

In Defence of Leninism

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The contemporary defence of Leninism involves two tasks: first, the defence of the political record of the historical Lenin; second the demonstration of the continuing relevance and applicability of Lenin's key political ideas today. This article will mainly focus on the second task but I will begin with a few remarks about the first.



1. The historical Lenin

As I have written elsewhere:

Lenin matters. I don't mean he mattered in Russian history or in the history of the twentieth century - that's obvious. I

mean he still matters, matters to the bourgeoisie and matters for socialist practice today.

The single most serious challenge to the world capitalist order in its whole history was that posed by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the international revolutionary wave that followed in its wake. For a few short years the survival of the system literally hung by a thread and if we were to identify a single moment on which the fate of humanity hinged and when history turned, it would be the failure of the German Revolution in 1923. Obviously there can be no certainty in such matters, but if the German Revolution had succeeded there is an excellent chance that there would have been no Stalin, no Hitler and a fair chance that today we would be living in a socialist society.

Lenin symbolises the Russian Revolution and that historical moment. More than that, it was Lenin's politics and organization that led the Russian Revolution to victory¹.

For this reason it has always been especially important to the bourgeoisie and its academic apologists to discredit Lenin. This has involved a fair amount of

¹John Molyneux, 'Lih's Lenin', <http://johnmolyneux.blogspot.com/2006/11/lihs-lenin-review-of-lars-t-lih-lenin.html>

personal character assassination² but the main charge has been that Leninism led, more or less inevitably, to Stalinism and that the principal factor in this continuity was the Leninist Party. Crafted by many hands over the years, ranging from former Mensheviks to American and British cold war 'scholars', this argument has achieved a remarkable consensus right across the political spectrum from right wing conservatives through liberals and social democrats to anarchists. In their own way even Stalinist communists agreed. Trotskyists were practically the only dissenters. But majorities, even large ones, are frequently wrong and there are powerful factual and theoretical arguments against what I shall call the Lenin/Stalin continuity thesis.

First the facts:

1. In terms of their political ideas and policies there was a vast gulf between Lenin and Stalin. Lenin was a strict internationalist and discounted the possibility of socialism in one country; Stalin adopted socialism in one country and encouraged Russian nationalism. Lenin was an egalitarian opposed to privileges for bureaucrats and party leaders; Stalin systematically encouraged such inequalities. Lenin detested racism and anti-semitism; Stalin made subtle and not-so-subtle use of it. Lenin passionately defended the rights of oppressed nations to self determination (including directly against Stalin); Stalin crushed these rights. Lenin was absolutely in favour of women's emancipation; Stalin made a point of restoring the traditional family. Lenin was opposed to forcing the collectivization of agriculture on the

peasantry; Stalin imposed it at the cost of millions of lives. This list could be continued almost indefinitely.

2. There was very little continuity in terms of personnel between the Bolshevik leadership in Lenin's day and the party leadership under Stalin. In October 1917, just before the insurrection, the party central committee elected a Political Bureau of seven - Bubnov, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Lenin, Sokolnikov, Stalin, Trotsky. Only one survived - Stalin, who murdered the rest with the exception of Lenin. Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, Smilga, Preobrazhensky, Shlyapnikov, Pyatakov, Radek, Krestinsky were all leading members of the CC in Lenin's day and all played important roles in the party, the revolution and the Civil War; all were killed by Stalin in the purges. As were many thousands of other prominent Old Bolsheviks and Communists. When Trotsky said Stalinism was divided from Bolshevism by 'a river of blood' it was literally true.
3. Nearing the end of his life, in late 1922, Lenin turned against Stalin, broke off relations with him and was looking to remove him from his position as party General Secretary, as part of an overall struggle against growing bureaucracy in the party and the state.
4. The Bolshevik Party functioned highly democratically, from its foundation to well after the revolution - at least until 1921, when factions

²The idea that Lenin was, from the start, bent on personal power has always struck me as silly. If as a young man in Tsarist Russia in 1893 your aim was maximum personal power you would join the Tsarist bureaucracy, not as Lenin did, the Emancipation of Labour Group, with about 30 members and no prospect of getting anywhere except Siberia.

were banned, and in many respects until in 1923. At no point was it in any way the personal dictatorship of Lenin, who was quite often out-voted - for example on participating in Duma elections in 1907, on unity with the Mensheviks in 1910, on boycotting the Democratic Conference in September 1917, and on postponing elections to the Constituent Assembly in December 1917. On a number of crucial occasions when Lenin did get his way, it was only after vigorous debate in which he succeeded in winning a majority to his point of view; for example over breaking with the Provisional Government and orienting on workers' power in April 1917, on launching the Insurrection in October 1917 and on signing the Brest-Litovsk Peace in January 1918. And in each of these cases Lenin's victory was not just a matter of his personal authority or the power of his arguments but the fact that over a period of time they were seen to correspond to the objective logic of events.

The theory:

The academic myth that Leninism was elitist and authoritarian from the start as demonstrated by his 1901 statement in *What is to Be Done?* that 'socialism has to be brought to the working class from the outside' is been answered many times³. The formulation, taken directly from Karl Kautsky, was indeed 'biased therefore erroneous' as Trotsky put it⁴. but it was revised by Lenin in 1905 and not at all typical of his thought - indeed it was never repeated in his later work and he specifically cautioned that *What is to Be Done?* was a polemic against 'economism'(a trend in

Russia which argued that socialists should confine themselves to supporting workers' economic demands) in which he 'bent-the-stick'. Moreover Lars Lih, in a work of monumental scholarship, *Lenin Rediscovered - 'What is to Be Done?' in Context*, comprehensively refuted the notion that Lenin had a negative attitude to the working class. On the contrary, Lih shows, with an abundance of evidence, that Lenin was consistently the most enthusiastic of all the Russian Marxists about the political capacities and potential of the Russian working class.

