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FOR COMRADE LENIN ON HIS 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

VIJAY PRASHAD

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870–1924) was known by his pseudonym—Lenin. He was, like his siblings, a revolutionary, which in the context of tsarist Russia meant that he spent long years in prison and in exile. Lenin helped build the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party both by his intellectual and his organizational work. Lenin's writings are not only his own words, but the summation of the activity and thoughts of the thousands of militants whose paths crossed his own. It was Lenin's remarkable ability to develop the experiences of the militants into the theoretical realm. It is no wonder that the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács called Lenin 'the only theoretician equal to Marx yet produced by the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat'.*

BUILDING A REVOLUTION

In 1896, when spontaneous strikes broke out in the St. Petersburg factories, socialists were caught unawares. They did not know what to do. They were disoriented. Five years later, V.I. Lenin wrote, the 'revolutionaries **lagged behind** this upsurge, both in their 'theories' and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organization capable

* Georg Lukacs, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, London: Verso, 2009, p. 13.

of leading the whole movement'.* Lenin felt that this lag had to be rectified.

Most of Lenin's major writings followed this insight. He worked out the contradictions of capitalism in Russia (**The Development of Capitalism in Russia**, 1896), which allowed him to understand how the peasantry in the sprawling tsarist Empire had a proletarian character. It was based on this that Lenin argued for the worker-peasant alliance against tsarism and the capitalists. When the Russian Revolution of 1905 collapsed, Lenin took to **Novaya Zhizn** (12 November 1905) to argue that the 'survivals of serfdom' formed a 'cruel burden on the whole mass of the peasantry'; the 'proletarians under their red banner', he wrote, 'have declared war on this burden'. It was not enough, Lenin argued, for the workers to fight for the peasants' demands, and it was not enough for the independent demands of the peasantry—for land—to be met; what was necessary was to deepen the unity between the workers and the peasants in the fight 'against the rule of capital' and for socialism. There was no sense in being naïve about the fact that there were class relations within the 'peasantry', and that the small farmers had their own vested class interests in their small private holdings. Lenin's study emphasized the differentiation of the peasantry, in order to understand that the small farmers had a closer class allegiance to the landlords in terms of the defence of private property and in terms of the right to exploit landless agricultural workers. Lenin saw with steely-eyed clarity that the development of worker-peasant unity had to fully grasp the complexities of the countryside, otherwise the movement for socialism would be derailed in a petty bourgeois direction.

* V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 5, p. 397.

Opponents of tsarism other than the Bolsheviks (such as the social democrats, the agrarian radicals, the Socialist-Revolutionaries [SR], and the Mensheviks) stopped far short of the socialist project. Lenin understood from his engagement with mass struggle and with his theoretical reading that the social democrats—as the most liberal section of the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats—were not capable of driving a bourgeois revolution let alone the movement that would lead to the emancipation of the peasantry and the workers. His theoretical assessment was elaborated in **Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution** (1905). *Two Tactics* is perhaps the first major Marxist treatise that demonstrates the necessity for a socialist revolution, even in a 'backward' country, where the workers and the peasants would need to ally to break the institutions of bondage and advance society into socialism.

These two texts from 1896 and 1905 show Lenin avoiding the view that the Russian Revolution could leapfrog capitalist development (as the populists—**narodniki**—suggested) or that it had to go through capitalism (as the liberal democrats—the Kadets, for example—argued). Neither path was possible or necessary. Capitalism had already entered Russia, a fact that the populists did not acknowledge; and it could be overcome by a worker and peasant revolution, a fact that the liberal democrats disputed. The 1917 Revolution and the Soviet experiment proved Lenin's point.

Having established that the liberal elites would not be able to lead a worker and peasant revolution, or even a bourgeois revolution, Lenin turned his attention to the international situation. Sitting in exile in Switzerland, Lenin watched as the social democrats capitulated to the warmongering in 1914 and

delivered the working-class to the world war. Rosa Luxemburg, equally dismayed, wrote, 'workers of the world unite in times of peacetime; in times of war they slit each other's throats.'^{*} Frustrated by the betrayal of the social democrats, Lenin wrote an important text—**Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism**—which developed a clear-headed understanding of the growth of finance capital and monopoly firms as well as inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist conflict. It was in this text that Lenin explored the limitations of the socialist movements in the West, with the labour aristocracy providing a barrier to socialist militancy; and the potential for revolution in the East, where the 'weakest link' in the imperialist chain might be found. Lenin's notebooks show that he read 148 books and 213 articles in English, French, German and Russian to clarify his thinking on contemporary imperialism. Clear-headed assessment of imperialism of this type ensured that Lenin developed a strong position on the rights of nations to self-determination, whether these nations were within the tsarist Empire or indeed any other European empire. The kernel of the anti-colonialism of the USSR—developed in the Communist International (Comintern)—is found here.[†]

The term 'imperialism', so central to Lenin's expansion of the Marxist tradition, refers to the uneven development of capitalism on a global scale and the use of force to maintain that unevenness. Certain parts of the planet—mostly those that had a previous history of colonization—remain in a position of subordination, with their ability to craft an independent national development agenda constrained by the tentacles of foreign political, economic, social and cultural

* Rosa Luxemburg, 'Rebuilding the International', 1915.

† John Riddell et al., eds., **Liberate the Colonies. Communism and Colonial Freedom, 1917–1924**, New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2019.

power. In our time, new theories have emerged that suggest that the new conditions no longer can be sustained by the Leninist theory of imperialism. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, for instance, argue that there is no geo-political rivalry left, that there is only the extension of the sovereignty of the constitution of the United States on a world-scale. This is what they call Empire. What the people—the multitude—must do, they suggest, is to contest the terms of this constitution but not the fact of its global aspiration. Others argue that the world has flattened, so that there is no longer a Global North that oppresses a Global South, that the elites of both regions are part of a global capitalist order. This is the kind of theory that Karl Kautsky advanced in the name of 'ultra-imperialism'. Lenin responded sharply to Kautsky and this theory of 'ultra-imperialism', saying that Kautsky noted that 'the rule of finance capital lessens the unevenness and contradictions inherent in the world economy, whereas in reality it increases them.'^{*} Elements of Lenin's text are, of course, dated—it was written a hundred years ago—and would require careful reworking. But the essence of the theory is valid—the insistence on the tendency of capitalist firms to become monopolies, the ruthlessness with which finance capital drains the wealth of the Global South and the use of force to contain the ambitions of countries of the South to chart their own development agenda.

Finally, Lenin spent the period from 1893 to 1917 studying carefully the limitations of the party of the old type—the social democratic party. If you spend any time in Lenin's **Collected Works** during the decades before the 1917 Russian

* Quoted in Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 19, p. 165. Also see, Karl Kautsky, 'Ultra-Imperialism', **New Left Review**, vol. 1, no. 59 (January–February 1970).

Revolution, you will find thousands of articles and reports on how to strengthen mass work and party building. In Lenin's 1899 text—**Our Programme**—he makes the point that the party must be involved in continuous activity and not rely upon spontaneous or initial (*stikhiinyi*) outbreaks. This continuous activity would bring the party into intimate and organic touch with the working-class and the peasantry as well as help to germinate the protests that then might take on a mass character. It was this consideration that led Lenin to work out his understanding of the revolutionary party in **What Is To Be Done?** (1902). Lenin developed bold ideas for the construction of a worker-peasant party, including the role of the class-conscious workers as the vanguard of the party and the importance of political agitation amongst workers to develop a genuinely powerful political consciousness against all tyranny and all oppression. The workers need to feel the intensity of the brutality of the system and the importance of solidarity.

These texts—from 1896 to 1916—prepared the terrain for the Bolsheviks and Lenin to understand how to operate during the struggles in 1917. It is a measure of Lenin's confidence in the masses and in his own theory that Lenin wrote his audacious pamphlet—**Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?** This was written a few weeks before the seizure of power. And as events unfolded in 1917, Lenin constantly tried to theorize the dynamic of change. The revolution of February 1917 had overthrown the tsar; it had brought to power the liberals. Lenin tracked two developments of equal importance: first, that the liberals—under Kerensky—were preparing to betray the revolutionary aims and return Russia to the war, and therefore to retain the entire tsarist system;

second, that the revolutionary proletariat—and its main parties—remained alert and active, and had strengthened their political form through the Soviets. The worker-peasant-controlled Soviets became a centre of 'dual power' against the liberal-dominated Duma (Parliament). What this meant to Lenin, as he wrote in several of his essays in this period, was that the Soviets had to defend the revolutionary aims and to take power. In September 1917, Lenin wrote that for a Marxist, 'insurrection is an art'; Lenin and the Bolsheviks marshalled their forces, and in October 1917 they struck, and completed the Russian Revolution of 1917.

BUILDING A STATE

No revolution is 'completed' just by seizing power. There was much work to be done in the immediate period after Lenin and his comrades took control of the collapsed tsarist state. A close reading of Lenin's **State and Revolution** (1918) anticipates the problems faced by the Soviets in their new task—they could not only inherit the state structure, but had to 'smash the state', build a new set of institutions and a new institutional culture, create a new attitude by the cadre towards the state and society.

The most important text here is **The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government** (April 1918), which lays out the agenda for the USSR in its first few years. The other texts show Lenin's general attitude towards state construction and to the challenges faced by the USSR—surrounded by hostile powers—in this period. Lenin's **Better Fewer, But Better** (1923), written towards the end of his life, is one of the most honest and reasonable texts on the problems faced by the new government and society.

