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An Approach to Lenin's Selected Works

What characterizes all and every volume of Lenin's works is ~~the method~~ the method which so concretely combines the three constituent elements of Marxism, that is, economic, dialectics, and the socialist revolution. Let us begin with Vol. I⁽¹⁾. We see immediately what tasks the young Lenin set for himself in the period, 1894-97: ~~insofar~~ insofar as economics is concerned, it was the working out, in terms of the Russian development, of the part on rent of Vol. III of Capital, or the agrarian problem, on the one hand, and the concretization of the abstract problem of the "realization" of surplus value, or the industrial ~~development~~ ^{problem} ~~of~~ on the other. ~~His~~ ⁽²⁾ profound interpretation of Volume II in the first chapter of his "Development of Capitalism in Russia" is ~~the result not~~ ^{the result} of his astuteness. No, it was the fact that in Russia the debate as to whether it is the market and the realization of surplus value, or the the question of production and hence the production relations, that ~~sent~~ ^{sent} capitalism into periodic convulsions assumed not the form of an abstract debate between two groups of Marxists, ~~but~~ ^{where} the Marxists had to meet challenge of the Narodniki or Populists who argued, with Marx's text in hand, that since Russia developed at a time when the world market had already been divided among the great powers, therefore it need not go through capitalism, but can skip from the Russian Mir (Commune) to the Socialist commune. It was this milieu which forced Lenin to make his exemplary "statistical" work on the development of capitalism at the same time a ~~proof~~ ^{proof} that of ~~the~~ ^{which} Marx's abstraction of a closed capitalist society ~~was~~ ^{was} escape the contradictions of capitalist production merely by escaping the headaches of the market. For Lenin to prove both

- (1) Except for the last two volumes--11 and 12--, which deal with the writings on Marxism, and on the agrarian question, the set runs fairly chronologically. To make the chronology complete, these writings are here dealt with, not as published, but as written.
(2) This first chapter is not included in this set, but it can be read in the translation published in the NI of Oct., Nov. & Dec. 1943)

theoretically and practically that, on the one hand, Russia could not escape capitalism, and, on the other hand, that Socialism evolves not from the peasant commune, but from the contradictions between capital and labor, meant the "appropriation" of Marxism. And this, in turn, meant the only way to understand "statistics". Two basic works then, one on the development of agriculture in the 19th century, and the other on the development of industry, comprise the first part of this volume.

II. On the philosophic front, too, there is here no scholastic debate, but a challenge met and overcome from the Narodniki. "Who Are the Friends of the People"--and the final section of this article which is published in Vol. 11 of the works should be read now--is one of the finest examples of the application of dialectics to a current debate with the intelligentsia of the day.

III. Finally we ~~have~~ deal with, in this same volume, ~~under~~ the with ~~the~~ problems of the proletarian revolution, ~~the~~ working out of a program of the Social-Democracy. Just as the application of dialectics meant the intellectual struggle against Narodnikism, so the working out of the problems of the proletarian revolution means the actual ~~we find~~

It is in this section (p. 385) where ~~the~~ famous statement "without a 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, "now" we must go to the masses, (2) he knew how to disregard boom periods and to prepare party propaganda for the coming crash (pp. 388-89), and (3) saw the intimate interlocking of politics and economics. (pp. 394-98). We will see that the organic concretization of the three constituent elements of Marxism--dialectics, economics, and the proletarian revolution--characterize as distinctly all other volumes of Lenin's Selected Works as they do the first.

Vol. II & III

I. Here on the economic front we see that the agrarian problem gains a new aspect; it is now linked to the national question.

II. The tasks of the proletarian revolution now assume two forms: (1) the fight against economism (What Is To Be Done?), and (2) the fight against Menshevism. The fight against Narodnism and Economism characterize the years 1894-1903; that against Menshevism, 1903-08. This is not to say that neither of these tendencies ever appear again. No, but it does mean that so thoroughly have their theoretical foundations been destroyed in the period of their formation that ~~there~~ as solid a basis against these tendencies has been created by Lenin for future generations as has been laid by Marx on the economic theories of ~~the~~ bourgeois and the petty-bourgeoisie.

The comrades should here read Com. Stone's Draft Document on "The Economist Tendency in the Fourth International".

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is the analysis of the factional disputes in Russia and particularly so the articles on the 2nd Congress of the Russian S-D called "One Step Forward and Two Steps Backward" in Vol. II and the one entitled "The Historic Meaning of the Party Dispute".

Both of these are of the greatest significance in understanding the present internal disputes in the W.P. The Resolution on the American Question/should be reread here, particularly pp. 36-37, to see how solidly it is based on Lenin's methodology, and how to distinguish between the method of Bolshevism and that of Menshevism.

On
III. ~~Finally~~, the philosophic front --dialectics, you will now note, is applied directly to the internal struggle. (See p. 463 Vol. II.)

Finally and of greatest importance overshadowing any other problems dealt with the center of Vol. III is occupied with the Revolution of 1905. Here, then, ~~there~~ is not merely talk as to which road for the revolution as mapped out by any one tendency, but the actual revolution as created by the masses. Yet,

at the same time
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~, this real revolution illuminates the real meaning of the disputes in the Party which, at first, seemed to be merely organizational, but, in reality, show themselves now to be different attitudes toward the problems confronting the proletariat on the road to revolution. And this revolution becomes the dress rehearsal for 1917 only for the Bolshevik Tendency, where for the Menshevik tendency its defeat becomes so great a source of pessimism as to further degenerate that tendency.