It should also be noted that as well as being historically false, the proposition that a whole social order of the dimensions and duration of Stalinist Russia (and remember similar regimes were established across Eastern Europe, China, North Korea etc) could be 'based on' or 'caused by' a 'theory' developed thirty years earlier is, in fact, crude and rampant idealism. It holds no more water than the notion that capitalism was based on or caused by the doctrines of John Calvin or Adam Smith, or that we that we can explain the nature of Nazi society mainly by means of *Mein Kampf* .

What is required is rather a historical materialist analysis which takes as its point of departure the development of the forces and relations of production in Russia and internationally and then examines the class forces at work in Russia after the revolution and the struggle between them. What such an analysis shows is that in 1917 the material basis for socialism, in terms of the level of economic development and the strength of the working class, existed internationally and especially in Western Europe and North America, but it did not exist in Russia taken by

³ See for example, John Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party*, London 1978, Chs 2 and 3, and Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Building the Party*, London 1975, especially Ch.4.

⁴L. Trotsky, *Stalin*, London 1968, p58.

itself. This was common ground among all the Russian Marxists including both Lenin and Trotsky; as Lenin put it with characteristic bluntness, 'It is the absolute truth that without a German revolution we are doomed.'⁵

Moreover, if the material prerequisites for socialism were lacking in Russia in 1917, the situation rapidly got much, much worse due to the Civil War inflicted on Russia by the alliance of Western imperialism and the White Guard generals. This produced the utter collapse of the economy and the virtual destruction of the already small Russian working class. In these horrendous circumstances an alliance between the workers and peasants, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, was able to defeat the White counter revolution, but in the process the exhausted and decimated working class lost the ability to exert democratic control over the state apparatus which passed increasingly into the hands of a combination of remnants of the old (pre-October) officials and newly emerging Bolshevik bureaucrats. Thus was born the embryo of a new ruling class who progressively separated themselves from the working class during the 1920s and, under the leadership of Stalin, took total power in 1927-28, launching Russia, via the Five Year Plan, on a process of forced industrialisation and capital accumulation in competition with the capitalist west. That, in class terms, is the essence of what happened. Without the spread of the revolution internationally (which WAS a real possibility and came within an inch of success, especially in Germany) it was highly unlikely there could have been any alternative outcome other than the conquest of Russia by foreign intervention.

⁵Cited in Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Revolution Besieged*, London 1987, p.54

⁶For a very detailed assessment of all Lenin's political work during this period, which operates within this theoretical framework but is both critical and brutally realistic, see Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Revolution Besieged*, as above.

Of course, on this basis the actions of the Bolshevik Party and the deeds and ideas of Lenin are both factors that play a role in the whole process and, provided they are not taken as the starting point of the account, need to be assessed. Lenin's strategic orientation, as made clear during the debate over whether to sign the extremely onerous peace terms imposed at Brest Litovsk in late 1917, was to take such measures as were necessary for the revolution to survive until such a time as the international revolution came to their aid while simultaneously doing everything possible to facilitate that revolution by means of the Communist International and so on. Lenin pursued this strategy until his terminal illness took him out of politics in early 1923. In the process he, and the Bolsheviks, doubtless made many mistakes - some on the authoritarian side, some on the adventurist side - eg the attempt to march on Warsaw in 1920, and perhaps, delaying the introduction of the New Economic Policy till 1921. Perhaps the suppression of Kronstadt was a mistake, though personally I think it was necessary. In the enormously difficult circumstances mistakes (and excesses, even crimes) were inevitable; but the overall strategy was surely correct⁶.

What were the alternatives? Two widely touted options were a) the establishment of a 'liberal' parliamentary democracy and b) immediate transition to a vibrant 'ideal' workers' democracy or even a stateless anarchist commune. In my opinion neither of these options were remotely possible in the conditions prevailing in Russia during or following the Civil War. Attempting either would have led directly to the victory of the Whites, wholesale slaughter of the workers and the rev-

olutionaries, and the setting up of a fascist regime of utter brutality. Victor Serge, the former anarchist and libertarian socialist, in explaining why he reluctantly supported the Bolsheviks at the time of Kronstadt wrote, 'If the Bolshevik dictatorship were to fall, we felt, the result would be chaos: peasant putsches, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the émigrés, and, finally, another dictatorship, of necessity anti-proletarian.'⁷

Finally it should be stressed that the alternative pursued by Stalin from 1923-24 onwards, while it certainly built on many of the authoritarian practices developed under Lenin, was a qualitatively different strategy. Whereas Lenin's strategy was an attempt to hold out until the international revolution and in the meantime to try to counter growing bureaucratisation⁸, Stalin's was to entrench the bureaucratic apparatus, basing himself on it, and, crucially, with his articulation of the doctrine of 'socialism in one country', to abandon the pursuit of international revolution. Without international revolution, Russia, thrown back on to its own inadequate resources, could survive only by forced industrial development funded by the exploitation of its workers and peasants. This in turn necessitated the bureaucracy establishing itself, with Stalin at its head, as a new exploiting class. Far from being a continuation of Leninism Stalin's policy was its counter revolutionary negation.

2. Leninism today

Clearly it is possible to respect and even revere Lenin as a historical figure while maintaining that due to changed circumstances

Leninism, as a political doctrine or strategy, is no longer relevant or appropriate today. This was the 'mainstream' international Communist attitude to Lenin from, at least, the 1950s onwards when the European CPs adopted 'the parliamentary road to socialism'. An example of this attitude is provided by one of that movement's outstanding intellectuals, Georg Lukacs. In 1924 Lukacs produced a short book, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, which was a superb summary and vindication of the essence of Leninism, but when in 1967 it was republished, he wrote a Postscript arguing 'the renaissance of Marxism requires a purely historical treatment of the twenties as a past period of the revolutionary working-class movement which is now entirely closed'⁹ and confined himself to a eulogy of Lenin's personality without reference to any of his specific political positions. This is not my position. I intend to argue that the core of Lenin's politics (not every detail of course) not remain relevant but are an essential foundation for contemporary revolutionary socialist theory and practice.