In his last public appearance—at the Moscow Soviet on 20 November 1922—one can see Lenin's personality in full display. There is Lenin's confidence and his humanness. There is Lenin's honesty and his ambition:

We still have the old machinery, and our task now is to remould it along new lines. We cannot do so at once, but we must see to it that the Communists we have are properly placed. What we need is that they, the Communists, should control the machinery they are assigned to, and not, as so often happens with us, that the machinery should control them. We should make no secret of it and speak of it frankly. Such are the tasks and the difficulties that confront us—and that at a moment when we have set out on our practical path, when we must not approach socialism as if it were an icon painted in festive colours. We need to take the right direction, we need to see that everything is checked, that the masses, the entire population, check the path we follow and say, 'Yes, this is better than the old system.' That is the task we have set ourselves. Our Party, a little group of people in comparison with the country's total population, has tackled this job. This tiny nucleus has set itself the task of remaking everything, and it will do so. We have proved that this is no utopia but a cause which people live by. We have all seen this. This has already been done. We must remake things in such a way that the great majority of the masses, the peasants and workers, will say, 'It is not you who praise yourselves, but we. We say that you have achieved splendid results, after which no intelligent person will ever dream of returning to the old.' We have

FOR COMRADE LENIN

not reached that point yet ... Socialism is no longer a matter of the distant future, or an abstract picture, or an icon. Our opinion of icons is the same—a very bad one. We have brought socialism into everyday life and must here see how matters stand. That is the task of our day, the task of our epoch.*

By 1921, Lenin's health had deteriorated dramatically. In May 1922, he suffered his first stroke. He died on 21 January 1924 at the age of 53. Over a million people came to pay homage to Lenin over three cold days in January before he was interred in a mausoleum in Red Square, where his body remains.

Everything that Lenin wrote a hundred years ago is not to be taken as gospel. It is a guide. Circumstances change, developments must be studied carefully. It was Lenin who taught us that 'the very gist, the living soul of Marxism [is] a concrete analysis of a concrete situation'. What we learned from Lenin is his method and his discipline, his sharp awareness of class in terms of his understanding of politics and policy. Revolutions do not repeat themselves in all their particulars, nor do revolutionary processes. Different historical conjunctures, the concrete situations, require different historical revolutionary dynamics. We have Lenin over our shoulders; he is our inspiration and model.

* Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 33, p. 442.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

:1924:

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

**To the Russian
Communist Party,
I dedicate this poem**

The time has come.

I begin
the story of Lenin.

Not

because the grief
is on the wane,

but because

the shock of the first moment

has become

a clear-cut,
weighed and fathomed pain.

Time,

speed on,
spread Lenin's slogans in your whirl!

Not for us

to drown in tears,
whatever happens.

There's no one

more alive
than Lenin in the world,

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

our strength,
 our wisdom,
 surest of our weapons.

People
 are boats,
 although on land.

While life
 is being roughed
all species
 of trash
 from the rocks and sand
stick
 to the sides of our craft.

But then,
 having broken
 through the storm's mad froth,
one sits
 in the sun
 for a time
and cleans off
 the tousled seaweed growth
and oozy
 jellyfish slime.

I
 go to Lenin
 to clean off mine
to sail on
 with the revolution.

I fear
 these eulogies
 line upon line

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

like a boy
 fears falsehood and delusion.
They'll rig up an aura
 round any head;
the very idea—
 I abhor it,
that such a halo
 poetry-bred
should hide
 Lenin's real,
 huge
 human forehead
I'm anxious lest rituals,
 mausoleums
 and processions,
the honeyed incense
 of homage and publicity
should
 obscure
 Lenin's essential
simplicity.
I shudder
 as I would
 for the apple of my eye
lest Lenin
 be falsified
 by tinsel beauty.
Write!—
 votes my heart,
 commissioned by
the mandate

of duty.



All Moscow's
frozen through,
yet the earth quakes with emotion.

Frostbite
drives its victims
to the fires.

Who is he?
Where from?
Why this commotion?

Why such honours
when a single man expires?

Dragging word by word
from memory's coffers
won't suit either me
or you who read.

Yet what a meagre choice
the dictionary offers!

Where to get
the very words we need?

We've
seven days
to spend,
twelve hours
for diverse uses.

Life must begin—
and end.

Death won't accept

excuses.

But if

it's no more

a matter of hours,

if the calendar measure

falls short

'Epoch'

is a usual

comment of ours,

'Era' or something

of the sort.

We

sleep

at night,

busy

around

by day,

each grinds his water

in his own pet mortar

and so

fritters life away.

But if,

single-handed,

somebody can

turn the tide

to everyone's profit

we utter

something like

'Superman',

'Genius'

or 'Prophet'.

We

 don't ask much of life,
won't budge an inch
 unless required.

To please

 the wife

is the utmost

 to which we aspire.

But if,

 monolithic

 in body and soul,

someone

 unlike us

 emerges,

we discover

 a god-like aureole

or appendages

 equally gorgeous.

Tags and tassels

 laid out on shelves,

neither silly

 nor smart—

 no weightier than smoke.

Go

 scrape meaning

 out of such shells—

empty as eggs

 without white or yolk.

How, then, apply

 such yardsticks to Lenin

when anyone could see

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

with his very own eyes:
that 'era'
cleared doorways
without even bending,
wore jackets
no bigger
than average size.
Should Lenin, too,
be hailed by the nation
as 'Leader
by Divine Designation'?
Had he
been kingly or godly indeed
I'd never spare myself,
on protest bent;
I'd raise a clamour
in hall and street
against the crowds,
speeches,
processions
and laments.
I'd find
the words
for a thundering condemnation,
and while
I'd be trampled on,
I and my cries,
I'd bomb
the Kremlin
with demands
for resignation,

hurling
 blasphemy
 into the skies.
But calm
 by the coffin
 Dzerzhinsky*
 appears
Today
 he could easily
 dismiss
 the guard.
In millions of eyes
 shines nothing
 but tears,
not running down cheeks,
 but frozen hard.
Your divinity's decease
 won't rouse a mote of feeling.
No!
 Today
 real pain
 chills every heart.
We're burying
 the earthliest
 of beings
that ever came to play
 an earthly part.
Earthly, yes;
 but not the earth-bound kind

* Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky—then People's Commissar of Internal Affairs.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

who'll never peer
 beyond the precincts of their sty.
He took in
 all the planet
 at a time,
saw things
 out of reach
 for the common eye.
Though like you and I
 in every detail,
his forehead rose
 a taller,
 steeper tower;
the thought-dug wrinkles
 round the eyes
 went deeper,
the lips looked firmer,
 more ironical than ours.
Not the satrap's firmness
 that'll grind us,
tightening the reins,
 beneath a triumph-chariot's wheel.
With friends
 he'd be
 the very soul of kindness,
with enemies
 as hard
 as any steel.
He, too,
 had illnesses
 and weaknesses

to fight
and hobbies
 just the same as we have,
 reader.
For me it's billiards, say,
 to whet the sight;
for him it's chess—
 more useful
 for a leader.
And turning
 face about
 from chess
 to living foes,
yesterday's dumb pawns
 he led
 to a war of classes
until a human,
 working-class dictatorship
 arose
to checkmate Capital
 and crush its prison-castle.
We and he
 had the same ideals to cherish.
Then why is it,
 no kin of his,
 I'd welcome death,
crazy with delight,
 would gladly perish
so that he might draw
 a single breath?
And not I alone.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

Who says I'm better than the rest?
Not a single soul of us,
I reckon,
in all the mines
and mills
from East
to West
would hesitate
to do the same
at the slightest beckon.
Instinctively,
I shrink
from tram-rails
to quiet corners,
giddy
as a drunk
who sees the lees.
Who would mind
my puny death
among these mourners
lamenting
the enormousness
of his decease?
With banners
and without,
they come,
as if all Russia
had again
turned nomad for a while.
The House of Unions*

* A historical public building in the centre of Moscow where Lenin lay in

trembles with their motion.

What can be the reason?

Wherefore?

Why?

Snow-tears

from the flags' red eyelids

run.

The telegraph's gone hoarse

with humming mournful rumours.

Who is he?

Where from?

What has he done,

this man,

the most humane

of all us humans?



Ulyanov's short life

is well known

to men in

every country

among every race.

But the longer biography

of Comrade Lenin

has still

to be written,

rewritten

and retraced.

Far,

state in January 1924.

far back,
 two hundred years or so,
the earliest beginnings
 of Lenin go.
Hear those brazen,
 peremptory tones
with their century-piercing motif?
It's the grandfather
 of Bromley's and Goujon's,*
the first
 steam locomotive.
Capital,
 His Majesty,
 uncrowned,
 as yet unknown,
declares
 the gentry's power
 overthrown.
The city pillaged,
 plundered,
 pumped
gold
 into the bellies
 of banks,
while at the workbenches,
 lean and humped,
the working class
 closed ranks.
And already threatened,

* Bromley's and Goujon's—foreign-owned engineering works in old Russia; after the revolution they were nationalized, renamed and considerably expanded.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

rearing smokestacks
to the sky,
'Pave your way with us
to fortunes,
grip us tighter!
But remember:
he is coming,
he is nigh,
the Man,
the Champion,
the Avenger,
the Fighter!'
And already
smoke and clouds
get mixed together
as when mutineers
turn orderly detachments
into crowds,
until
the tokens of a storm
begin to gather—
the sky brews trouble—
ugly smoke blacks out the clouds.
'Mid beggars
a mountain of goods arises.
The manager,
bald beast,
flips his abacus,
blurts out 'crisis!'
and pins up a list:
'DISMISSED: ...'

Fly-blown
 pastries
 in dustbins found graves,
grain—
 in granaries
 with mildew cloyed,
while past
 the windows
 of Yeliseyev's,*
belly caved in,
 shuffled the unemployed.
And the call
 came rumbling
 from shack and slum,
covering
 the whimper of kiddies:
'Come, protector!
 Redressor, come!
And we'll go
 to battle
 or wherever you bid us!



Hey,
 camel,
 discoverer of colonies!
Ahoy,
 caravans
 of steel-hulled ships!

* A big food-dealer with huge shops in Russia's principal cities.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

March through the desert,
sunset following,
cleave through the billows
on east-bound trips!

Shadows
of ominous
ugly black
start patching the sky
over sun-kissed oases.

Hear the Negro
with whip-lashed back
muttering
among the bananas and maizes:

'Oo-oo,
oo-oo,
Nile, my Nile!

Splash up a day
like a crocodile,
let it be blacker
than I at night

With fire
like my blood,
as red
and as bright,
for the fattest bellies
both white and black
to fry and sizzle,
to split and crack!

