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# Lenin — An Appreciation.

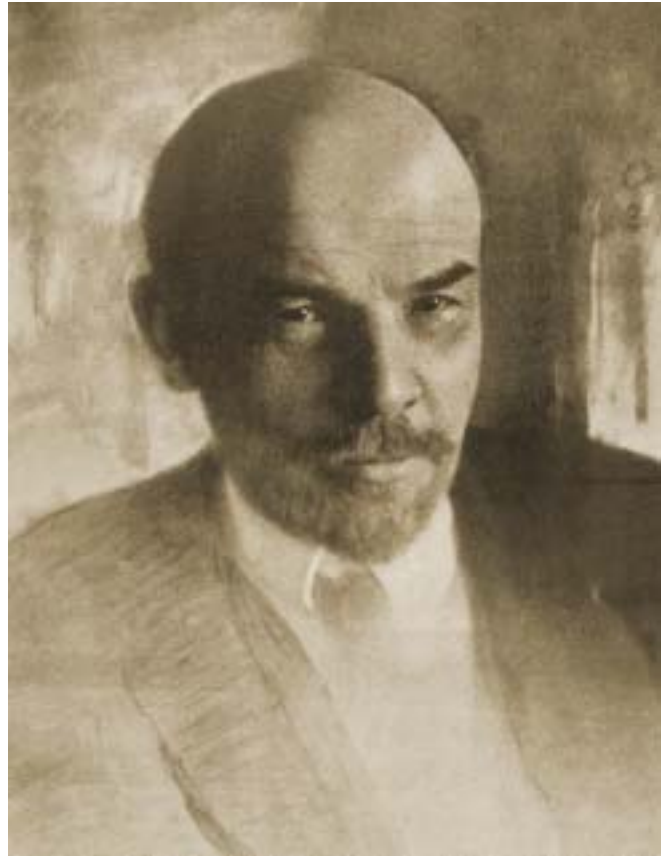
by Louis C. Fraina

Published in *One Year of Revolution: Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Founding of the Russian Soviet Republic: November 7, 1918.* (Brooklyn, NY: The Class Struggle, 1918), pp. 3-6

Marx was the master of the Revolution in theory. Lenin is the master of the Revolution in action. But as Marx, the man of theory, had great capacity for action, so Lenin, the man of action, has great capacity for theory.

In fact, the dominant *form* of the activity of Marx and Lenin is determined not by peculiar talent or characteristics, but by the historic *milieu* conditioning their activity. This is precisely the mark of the great rebel — that he concentrates upon the fundamental revolutionary task of his day.

If I were asked what particular phase of Lenin appears to me as decisive, I would answer: his dynamic capacity to unite theory *and* practice. This is not as simple a thing as it may appear. Usually, the Socialist is an opportunist, who casts aside every real opportunity for immediate revolutionary action, becoming an adept in bourgeois liberal activity and social reformism, accepting theory in the facile fashion of an average Christian accepting his religion — repudiating the revolutionary tasks of Socialism; or a “revolutionist” becomes an adept in using formulae, whose action is hampered by the silken cord of abstract theory, absorbed so much in *the* Revolution that the requirements of the immediate revolutionary struggle are allowed to pass into the years of wasted opportunity — paltering with the revolutionary tasks of Socialism. Each of these two types of Socialists evade all actual problems of the Revolution. Action must be directed by theory, and theory must become action. An uncompromising revolutionist, Lenin has an overwhelming sense of reality. The Revolution to him is not a dress parade of amicable transformation, of the pacific “penetration” of Capitalism by Socialism; nor is it the conquest of Capitalism by the formulation of “revolu-



tionary” theory and formulae, much as a bourgeois “idealist” sees in general principles of human action the means for the emancipation of the world. No; Lenin conceives the Revolution as a series of implacable, brutal class struggles; as a process in which theory and action are inseparably united; as a dynamic movement in which every opportunity, every crisis, every strength, weakness, and peculiarity of the social alignment becomes the subject of study and appropriate action.