I will make this argument by focusing on three aspects of Lenin's thought which in my opinion constitute the main defining characteristics of Leninism: his theories of imperialism and war; of the state and his theory and practice of the party. In doing so I take for granted something that was undoubtedly even more fundamental to Lenin, namely the revolutionary role of the working class, but I would regard this as the defining characteristic of Marxism has a whole.¹⁰

⁷Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1945/memoirs/ch04x.htm#h3>

⁸For a thorough account of Lenin's final struggle against bureaucracy see Tony Cliff, as above, pp..394-442.

⁹G.Lukacs, *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of his Thought*, London, 1970, p.89.

¹⁰See John Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*, London 1985.

Imperialism and War

Lenin's theory of imperialism was most fully expressed in his famous book, *Imperialism- the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. This was written in 1916 with the aim of demonstrating the imperialist roots and character of the First World War, but it was also part of a collective endeavour by Marxists at that time to analyse the development of capitalism at the beginning of the twentieth century: other important contributions included Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910), Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), and Nikolai Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy* (1916). The work of summarizing Lenin's analysis of imperialism has been done for us by Lenin himself. He writes:

If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism...

But very brief definitions, although convenient, for they sum up the main points, are nevertheless inadequate, since we have to deduce from them some especially important features of the phenomenon that has to be defined. And so, without forgetting the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general, which can never embrace all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development, we must give a definition of imperialism that will include the following five of its basic features:

(1) the concentration of pro-

duction and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital", of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.¹¹

The capitalists divide the world, not out of any particular malice, but because the degree of concentration which has been reached forces them to adopt this method in order to obtain profits. And they divide it "in proportion to capital", "in proportion to strength", because there can-

¹¹<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch07.htm>

¹²<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch05.htm>

not be any other method of division under commodity production and capitalism.¹²

As the relative strength of the main imperialist powers changes (eg the rise of Germany) so a struggle sets in for the re-division of the world; hence the drive to imperialist war.

It would, of course, be contrary to the Marxist dialectical method and Marx's analysis of capitalism ('Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones,.' *The Communist Manifesto*) to imagine that over almost a century there would not have been numerous and important changes in the economic and political structure of imperialism. Chris Harman in 'Analysing imperialism'¹³ and Alex Callinicos in *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*¹⁴ offer extensive and masterly surveys of these changes which include: the decline in the importance of export capital; the shift of investment away from 'the third world' and the retreat from formal colonialism; the decline of Europe in the Second World War and the emergence of Cold War imperialist rivalry; the emergence of NICs (newly industrializing countries such as South Korea and Singapore, then China, Brazil, etc) and of oil as the imperialist commodity par excellence; the collapse of 'communism' in the eastern block and the era of so-called 'globalisation'.

However, the fact is that despite all these developments certain basic continuities remain. The process of concentration and centralisation of capital identified by Marx has continued and the world economy, more than ever, is dominated by giant

multi-national corporations. The vast majority of these corporations, however, retain a national home base with close ties of mutual dependence to their respective state apparatuses, with state power (economic, diplomatic, political and military) being regularly deployed to bolster and defend those economic interests. As a result the world is still divided into oppressor and oppressed nations, so-called 'great powers' and 'regional powers' and much lesser fry. Imperialism is still with us and so is the fact and threat of imperialist war.

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the hype about globalisation was at its height, various attempts were made to deny this. On the right outright supporters of capitalist globalisation claimed that it was about to solve all problems of underdevelopment and poverty and produce a 'flat' world in which there would be little room for national conflicts. This went, hand in hand, with large quantities of (bourgeois) wishful thinking about a 'New World Order' and, even, 'the end of history' (by which Francis Fukayama meant the end of serious ideological/political conflict ie of any challenge to capitalist liberal democracy). On the left, Nigel Harris argued that globalisation was liberating capital from its ties to the state and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in the influential *Empire*, argued that traditional imperialism, with its rival powers, had been replaced a de-territorialised global system of 'Empire'.

Personally, I always found the notion of capital freed from its dependence on, and links to, state power completely implausible. Unless they had their own police or army, not a single supermarket could operate for a day without the back up of the state. The poor, all those with hungry children to feed, would simply walk in and help them themselves and if they got away with

¹³*International Socialism* 99, (2003).

¹⁴Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, London 2009.

it, many others would follow suit. Be that as it may, history did not prove kind to these claims. As Joseph Choonara pointed out, 'The ink had barely dried [on *Empire*] before the events of 11 September 2001 and the beginning of a new cycle of imperialist wars.'¹⁵

In this context, and regardless of the precise economic structure of contemporary imperialism, the fundamental political and operational conclusions that Lenin drew regarding the socialist response to imperialism remain indispensable for revolutionary practice today.

First and foremost among these is uncompromising opposition to imperialism as a whole and imperialist war in particular. It was on this principle that Lenin broke from the Second International, of which he had previously been an ardent supporter, when the majority of its sections, above all its leading organization, the German Social Democratic Party, collapsed into patriotic support for their own governments at the outbreak of World War 1. That it continues to be relevant and, indeed, crucial should be obvious. On the one hand the 21st century has already seen a series of vast international mobilisations against imperialist war (with the great demonstrations of 15 February 2003 being probably the largest national and international demonstrations in history). On the other hand we can see the lamentable trajectory of those former leftists, socialists and Marxists who abandoned opposition to imperialism in the name of the supposed threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism: a trajectory epitomised by Christopher Hitchens (who actually ended up endorsing George Bush) but also manifested to greater or lesser extent by the likes of Fred Halliday, Nick Cohen

and Norman Geras.

Then there is the ongoing vital question of Palestine. All those, including those on the left, who fail to grasp that the struggle in Palestine is fundamentally an anti-imperialist struggle tend to lose their way on this issue. Either they view the conflict as a local or regional dispute between different religions/races/nations who should learn to 'tolerate' each other. Alternatively they explain the US's seemingly unconditional support for Israel in terms of 'the power of the Jewish lobby' as though Jewish interests controlled America, if not the world - an idea that leads straight to anti-semitic fantasies and conspiracy theories.