Each
and every
ivory tusk

hack and poke them
 from dawn to dusk.
 Don't let me bleed in vain—
 if only for descendants
 come,
 O Sun-Faced,
 deal out justice and defend us!
 I'm through;
 the God of deaths won't wait—
 I've lived my while.
 Mind my incantation,
 Nile, my Nile!
 From snow-bound Russia
 to sun-scorched Patagonia
 mechanical sweat-mills
 went grinding
 and groaning.
 In Ivanovo-Voznesensk,*
 the loom-twirling city,
 brickwork
 mammoths
 shook with the ditty:
 'Cotton-mill, my cotton-mill,
 Gins and looms a-buzzin',
 It's high time he came along,
 Another Stenka Razin!†



* A big textile centre, scene of mass strikes and revolutionary upheavals for many years.

† Stepan Razin—leader of a peasant uprising in the 17th century.

Grandsons will ask,
 'What does Capitalism mean?'
just as kiddies
 today,
 'What's a Gendarme, Dad?'
So here's
 capitalism
 as then he was seen,
portrayed
 for grandsons
 full-size in my pad.
Capitalism
 in his early years
wasn't so bad—
 a business-like
 fellow
Worked like blazes—
 none of those fears
that his snowy cravat
 would soil
 and turn yellow.
Feudal tights
 felt too tight
 for the youngster;
forged on
 no worse
 than we do these days;
raised revolutions
 and
 with gusto
joined his voice

in the **Marseillaise**.
Machines he spawned
 from his own smart head
and put
 new slaves
 to their service:
million-strong broods
 of workers
 spread
all over
 the world's surface.
Whole kingdoms
 and counties
 he swallowed at a time
with their crowns
 and eagles
 and suchlike ornaments,
fattening up
 like the biblical kine,
licking his chops,
 his tongue—
 parliament.
But weaker
 with years
 his limb-steel became,
he swelled up
 with leisure and pleasure,
gaining in bulk
 and weight
 the same
as his own

beloved ledger.
He built himself palaces
ne'er seen before.
Artists—
hordes of 'em—
went through their chores.
Floors—
à l'Empire,
ceilings
Rococo,
walls—
Louis XIV,
Quatorze.
Around him
with faces
equally fit
to be faces
or the places
on which they sit,
keeping the peace,
stood buttock-faced
police.
His soul
to song
and to colour insensate—
like a cow
in a meadow abloom with flowers—
ethics
and aesthetics
his domestic utensils
to be filliped with

in idyllic hours.
Inferno and paradise
 both his possession,
he sells to old dames
 whose faculties fail
nail-holes from the Cross,
 the ladder of Ascension,
and feathers
 from the Holy Spirit's
 tail.
But finally
 he too
 outgrew himself
living
 off the blood and sweat
 of the people.
Just guzzling,
 snoozing
 and pocketing pelf,
Capitalism
 got lazy and feeble.
All blubber,
 he sprawled
 in History's way.
No
 getting over
 or past him.
So snug
 in his world-wide
 bed
 he lay,

the one way out
was to blast him.



I know,
 your critics'll
 grip their whipsticks,
your poets'll go hysteric:
'Call that poetry?
 Sheer publicistics.
No feeling,
 no nothing-
 just bare rhetoric!
Sure,
 'Capitalism' rings
 not so very elegant;
'Nightingale'
 has a far more delicate sound.
Yet I'll go back to it
 whenever relevant.
Let stanzas
 like fighting slogans resound!
I've never
 been lacking in topics—
 you know it,
but now's
 no time
 for lovesick tattle.
All
 my thundering power of a poet

is yours,
 my class
 waging rightful battle!
'Proletariat'
 seems
 too clumsy for using
to those
 whom communism
 throws into a fright.
For us, though,
 it sounds
 like mighty music
that'll rouse
 the dead
 to get up
 and fight.
Sumptuous mansions
 huddle closer, shivering.
Up their storeys
 goes the cry of basements, quivering:
'We'll break free
 into the sky's
 wide-open blue,
out
 of the abysmal stone blind alley.
He will come—
 a worker's son all through,
a leader yet unborn,
 the proletariat to rally.'
Look,
 the world's already small for Capital's ambition;

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

with his billion-dollar
diamond-studded hands,
doomed
to dream of gain
until perdition,
Capital
goes grabbing other lands.
Off they march,
in clashing steel,
athirst for pillage.
'Kill!'
they shriek;
two moneybags must come to clutches.
Soldiers' graveyards
blot out every village,
each town
becomes a workshop
making crutches.
When it's over
they lay their tables,
unfinicky.
Victory's
the cake they carve and share.
But—
hearken to the burial mounds' ventriloquy,
to the castanets of bones
picked clean and bare.
'You will see us once again
in war aflame.
Time will not forgive
the bloody crime.

He is coming—
 sage and leader-
 to declare
war on you,
 to end war for all time.
Lakes of tears
 spread out
 to flood the globe.
All too deep
 grow blood-mires,
 all too copious.
Till at last
 lone day-dreamers
 began to probe
the probabilities
 of fancy-bred utopias.
But—
 philanthropists—
 they got their brain-pans cracked
against the adamantine rock
 of actual fact.
How could
 footpaths
 blazed by random spurts of brilliance
serve as thoroughfares
 for all the suffering millions?
Now Capitalism
 himself,
 the blundering thief,
can't tame them,
 so his cogs' wild tempo rises.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

His system's carried
like a yellow
wilted leaf
over the giddy ups and downs
of strikes and crises.
What to make
of all this
gold-fed circus,
whom to blame
and on whose side
to stand?
The million-headed,
million-handed
class of workers
strains its brains
itself to understand.



Capital's days
were eroded and gnarled
by time
outblazing
searchlight arcs,
till time
gave birth
to a man named Karl—
Lenin's
elder brother Marx.
Marx!
His portrait's gray-framed sternness

grips one.
But what a gulf
 between impressions
 and his life!
What we see
 immured in marble
 or in gypsum
seems a cold old man
 long since past care and strife.
But when the workers took—
 uncertain yet in earnest—
the first short steps
 along their revolutionary path,
into what a giant,
 blazing furnace
Marx
 fanned up his mind and heart!
As if he'd drudged whole shifts
 in every factory himself
and,
 callousing his hands,
 each tool and job had handled,
Marx caught
 the pilferers
 of surplus value
 with their pelf,
red-handed.
Where others quailed,
 eyes dropped too low
 in awe
to peer up

even as high
as a profiteer's umbilicus,
Marx undertook
to lead the proletariat
into class war
to slay the golden calf,
by then a bull,
immense and bellicose.
Into the bay of communism,
still fogged
with blinding mystery,
we thought
the waves of chance alone
could bring us
from our hell.

Marx
disclosed
the deepest
laws of history,

put
the proletariat
at the helm.

No,
Marx's books
aren't merely print and paper,
not dust-dry manuscripts
with dull statistic figures.

His books
brought order
to the stragglers of labour
and led them forward,

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

full of faith and vigour.

He led them

and he told them:

'Fall in battles!

The proof of theories

are concrete deeds.

He'll come

one day,

the genius of practice,

and guide you on

from books

to battlefields!'

As he wrote

his last

with fingers trembling,

as the last thoughts

flickered in his eyes,

I know,

Marx had a vision

of the Kremlin

and the flag

of the Commune

in Moscow's skies.



Like melons

the years

came on in maturity.

Labour

grew out of childhood

at length.
Capital's
 bastions
 lost security
as the proletarian tide
 gained momentum and strength.
In a matter
 of several years or so
inklings of gales
 into tempests grow.
Uprisings break out
 as the climax of wrath,
revolutions
 come in their aftermath.
Ruthless
 are the bourgeois' bestial ways;
crushed
 by Thiers' and Galliffet's*
 inhuman hammer,
from Paris,
 from the wall
 of Père Lachaise†
the shadows
 of the Communards
 still clamour:
'Look and listen,
 comrades!
 Learn
 from our debacle!

* The French Prime Minister Thiers and General Galliffet headed the operations against the Paris Commune of 1871.

† Paris cemetery where Communards were shot and buried.

Woe to single fighters!
Let our lesson
not be missed.
Only by a party
can the enemy be tackled,
clenching
all the working class
in one great fist!
'We leaders!'
some'll say,
then turn about and sting.
Learn to see
beneath the words
the spotted skin!
There'll be a leader
ours to the least thing,
straight as rails, simple as bread,
prepared to go through thick and thin.
A pot-pourri
of faiths and classes,
dialects
and conditions,
on wheels of gold
the great world
creaked along.
Capital,
a very hedgehog for contradictions,
bristling with bayonets,
waxed fat and strong.
The spectre of Communism
haunted Europe,

withdrew, then roamed again
 throughout its girth.
For all these reasons
 in Simbirsk,
 half-way from Moscow
 to the Urals,
Lenin,
 a boy like any other,
 came to birth.
I knew a worker—
 he was illiterate—
hadn't even tasted
 the alphabet's salt,
yet he
 had listened
 to a speech by Lenin
and so
 knew
 all.
I remember a story
 by a Siberian peasant;
they'd seized land,
 held it
 and worked it
 into very heaven
They'd never even heard,
 much less read Lenin
but were Leninists all,
 from seven to seventy-seven.
I've been up mountains—
 not a lichen on their sides.

Just clouds
 lying prone
 on a rocky ledge.
The one
 living soul
 for hundreds
 of miles
was a herdsman
 resplendent
 with Lenin's badge.
Some'll call it
 a hankering for pins.
Fit for girls—
 makes a frock
 look a bit more rich.
But that pin'll scorch
 through shirts
 and skins,
to the hearts
 brimful
 of devotion to Ilyich.
This couldn't
 be explained
 by churchmen's
 hooks and crooks;
no God Almighty
 bade him
 be a saviour.
Working
 step
 by step

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

his way through life and books,
he grew to be
the teacher of world labour.



Look down
at Russia
from a flying plane.

She's blue
with rivers
as if
lashed all over
with a willow cane
or striped
by a seven-tail whip.

