

Notes of the Month

LENIN AFTER 90 YEARS

No force can dim the torch which Lenin kindled
in the stifling darkness of a crazy world.

Maxim Gorki.

NINETY years have passed since the birth of Lenin. With the passage of years many names famed in their day grow less. Some grow greater. Lenin's place in history—already sufficiently established by common standards—is only beginning to

approach its future fuller recognition as mankind passes into communism. Lenin was not only the outstanding genius and teacher of the modern era—the era of the most decisive change in human history. By the creative activity of his leadership, carrying forward the teachings of Marxism, through the formation of the Communist Party as the organ of the working class leading all the oppressed masses for social change, and through the first victory of the socialist revolution, Lenin was the greatest builder of the modern world. Not of the old world which is dying in a stink of corruption and dreams of suicidal violence. But of the new world which is arising, of hundreds and hundreds of millions of human beings who have broken the fetters of age-old slavery and barbarous brutality and entered into freedom and abounding new life thanks above all to the work of Lenin.

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Assassin's Bullet

Had Lenin lived the span of that noble veteran fighter for freedom, who is still with us, William Du Bois, he would have lived to see this world of achievement today. He would have covered the full range from the still flourishing capitalism of Marx's *Capital* at the time of his birth and early days, to its outcome and degeneration in imperialism and the first world war, the first victory of the world socialist revolution, the savagery of counter-revolution and fascism and the second world war, the new triumphs of socialist and national liberation extending over the world, and the tense choice today between peaceful co-existence or destructive war. His life was cut short prematurely, at the height of his achievement, through the consequences of the bullet fired by the 'Socialist Revolutionary' assassin, the daughter of the bourgeoisie, inspired by the Western-organised campaign of terrorism and assassination (on the same day Uritsky was shot), and subsequently idolised and glorified by the prophets of Western civilisation, just as their forefathers previously idolised and glorified Charlotte Corday, the assassin of Marat.

From Violence to More Violence

Characteristic indeed are the weapons which the representatives of the old ruling order, the self-styled apostles of 'civilisation' and 'superior morality', use against the spokesmen of the working class and popular struggle for social justice. Jaurès—murdered to make way for the first world war. Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg—murdered to make way for Social-Democracy followed by Hitler. It is ironic, for the choice of methods, that the Secretary of the old inter-war 'Labour and Socialist International', Fritz Adler, preaching endless sermons against the Bolsheviks for their 'violent methods' of organised mass struggle to defeat capitalist violence, himself won his original fame by assassinating the Austrian Prime Minister. In the United States the chain of violent death for the champions of human freedom ranges in an endless line from John Brown and Abraham Lincoln, through the Chicago Martyrs and Joe Hill, to Sacco and Vanzetti and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in our day. All this pales beside the colonial record, or the extermination of millions in the incinerators of Nazism, that darling of the most cultured representatives of Western civilisation, now being built up anew in the hope of fulfilling similar tasks.



On the occasion of the 90th Anniversary of Lenin's birth, we publish this new portrait of Lenin. Next month we shall print some recollections of him by his widow Nadezhda Krupskaya, recently published for the first time, and especially translated for *Labour Monthly*.

Auschwitz Reminder

At the Auschwitz commemoration ceremony this year—that Auschwitz camp where four millions from all over Europe were done to death—attended by 20,000 participants from 13 countries, including British M.Ps, survivors wept on the shoulders of the Soviet Colonel Yelisavietsky, himself a Jew, the Liberator of Auschwitz: a symbol of the socialist liberation of humanity from the horrors of the dying Western social order. What need of incinerators today? Western civilisation initiated the atom bomb, and is now advancing to the public advocacy of wholesale lethal poison gases, chemical, bacteriological and biological warfare as exceeding the old obsolescent nuclear weapons in the glorious aim of mass extermination. Lenin gave his whole genius and his whole life to save mankind from these horrors of destruction and win a different future.

Light on Lenin

Many readers have written in to say how they were struck by that prediction of Lenin which we quoted in these Notes in February, when, during his interview with H. G. Wells forty years ago he threw his gaze into the future and stated that the coming of the era of inter-planetary travel would bring within reach the end of violence in human affairs. They were struck, not merely because this prediction, so little noted or understood at the time, has become so topical today, in the era of the simultaneous sweep forward of the lunik and the new concrete urgency of disarmament. They were struck because of the contrast of this communist outlook on the future with the grisly imaginings of the more commonplace type of Anglo-American purveyors of 'sci-fic', who could only see in the advance of science the opening of the gates to new inter-planetary wars and destruction. They were struck above all by the light that it threw on the whole foundation of the character and outlook of Lenin, which has been too little recognised by the shallow, that deep humanism which even the chatters today, who used to prattle of the aridity of Marx and Marxism, are beginning now to rediscover in Marx.