A grasp of, and opposition to, imperialism as an overall system is also of particular importance in relation to the current notion of 'humanitarian intervention', as practiced in relation to Libya and (so far by-proxy) Syria. For example, the claim that NATO was intervening in Libya to 'save Benghazi', or 'prevent a massacre' was a hypocritical lie, but it was much easier not to fall for this lie on the basis of an understanding of imperialism as a totality, rather than looking at the situation in Libya as an individual case.

Another aspect of Lenin's anti-imperialist politics is his support for the right of national self-determination¹⁶. Lenin first addressed this issue in relation to the problem of national minorities within the Tsarist empire (the 'prison of the peoples') and then in relation to the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the World War but it came to be an integral part of his opposition to imperialism in general. Lenin had to fight for his position against other socialists and Marxists, particularly Otto Bauer of the Austrian Socialist Party, Rosa Luxemburg and his

¹⁵Joseph Choonara, 'Empire built on shifting sand', *International Socialism* 109,(2006).p.143.

¹⁶For a very full account of Lenin's attitude to the national question see Tony Cliff, *Lenin, Vol 2, All Power to the Soviets*, London 1985, pp44-57.

fellow Bolshevik, Bukharin.

Bauer wanted to resolve the problem of oppressed nationalities 'harmoniously' within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and so opposed the right of political secession but advocated national-cultural autonomy (separate schools etc). Lenin took the opposite view. He defended the right of oppressed nations to political separation but opposed cultural nationalism or separatism in the name of proletarian internationalism and international culture. Luxemburg and Bukharin opposed advocacy of the right of national self-determination on the grounds that it was utopian, in that it couldn't be realised under capitalism, and opportunist in that it sowed illusions in nationalism. In opposition to this Lenin insisted that self-determination, including the right to form a separate state, was a basic democratic right which had to be supported.

The bourgeois nationalism of *any* oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *unconditionally* support.¹⁷

He argued that to reject the right to self-determination was, in practice, to side with imperialism and oppression and that support for the right to secession was in the interests of the working class of the oppressor nation.

Can a nation be free if it oppresses other nations? It cannot. The interests of the freedom of the Great Russian

population require a struggle against such oppression....

In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and their fighting for it. Without this there can be *no* internationalism.¹⁸

In the context of defending the Easter Rising of 1916 Lenin wrote:

The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene¹⁹.

At the same Lenin argued strongly for the unity of socialists of different nationalities or ethnicities in a common organisation (and ultimately a common international) and against

...attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries ... The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not

¹⁷ V.I.Lenin, 'The right of nations to self determination', cited in Cliff, as above, p53.

¹⁸ Cited in Cliff, as above, p.54

¹⁹ Cited in Cliff, as above, p.55)

²⁰ V.I.Lenin, "Theses on the National and Colonial Question", in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London 1980) p.77.

merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form.²⁰

I would argue that all of this has great relevance today. Not only does it apply to the attitude socialists should take to anti-imperialist movements and struggles in the so-called Third World or Global South, where it is necessary to reassert that support for the right to self-determination is in no way dependent on approval of the leadership or government of the country concerned, it is also useful when it is a question of national rights within advanced capitalist and imperialist countries. For example, socialists have to defend the right of Quebec to secede from Canada or Scotland to secede from the UK if the Quebecois or Scottish people want it (without us arguing that they should want it).

The argument against giving nationalist movements a ‘communist colouration’ has become even more important than when Lenin first made it in view of the Stalinist practice, now long established, of doing just that and also the tendency, equally long established, of essentially nationalist movements to themselves adopt ‘Communist’ or ‘Marxist’ labels and language, as with such varied formations as the Castro regime in Cuba, the Ethiopian Derg (described in Wikipedia as a Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist military junta), and Mugabe’s ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, because of the attractiveness (to them) of the Stalinist model of industrialisation and development.

Finally the relevance of Leninist anti-imperialism to the struggle in Ireland before and after the ‘peace process’ should be clear. Those socialists and would-be Marxists, in Britain and in Ireland, who

lost sight of the anti-imperialist, and therefore progressive, content, of the Republican struggle, for example equating the Provisional IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries, were ineluctably drawn into reactionary positions, siding with the British state by commission or omission. Whereas those who took the Republicans at their (more radical) word and invested in them their hopes for a workers’ republic, were doomed to disappointment.

The Theory of the State

Lenin’s theory of the state was set out in what is probably his most famous work, *The State and Revolution*, written in August 1917 in the heat of the Russian Revolution. Lenin believed that Marx had been profoundly distorted by Kautsky, Plekhanov and other leaders of the Second International and his aim was to ‘re-establish what Marx what Marx really taught on the subject of the state’ on the basis of an examination of ‘all the most essential passages in Marx and Engels on the subject’²¹. Because *The State and Revolution* is well known I will simply summarise its principal propositions without resort to extensive quotation.

1. The state is not an eternal institution but the product of the division of society into classes and the irreconcilability of class antagonisms.
2. The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another.
3. The essence of the state is a public power standing over society and consisting of special bodies of armed men, police, prisons and other instruments of coercion.

²¹V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Moscow 1977, pp 9-10

4. The modern state is a capitalist state, serving the interests of the capitalist class - essentially it is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie
5. This state cannot be taken over and used by the working class to build socialism, as had been the strategy of the parties of the Second International. Rather it has to be broken up/dismantled/smashed by the proletarian revolution.
6. The smashed capitalist state must be replaced by a new workers' state based on the election and recallability of all officials and the reduction of their salaries to ordinary workers' wages.
7. This workers' state is essential to deal with the counter revolutionary resistance of the bourgeoisie and secure the transition to socialism.
8. With the achievement of a fully classless society the state will wither away altogether and be replaced by a self governing community of associated producers.