But bluer
than a river
ever looks through its rushes
were the bruises
of landlord-ridden
Russia.

Take a sidelong view
of the woebegone land:
wherever
you cast your eyes
mountains,
pit-heads
and prisons stand
propping up
her skies.

But worse than jail,
worse than war in the trenches
was the lot
of those
who slaved at her benches.

There were countries
richer by far,
I've heard,
more beautiful,
more sane,
but never have I met
in the whole wide world
a land
more full
of sorrow
and pain.

Yet pain and contempt
can't be borne
forever.

Land and Freedom!
the cry grew strong,
until lone rebels,
believers
in individual terror
took to dynamite,
bullet
and bomb.

It's well
to finish
the tsar at a shot,
but what

if the bullet
 goes wide?
And Lenin's brother
 Alexander
 is caught
preparing
 regicide.
Shoot a tsar,
 and another
 with all his might
will strain
 to break
 the record in tortures.
And so
 Alexander Ulyanov
 one night
was hanged
 by the light of Schlüsselburg torches.*
Then his brother,
 a seventeen-year-old youth,
swore an oath
 that was firmer
 than any.
'Brother,
 we'll take up
 the battle for truth
and win,

* Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin's elder brother, a member of the Narodnaya Volya revolutionary society, was arrested on the eve of an attempt to assassinate the tsar, and executed, after court martial, at the Schlüsselburg Fortress, place of execution of many Russian revolutionaries.

but by other means,'
pledged Lenin.



Your usual hero—
 look at the statues—
struts like a peacock:
 'I'll show you
 which is which!'
Not such was the feat,
 arduous,
 plain,
 undramatic,
chosen
 as the task of his life
 by Ilyich.
Together with men
 from the mills and mines
he sought
 to raise wages
 to a decent level,
looked for ways
 of fighting
 deductions and fines
and teaching good manners
 to a foreman-devil.
But the struggle's
 not merely
 for some such claim—
to sweep up a puddle

and then go slow—
satisfied
by a trifle.
No—
Socialism's the aim,
Capitalism
the foe
and the weapon
no broom
but a rifle.
The same things
again
and again
and again
he hammers down
into the work-dimmed brain.
And tomorrow
those
who've at last understood
pass it on,
making
the lesson
good.
Yesterday it was dozens,
today it's hundreds,
tomorrow
thousands
into action rising,
till the whole working world
will start rumbling like thunder
and break

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

into an open uprising.
We're no longer timid
as newly-born lambkins;
the workers' wrath
condenses
into clouds,
slashed
by the lightning
of Lenin's pamphlets,
his leaflets
showering
on surging crowds.
The class
drank its fill
of Lenin's light
and,
enlightened,
broke
from the gloom of millennia.
And in turn,
imbibing
the masses' might,
together with the class
grew Lenin.
And gradually,
enriched
by the fertile communion,
they bring
young Vladimir's pledge
to realization,
no longer

each
 on his own,
 but a Union
of Fighters
 for Working Class
 Emancipation.*
Leninism spreads
 ever wider
 and deeper.
Lenin's disciples
 work miracle after miracle,
the underground's grit
 traced in blood-drops
 seeping
through the dust
 and slush
 of the endless Vladimirka.†
Today
 we spin
 the old globe
 our way.
Yet even
 when debating
 in Kremlin armchairs
there's few
 won't suddenly recall a day
filled
 with the groans

* Name of earliest Marxist workers' organization in Russia; embryo of the Communist Party.

† The highway by which political convicts were driven from Moscow to Siberia.

of chain-gang marchers.

Remember

the none-too-distant past:

beyond the eye-hole,

trams, droshkies, cars . . .

Who of you,

let me ask,

didn't bite

and tear

at prison-bars?

We could smash out

our brains

on the walls weighing on us:

All they did was mop up

and strew sand.

'It wasn't long but honest,

Your service to your land . . .'

In which of his exiles

did Lenin

get fond

of the mournful power

of that song?



The peasant—

'twas urged—

would blaze his own tracks

and set up socialism

without hitch or wrangle.

But no—

Russia too
 goes bristling with stacks;
black beards of smoke
 round her cities tangle.
There's no god
 to bake us
 pies in the skies.
The proletariat
 must head
 the peasant masses.
Over capital's corpse
 Russia's highroad
 lies,
with Lenin
 to lead
 the toiling classes.
They'd promise heaps,
 wordy liberals and SRs,*
themselves
 not loath
 to saddle workers' backs.
Lenin made
 short work of their yarns,
left them bare as babies
 in the blaze of facts.
He soon disposed
 of their empty prattle
full of 'liberty',
 'fraternity'

* Socialist-Revolutionary Party, a petty-bourgeois organization preaching individual terror; after the October Revolution it degenerated into a gang of plotters opposing Soviet power.

and suchlike words.

Arming

with Marxism,

mustering for battle,

rose the only

Bolshevik Party

in the world.

Now,

touring the States

in a de luxe coupé,

or footing it through Russia—

wherever you be

they meet you,

the letters

R.C.P.

with their bracketed neighbour,

B.*

Today

it's red Mars

astronomers are hunting,

telescopes

scanning the sky from a high tower.

Yet that modest letter

on paper or bunting

shines to the world

ten times redder and brighter.



Words—

* Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—name used from 1918 to 1925.

even the finest—
 turn into litter,
wearing threadbare
 with use and barter.
Today
 I want to infuse
 new glitter
into the most glorious of words:
 PARTY.
Individual—
 what can he mean
 in life?
His voice
 sounds fainter
 than a needle dropping.
Who hears him?
 Only, perhaps,
 his wife,
and then if she's near
 and not out shopping.
A Party's
 a raging
 single-voiced storm
compressed
 out of voices
 weak and thin.
The enemy strongholds
 burst with its roar
like eardrums
 when cannon
 begin their din.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

One man alone
feels down and out.
One man alone
won't make weather.

Any old bully
can knock him about—
even weaklings
if two together.

But when
we midgets
in a Party stand—
surrender,
enemy,
fade
out of sight!

A Party's
a million-fingered hand
clenched
into one fist
of shattering might.

What's an individual?
No earthly good.

One man,
even the most important of all,
can't raise a ten-yard log of wood,
to say nothing
of a house
ten stories tall.

A Party means millions
of arms,
brains,

eyes

linked

and acting together.

In a Party

we'll rear our projects to the skies,

upholding and helping

one another.

The Party's

the compass

that keeps us on course,

the backbone

of the whole working class.

The Party

embodies

the immortality of our cause,

our faith

that will never

fail or pass.

Yesterday an underling,

today

whole empires I'm uncharting.

The brain,

the strength,

the glory of its class,

that's what it is,

our Party.

Lenin

and the Party

are brother-twins.

Who'll say

which means more

to History, their mother?

Lenin

and the Party

are the closest kin;

name one

and you can't but imply

the other.



Crowns and coronets

still galore,

bourgeois

still blacken

like wintering crows.

But labour's lava

already starts to pour:

see—

through the Party's crater

it flows.

January 9.

Gapon,*

the 'people's friend',

debunked.

We fall

in the rifles' crackle.

Tall tales

* On 9 January 1905, the gendarmes, killing hundreds, scattered a peaceful manifestation carrying a petition to the tsar. The priest Gapon, its leader, had organized a whole system of police-sponsored workers' circles, spreading the belief that the tsar was unaware of their miserable conditions.

about the tsar's royal mercy
end
with Mukden's bloodbath
and Tsushima's debacle.*
Enough!
No belief left
for twaddle and twiddle.
The Presnya†
takes to arms,
done with ballyhoo.
It seemed
the throne
would soon snap across the middle
and forthwith
the bourgeois easy chair too.
Ilyich is everywhere.
Day after day
he fights
with the workers
through 1905,
standing nearby
on every barricade,
innervig
the revolution
with his vigour and drive.
But soon
came the treacherous trick:

* Mukden, Tsushima—sites of land and naval battles in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), where tsarism sustained military defeat from the Japanese; one of the main events that set off the revolution of 1905, disclosing the decay of the regime.

† An industrial district in Moscow where the street-fighting began in 1905.

Hey Presto!

Red ribbons
blossomed
like a virgin's cheek.

The tsar
from his balcony
read the Manifesto.*

Then,
after a 'free' honey-week,
the speeches,
the singing,
the hooraying and hailing
are covered
by the treble bass of
cannon:

on the workers' blood goes sailing
the tsar's butcher-admiral
Dubasov.†

Spit in the faces
of white dross who tell us
about the Cheka's‡
blood-dousings!

They ought to have seen
how, tied by the elbows,
workers
were flogged to death
by thousands.

* On 17 October 1905, the tsar issued a manifesto promising certain civil rights—a subterfuge aimed at allaying popular indignation.

† Admiral Dubasov—governor-general of St. Petersburg, headed operations against the insurgent workers.

‡ Cheka—Extraordinary Commission headed by Dzerzhinsky; crushed counter-revolutionary plots in the first years of Soviet power.

Reaction ran amuck.
 Intellectual bunglers
 withdrew,
 recluses,
 and became the meekest,
 locked themselves in
 with blinking candles
 and smoked incense,
 god-damn God-seekers.*
 Even Comrade Plekhanov† himself
 raised a whine:
 'It's the Bolsheviks' fault;
 it's theirs, the muddle is.
 Shouldn't have taken up arms
 at the time
 and blood wouldn't swirl,
 as it does,
 in puddles.'

But here
 with his courage
 never failing
 Lenin
 cut
 into the traitors' wail:
 'O yes we should have—
 I'll repeat it daily—
 only far more resolutely—

* Some of the intellectuals earlier supporting the revolutionary cause lost heart after the defeat of the revolution and abandoned the militant principles of the movement, indulging in 'God-seeking', i.e. religious mysticism.

† Georgi Plekhanov—prominent Marxist scholar and theoretician, who in 1905 drifted to the right and broke with Lenin.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

and wouldn't have failed.

I see

the hour of new upheavals
arriving

again

to bring out
the working
classes.

Not defence

but attack
should become the driving

slogan

of the masses.'

