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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

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.

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

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

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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
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 interned 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.

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,
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
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
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.
VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

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.
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.
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*
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.
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.
March through the desert,
sunsets 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;
'Ve'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;
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 aflare.
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.
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 straggling ranks of labour
and led them forward,
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
goest 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
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 prea-
  ching 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 coupe,
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.
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,
innerving
   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.
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.
false teeth bared,
growling and grunting,
quite at home
in the gurgling ocean of blood,
grew 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,
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
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.
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.
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
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 pester 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.
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?
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.
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
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 Paveletsy 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
VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

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,
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
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.
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
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.
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,
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.
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.
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. Gripped 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.