As Lenin demonstrates all of these ideas were already present in Marx and Engels and his only real addition, on the basis of the experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, was that the central institutions of the workers' state would be workers' councils or soviets (the Russian word for 'council') based on deputies from *workplaces*, and this is not elaborated in *The State and Revolution*. Nevertheless Lenin's systematisation of the Marxist theory of the state was enormously important. It drew the clearest possible line of demarcation between reformism (including left reformism) and revolutionary socialism, the 'Marxism' of Social Democracy

and that of Communism and the Third International. At the same time it clarified the differences between Marxism and anarchism.

The decisive point, taken from Marx writing on the Paris Commune and repeatedly emphasized by Lenin, is the need to destroy rather than take over the existing state machine. It has enormous implications not only for what will happen in a revolution but also for day-to-day political practice in the here and now. Right wing social democrats, the likes of Tony Blair and Eamon Gilmore, who have abandoned any perspective of challenging capitalism straightforwardly accept and endorse the state, spreading the myth of its neutrality between the classes and supporting 'our' armed forces and police as representatives of the people as a whole. Left reformists, such as Tony Benn, Jean Luc Melenchon of Front de Gauche and Alex Tsipras of Syriza, frequently recognise the class bias of the police and the law, as well as often opposing war, but they generally stop short of calling for the smashing of the state preferring to hope that it could be placed under the control of a socialist government and reformed, or gradually brought under democratic control. ie. precisely 'taken over and wielded by the working class' - the opposite of what Marx and Lenin urged. This is not only unrealistic because of the thousands of ties that exist between the state apparatus (the generals, police chiefs, judges, top civil servants and so on), but also gives rise to the possibility, indeed likelihood of slippage, from the left to the mainstream reformist position of wholesale acceptance and support for the capitalist state, especially in the event of assuming office. It is this context that Syriza's failure to address this issue in its otherwise radical programme of social and economic policies, along with Tsipras's public handshake with the Chief

of Police in Athens, is a warning sign.

There have, over the last ninety odd years, been many implicit or explicit critiques of the Leninist theory of the state. A detailed discussion of all these is beyond the scope of this article but the most important are as follows: 1) the mainstream pluralist critique; 2) the Nietzsche/Foucault 'will to power' critique; 3) the so-called 'Gramscian' critique; 4) the autonomist/ anarchist critique. Here I will offer a brief explanation and rebuttal of each.

The pluralist critique: this view which drew on the work of the German sociologist Max Weber, and the Italian elite theorists Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, became the dominant position in academic social science in the fifties and sixties (in the work of political scientists such as Ronald Dahl, Arnold Rose and Raymond Aron) and remains the perspective underlying much media coverage of politics and current affairs. This perspective accepts that each area of political and social life eg. industry, finance, media, law, medicine, trade unions, the arts, sport etc., is dominated by an elite but maintains that these elites do not form a unified ruling class, rather they are in competition with each other. The competition takes the form of influence exerted by numerous interest and pressure groups with the rivalry between them preventing any one group exercising total or grossly disproportionate power. Within this scenario the role of government and the state was to act as a mediator or broker between the different groups. Such pluralism was counterposed to the 'totalitarianism' of the Communist east in the Cold War and the way in which it dovetailed with a view of politics as seen from the vantage point of the US Congress, the Westminster Parlia-

ment, the Irish Daíl and the newsrooms of the BBC, RTE and other state broadcasters, should not be hard to see.

The pluralist analysis was effectively demolished as far back as 1969 by Ralph Miliband in his famous *The State in Capitalist Society* which demonstrated, with much empirical evidence, that the various elites, including the elite of the state apparatus, were overwhelmingly drawn from the same social class, went to the same top schools and universities and shared the same basic (pro-capitalist) ideology, so that the 'competition' between them was illusory or superficial and that they did indeed form a ruling class which did indeed control the state.

The pluralist view also fails to take account of the way in which all the elites are governed by the same economic logic of capitalist competition (competitive capital accumulation) which also governs the behaviour of the government and the state, even when the government members and the state managers do not happen to be drawn from the capitalist class.

The Nietzsche/Foucault critique: the hugely influential French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault, argued that power was not concentrated solely in the hands of a social class or the state, as suggested (according to Foucault) by the Marxist and Leninist theory of the state, but is rather a relation present every where in society and operating in a multiplicity of institutions and social relations: prisons, schools, hospitals, families, offices and so on. Moreover, 'where there is power, there is resistance'²² and therefore, instead of a strategy focused on the conquest of power, it was necessary to pursue a multitude of localized, dispersed, battles against over-weening power wherever it appeared.

²²M.Foucault, *The Will to Know*, cited in Alex Callinicos, *Is There a Future for Marxism?*, London 1982, p.108.

The first objection to this argument is that, as so often, it rejects Marx and Lenin on the basis of an oversimplification. Neither Marx nor Lenin claimed **all** power was held by the ruling class or its state or that it was not necessary to challenge power at a local or workplace or familial level; merely that decisive power in society was concentrated there. Of course it is true that the teacher exercises a certain power in the classroom, the doctor in the hospital, the manager in the office, the father in the family, but to equate their respective power to that of the capitalist state is like equating the gravitational pull of an apple with that of the earth on the grounds that 'gravity is everywhere'. Even a guerilla struggle a la Mao or Castro has to culminate in taking the capital city (ie the state).

The second objection is that Marxism offers an analysis of **why** oppressive power relations exist in schools, hospitals and personal relations: it explains them in terms of the alienation and exploitation embedded in capitalism, and other class divided modes of production. Foucault rejected this analysis preferring to base himself on Nietzsche's concept of an innate and universal 'will to power'. But while this concept can possibly be used to underwrite a sort of left wing anti-authoritarian resistance, it offers no possibility of eventual liberation or victory. If the will to power is universal, success for relatively powerless person A over relatively powerful person B in office C will simply replace B with A while the oppression will continue. Moreover Foucault may have generally chosen to side with the oppressed, but such a choice is arbitrary. If everyone is pursuing their own 'will to power', as Nietzsche maintains, there is no particular reason for not siding with the oppressor, as Nietzsche himself did.