That nightmare year

with the bloody bath

and the massacre

of the workers'
insurgent millions

will pass

and appear
as preparatory class

for the hurricanes

of future rebellions.



And Lenin

once more
turns exile into college,

educating us

for the coming battle.

teaching others,
 himself gaining knowledge,
regathering the Party,
 unmanned and scattered.
Year after year
 the strikes scored higher:
a spark
 and the people'd
 flare up again.
But then
 came a year
 that put off the fire—
1914
 with its deluge of pain.
It's thrilling
 when veterans
 twirl their whiskers
and, smirking,
 spin yarns
 about old campaigns.
But this wholesale,
 world-wide
 auction of mincemeat—
with what Poltava
 or Plevna*
 will it compare?
Imperialism
 in all
 his filth and mud,

* Poltava (Ukraine, 1709) and Plevna (Bulgaria, 1877)—cities near which big historic battles were won by Russian forces.

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

false teeth bared,
 growling and grunting,
quite at home
 in the gurgling ocean of blood,
went swallowing up
 country after country.
Around him,
 cozy,
 social-patriots and sycophants.
raising heavenwards
 the hands
 that betray,
scream like monkeys
 till everyone's sick of it:
'Worker—
 fight on—
 on with the fray!
The world's
 iron scrap-heap
 kept piling
 and piling,
mixed with minced man's-flesh
 and splintered bone.
In the midst
 of all this
 lunatic asylum
Zimmerwald*
 stood sober alone.
Ever remembered

* The international socialist conference held in Zimmerwald (Switzerland, 1915) took a resolute stand against the imperialist war.

is the speech Lenin made
above the world uproar
 raising on high
a voice
 far louder
 than any cannonade,
thoughts more inflaming
 than any fire.
On one side
 were millions
 writhing in the labour
of war
 to bring would-be victory
 forth,
on the other—
 against
 both cannon and sabre—
one man
 of ordinary
 stature and girth.
'Soldiers!
 The bourgeois
 betray and sell you,
send you to slaughter
 as a thousand times before.
Enough of it!
 Hear what I tell you:
Turn this war
 among nations
 into civil war.
What are we,

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

peoples,
 arguing for?
Put an end
 to catastrophes,
 wounds
 and losses.
Raise the banner
 of holy war
against
 the world-wide bosses!
It looked as though,
 infernally booming,
the cannon would sneeze
 and blow him away.
Who'd ever find
 the fragile human?
Who would remember
 his name?
'Surrender!'
 one country roared to another.
Looked as if they'd go on fighting
 for millennia.
But at last it was over,
 and lo,
 no winners
except for one—
 Comrade Lenin.
Imperialism,
 damn you!
You've exhausted our patience,
 once fit for angels.

Rebellious Russia
 has rammed you
through—
 from Tebriz to Archangel.
An empire's no hen—
 no joke bagging it,
the two-headed,
 power-vested,
 hook-beaked eagle.
And yet
 we spat out
 like a finished fag-end
their dynasty
 with all trappings,
 regal and legal.
The nation
 scrambling out of the mire,
huge,
 famished,
 blood-crust all over it—
would it go on
 dragging chestnuts from the fire
for the bourgeois,
 or would it go Soviet?
'The people
 have broken
 tsarist fetters.
Russia's boiling,
 Russia's ablaze!
Lenin read
 in newspapers and letters

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

in Switzerland
 where he lived those days.
But what could one fish
 out of newsprint tatters?
O,
 for an airplane
 skyward to speed—
home,
 to the aid
 of the workers in battle—
that
 was his only longing and need.
But at last
 at the Party's bidding
 he's on wheels.
If only
 the murderous Hohenzollern* knew
that the German goods waggon
 under German seals
carried
 a bomb
 for his monarchy, too!



Petrograd citizens
 still kept skipping,
exulting
 in glee ephemeral.
But already,

* The dynastic name of German Kaiser Wilhelm II.

red-ribboned,
 in martial frippery,
 the Nevsky* swarmed
 with treacherous generals.
 Another few months
 and they'll reach the limit:
 it'll come
 to policemen's whistles.
 The bourgeois
 already itch to begin it,
 already
 the fur
 on the beast's back bristles.
 At first
 mere fry
 at which one might scoff,
 then big sharks
 emerged
 to swallow
 the nation.
 Next
 Dardanelsky,
 née Milyukov,†
 and finally
 Prince Mikhail‡
 agog for coronation.

* Nevsky Prospekt—central thoroughfare of Petrograd.

† One of the leaders of the Russian counter-revolutionary forces; during the First World War advocated war until victory and annexation of the Dardanelles straits.

‡ Brother of Nicholas II; made claims to the throne immediately after the tsar's abdication.

The Premier*
 wields power
 with feathery splendour:
none of your commissar's snarling.
Sings in a tenor
 maidenly tender,
even kicks up hysterics,
 the darling.
We hadn't yet tasted
 the sorriest crumbs
of February's
 freedom-prodigies
when
 'Off to the front,
 working thingamagums!
the war-boys
 began prodding us.
And to crown
 this picture
 of passing beauty,
traitors and doublecrossers
 before and after that.
SRs and Savinkovs†
 stood on watchdog duty
with Mensheviks‡

* Kerensky, A.F.—Socialist-Revolutionary; from July 1917 headed the bourgeois Provisional Government. In August 1917 Premier Kerensky ordered Lenin's arrest, secretly planning his murder.

† Boris Savinkov—one of the leaders of the SR Party; after the revolution headed several counter-revolutionary plots.

‡ Mensheviks—opportunist minority in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.

as the Tell-Tale Cat.*

When suddenly
into the city
sleekening with blubber,
from beyond
the broad-banked Neva,
from Finland Station
through the Vyborg suburb
rumbled
an armoured car.

And again
the gale,
momentum gaining,
set the whirlwind
of revolution spinning.

Caps and blouses
flooded the Liteiny:†

'Lenin's with us!
Long live Lenin!'

'Comrades,'
and over the heads
of the hundreds clapping

forward
a guiding hand
he thrust,

'Let's cast off
the outworn Social-Democrat trappings

Chuck the capitalists
and their yes-men

* The Tell-Tale Cat—folklore cat that could speak and tell stories.

† Liteiny Prospekt—one of Petrograd's main streets.

into the dust!

We voice

the will

of the toilers

and tillers

of the whole world.

Now's the hour.

Long live the Party

of communism builders,

long live

armed struggle

for Soviet power!

For the first time ever

without ado

before the flabbergasted

human ocean

arose

as a routine job to do

once unattainable

socialism.

There,

beyond the factories roaring,

there, on the horizon

with blinding force

it shone

before us,

the Commune

of tomorrow

without bourgeois,

proletarians,

slaves

or lords.
Through the tangle
of tethering
yes-men's tenets
Lenin's speech
came crashing like an axe,
indented with uproar
every minute:
'Right,
Lenin!
It's time to act!
Kshesinskaya's palace,*
earned by twiddling toes,
today's invaded
by boots
steel-heeled.
It's here
the factory multitude
flows
in Lenin's smithy
to be tempered
and steeled.
'Munch your pineapples,
chew your grouse!
Your days are over,
bourgeois louse!
Already we demanded
the wherefore and why
from those

* Kshesinskaya—prima ballerina of the Mariinsky Theatre; the tsar's favourite, whose palace, a present from the tsar, was taken over by the revolutionary masses.

who, lording it,
 quaffed and guzzled,
and during
 the dress rehearsal of July*
tickled their gizzards
 with revolver muzzles.
The bosses bared fangs,
 their looks spelt murder;
'Rioting slaves!
 We'll show 'em!
 they thundered.
'Lenin to the wall!
 Kerensky penned the order;
'To jail with Zinoviev!†
 and the Party
 went underground.
Ilyich's in Finland,
 at Razliv,
 safe and sound,
hidden securely
 in a twig shelter.
It won't betray him
 to the pack of hounds
ready
 to snap him up
 in the welter.
Lenin's unseen,

* On 3–4 July 1917, Petrograd workers, soldiers and sailors held a peaceful demonstration demanding complete transfer of power to the Soviets. It was dispersed by gunfire at the orders of the Provisional Government.

† Zinoviev, G.Y.—joined the Russian Social-Democratic movement in 1901. After the Second Congress of the RSDLP (1903) Zinoviev joined the Bolsheviks.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

and yet he's near,
and time and events
don't stand.
Every slogan
is Lenin's idea,
every move
is guided
by Lenin's hand.
Each word
by Ilyich
finds soil most fertile
and falling
forthwith
promotes
our cause,
and see—
alongside
with Leninist workers
millions of peasants
into its orbit it draws.
And when
it remained
but to mount barricades,
having chosen
a day out of many,
back to Petrograd
to the workers' aid
with
'Comrades,
we've waited enough!
came Lenin.

'The yoke of capital,
hunger's prodding,
the banditry of wars
and thieving intervention
will seem
in time
mere moles on the body
of Grandma History,
escaping attention.'
And looking back
from the future
on this day
the first thing seen
will be Lenin's figure,
from millennia
of slavery
blazing the way
to the age of the Commune
through want
and rigour.
These years of privation
will sink into the past
and the summer
of the Commune
warm this globe of ours,
and the huge,
sweet fruit of happiness
at last
will mature
from the crimson
October flowers.

And then
 the readers
 of Lenin's behests,
as the yellowing pages
 they peruse,
will feel a hot tide
 well up in their breasts,
and in their eyes—
 hot tears,
 long since out of use.

When I look
 for the grandest day
 of my life,
rummaging
 in all
 I've gone through and seen.

I name without doubt
 or internal strife

October 25,
 1917.

The Smolny* throbs
 in a buzz of excitement.

Grenades
 hang on seamen
 like partridges.

Bayonets zigzag
 like flashes of lightning.

Below stand machine-gunners
 belted with cartridges.

* Historic building accommodating the Petrograd Soviet; headquarters of the October uprising.