Lenin's Communism

Listen to Gorki on Lenin:

I have never met... nor do I know of any man who hated, loathed and despised so deeply and strongly as Lenin all unhappiness, grief and suffering.

And Gorki, that greatest twentieth century master of understanding of the hearts of men and women, continues:

Lenin was exceptionally great in my opinion precisely because of this feeling in him of irreconcilable, unquenchable hostility towards the sufferings of humanity, his burning faith that suffering is not an essential and unavoidable part of life, but an abomination which people ought and are able to sweep away.

That is the spirit of Communism. That is what Communism means.

Lenin on Capitalism

Lenin's whole life activity was governed, not merely by feeling, by his deep hatred of human suffering and determination to end it, or by sentimental aspirations for a happier future, but by the scientific understanding (Marxism) that the only road to end human suffering and win a happier future lies through the accomplishment of the historical task of our epoch to end capitalism and replace it by socialism as the first stage to a free communist society. Lenin learned from Marx that the capitalist social system, once such a mighty engine of progress, and still so vaunted by its bat-eyed latter day apologists, belonged to the dustbin of history. He wrote:

Our grandchildren will look on the documents and memorials of the capitalist system as curiosities. It will be difficult for them to imagine how it was that trade and articles of prime necessity could be in the hands of private ownership, how it was that factories and workshops could belong to individuals, how it was that one man could exploit another, how it was that people could exist who did no work.

Of course Mr. Gaitskell has now informed us, speaking to Leeds students on March 11, that there is no longer a capitalist class ('if people thought there was a capitalist class and a working class they did not know the true position'), since '99.9 per cent of the people are working' and there is 'virtually no class left that does no work that is capable of working' (*The Times*, March 12, 1960). Certainly. If Sir Gorgious Midas, in the intervals between his prolonged holidays to catch the sun in Bermuda or the Canary Islands, totters in for an hour in the morning to attend a board of directors before proceeding to lunch at his club, he also is 'working' in the Gaitskellian definition and is therefore 'not a capitalist'. Mr. Gaitskell undoubtedly belongs to the 'curiosities' of our time that our grandchildren will view with some amazement.

Lenin on the Socialist Revolution

But Lenin equally understood that capitalism, like every previous social system, does not perish of itself, however out-dated, however harmful. Capitalism has to be destroyed and replaced by socialism

through conscious human action. The destruction of capitalism, every day more urgent as the horrors of its declining years spread a sum of human misery unparalleled by all the pestilences and calamities of the human record and even threaten the human race with extinction, can only be accomplished along the difficult and arduous road, lasting over decades, of struggle and organisation, the organisation of the working class and its leadership, political clarity of the goal, leadership of the struggle of all sections of the people and the great national liberation struggles, to the final victory of the world socialist revolution. Lenin wrote:

Outside of socialism there is no deliverance of humanity from wars, from hunger, from the destruction of millions and millions of human beings.

(Lenin, 'In Louis Blanc's Footsteps', *Pravda*, April 21, 1917.)

Lenin on Revisionism

At the time when Lenin entered into political activity, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was a great deal of fashionable talk about the 'new capitalism' which was supposed to have rendered Marx out of date. The sponsors of this view, first put forward by the Fabians, and picked up from them by Bernstein and spread through continental Social-Democracy, were known as 'Revisionists'. Contemporary capitalism, according to them, so far from leading to a 'catastrophic' outcome (their term for the revolutionary analysis), was entering a new era of general prosperity, diminution of crises and class contradictions, and improvement of social conditions, rendering the old goal of socialism a superfluous myth ('the goal is nothing, the movement is everything', as Bernstein said). This was before 1914 dealt their illusions a blow. Against them were ranged the so-called 'Orthodox', or upholders of Marxism. Lenin entered with full energy into the battle against revisionism and on the side of Marxism. He exposed without mercy, not merely in general principle, but with concrete contemporary facts the fallacies of the revisionists. But he had no time for the dogmatic outlook which seeks to defy contemporary reality with abstract formulas. Instead, he set himself to examine, with a thousand times more care and precision than the shoddy generalisations of the revisionists, the new phenomena of twentieth century capitalism, not in order to abandon theory and surrender to capitalism, as the revisionists did, but in order to carry forward the theory of Marx in the same way as Marx ceaselessly did, that is, to master at each new turn the ever-changing, ever-developing, reality.