The so-called Gramscian critique: this is the most 'Marxist' sounding of the critiques of the Leninist theory of the state. Its origins have nothing to do with Gramsci but lie far back in the Stalinist Communist Parties' turn to reformism with the Popular Front strategy in the 1930s. This was developed further after the Second World War with the western CPs' adoption, at Moscow's behest, of national and peaceful parliamentary roads to socialism. The CPGB programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, adopted with the approval of Stalin in 1951, stated:

The enemies of Communism accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish Parliament. This is a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy. Experience has shown that in present conditions the advance to Socialism can be made just as well by a different road. For example, through People's Democracy, without establishing Soviet Power, as in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe.

Britain will reach Socialism by her own road. Just as the Russian people realised political power by the Soviet road which was dictated by their historical conditions and background of Tsarist rule, and the working people in the People's Democracies and China won political power in their own way in their historical conditions, so the British Communists declare that the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transform-

ing Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of her people.

The path forward for the British people will be to establish a People's Government on the basis of a Parliament truly representative of the people.²³

In the 1970s, when Antonio Gramsci's writings became widely known, theorists associated with Eurocommunism (the trend in European Communism dissociating itself from Moscow) seized on some of his ideas to justify this parliamentary road and shift it even further towards social democracy. Gramsci, reflecting in a fascist prison on the causes of the defeat of the Italian and European Revolution in the period 1918-23, argued that due to Russia's economic and social backwardness there was a substantially different relationship between the state and civil society from that which was characteristic of western Europe.

In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.²⁴

And

In the case of the most advanced states... 'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc)²⁵.

This led to Gramsci's emphasis on 'hegemony', ie. the element of cultural, moral and intellectual leadership that accompanies the element of force in the ruling of society by an economically dominant class, and that enables that class to rule by consent as well as repressive power. 'The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as "domination", and as "intellectual and moral leadership" A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise "leadership" before winning governmental power.'²⁶

Gramsci argued for what he called a 'dual perspective' combining 'the levels of force and consent, authority and hegemony agitation and propaganda .. tactics and strategy etc.'²⁷ and involving the construction of alliances, which in Italy meant in particular an alliance between the proletariat in the northern cities and the southern peasantry.

The Eurocommunists used Gramsci's ideas to argue that the days of 'insurrection', ie revolution, were over and that the Leninist notion of 'smashing the state' should be abandoned in favour of gradual and protracted ideological struggle to establish cultural hegemony, combined with broad democratic alliances (with the middle classes) to achieve a left government. This interpretation of Gramsci

²³<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/brs/1951/51.htm>

²⁴A.Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1982, p. 238

²⁵As above, p.235

²⁶as above, p.57

²⁷As above p.169-70

and this strategy (at least the ‘ideological/theoretical’ element of it) proved to have a wide appeal in leftish academic circles and, for a period, it became almost the new academic orthodoxy that Gramsci had had displaced and replaced Lenin.

This was a complete travesty of Gramsci’s thought. He fully accepted the Leninist theory of the state including the need for its revolutionary overthrow and replacement by workers’ councils and considered Lenin to be ‘the greatest modern theoretician of the philosophy of practice’ and was seeking to build on Leninism not displace it. His concept of hegemony stressed the combination of ‘domination’ and ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ not the replacement of the former by the latter, likewise his ‘dual perspective’ involved both ‘force and consent’. His advocacy of alliances was a critique of ultra-leftism (represented in Italy by Amedeo Bordiga, leader of the Italian CP before Gramsci) in line with Lenin’s *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder* and a development of the Bolshevik strategy of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, not a precursor of the moderate parliamentarism of the Eurocommunists.²⁸

Gramscian or not, however, this critique of Leninism is palpably false. The fact that the ruling class rules through intellectual hegemony as well as physical force does not at all mean that if its hegemony breaks down it will not resort to force. Numerous historical examples, from Mussolini in Italy itself to Franco in Spain and Pinochet in Chile, prove this. The matter has only to be posed concretely to become very clear. Would the Greek military (who ran the dictatorship from 1967-73) or the Greek police

(50% of whom voted for Golden Dawn) sit back and let Syriza introduce socialism? Would the admirals, generals and marshals of the British armed forces with centuries of rule and empire and traditions going back to Marlborough, Wellington, Nelson and the Black and Tans, allow a government headed by Jeremy Corbyn or some such to ‘democratise’ them and gradually dismantle capitalism or would they ‘stand up for Queen and Country’ (and their class)? Would the senior officers of the Garda Síochána you know happily collaborate with Richard Boyd Barrett and Joe Higgins in ‘reclaiming Irish natural resources’ in Mayo, or locking up Ireland’s leading bankers? Alternatively is it plausible that the US working class could take over and wield for its own purposes the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI and the NYPD?

To ask these questions is, I think, to answer them. Many things have changed since Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* but the class nature of the state is not one of them.

The anarchist/autonomist critique: having written at length on this elsewhere²⁹ I shall be brief here. Revolutionary anarchists, as opposed to ‘life-style anarchists’, share the aim of destroying the capitalist state but they reject the idea that the working class, on the morrow of the revolution will need a state of its own, instead proposing an immediate abolition of the state as such and instant establishment of a self governing community with no institutions of authority and force, not even democratic ones.

This position is both naive and utopian at the same time. Is it naive to imagine that the core elements of the capitalist state, even **after** the state apparatus

²⁸For a much fuller account and refutation of the distortion of Gramsci see Chris Harman, *Gramsci versus Reformism*, London 1983.

