- i.e. Menshevism. You could say that in the years 1894-1903 the fight against Narodnikism and Economism, 1903-1908 fight against Menshevism, that not either Economism or Menshevism did not appear again, but that their theoretical foundations had been destroyed, root and branch, in their period of formation. This factor enabled Lenin to conduct his struggle against other minor tendencies on a more solid basis.

Of greatest significance in this Vol; and to be most carefully read for an understanding of factional disputes, are the articles on the 2nd congress of the Russian Social Democracy, particularly so- "One Step Forward-Two steps Backward" Note also that this article applies dialectics directly to an internal party struggle. (page 463)

Volume 3

Take Vol. 3 and see how these theoretical and practical problems become the essence of the question of revolution. The Revolution of 1905 is the center of this volume and when we come to the question of the internal dispute, the revolution in turn illuminates the real meaning of the dispute with the Mensheviks. "The article," "The Historic Meaning of the Party Dispute", should be studied very carefully, with particular attention to the question of how to distinguish between the Method of Bolshevism and Menshevism in our American Resolutions, pages 35-37

Volume 4

In Volume 4 and its analysis of the years of reaction, we must bear in mind Trotsky's statement in Defense of Marxism, (pages 11 to 15) that the revolutionists have always based themselves on the ~~know~~ the highest stage ~~the~~ of development that the proletariat has reached. There is no mood of defeatism in Lenin, though he is here dealing with the period of 1908-1911. By 1912 he starts talking of the years of revival. Note that during the years of reaction the party crisis also reached its climax and that ⁱⁿ the analysis of this party crisis Lenin did not fear isolation because of splits, because contrasted to the appearance of unity abroad, and the stagnation of the actual work among the masses of Russia. (pages 122-123)

In this volume we find Lenin's analysis of factional groupings, the liquidationists⁽¹⁾ (Otzovists) in terms of the objective situation, and here again, the lesson for us is not to view our own disputes in subjective terms, even in so-called psychological aberrations are deep-rooted in the current economic situation and therefore in the class struggle, but in terms in which Lenin would put it, Which road for the proletarian revolution?

This holds true in the analysis of groupings before the 1905 revolution and after, in the years of reaction and in the years of revival, as we shall see in the later volumes of the period of 1917 and after. In other words, even serious factional groupings at one period had a meaning only because they reflected an objective stage in the development of the economy and therefore, humanity.

In the years of revival (1912-1914) there occurred the famous "August Bloc". By then we talk, not merely of opportunism, but of reformism, although the Bloc included such revolutionists as Trotsky and ^{so called} "party Bolshheviks". In other words Lenin makes clear, and Trotsky never forgot this, lesson that Lenin taught him, that what appears as an organizational fight is in actuality a political fight and it vital for Marxists to expose the politics implicit in organizational maneuvers.

¹ The liquidationists were the group who did not wish to retain an illegal organization, which meant in this death period of Tsarist reaction that the propaganda of the Marxists would be watered down to meet the exigencies of the Tsarist censorship. These Otzovists or "realists" were the opposite extreme, and demanded the recall of all party representatives in the Duma. This in effect meant the refusal to participate in the parliamentary arena. Lenin fought them both, and in fighting them he was not a centerist but showed that both groupings were opposite sides of the same coin.

Read "Notes of a Publicist": note precious titles like, "The New Faction of ~~Conciliators or the Virtuous~~" "Violations of Unity under the Cry for Unity"-the latter pages 187-219)

The agrarian and national questions assume a new and profound meaning in this period and will form the basis of Lenin's position at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International. That is, after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. We have herethe fight with Rosa Luxemburg, and along with part IV of the book, Vol 19 of the collected works, which includes all his writings on the national question. (*1)

Before approaching Vol 5, it would be good to study Vol 18 which would complete the agrarian topic. These articles were written before the outbreak of the Imperialist War. More ever, even in the article written in 1914-15, "Development of Capitalism in the U.S.," dealing with the situation in the south based on the 1910 census, he raises and analyzes the Negro problem in a manner illuminating the problems of the Russian Serf. The parrellel is drawn between the serfdom of Russia and slavery in the south, a comparison that up to today has not recieved the serious study by ^{American} Marxists that it deserves. This is of prime importance for the study of the Negro problem in the U.S. and should be studied along with the resolution of Johnson-Forrest on the Negro Question and the Forrest articles in the dispute with Collidge in the W.F.

*1 It is better to read Vol 19 rather than this part, since it includes the problems of the international movement. It may also be a good idea to re-study this section when Vol 10 and the question of the C.I. is dealt with.

Volume 5

Up to this volume, the basis of the economic study of Lenin are Vol. II of Capital and the section on rent of Vol. III. "e ~~xxx~~ now reach a new stage in the development of capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and its phenomenal expression, the development of imperialism. Lenin analyzes this new stage in what he calls a popular outline and its greatest significance lies in the fact that this, "unforeseen phenomenon" does not throw Lenin off balance, as it did Luxemburg, precisely because he kept so closely to the basic analysis of the accumulation of capital that Marx had made. Hence, although "Imperialism" is a popular pamphlet, it belongs as an integral part of Capital by Marx, a sort of Vol VI of Capital.