Lenin on Twentieth Century Capitalism

It was on this basis that Lenin was able to draw together into a single theoretical understanding the multiple diverse phenomena of twentieth century capitalism, which had previously been seen only superficially in a series of miscellaneous unrelated aspects (the 'new imperialism', social reform, trusts and trust-busting, state intervention in industry, 'labour unrest', the colonial question, nationalism, the arms race). He showed how the guiding thread was the development of capitalism, through the operation of the laws of capitalism laid bare by Marx, from the era of liberal free trade capitalism to monopoly capitalism or imperialism, and eventually state monopoly capitalism. He showed further that this new era of imperialism was no era of diminishing contradictions and extending prosperity and peaceful reform, as the Revisionists imagined. It would prove the era, he asserted, of decaying, parasitic, dying capitalism; of all the contradictions carried to their most extreme point; of the subjection and enslavement of all nations of the world to a handful of dominant powers, and their rising revolt; of inter-imperialist conflict flaring out to world war on a scale never before known; of the opening of the world socialist revolution. The experience of the first six decades of this century has proved that what Lenin said was true. The revisionists were wrong.

Lenin on the Twentieth Century World Wars

All the fashionable memoirs of the upper class celebrities of the period speak of the world before 1914 as if it has been a 'golden age' of peaceful serenity and progress blissfully unconscious of the holocaust in front which was to wipe out a generation. This conventional prattle is either plain hypocrisy, if the writers played any role in politics (for the air was thick with the clangour of the arms race, war preparations and the forging of the rival military alliances), or a revelation of how sheltered was their childhood in the nurseries of the imperialist paradise at the top of the pyramid of exploitation from the cruel realities of the living world. But none saw the meaning of the coming war with such merciless clarity of vision as Lenin. Gorki relates a conversation with him in 1908 in Paris:

He brought forward a series of arguments for the imminence of war, and 'probably not of one, but of a whole series of wars'. 'War is coming, it is inevitable. The capitalist world has reached the stage of putrescent fermentation. I think we shall yet see a general European war. The

proletariat will hardly be able to find in itself the strength to avert the carnage... The proletariat of course will suffer terribly. Such must be its fate for some time yet. But its enemies will weaken each other; that also is inevitable'.

'For some time yet'. The truth of that was shown in the first world war and the second world war.

'In the End They Will Gain'

And then Gorki's moving account of that conversation in 1908 goes on to reveal how this vision of Lenin was no mere cold-blooded logical analysis of the approaching imperialist war and its outcome. Long before Barbusse and Remarque and Sassoon, Lenin saw and felt with all the passionate intensity of his being those ten million dead of the first world war slaughtered without a cause.

Coming up to me he said forcibly, but not loudly, as if in amazement: 'No, but think of it. Why should people who are well-fed force hungry ones to fight against each other? Could you name a more idiotic or revolting crime? The workers will pay a dreadfully heavy price for this. But in the end they will gain. It is the will of history.'

'In the end they will gain'. The truth of that too has been proved by the event.

Tested by Experience

The truth of Lenin's vision has been tested by experience in the crucible of history, alike through the first world war and the victory of the Russian socialist revolution, not only by the fulfilment of the outcome that he foresaw, but by the direct role of Lenin's leadership in action to master the event and guide that outcome. In the breakdown of the old forms of the international socialist movement under the impact of the first world war, whose blazing heat shrivelled up and exposed forever the rottenness of opportunism and revisionism, it was the leadership of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party above all that carried forward the whole international movement and saved the world. The victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, followed by its reflection in revolutions in Germany and Central Europe, brought the endlessly protracted first imperialist world war to an end at a time when the military staffs on both sides were planning new holocausts for 1919 in their grand strategy of 'attrition'.

Guidance for Today

And today? Lenin's guidance still points the way forward in the new conditions—not as an empty formula to repeat the past,

but carried forward, as he would have carried it forward, in the new world balance of forces. Failure to carry through the socialist revolution in Western and Central Europe, and the restoration of the old order and capitalism in these countries thanks to the role of Social-Democracy, brought fascism and the second world war on an even more destructive scale, as Lenin had warned. Once again the workers had to 'pay a dreadfully heavy price for this'. Once again 'in the end they gained'. The victory of socialism over one third of the world, and the miracles of scientific and technical construction since achieved, mean that at last imperialism no longer dominates the world. Therefore there is the real possibility to prevent the third world war and win peaceful co-existence. But the revival and open expansionist aims of West German militarism with Western backing at this moment, and the aggressive and ever-increasingly desperate and reckless military plans of powerful circles in the West, show that the biggest hurdles are in front.