No aimless shuffling
in the corridors;
with bombs and rifles
no one's a novice.
'Comrade Stalin
wants to see you.
Here's
the orders:
armoured cars—
to the General Post Office.'
'Comrade Trotsky's*
instructions.'
'Right!
—he dashed forward
and the man's
navy ribbons
flashed:
'Aurora'.†
Some run with dispatches,
others
stand arguing,
still others
click rifle-bolts—
no two figures
the same.
And here,

* Trotsky, L.D.—joined the Bolshevik Party on the eve of the October Revolution. After the October Revolution became the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and later, People's Commissar of Army and Navy Affairs. In 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Party and deprived of Soviet citizenship for anti-Soviet activities.

† Aurora—famous battleship whose salvo signalled the beginning of the revolution.

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

no token
of greatness
or grandeur,
brisk
but inconspicuous,
Lenin
came.
Already
led
by Lenin
into battle,
they didn't know him
from portraits
yet;
bustled,
hollered,
exchanged banter,
with a quickfire of oaths,
hail-fellow-well-met.
And there,
in that long-wished-for
iron storm
Lenin,
drowsy with fatigue,
it would seem,
pacing,
stopping,
hands clasped behind back,
dug his eyes
into the motley scene.
Once I saw him

stabbing them
 into a chap in puttees,
dead-aiming,
 sharp-edged
 as razors,
seizing the gist
 as pincers would seize,
dragging the soul
 from under words and phrases.
And I knew,
 everything
 was disclosed
 and understood,
everything
 those eyes
 were raking for:
where
 the shipwright
 and miner stood,
what
 the peasant and soldier were aching for.
He kept all races
 within his sight,
all continents
 where the sun goes setting
 or dawning;
weighed the whole globe
 in his brain
 by night
and in the morning:
To all,

every
 and each,
slaves of the rich
one another
 hacking and carving;
to you we appeal
 this hour:
Let the Soviets
 take over
 government power!
Bread
 to the starving!
Land
 to the farmers!
Peace
 to the peoples
 and their warring armies!
The bourgeois, busy
 drinking their fill of
soldierly blood,
 shrieked in a frenzy:
'At 'em,
 Dukhonin and Kornilov,
show 'em what's what,
 Guchkov* and Kerensky!
But both front and rear
 surrendered without a shot
when the decrees†

* Dukhonin and Kornilov—White generals, Guchkov—minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government; leaders of the planned coup that aimed at preventing the imminent revolution.

† Decrees on Peace and Land and Decision on the Formation of a

hailed down on them,
scorching.
Today we know
who showed whom
what's what;
even at illiterates' hearts
they got,
into steel determination
forging.
From near
unto far
it went rolling,
mounting
from a whisper
to a roar:
'Peace to cottages
poor and lowly,
war on palaces,
war, war, war!'
We fought
in all factories,
humble and famous,
shook 'em out of cities like peas,
while outside
the October wildfire
left flaming manors
for landmarks
marking
its triumphant stride.

Workers' and Peasants' Government—the first to be issued by the revolutionary authorities.

The land—
 once a mat
 for wholesale floggings—
was suddenly seized
 by a calloused hand
with rivulets,
 hillocks
 and other belongings
and held tight—
 the long-dreamed-of,
 blood-soaked land.
The spectacled white-collars,
 spitting in spite,
sneaked off
 to where kingdoms and dukedoms
 still remain.
Good riddance!
 We'll train every cook
 so she might
manage the country
 to the workers' gain.



We survived
 for the time
 by printing,
 writing,
bellowing
 from the trenches
 into the German ear:

'Come out and fraternize!
Finish fighting!
Enough!
and the front
crumbled off into the rear.
Leaking in torrents
that swelled out of trickles,
it seemed
our boat was about to careen:
Wilhelm's boot,
far heftier than Nicholas',
would smash the country
to smithereens.
Then came the SRs
with their infantile drivelling,
to catch the runners
in their word-traps preposterous;
dragged them back
with toy swords
from the scrap-heap of chivalry
picturesquely to vanquish
the iron-dad monsters.
But Lenin
curbed
the gamecocks' zest:
'The Party
must shoulder
the burden again.
We'll accept
the breathing-space

of filthy Brest:*

Territory we'll lose,
but time we'll gain.'

And,
so as the breathing-space
shouldn't kill us,
to be able,
later,
to knock them barmy,
let discipline
and conscious resolve
be our drillers.

Rally
in the ranks
of the Red Army!



Historians
will stare
at the posters with hydras:†

'Did those hydras
exist or not?'

As for us,
that same hydra
reached out to bite us
and a full-size hydra it was,

* The young Soviet Government was forced to sign the inequitable Brest Treaty with the Germans, which lasted only until November 1918, when the revolution in Germany overthrew the Kaiser.

† ... posters with hydras—cartoons of the civil war depicted imperialism as a many-headed monster out to devour the Soviet Republic.

by god.
 'All dangers we'll defy,
 No limit to our courage,
 And fighting we will die
 For Soviet power to flourish!
 First comes Denikin.
 Denikin gets a lickin'.
 Repair work begins
 on our ruined hearths.
 Then Wrangel turns up
 in the wake of Denikin;
 the baron kicked out,
 Kolchak* comes en masse.
 Our dinners—bark,
 beds—any old where,
 yet forward
 the red-starred legion bursts.
 In each lives Lenin,
 each feels Lenin's care,
 each along a front
 of eleven thousand versts.
 That was its breadth—
 eleven thousand versts,
 but who knows
 its depth and length?
 Every door
 an enemy ambush nursed,

* General Denikin headed the first White Guard onslaught from the South; soon after his defeat, Baron Wrangel entered the Ukrainian steppes from the Crimea. Admiral Kolchak led the White armies based in Siberia. With equipment and financial backing from abroad, they successively and simultaneously attempted to smother the Soviet Republic.

every house
 to be captured
 took blood and strength.
SRs and monarchists
 with their tongues and guns
sting,
 the vipers,
 or bite like hounds.
You don't know the way
 to Michelson's?
You'll find it
 by the blood
 from Lenin's wounds.*
SRs talk better
 than they pull a trigger,
their bullets
 their own ribs ramming.
But a menace
 beside which
 bullets were meagre
was the siege
 begun
 by typhus
 and famine.
Look at the crumb-collecting
 flies:
by far
 better off
 than we were then,

* Allusion to an attempt on Lenin's life by the SR terrorist Kaplan who chose the moment when Lenin was leaving a workers' rally at the Michelson engineering works in Moscow, August 1918.

queueing
 in the freeze
 for a tiny slice
days
 on end.
Fancy
 a giant shipbuilding works
working for nothing
 but cigarette-lighters!
Jail 'em,
 hang 'em,
 cut their heads off,
how else
 could the workers earn grub,
 poor blighters?
But the kulaks
 had heaps of both butter and flour.
Kulaks,
 they weren't no boobies;
hid and hoarded
 till a fitter hour
their grain
 and their greasy rubles.
Hunger
 hits harder,
 kills surer than bullets.
You need a steel grip here,
 not cotton-wool lenience.
So Lenin sets out
 to fight the kulaks
by food requisition teams—

grim expedients.
How could the very notion
of democracy
at such a time enter
any fool's head?!
At 'em
and none of your mincing hypocrisy.
Only iron dictatorship
to victory led.



We've won,
but our ship's all dents and holes,
hull in splinters,
engines near end,
overhaul overdue
for floors,
ceilings,
walls.
Come,
hammer and rivet,
repair
and mend!
Where's port?—
all the beacons gone dead in the harbour.
We careen,
crossing
the waves
with our masts.
There's risk she'll keel over,

such cargo to starboard:
the 100 million
 peasant class!
While enemies howled
 with malicious glee
Lenin alone
 kept his nerve:
turned her twenty points leeward
 and she
swerved upright
 and entered port at a curve.
And at once,
 surprisingly,
 no more gale;
peasants cart bread
 and at every step
the familiar ads:
 WILL BUY—
 FOR SALE—
—NEP*
Lenin winks:
 we're in fur repairs.
Get used to the yardstick—
 nothing to fear.
The shore
 rocks the crew,
 weak with wear and tear:
'Whoah!

* Abbreviation for the New Economic Policy proclaimed by Lenin, envisaging temporary permission for free private commerce, purposed to help the economy recuperate; the key positions in the economy being retained by the proletarian state.

Where's the gale?
What's the big idea?'

Lenin
points out
a deep bay
free of rocks
with the piers
of co-operatives
looming
over it.

And smoothly
into construction's
docks

sailed
the colossal
country
of Soviets.

Lenin himself
heaves timber and iron
to patch up
the breaks and ruptures,
marks off and measures
with an all-seeing eye on
future co-ops,
shops
and management structures.

Then again
he resumes
his post
on the bridge:

Lights on

in front,
 at the sides
 and back!
Since now,
 systematic
 everyday
 siege
will replace
 both storm raid
 and surprise attack
At first
 we withdrew,
 discreet and sober.
Anyone disgraced—
 out without a word!
Now forward again—
 the retreat is over.
R.C.P.—
 crew aboard!
The Commune'll live centuries.
 What's a decade for her?
Forward,
 and this quagmire of a NEP
 will be past.
We'll move
 and build
 a hundred times slower
so a million times longer
 our edifice may last.
The morass
 of petty 'private enterprise'

still tethers
 the tempo
 of our advance,
but through the gathering clouds
 of the world-wide tempest
the first streaks of lightning
 already glance.
Old enemies drop
 and give place to new.
Yet wait—
 the skies
 over the world
 we'll ignite.
But that
 is surely
 better
 to do
than
 to write about.
 Right?
Today,
 whether in the office
 of a director
or running a lathe
 at a public-owned factory,
we know—
 the proletariat is victor.
and Lenin
 the architect of victory.
From the Comintern
 to the hammer and sickle

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

on brand-new kopeks
 shining in glory,
our achievements
 and triumphs
 double
 and triple,
filling page after page
 of Lenin's great story.
Revolutions
 are the business of peoples;
for individuals
 they're too heavy to wield,
yet Lenin
 ranked foremost
 among his equals
by his mind's momentum,
 his will's firm steel.
Countries rise
 one after the other,
fulfilling
 his predictions
 each in turn;
men of all races—
 white
 and dark-skinned—
rally
 under the banner
 of the Comintern.
The imperialists
 and bourgeois
 in their thinning crowds,

still pestering the world
and lording over it,
politely tip
their top hats and crowns
to Ilyich's brain-child—
the Republic of Soviets.
Fearing no effort
or artifice by the rich,
on speeds our engine
in curling smoke.
When suddenly—
the shattering news:
Ilyich
had a stroke ...
If
you exhibited
in a museum
a Bolshevik in tears,
all day
they'd flock in the museum
to see him.
Small wonder—
you won't see the like in years.
With five-pointed stars
we were branded
by Polish voivodes.
Buried alive
neck-deep in the ground
by the bandits of Mamontov,*
burned up in engine fire-boxes

* White Guard general, notorious for brutality.

