

Critically Evaluate Lenin's Adaptation of Marxism to Russian Conditions.

The theories of Vladimir Ulianov, his ideology of Leninism and personality played a significant role in the revolutionary movement, and the eventual victory of the workers party in Russia. His revolutionary ideas grew out of the influence of both his family and his reading of Marxist literature. The ideology of Soviet Russia was founded upon the ideas Marxism – Leninism which was inspired by Lenin's adaptation of the ideas of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels in their work, most notably 'The Communist Manifesto'. Russia, however, unlike the state portrayed in Marx's work, had not progressed in the same style as her European neighbours, still primarily agrarian but developing into a capitalist state. While his ideology was Marxist at its core, Lenin understood that Russia was not the nation-state prepared for the transition to socialism as Marx had envisaged. Lenin therefore, to the criticism of some socialists then and today, amended principles of Marx's work in order for its transition to the specific Russian political, social and economic climate. Several of Lenin's modifications to Marx's original ideas stand out, and it is the purpose of this essay to assess these altered doctrines.

Lenin's foremost revision to the Marxism doctrine was his theory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This concept is linked with the Marxist teachings of class struggle, whereby the minority dictatorship of the capitalist bourgeois is overthrown by the majority dictatorship of the working class. The Paris Commune of 1871 failed, in the view of Marx and Engels, because of the passive and inadequate force of the proletarian government. Drawing inspiration when comparing the situation with that of Russia, Lenin added that the use of coercive measures was needed to ensure that the minority that opposes the dictatorship of the proletariat was controlled (Chubarov, 2001: 124). Lenin emphasised, beyond the normal Marxist teachings, the importance of conflict, he believed the main question of politics was a fight and a decision between who won and who lost (Conquest, 1972: 27). His theory advocated the creation of a workers militia, (later becoming the Red Guards) within factory committees, who would control their factories and remove bureaucratic administration. Lenin's idea was that the workers militia would be built from the people and not separate from them, unlike western democracies which used a separate military force to coerce the masses to their will (Kaplan, 1969: 111). Lenin therefore, envisaged a state where the people and the state were the same. Kaplan explains his thought, 'Once authority is equated with the will of the subject, it ceases to be authority at all' (Kaplan, 1969: 113). Lenin's adaptation of the dictatorship of the proletariat calls for a new kind of state, the state of the people,

one in which the authority comes from arming the workers themselves rather than creating a separate military institution.

Lenin's second adjustment to Marxism was fundamental due to Russia primarily peasant population. The application of Marxism was not straightforward. Marx dealt with a systematic process towards the development of socialism and did not analyse its application to societies in different stages of industrialisation (Wesson, 1978:12). Marx and Engels neglected the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary force, consigning them to the camp of the petty-bourgeois and not considering them a revolutionary agent. However, due to Russia's backwards feudalism the majority of the population was peasantry. In response to this idea, and the aftermath of the 1905 revolution, Lenin believed if the masses were divided against the autocracy, it would be impossible for any revolution to take place (D'Encausee, 1982: 31). Therefore, he envisaged a government of peasants and proletarians; this reflects the ideas and shows an attachment to Narodnichesto (Chubarov, 2001: 125). The specific condition of Russia, Lenin understood, gave a significant importance to the peasantry, who had to become part of the revolutionary movement if a revolution was to take place.

The third adaptation of Marxism was based in Marx's idea of the development of Socialism. His theory believed in a structured development of states that passed through phases of growth, eventually leading to the downfall of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist regime. 'Marx's predictions presupposed an established bourgeois society with a legal order and with political freedoms; a 'class-conscious' proletariat engaged in a 'class-war' with the bourgeois' (Broido, 1987: 2). Russian Marxists envisaged two revolutions. Firstly a bourgeois-democratic revolution, whereby the tsarist regime would be overthrown by a democratic republic, this would enable capitalist development and industrialisation. The second proletarian-socialist revolution would overthrow the bourgeois and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat (Chubarov, 2001: 126). Sergei Witte's industrialization gave Marxists a belief that feudalism would be replaced by capitalism (Wood, 1993: 27). The transition to capitalism and the growth of both the middle and working classes was developing with haste and therefore a promising time for Marxists (Broido, 1987: 2).

However, to think in terms of a 'bourgeois - democratic' or 'proletarian - socialist' revolution was inappropriate as Russia was an autocratic state with a middle class that was not economically powerful or politically aware (Wood, 1993: 26). Marx's idea that the capitalist middle class would fight the revolution could not be applied to Russia as the middle class had not yet established its economic dominance (Shukman, 1977: 25). 'As Pavel Axelrod said in 1881, there was no real class war in Russia, only a conflict

between the tsarist regime and a revolutionary intelligentsia supported by dissatisfied individuals of all classes' (Broido, 1987:2). Because the Russian bourgeois was deemed too conservative, due to its undeveloped position, Lenin believed that the Marxist idea of two revolutions should be telescoped into one, using the working class to push radical capitalist reforms and speed up the process (Chubarov, 2001: 126). He believed that the revolutionary activities of the peasantry, inspired by the events of 1905, could be used to accomplish a proletarian revolution and establish a government.