Vol. IV

This volume deals with the years of reaction, 1908-11, and the years of revival, 1912-1914. Note that although the center of the volume is now the years of reaction the method used in the volume dealing with revolution is the same. It would be well here to read "In Defense of Marxism" how Trotsky interprets this method: "In the period of darkest reaction, (p.17?)

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. On the contrary, he contrasted to the ~~XXXX~~ appearance of unity abroad, and the stagnation of the work among the masses in Russia (pp.122-3), the actual beginning of a movement among the masses themselves.

We find in this volume also Lenin's analysis of factional groupings in terms of the objective situation, and here, again, the lesson for us is not to view internal disputes in subjective terms, but in terms in which Lenin would put it, which road for the proletarian revolution.

Note the type of groupings that appeared in the years of reaction: (1) the liquidationists, or those who wish to liquidate the illegal organization, which meant in this period of Tsarist reaction that the ^{Marxist} propaganda would have to be watered down to meet the exigencies of the Tsarist censorship; and (2) the Otzovists or recallists, the opposite extreme, who demanded that all Party

representatives in the Duma be recalled, which meant a refusal to utilize the parliamentary arena altogether. Lenin, in fighting against both of these, showed that, in reality, both groupings were merely the opposite sides of the same coin. Read "Notes of a Publicist". Note precious titles like "The New Faction of Conciliators or the virtuous"; "Violation of Unity under the Cry for United" (pp.187-219).

We learn that even so-called psychological aberrations are deep-rooted in the current economic scene and hence in the class struggle, and, in fact, every serious factional grouping has a meaning only because it reflects an objective stage in the development of production and hence of production relations, or "humanity" itself.

In the years of revival there occurred the notorious August Bloc. The Bloc, although it included such revolutionists as Trotsky and the ^{so-called} "party Bolsheviks", gained its ^{political} coloration from those who had a political line, not by those who tried to forget political differences for the sake of an organizational unity without basic roots. Lenin was merciless in his attack on it, and Trotsky never forgot the lessons taught him by this error. (Read here "In Defense of Marxism", p.) It is the politics implicit in organizational maneuvers that is important, and not the maneuvers themselves.

Of importance in this volume, which is such a meaty one in lessons for us, is the fact that the agrarian and national questions assume a new and profound meaning in this period, and this will form the basis of Lenin's position at the Second Congress of the CI much later. There are here the ^{priceless} debates with Luxemburg. It would be better, however, if the comrades, instead of reading the shortened form of these debates in this vol., read instead Vol. XIX of the ~~19th~~ Collected Works.

Before approaching Vol. 5, it would be best here to study Bol. 12 which would complete the entire work on the agrarian question. Or t

if the comrades prefer, they can hold this off until they get to Vol X, dealing with the International, and then reread this vast material, on the national question.

In either case, the study ~~xxx~~ of greatest importance to us here because of the direct application to the American case, is the work included in Vol. XII, written in 1914-15, but based on the 1910 census, called "Development of Capitalism in the U. S." This is a study of the South and, although it was undertaken to illuminate the problems of the Russian serf, is still the finest study of the American freedman (the Negro). The comparisons Lenin draws between the Negro and the Russian serf has been utilized and elaborated upon by Com. Johnson in his Resolution on the Negro Question, which should be read here. Also the entire dispute on the Negro question, including the ^{polemic} ~~articles~~ between Forest and Coolidge, should be studied at the time the comrades will study this work of Lenin's.

Vol. V

Up to this volume, the basic of the economic studies of Lenin are the second volume of Capital, and the part of rent in Vol. III of the same work. Now we reach a new stage in the development of capitalism--monopoly capitalism,--and its phenomenal expression, imperialism. It is this new stage which Lenin analyzes and, although he calls it, merely a "popular outline", it rightly belongs as a sort of Volume IV to Capital itself. What is significant is that the "unforeseen phenomenon" of imperialism does not throw Lenin off balance, as it did Luxemburg, precisely because he kept so closely to the basis analysis of the accumulation of capital made by Marx.

Note, moreover, that as soon as we reached a new stage in the development of the economy, Lenin does not satisfy himself merely by analyzing this new stage as an economist, but, along with the analysis of ~~the~~ monopoly capitalism and its coupon

clippers, ~~Maxx~~ Lenin proceeds to fathom the source of corruption of the Second International: the labor aristocracy. Hence, this volume rightly includes the articles on the collapse of the Second International, the right of nations to self-determination, the significance of this fight for revolutionists --its significance in connection with the development of Imperialism, and, finally, what concrete tasks for the Marxist party follow from this "economic" analysis.

With this volume, one should read in Vol. XI, the brilliant pamphlet "Marxism", the best succinct study of ~~Marx's theories~~ Marx's theories: from dialectical philosophy to the class struggle, from the economic theories to the socialist groupings. All this is done so compactly and profoundly that it should become, especially for the youth, the very foundation of their full study of Marxism.

Volumes VI and VII

Once again we leave theories of revolution to come to the unfolding revolution itself. The core of these volumes are concerned with the Feb. and Nov. Revolutions. They are indispensable to an understanding of the present international situation. It is impossible for any Marxist to understand the theoretical and practical problems of the revolution without mastering the contents of these two volume. The theoretic basis of our anti-Germain thesis lies here, and together with, especially the articles "The Threatening Catastrophe" and "Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power", this thesis should be studied now.

Note that Vol. VII also includes the incomparable "State and Revolution", written on the eve of October, and put away that October may be led; the intimate interlinking of theory with the self-activity of the masses. Thus we see that politics is practice. Party program is the development of humanity itself. Dialectics is the actual process of revolution ~~xxx~~ "performed" by the historic initiative of the masses who have become subject, not

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