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by Japanese marauders,
mouths plugged with molten tin,
 threatened with bullets;
'Renounce it!' they bellowed,
 but from
the hell-holes of burning gullets
'Long live Communism!'
 was all that would come.
Row
 after row,
 in its might unreckoned,
this iron,
 this steel,
 the recess not over yet,
crowded
 on January
 the twenty-second
the five-storey building
 of the Congress of Soviets.
Down they settled,
 joking
 and grinning,
affairs talked over
 in business-like idiom.
Time to start!
 Why aren't they beginning?
Here,
 what are those gaps in the presidium?
Why are their eyes
 red as box-stall plush?

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Look at Kalinin*—
 hardly keeps his feet.
Something happened?
 What is it? ...
 Hush!
What if it's him?
 No, indeed ...
Raven-like,
 the ceiling
 swooped upon us,
 lowering;
down dropped heads,
 bent floorward by their fears.
Of a sudden
 ghastly,
 blackly glowering
grew the swimming lights
 of chandeliers.
Silence choked the bell's unneeded tinkle.
Up Kalinin got,
 by will alone.
Tears—
 go try and chew them
 from moustache and wrinkle:
they betray him,
 shining
 on the beard's sharp cone.
Veins ablaze—
 no hope of quenching them;

* Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin—Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and later of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

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thoughts confused—
like walls his head impenning;
'Yesterday
at 6.50 p.m.
died
Comrade Lenin.'



That year
beheld a sight
that ages won't set eye on.
That day will keep
its tale of woe
forever throbbing.
Horror
squeezed an anguished groan from iron.
The rows of Bolsheviks
were swept
with waves of sobbing.
What a weight!
Ourselves
we dragged out bodily.
Get the details!
When and where?
Why do they hide it,
damn!
Through the streets and lanes,
a white hearse modelling,
the Bolshoi Theatre swam.
Joy

crawls on like a snail.
Grief
 will never go slow.
No sun shone.
 No ice
 gleamed pale.
All the world
 from the newspapers' pail
was cold-showered
 with coal-black snow.
On the worker
 bent at his gears
the news pounced
 and bullet-like
 burned.
And it seemed
 a cupful of tears
on his instruments
 overturned.
And the peasant,
 weathered and wizened by life,
whom death
 more than once
 just missed,
swung round—
 away from his wife,
but she saw it—
 the dirt he smudged with his fist.
There were some—
 no flint could be harder or colder,
yet they too

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clenched their teeth,

lips awry.

Children

in a minute grew graver and older

and,

childlike,

the grey-bearded started to cry.

The wind

to all the earth

in sleepless anguish whined,

and she, the rebel,

couldn't stand up to the notion

that here,

in Moscow,

in a frosty room enshrined

lay he—

both son and father

of the Revolution.

The end,

the end,

the end . . .

All persuasion

useless!

Glass

and beneath—

the deceased.

It's him

they bear

from Paveletsky Station

through the city

that he

from the lords
released.

The street's like a wound
that'll worsen and worsen,
so the ache of it
cuts
and hacks.

Here every cobble
knew Lenin
in person
by the tramp
of the first October attacks.

Here every slogan
on banners embroidered
was thought out
and worded
by him.

Here every tower
his speeches
applauded,
would follow him
anywhere,
staunch and grim.

Here Lenin
is known
both in works and offices.

Spread hearts
like spruce-tree boughs
in his way!

He led,
he steeled

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with his victory-prophecies,
and see—
proletarians
have taken sway.

Here every peasant
holds Lenin's name
dearer
than any
of kinsmen cherished
for the land
that at Lenin's bidding became
his own—
a dream
for which grandsires
rebelled
and perished.

And Communards
from their graves
in Red Square
seemed to be whispering
'Dear,
beloved,
live,
and no need for a lot more fair.

We'd die ten times
for fulfilment of it.'
Let the word
be pronounced
by a miracle-maker
for us to die
that he be awoken;

the street-streams would swell
and flood their embankments
and all
go to death
with a joy unspoken.
But there aren't any miracles.
Only Lenin.
Lenin,
his coffin
and our bent shoulders.
This man was a human—
as human as anyone.
So just bear it—
the pain
that in humans smoulders.
Never
was there
a burden more precious
borne along
by oceans of people
than this red coffin
borne by processions
on the drooping shoulders
of marches and weeping.
The Guard of Honour
had scarcely been formed
of heroes,
heirs
of his wisdom and strength,
when crowds,
impatient,

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already swarmed
through all the neighbourhood's
breadth
and length.
Into a 1917 breadline
no hunger
could drive—
better eat tomorrow.
But into this bitter,
freezing,
dread line
kids,
invalids—
all
were driven by sorrow.
Alongside
village and town
were arrayed,
child and adult,
wrung
by their grief's insistence.
The world of labour
passed
in parade,
the living total
of Lenin's existence.
Downcast,
the sunbeams
dropped through the trees,
slanting down
from the house-top slopes,

yellow
as whipped-into-meekness Chinese
bent with their sorrow,
lamenting their hopes.

Nights
swam in
on the shoulders
of days
muddling hours
and confusing dates
and it seemed,
not night
with its star-born rays,

but Negroes
were here
with their tears
from the States.

The frost,
unheard-of,
scorched one's feet,
yet days
were spent
in the tightening crush.

Nobody
even ventures
to beat
hands together to warm them—
hush!

The frost grips fast and tortures,
as if
trying how tough

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the love-tempered will is,
cuts into mobs,
and, freezing them stiff, as if
sneaks in
with the crowds
behind the pillars.
The steps expand,
grow up into a reef.
Silence.
Breathing and sighing stop:
how pass it,
fearful beyond belief,
that dismal,
abysmal
four-step drop?
That drop
from the logic of farthing and penny,
from ages
of thraldom to His Majesty Gold;
that drop
with its brink—
the coffin
and Lenin
and beyond—
the Commune
in its glory unrolled.
Lenin's forehead
was all you saw
and Nadezhda Konstantinovna*

* Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya—Bolshevik leader, and major theorist of education; partner of Lenin.

in a haze ...
Maybe eyes less full of tears
could show me more.
It's through clearer eyes
I've looked on gladder days.
The floating banners
bend
in the last
honours,
and, silken, sway.
'Farewell to you,
comrade,
who have passed
from a noble life
away ...'
Horror!
Shut your eyes
and blindfold pace
the infinity
of tight-rope grief.
As if
for a minute
left face to face
with the only
truth
worth belief.



What joy!
My body,

light as a feather,
drifts
in the march-tune's resonant stream.
I know
for sure—
from now and forever
the light of this minute
in me will gleam.
What a joy it is
to be part of this union,
even tears from the eyes
to be shared en masse,
in this—
the purest,
most potent communion
with that glorious feeling
whose name is Class.
The banner-wings
droop
one after another,
in tomorrow's battles
again to rise;
'We ourselves,
dear brother,
closed
your eagle eyes ...'
Shoulder to shoulder—
not to fall!
Flags blackened,
eyes reddening,
tears agleam,

for the last farewell with Lenin
 came all,
 slowing
 down
 at the Mausoleum.
 On went the funeral ceremonial.
 Speeches flowed.
 Ay, speaking's all right;
 the tragedy is
 there's a minute only—
 how embrace him
 at one insatiable sight!
 Out they file
 and with dread in their glance
 look up
 at the glowering,
 snow-pocked disk:
 how madly
 the dockhands on Spasskaya* dance!
 A minute—
 and past the last quarter
 they whisk!
 Stop
 at this news,
 mankind,
 and grow dumb
 Life,
 movement,
 breathing—cease.
 You,

* Kremlin clock-tower.

with hammer uplifted,
be numb.

Earth,
lie low
and, motionless, freeze.

Silence.
The end of the greatest of fighters.

Cannon fired.
A thousand, perhaps.

Yet all that cannonade
sounded quieter
than pennies
jingling in beggars' caps.

Straining,
paining
each puny iris

I stand,
half-frozen,
with
bated breath.

In the gleaming of banners
before me arises
darkling,
the globe,
as still as death.

And on it—
this coffin
mourned by mankind,
with us,
mankind's representatives,
round it,

in a tempest of deeds
and uprisings destined
to build up
and complete
all this day has founded.



But now,
from the bowing banners'
red arch
comes the voice of Muralov:*
'Forward
march!'
The command's so apt
it needn't be given:
our breathing firmer,
more even
and rare,
leaden bodies with effort
driven,
we hammer
our footsteps
down from the square.
Each of the banners
above our heads
in steadying hands
soars up
as it ought.
From our marching ranks

* Muralov, N.I.—then commander of the Moscow Military District.

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the energy
spreads
in circles,
carrying through the world
one thought;
one thought
from a common anxiety
stemming
burns
in the army,
at the lathe,
at the plough:
it'll be hard for the Republic
without Lenin.
He's got to be replaced,
but by whom
and how?
'Enough of dozing
on bug-ridden mattresses!
Comrade secretary,
here's
our application:
put down
the whole of the factory
on the membership list
of the Party organization.'
Cold sweat
comes oozing
from bourgeois flesh
as they watch on,
grinding

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their teeth.
400,000
from the workbench
fresh—
could the Party
bring Lenin
a welcomer
wreath?
'Comrade secretary,
where's your pen?
Replace means replace—
why squander words?
If you think I'm too old,
here's my grandson then;
YCL-er,*
one of the early birds!