²⁹See John Molyneux, *Anarchism: A Marxist Criticism*, London 2011.

has been broken by revolution, will not join with the core elements of the ruling class (the top bankers, industrialists etc) in attempting counter revolution to restore capitalism, and therefore not need to be resisted by 'bodies of armed men and women' ie by a state. It is utopian to imagine that after the taking of power by the working class, when class divisions still exist (especially internationally) that the mass of the population will be so uniformly conscious and enlightened, so immediately and universally free of the legacy and habits of millennia of class society that it will be possible to build up a socialist economy without any element of subordination, of any compulsion of the minority to accept the will of the majority. Rejection 'on principle' of any use of state power is simply a recipe for defeat.

Many autonomists, like John Holloway, have argued that an obsessive focus on capturing the state - an inherently oppressive structure - has been an abiding error and source of corruption for the workers' movement. (Insofar as the state in question is the bourgeois state they have a point but, as we have seen. This is not the Leninist position.) Instead he/they propose eschewing engagement with the state and establishing 'autonomous' spaces under democratic people's control on the model of the Zapatistas in Mexico. But while this may appear an attractive tactical operation in the short term it is plainly not a viable strategy for changing society. The Zapatistas made inspiring propaganda but changed neither the world nor Mexico. As I have said before:

Moreover what was possible in the jungles of Chiapas is not replicable in Sao Paulo or Buenos Aires or Cairo or anywhere in advanced capitalist

world, where there simply is nowhere that is beyond or outside the reach of the state, and no place which can be maintained indefinitely as an autonomous space *if it is also a threat to capitalist power*. We may try to ignore the state, but that does not mean the state will ignore us³⁰.

For all these reasons the Leninist theory of the state remains an essential part of socialist practice today.

The Leninist Party

Of the core elements of Leninism identified here there is little doubt that his theory of the revolutionary party is the least popular in the current political atmosphere. This was manifestly the case in the Spanish Indignados movement and in many of the various Occupy camps. But it is a mood which extends beyond worked out anarchists and autonomists to broader sections of the left and merges with a widespread inchoate suspicion of **all** political parties among many of the general public.

So before addressing the specific Leninist theory of the party, I want to consider two antecedent questions: first whether it is possible to be a Leninist without the idea of a revolutionary party; second whether there is something wrong (or anti-democratic) inherent in parties as such.

Certainly there are activists and theorists who would broadly accept a version of Lenin's concept of imperialism and much of his analysis of the state and who would pay homage to Lenin in other ways as well, but who reject the theory of the party and, especially, reject it in practice. This would be true of a many, perhaps most, of the contributors to the *Lenin Reloaded* confer-

³⁰As above, p.64.

ence and book of 2007³¹ (not Alex Callinicos, of course, but probably Zizek, Eagleton, Jameson, Anderson, Lazarus, Negri and others). To the best of my knowledge the theoretical pioneers of this position were C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya who were a faction within US Trotskyism in the 1940s and who, on breaking away, remained adherents of Lenin and the Russian Revolution but opposed any idea of a vanguard party. Kevin B. Anderson, a contributor to *Lenin Reloaded*, is probably the leading contemporary representative of this tendency.

Unfortunately for those who hanker for Lenin without the party the actual Lenin devoted his entire political life up to 1917 to the building of such a party, ferociously defending it against any tendency to liquidate it, even in the most desperate times of the 1907- 12 reaction. Then, after 1917, he proceeded to the construction of similar revolutionary parties world wide and their unification in the Communist International. Lenin *sans* party is frankly a non-starter and those who renounce the idea of a revolutionary party are in reality abandoning Leninism.

As for the idea that there is something wrong with political parties as such we have, of course, to recognize how understandable such a reaction is in the face of the manifest behaviour of virtually all the parties most people have experience of, and we also need to understand there really is something wrong with the existence of political parties in that they are symptoms and expressions of a class divided society and thus exhibit many of the horrible characteristics of class society³². However given the actual existence of class society and the fact that the working class cannot

walk away from this society and establish utopia elsewhere but has to fight for its liberation from within, and on the ground of this society it has to be said that the existence of political parties is a gain and a necessary condition of even limited democracy.

First it should be noted that, historically, political parties developed hand in hand with the development of (bourgeois) democracy and the extension of the franchise to working people in the nineteenth century. Prior to that there existed not parties but only loose associations among 'notables' ie aristocrats and leading bourgeois. It was only the winning of the right to vote by the masses that obliged the upper and middle classes and the workers themselves to form parties to fight for those votes. Second, the only modern societies where multiple parties do not exist are those where they are forcibly suppressed by military, fascist or Stalinist dictatorships, ie where there is no democracy at all.

Moreover, imagine it were possible (of course, it is not), in a capitalist society, to secure without repression the voluntary dissolution of all political parties so that all deputies, TDs, MPs, councilors etc were unaffiliated individuals. Would this benefit the working class and the majority of people? No, it would not. On the contrary in such circumstances it would be the rich, the bourgeoisie, who would benefit enormously because they would be able to use their personal wealth and all their other advantages (connections, cultural capital etc) to dominate politics even more than they do at present. Only through collective organisation - be it in unions or in parties - are working people able to resist the power of

³¹S. Budgen, S.Kouvelakis, S. Zizek, ed., *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, Durham and London 2007

³²See the discussion of some of these problems in John Molyneux, 'On Party Democracy,' *International Socialism* 124, (2009).

capital and the domination of the bourgeois.

To return specifically to the issue of the Leninist Party, I will pose three questions: 1) What are the main characteristics of the party as conceived by Lenin? 2) Is it the case, as is so often claimed, that there is something distinctively elitist or anti-democratic about such a party? 3) Why is it necessary, today, to undertake the difficult task of attempting to build such a party, here in Ireland and in every country?

Unlike on imperialism and on the state there is no single key text outlining Lenin's view of the party - as noted earlier in this article attempts to use *What is to be Done?* as such a text are seriously flawed - therefore the account I offer here is a very brief summary based on a consideration of Lenin's practice as a whole.