Lenin on the World Revolution

Lenin always emphasised that the socialist revolution is no sudden overnight change, but comprises a whole historical epoch over many decades of the most varied and divers form of struggle, gains and losses, successes and defeats, in the advance to the victory of the working class and all the oppressed peoples against imperialism and the building of the new social order. 'The transition from capitalism to socialism occupies an entire historical epoch' (Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution*). And more fully:

The socialist revolution cannot take place in any other form than that of an epoch, uniting the civil war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the leading countries with a whole series of democratic, revolutionary and national-emancipatory movements in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed countries. Why is this? It is because capitalism develops unequally.

(Lenin, *On a Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*.)

For Lenin the national liberation movement of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples against imperialism, always a part of the world democratic movement, was from 1917 an integral part of the world socialist revolution. Herein lies and has always lain one of the most decisive differences of the communist outlook from the narrow egocentric outlook of the old Second International and Social-Democracy, focused on Western Europe and the United States as the hub of the world. Only now in the face of world-wide revolt have they awoken in a flurry to offer charity from the crumbs

of imperialist plunder, but never to stop the plunder. In vain. The Macmillans and Gaitskells will not succeed to stem the tide of revolt. The world revolution will conquer through the union of socialism and the national liberation movements; for these represent the overwhelming majority of the human race.

Fifty Years On

Already Marx had given warning of this character of the world socialist revolution as comprising a whole historical epoch.

We say to the workers: 'You will have to go through fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and international wars, not only in order to change existing conditions, but also in order to change yourselves and fit yourselves for the exercise of political power'.

(Marx, *Revelations on the Communist Trial at Cologne*, 1851.)

A profound thought when we consider the entire character and experience of our age, and not merely a very temporary and unstable corner of sheltered prosperity of a small privileged section in a minute minority sector of the imperialist world. The experience of the Somme and Guernica, of napalm and the H-bomb, of two world wars and world economic crisis, of fascism and white Terror and the extermination chambers, of the international solidarity of the war against fascism in Spain, of the liberating inspiration of the great anti-fascist alliance and joint victory with the socialist world, of the bitter fruits of Social-Democracy throwing away the fruits of victory and rebuilding German militarism, of the new experiences of the fight for peace against nuclear war—all these have helped to shape and are shaping, despite all the lies and indoctrination of capitalist mass propaganda, that strength and that consciousness which shall finally win the victory for the cause of the working people and socialism.

For Peace and Socialism

Since 1917 forty-two years have passed. Marx's 'fifty years' would bring us to 1967. By that date, if we can prevent major war, there is every prospect that socialism will be well on the way to overtaking and leaving behind, not merely the average levels of productivity and living standards of the capitalist world (that has long ago been accomplished), but of the most advanced privileged apex of the capitalist world, so that the economic superiority of socialism will have been finally and inescapably demonstrated to all, and the decisive battle will have been won. This close goal within reach can be realised if we succeed in preventing that third

world war which the nuclear maniacs of the dying Western social order still openly and suicidally plan. That is why the fight for peace is at this moment the heart of the world socialist revolution.

Lenin on Britain

Like Marx before him, Lenin paid special attention to the problems of Britain and the British labour movement. Lenin understood very well the reasons why the classic country of capitalism, Britain, once the leading world industrial power, should have fallen behind in the race with newer capitalist powers like the United States and Germany. He understood equally why the British working class, which had once led the way as the pioneer of the international working class movement with the epic struggles of Chartism and the foundations of the trade unions, should have later lagged behind and remained under the yoke of landlordism and capitalism, while younger working class movements, arriving later in the field, had already advanced to the victory of socialism. The very advantage of the former privileged position, of the world industrial monopoly and colonial monopoly, became a disadvantage. The world tribute led to stagnation of technique and development at home of British capitalism compared to younger competitors. Similarly the relatively privileged condition of a section of the workers on the same foundation, providing 'relatively tolerable petty bourgeois conditions of life' within which they were more interested to struggle for further improvements of those conditions than to change the social order, furnished the basis for the domination of an opportunist leadership in the service of capitalism and rewarded with rich plums.