"e have reached a new stage and Lenin, in analyzing the coupon clippers, puts his finger on the source of corruption of the 2nd International and the labor aristocracy. "his volume rightly includes the collapse of the 2nd International, the right of nations to self determination in connection with the development of Imperialism, and once again, the immediate concrete tasks and tactics of the party.

With this volume one should also read in vol. XI the brilliant pamphlet, "Marxism", written in 1914, in which is combined the stature of the man Marx, the dialectic philosophy, the materialist conception of history in its class struggle context, the economics of Marx in so complete a form that it should have become the very foundation of the study of Marxism, especially for the youth.

Volumes 6 and 7

These volumes deal with the February and November revolutions. They are absolutely indispensable for the understanding of the present international situation. It is impossible for any revolutionist to understand the theoretical problems of the revolution without a thorough comprehension of the contents of these two volumes.

Note that Vol. VII includes, "State and Revolution", written on the eve of October and then put away so that October could be made and its theoretical and practical principles applied after October. Politics here is practice. Party program here is development of humanity itself. Dialectics here are the development of the actual revolution and the development of the masses concretely, becoming the subject, not the object. (*1)

The theoretic basis of

By Johnson is contained in this volume (Vol. VII) particularly in, "The Threatening Catastrophe" and "Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" Both must be studied with a full understanding of the Anti-Germain Document.

*1 Subject in philosophic terms means a sort of hero whereas object means only the instrument under capitalism. The masses are never the subject but only the object of production. Under Socialism they would become the subject. (see "Reason and Revolution" - Marcuse)

Volumes 8 & 9

These volumes deal with the problems of the reorganization of society after the proletarian revolution. "The Principal Problems of War Communism" in vol. VIII and the trade union dispute in vol. IX form the background for the analysis of the "Economist Tendency in the Fourth International" by R. Stone. In an certain sense all the articles by Johnson and Forrest on the Russian Question are deep rooted in the Leninist conception of the problems of liberated humanity trying to construct a Socialist society, and become the basis of the Russian Question and also the conception of Socialism and the tasks of the Fourth International. In the field of the Russian Question, read particularly the section "Labor and the State" by F. Forrest. (unpublished) A much higher stage is reached in "After 10 Years" by J.R. Johnson (an 1947 N.I.) which is based solidly on the early writing of Marx on alienated labor, and is applied to the latest stage of the degeneration of Russia into State Capitalism.

The section on the party program, in Vol. VIII derives its present day significance from its concern with the elaboration of a new program for revolutionists, following the betrayal of the 2nd International, and reveals the inner connection of past capitalism and the present road to Socialism.

The polemic with Bukarin, who wished to delete the section on the development of capitalism, because it no longer existed, and the insistence of Lenin on the other hand that it remain, because it was history and hence illustrates a necessary development, has a bearing on the present day theory of Retrogressionism.

Vol. IX contains, not only the famous disputes with Trotsky on the trade union question, but includes the epochal last address of Lenin to the congress of the R.C.P. in which he warned of the possible return to capitalism.

The relationship of the international situation to this reversal makes it necessary to study the addresses ^{to} of the C.I. included in vol. X. It would also be useful to study for this integral connection of national and international problems the book, "Proletarian Revolution in Russia" by Lenin and Trotsky.

Volume X

This volume, which includes the collapse of Zimmerwald and the foundation of the 3rd International, completes the selected works of Lenin. Since Vol XI, dealing with Marxism, and Vol. XII have been dealt with previously in their proper ~~order~~ chronological order. The thesis of the 2nd congress of the C.I. on the national question is of the utmost significance for the study of the international question and its meaning, in its most profound ~~sense~~ sense, of The Permanent Revolution.

It is not by accident that it also includes the references to the Negro Question. It must become the foundation for the program of the Fourth International.

In connection with the study of this volume it would be very useful to study Leon Trotsky's, "The First Five Years of the Comintern"

CONCLUSION

Whichever part of the 12 volumes any comrade wishes to study first, they must not forget the method of the whole. First, and most important, the three constituent elements of Marxism as included in all the volumes and in all of Lenin's life work. Take as example the dialectics included in, "Who are The Friends of the People" 1904 and in the note to the editors

of, "Under the Banner of Marxism" (1919), where he urges the establishment of the, "Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic", his method is crystal clear. Or, to take another example, his concretization of this in the practical program of the Bolshevik Party, beginning with the practical tasks of the Social-Democracy (1897) and ending with the fight against Buk^harin in "Party Program", (1919) and the last of his writing on the Subbâtniks etc. (1920-1922). Truth then, we find, is always concrete, never abstract.

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