Lenin's desire to telescope the two revolutions into one reflects the haste to which he believed the proletarian revolution was coming. In order to prepare the proletariat, Lenin planned the organisational concepts of the Marxist party he hoped to establish. While Marx advocated the progression of society towards socialism; Lenin did not have the same outlook. Lane explains the difference in thought between Marx and Lenin, 'Marx had much more faith in the spontaneous growth of the proletariat's class consciousness, Lenin's emphasis on the role of the intelligentsia bringing ideas to the proletariat and helping to create a revolutionary consciousness was alien to Marx' (Lane, 1978: 13). Lenin understood that 'Russia's factory-working class was scarcely born before it became the chosen vehicle of the revolutionary intelligentsia' (Shukman, 1977: 25). Therefore he supported the idea of assembling a group of professional revolutionaries made from the revolutionary intelligentsia, in order to provide leadership when the Marxist party emerged from the underground.

The problem that Lenin envisaged is made clear, in 'What is to be done?' He criticises the idea of a spontaneous development of political consciousness in the working class (Wood, 1993: 28). Lenin wrote, 'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness' (Lenin, 1970: 143). Consequently, Lenin envisaged a monolithic party with direct control under the authority of the revolutionary intelligentsia (Lane, 1978: 11). His idea of party structure was to promote the interests of the working class under autocratic conditions (Lane, 1978: 12). In a discussion with Radchenko, during his contact with the Union of Struggle in 1897, Lenin made it clear that he thought that only way that the working class could acquire socialism as a doctrine was through the guidance of intellectuals (Service, 1985: 63).

Lenin went further in his analysis of party organisation in 'What is to be done?' At The second congress of socialists, which met in July-August 1903 in Brussels and London, Lenin's ideas on membership proved to be a central argument which had severe consequences for the party (Broido, 1987: 4). Lenin believed that only 'professional-revolutionaries', those who were full-time conspirators should be allowed to join the

party, which was met with opposition by Martov and the Mensheviks who envisaged wider membership clause. The split between the ideas of membership revealed a divide in the vision and aims of socialism in Russia as well (Brodio, 1987: 5). Lenin had very little confidence in the ability of Russia's workers to acquire political consciousness and ridiculed the Mensheviks for their 'trade-unionist' activities (Broido, 1987: 6). Revolutionaries such as Martov, Trotsky and, the Polish socialist, Rosa Luxembour argued that Lenin's idea of 'democratic centralism' resembled an autocratic regime (Conquest, 1972: 46). Lenin's ideas on membership were influenced by his alarm to the revisionist theories of Eduard Bernstein, the German social democrat, who believed in, firstly, the assumption that the transition to socialism could be achieved without a worker's revolution, secondly, the centrality of the idea of economic struggle rather than the development of political consciousness of the working class (Wood, 1993: 28).

Due to the negative outcome of the communist experiment, socialists disassociate Lenin from Marx. However, although Lenin changed aspects of Marx's ideas, his ideology was based in Marxism, hence the term coined by Stalin, Marxism – Leninism (Chubarov, 2001: 134). Lenin's ideas can be connected to the early work of Marx in two ways. Firstly, it was based in the Marxism of the earlier work of Marx. And secondly, it reflected the ideas concerned with applying socialism to a backward Europe (Conquest, 1972: 40). His understanding of the difficulty in bringing Marxist ideology to the conditions of Russia was clear in his conviction to the revolutionary cause. Rather than just his intelligence, the driving force behind Bolshevism was Lenin's character and upbringing (Conquest, 1972:26). He had a much greater force, energy and determination compared to his revolutionary colleagues (Conquest, 1972: 27). While Lenin was criticised for altering the basic tenets of Marxism, it was necessary in order for Russia to complete its transition into socialism.

In conclusion, this essay has shown that Lenin clearly adapted, with exceptional understanding the doctrine of Marxism to the specific condition of Russia. Marx envisaged the historical process guiding states through five stages of development, eventually leading to the downfall of capitalism and the emergence of socialism. Lenin understood firstly, that for socialism to develop in Russia, a core intelligentsia of professional revolutionaries was needed in order to guide the proletariat towards it. Without this leadership, the workers would only concern themselves with trade union activities, centred upon reforms including wages and working hours. With this idea Lenin set out the organisation of the Marxist party, with only full-time revolutionaries being allowed to join. This idea was contested by revolutionaries and other Marxists, such as Martov and led to the split of the party into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. Lenin also expanded upon Marx's ideas concerning government and rule after the proposed

revolution. Comparing the situation in Russia with the Paris Commune of 1871, Lenin believed that the dictatorship of the proletariat had to use coercion, perhaps excessively to prevent counter-revolution. A fundamental adaptation of Lenin's was the role of the peasantry, although ignored by Marx, due to Russia's social and economic condition the proletariat had to be allied with the mass population if a revolution was to take place. While Lenin was criticised by revisionist thinkers and other Marxists, his core ideology was Marxism. His personality and conviction to the revolutionary cause was the driving force of socialism in Russia.

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