The Leninist party is first and foremost the party of a definite class: the working class. This is where its activity and membership is concentrated and this is the class whose interests it, primarily, strives to represent. The party's doctrine is based on, and its activity is guided by Marxist theory. The party is an explicitly revolutionary party not only in the sense that its declared goal is revolution but also in that its membership is, by and large, confined to revolutionaries: the Leninist party is not a 'broad church' and does not include a reformist wing. It is a party of struggle which aims to engage with, and where possible lead, the mass of the working class as a whole in all its day to day battles with the bosses and the government. In order to reach the mass of workers the party works

in the trade unions and participates in elections³³. The party aims to raise the political consciousness and culture of its members to equip them to fight for leadership in the class struggle. The party operates according to the principle of democratic centralism - democratic debate and decision making followed by unity in action.

Do these distinctive features make the Leninist party more undemocratic than other forms of political organisation? On the contrary all these characteristics make the Leninist party the **most** democratic form of organisation available to socialists operating in a capitalist society³⁴.

The working class, on which the party bases itself, is the most democratic class in capitalist society. The democracy of ruling class and middle class parties is continually subverted by the wealth and material privileges their 'natural' leaders and the careerism and aspiration to privilege of their cadres. Working class parties are not totally immune to these pressures but necessarily suffer from them far less. Revolutionary parties which aim to smash the state are also less subject to these pressures than reformist parties which aim to take over the existing state and thus offer the prospect of success within capitalist society (ministerial posts etc) to their leaders. The democracy of reformist parties (and trade unions) is also undermined not just by the privileges of their leading strata but also by the fact that the leaders develop a fundamentally different political perspective from their rank-and-file members: managing capitalism on behalf of workers (or in the case of unions, negotiating with it) as opposed to defending

³³See the extensive discussion of these points in V.I.Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism-an Infantile Disorder*.

³⁴This is a relative not an absolute statement. In practice Leninist parties suffer from all sorts of problems of elitism, hierarchy, infringements of democracy, as does every other organization in a hierarchical class society. It is just that it is better able than other forms of organization to resist these pressures. For fuller discussion of this see John Molyneux, 'On Party Democracy', as above.

workers interests within it. Of course the qualification for being a reformist politician or trade union leader is the ability skillfully to conceal this difference but it remains real and results in a continual effort to resist and divert democratic pressure from below. The Leninist party, restricted to revolutionaries, greatly inhibits the emergence of such a split between the aims of leaders and members.

The commitment to Marxism ie to the self emancipation of the working class, and to the political education of members, also enhances the democracy of the party. It produces or works to produce a membership able to debate issues and hold leaders to account. Inevitably the political level will remain uneven but the situation is far better than in most non-Leninist organizations where there is little systematic attempt at political education. Reformist parties and trade unions, for example, are typically happy to leave their members largely uneducated so long as they pay dues, canvass and turn out to vote. Engagement in the day to day struggles of the class is another major democratic factor. It means that debates inside the party reflect issues facing the class and that party policies are subject to the test of practice.

Finally there is the question of democratic centralism, often a bugbear with many on the left because it appears to restrict 'individual freedom' in that it involves an obligation to implement decisions, including those one disagrees with. In reality this is always a voluntary or freely accepted obligation in that every individual can leave the party. Democratic centralism is also a highly democratic form of organisation, as well as an effective one, because it ensures that the decisions of the

majority are actually carried out. Again the contrast is with non-democratic centralist organisations, especially reformist parties where, under the guise of 'freedom', majority decisions are commonly ignored by leaders.

Building a Leninist revolutionary party of any size with serious roots in the working class, is a difficult and onerous task. Why undertake it? Is it not out of date and unnecessary in these days of social media and horizontal networking?³⁵ Why not wait for more favourable circumstances, when the revolution breaks out for example? The answer to all these questions is simply that it is necessary for victory. This conclusion is based on both theory and experience.

The theoretical arguments are straightforward. The working class faces a centralised enemy -the ruling class and its state - and needs it own centralized organization to combat it. The ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. 'The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.'³⁶ Therefore there needs to be a struggle waged against the influence of those ideas on and within the working class. Working class consciousness and struggle develop unevenly. It is therefore necessary to organise the more conscious and advanced workers separately, in a revolutionary party, to combat both the direct influence of bourgeois ideology on the working class and its indirect influence via the reformists and the trade union bureaucrats. All of these conditions, operating

³⁵For the uses and limitations of social media, see Jonny Jones, 'Social media and social movements' *International Socialism* 130 (2011) and John Molyneux, *Will the Revolution be Televised?*, London 2011, pp.93-97.

³⁶Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*.

in Lenin's day, continue to operate today.

The historical experience is overwhelming. The working class has risen against the system on countless occasions from Paris in 1848 through to Egypt in 2011. On several occasions it has taken power locally or briefly (eg the Paris Commune of 1871) and on several other occasions it has come close to it (Germany 1923, Spain 1936 etc) but only one question has it conquered national power and held it for a period of years: the Russian Revolution of 1917, until it succumbed to the Stalinist counterrevolution. What distinguished October 1917 from all the defeats was the presence and leadership of a mass revolutionary party, the Bolshevik Party of Lenin, and its role was decisive.

Waiting for the favourable circumstances of the revolutionary situation will not do. The difference between victory in Russia in 1917 and defeat in Germany in 1919-23, was that the Bolshevik Party had been built over many years and had won the confidence of the key sections of the working class, whereas Rosa Luxemburg,

Karl Liebknecht and the German revolutionary socialists waited too long to split from the Social Democrats and did not have time, in the heat of the revolution, to build a strong party. It is necessary to be as well prepared as possible - that means building the party in advance of the revolution: now.

Conclusion

The three aspects of Lenin's politics discussed here by no means exhaust his legacy - there is a vast amount to be learned from the totality of his theory and practice- but taken together they form a central core of what constitutes Leninism. Revolutionary socialist theory and politics today cannot rest content with these achievements - the world changes, capitalism develops and Marxism must develop too, on all fronts and on the basis of concrete analyses of contemporary reality. However it is my contention this will be best achieved on the basis of Leninism and not by abandoning it.