Ahoy,
my Navy,
get into motion!
Off on your missions,
submarine moles!
'Over sea
and over ocean
travel sailors,
merry souls!
Hi there, Sun,

* YCL—The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, also called the Komsomol.

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come and be witness!

Hurry on,

smooth out the wrinkles of mourning.

In line with parents,

children show their fitness—

Tra-ta-ta-ta-aa-aa!

sing their bugles in the morning.

'One-Two-Three,

Pioneers are we:

We aren't afraid of fascists—

Let them come and see!'

In vain

old Europe

snarls like a cur.

'Back!'

we warn her,

'better be wiser!'

Lenin's

very death

has turned

into the greatest

communist-organizer!

Over the world-wide forest

of factory

stacks

like a giant banner

the huge

Red Square,

millions

of hands

welded into its staff,

soars
 with a mighty sweep
 into the air.
And from that banner,
 from every fold
Lenin,
 alive as ever,
 cries:
'Workers,
 prepare
 for the last assault!
Slaves,
 unbend
 your knees and spines!
Proletarian army,
 rise in force!
Long live
 the Revolution
 with speedy victory,
the greatest
 the justest
 of all the wars
ever
 fought
 in history!'

THE THREE SOURCES AND THREE COMPONENT PARTS OF MARXISM*

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

Throughout the civilized world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of 'pernicious sect'. And no other attitude is to be expected, for there can be no 'impartial' social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, **all** official and liberal science **defends** wage-slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the question of whether workers' wages ought not to be increased by

* This article was dedicated to the Thirtieth Anniversary of Marx's death, and was published in **Prosveshcheniye** (Enlightenment), a Bolshevik social, political and literary monthly published legally in St. Petersburg from December 1911 onwards. Its inauguration was proposed by Lenin to replace the Bolshevik journal **Mysl** (Thought), a Moscow publication banned by the tsarist government. Lenin directed the work of the journal from abroad and wrote the following articles for it: 'Fundamental Problems of the Election Campaign', 'Results of the Election', 'Critical Remarks on the National Question', 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', and others.

The journal was suppressed by the tsarist government in June 1914, on the eve of the First World War. Publication was resumed in the autumn of 1917 but only one double number appeared; this number contained two articles by Lenin: 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' and 'A Review of the Party Programme'.

decreasing the profits of capital.

But this is not all. The history of philosophy and the history of social science show with perfect clarity that there is nothing resembling 'sectarianism' in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose **away from** the high road of the development of world civilization. On the contrary, the genius of Marx consists precisely in his having furnished answers to questions already raised by the foremost minds of mankind. His doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate **continuation** of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism.

The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defence of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.

It is these three sources of Marxism, which are also its component parts that we shall outline in brief.

I
The philosophy of Marxism is **materialism**. Throughout the modern history of Europe, and especially at the end of the eighteenth century in France, where a resolute struggle was conducted against every kind of medieval rubbish, against serfdom in institutions and ideas, materialism has proved to be the only philosophy that is consistent, true to all the teachings of natural science and hostile to superstition, cant and so forth. The enemies of democracy have, therefore,

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always exerted all their efforts to 'refute', undermine and defame materialism, and have advocated various forms of philosophical idealism, which always, in one way or another, amounts to the defence or support of religion.

Marx and Engels defended philosophical materialism in the most determined manner and repeatedly explained how profoundly erroneous is every deviation from this basis. Their views are most clearly and fully expounded in the works of [Friedrich] Engels, **Ludwig Feuerbach** and **Anti-Dühring**, which, like the **Communist Manifesto**, are handbooks for every class-conscious worker.

But Marx did not stop at eighteenth-century materialism: he developed philosophy to a higher level, he enriched it with the achievements of German classical philosophy, especially of Hegel's system, which in its turn had led to the materialism of Feuerbach. The main achievement was **dialectics**, i.e. the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of the human knowledge that provides us with a reflection of eternally developing matter. The latest discoveries of natural science—radium, electrons, the transmutation of elements—have been a remarkable confirmation of Marx's dialectical materialism despite the teachings of the bourgeois philosophers with their 'new' reversions to old and decadent idealism.

Marx deepened and developed philosophical materialism to the full, and extended the cognition of nature to include the cognition of **human society**. His **historical materialism** was a great achievement in scientific thinking. The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory, which shows how, in consequence

of the growth of productive forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism.

Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e. developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's **social knowledge** (i.e. his various views and doctrines—philosophical, religious, political and so forth) reflects the **economic system** of society. Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat.

Marx's philosophy is a consummate philosophical materialism which has provided mankind, and especially the working class, with powerful instruments of knowledge.

II

Having recognized that the economic system is the foundation on which the political superstructure is erected, Marx devoted his greatest attention to the study of this economic system. Marx's principal work, **Capital**, is devoted to a study of the economic system of modern, i.e. capitalist, society.

Classical political economy, before Marx, evolved in England, the most developed of the capitalist countries. Adam Smith and David Ricardo, by their investigations of the economic system, laid the foundations of the **labour theory of value**. Marx continued their work; he provided a proof of the theory and developed it consistently. He showed that the value of every commodity is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time spent on its production.

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Where the bourgeois economists saw a relation between things (the exchange of one commodity for another) Marx revealed a **relation between people**. The exchange of commodities expresses the connection between individual producers through the market. **Money** signifies that the connection is becoming closer and closer, inseparably uniting the entire economic life of the individual producers into one whole. **Capital** signifies a further development of this connection: man's labour-power becomes a commodity. The wage-worker sells his labour-power to the owner of land, factories and instruments of labour. The worker spends one part of the day covering the cost of maintaining himself and his family (wages), while the other part of the day he works without remuneration, creating for the capitalist **surplus-value**, the source of profit, the source of the wealth of the capitalist class.

The doctrine of surplus-value is the cornerstone of Marx's economic theory.

Capital, created by the labour of the worker, crushes the worker, ruining small proprietors and creating an army of unemployed. In industry, the victory of large-scale production is immediately apparent, but the same phenomenon is also to be observed in agriculture, where the superiority of large-scale capitalist agriculture is enhanced, the use of machinery increases and the peasant economy, trapped by money-capital, declines and falls into ruin under the burden of its backward technique. The decline of small-scale production assumes different forms in agriculture, but the decline itself is an indisputable fact.

By destroying small-scale production, capital leads to an increase in productivity of labour and to the creation of

a monopoly position for the associations of big capitalists. Production itself becomes more and more social—hundreds of thousands and millions of workers become bound together in a regular economic organism—but the product of this collective labour is appropriated by a handful of capitalists. Anarchy of production, crises, the furious chase after markets and the insecurity of existence of the mass of the population are intensified.

By increasing the dependence of the workers on capital, the capitalist system creates the great power of united labour.

Marx traced the development of capitalism from embryonic commodity economy, from simple exchange, to its highest forms, to large-scale production.

And the experience of all capitalist countries, old and new, year by year demonstrates clearly the truth of this Marxian doctrine to increasing numbers of workers.

Capitalism has triumphed all over the world, but this triumph is only the prelude to the triumph of labour over capital.

III

When feudalism was overthrown and 'free' capitalist society appeared in the world, it at once became apparent that this freedom meant a new system of oppression and exploitation of the working people. Various socialist doctrines immediately emerged as a reflection of and protest against this oppression. Early socialism, however, was **utopian** socialism. It criticized capitalist society, it condemned and damned it, it dreamed of its destruction, it had visions of a better order and endeavoured to convince the rich of the immorality of exploitation.

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But utopian socialism could not indicate the real solution. It could not explain the real nature of wage-slavery under capitalism, it could not reveal the laws of capitalist development, or show what **social force** is capable of becoming the creator of a new society.

Meanwhile, the stormy revolutions which everywhere in Europe, and especially in France, accompanied the fall of feudalism, of serfdom, more and more clearly revealed the **struggle of classes** as the basis and the driving force of all development.

Not a single victory of political freedom over the feudal class was won except against desperate resistance. Not a single capitalist country evolved on a more or less free and democratic basis except by a life-and-death struggle between the various classes of capitalist society.

The genius of Marx lies in his having been the first to deduce from this the lesson world history teaches and to apply that lesson consistently. The deduction he made is the doctrine of the **class struggle**.

People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the **interests** of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. Champions of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is **only one** way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can—and, owing to their social position, must—constitute the power

capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organize those forces for the struggle.

Marx's philosophical materialism alone has shown the proletariat the way out of the spiritual slavery in which all oppressed classes have hitherto languished. Marx's economic theory alone has explained the true position of the proletariat in the general system of capitalism.

Independent organizations of the proletariat are multiplying all over the world, from America to Japan and from Sweden to South Africa. The proletariat is becoming enlightened and educated by waging its class struggle; it is ridding itself of the prejudices of bourgeois society; it is rallying its ranks ever more closely and is learning to gauge the measure of its successes; it is steeling its forces and is growing irresistibly.

**"The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true.
It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men
with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with
any form of superstition, reaction,
or defence of bourgeois oppression."**

V.I. Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (22 April 1870 – 21 January 1924), was the chief theoretician of the revolution against the Tsarist empire and the head of the government of the Soviet Republic and then the USSR from 1917 to 1924. Grippled by the suffering induced by capitalism and by the hopes of a communist revolution, Lenin worked hard between the energy of Marx's theories and the praxis of workers and peasants.

One hundred and fifty years after his birth, he and his ideas remain a beacon for revolutionaries the world over.

Three publishing houses—LeftWord Books (India), Expressão Popular (Brazil), and Batalla de Ideas (Argentina)—along with Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, have joined together to produce this book in honour of Lenin.

The book comprises Lenin's essay 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism' (1913), which is a short and concise introduction to the Marxist method; the epic poem on Lenin written by his younger contemporary and revolutionary poet and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky (1924); and a short text by Vijay Prashad on the enduring relevance of Lenin's ideas for us today.

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