Lenin on the British Revolution

But Lenin equally showed that the inevitable undermining of this old privileged position of British capitalism was bringing and would further bring profound changes in the political situation in Britain and in the character of the British working class movement. The loss of the world industrial monopoly in the eighteen-eighties brought the beginning of the pioneer socialist movement, which has since become the Communist Party. The opening of the imperialist era brought the foundation of the Labour Party. The victory of the Russian socialist revolution brought the adoption of the aim of common ownership in the constitution of the Labour Party and the unification of the militant socialist movement in the Communist

Party. In the solution of the problems involved in the foundation of the Communist Party, as the indispensable organisation of the Marxist vanguard, and at the same time of its relations with the Labour Party in order to assist the advance of the broad movement to socialist political consciousness and the fight for socialism, Lenin gave unwearied personal guidance and help.

Slowness and Sharp Turns

Lenin understood very well the slowness of development arising from the conditions in Britain:

All the best revolutionary elements in the working class who are dissatisfied with the slow progress of development, which in England perhaps will be slower than in other countries, will come over to us. Development is slow because the British bourgeoisie is in a position to create better conditions for the aristocracy of labour and by that to retard the progress of the revolution.

(Lenin, *Speech to the Second Congress of the Communist International, August 6, 1920.*)

At the same time he indicated that the character of the crisis in Britain could very suddenly give rise to the proletarian revolution:

Take England, for example. We cannot say, and no one is in a position to say beforehand, how soon the real proletarian revolution will flare up and *what* will serve as the *cause* to rouse it, to kindle it and move into the struggle very wide masses who are at present dormant. Hence, it is our duty to carry on our preparatory work in such a manner as to be 'well shod on all four feet', as the late Plekhanov was fond of saying when he was a Marxist and revolutionary. It is possible that a parliamentary crisis will cause the 'breach', will 'break the ice'; perhaps it will be a crisis caused by the hopelessly entangled and increasingly painful and acute colonial and imperialist contradictions; perhaps some third cause, etc. We are not discussing the kind of struggle that will *determine* the fate of the proletarian revolution in England (not a single Communist has any doubts on that score, so far as we are concerned, this question is settled and definitely settled). What we are discussing is the *cause* that will rouse the at present dormant proletarian masses and bring them right up to the revolution.

(Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism, 1920.*)

It is only necessary to recall the experience of Suez in the recent period, or of the general strike in an earlier period, to see in an embryonic form how rapidly such occasions can arise even in the conditions of Britain.

Seeking the Path

Through all the changed circumstances as they have developed the underlying principle of Lenin's approach holds good. The necessity for the active fighters for socialism to be united, organised

and ready to respond to every type of shifting situation, whether in a period of relatively lower and more limited level of mass struggle, or suddenly flaring out to a major political situation and even crisis of the regime. Never to be discouraged by slowness of development ('It is much more difficult—and much more useful—to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open really mass and really revolutionary struggle have not yet matured'). Above all, in the conditions of a country such as Britain, to find the bridge of contact with the broad not yet revolutionary movement, to find that transitional programme which can help to carry forward the fight of the working people on the way to more basic aims:

The main task of contemporary communism in Western Europe and America is to acquire the ability to find, to outline and to carry out a concrete, not quite revolutionary plan of measures and methods for *leading* the masses to the real, determined last and great revolutionary struggle.

(Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism*.)

The past decades have enriched experience in the approach to this problem. At the critical point now reached, when the British people can play such a key role in the choice of peace or war, when the choice between the aim of social ownership or the repudiation of that aim has become the foremost issue before all the organisations of the trade union and labour movement, it is more than ever necessary for all those, of whatever school or current of thought, who stand for the aim of socialism, for the victory of the working class, for the defeat of nuclear war, to find the basis and means of co-operation in a common fight.

'The Times' and Lenin

When Lenin died, *The Times* wrote in January, 1924:

It may be said with confidence that a disintegrating process has begun which will lead to the total collapse of the party. The end is probably only a matter of months.

That was thirty-six years ago. 'The end' of Communism which *The Times* so triumphantly prophesied as due within 'a matter of months' has not come. Communism is stronger than ever, extends more and more widely over the world, will win through finally also in Britain, as the peoples of the world, including in Britain, will become more and more convinced by experience of its necessity. The battle over social ownership now raging in the trade unions and the Labour Party (and the latest 'compromise' reached at the March meeting of the Labour Party Executive will hardly end the battle) is only a preliminary symptom and symbol of the deeper

issues and changes which are preparing in Britain, whose further development will assuredly prove that Lenin's confidence in the final outcome in Britain will be justified by the event.

R.P.D.

March 16, 1960.