Let it not appear from this that Lenin is an opportunist wavering with each new shift of the social wind; Lenin has the utmost scorn, and justly, for the

miserable opportunist who shifts and wavers, hesitates and compromises, and uses “reality” as a justification. Adapting one’s self to temporarily dominant facts, compromising with issues and forces fundamentally contrary to Socialism on the specious plea of “necessary action,” is not to adapt one’s self to reality, but to accept forms instead of substance, the appearance of reality for reality itself. Reality is infinitely deceptive. At the moment when the war and Tsarism constituted the “reality” in Russia, a new reality appeared and burst forth, the action of the revolutionary proletariat, the reality of revolutionary Socialism. Life is consistent in spite of apparent inconsistency. There must be consistency in theory and in action, based upon adapting each to the *fundamental facts* of the forces and tendency of Capitalism and the revolutionary proletariat. Consistency that is flexible, and flexibility that is consistent, are instruments of the Revolution. When the moment for “necessary action” comes — *revolutionary action* — the opportunist will waver and oppose this necessary revolutionary action, as did the majority Socialists in Europe, the “men of action”; while the man who was accused of not being “in action,” who rejected participation in certain action as contrary to Socialism and the class struggle, becomes the director and inspiration of the greatest of all revolutions.

It might make one cynical, if life itself didn’t suppress cynicism in the revolutionary Socialist, to consider certain reactions toward Lenin. There are many who consider Lenin a sort of bolt from the blue, a miraculous product of the Russian Revolution; there are others who bitterly attacked Lenin, now singing his praises, while they try to compress Lenin’s policy into the small space of their petty purposes and corrupt ideology; and there are still others who invoke Lenin and the proletarian revolution in Russian while pursuing the petty bourgeois, opportunistic policy of moderate Socialism which they have always pursued, and which Lenin condemned, condemns, and will continue to condemn... And Lenin serenely, uncompromisingly, adheres to the revolutionary theory and action compromising his fundamental policy *for twenty years*, disaster and success alike emphasizing his revolutionary energy and initiative....

During the course of years Lenin labored in comparative obscurity, forging the concepts that have become the thunderbolts of the Russian Revolution.

Lenin represented the minority, that minority of revolutionary Socialism which in all nations actively represents the Revolution and is the hope of the proletariat. The world of Socialism — that is to say, the world comprised in the petty bourgeois Socialism of the Second International — rendered homage to clay idols, to Karl Kautsky, to Georgii Plekhanov, to Jules Guesde, all of whom collapsed miserably under the test of the revolutionary crisis produced by the war. The world of petty bourgeois Socialism invoked the German Social Democracy, the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, the dominant Socialism in Russia, while it ignored, condemned, or knew nothing of the Bolsheviki and other groups of the revolutionary minority, the policy of which conquers in Russia, and will conquer everywhere by means of the New International of the final struggle and victory. But Lenin was not swerved from his course by apparent failure, no more than he has been swerved from his course by success. In these years of preparation for the Revolution, in these bitter years of momentary triumph of a Socialism essentially counterrevolutionary, Lenin developed the fundamentals of his policy, which his revolutionary integrity and mastery of theory convinced him were in accord with the fundamental facts and tendency of Capitalism and the proletariat, and which would necessarily conquer under the impulse of the universal crisis generated by Imperialism, which introduces the new revolutionary epoch of the proletarian class struggle.

The courage and initiative of the man, his integrity and devotion to the fundamental tasks of Socialism, his refusal to temporize with revolutionary consistency, policy, and honor for the sake of meretricious popularity, are marvels of character and vision, an inspiration to the Socialist and the rebel.

It is impossible to chronicle here the achievements of Lenin. But there is one achievement, I think, which is characteristic. I was discussing Lenin with a comrade the other day, and he said: “It rather tires me to read so much in which Lenin repeatedly insists, as against Karl Kautsky, that Marx said this or meant that. A man who has accomplished what Lenin has in Russia doesn’t have to worry about Marx.” But Marxism is the theoretical instrument of the proletarian revolution; it is upon the basis of Marxism that Lenin builds. And a great achievement of Lenin is the restoration of

Marxism to its real character as an instrument of revolutionary action. During the past twenty-five years, Marxism has experienced a transformation, becoming the means of interpreting history and a fetish of controversy, instead of a maker of history and an instrument of revolutionary action. This degrading conception of Marxism was dominant in the old International. The “Marxist,” instead of using Marxism to interpret new revolutionary developments, used their atrophied Marxism as a means of crushing new revolutionary ideas or compressing them into the stultifying limits of the old tactics, and justifying or explaining away every abandonment of revolutionary Socialism by the dominant petty bourgeois Socialism. Lenin used Marx against these pseudo-Marxists, insisted on making Marxism an instrument of revolutionary action, built upon the basis of Marxism and amplified its scope. Marx is again the rebel, and not the slave of the Socialist pedant. Lenin used Marxism to interpret the new social alignments of imperialism, the new forms of the class struggle, and to forge the concepts of theory and action corresponding to the new revolutionary epoch.

Lenin’s theoretical activity bulks large. His *Development of Capitalism in Russia* is considered a master work, as is his *Agrarian Problem in Russia*; his *Imperialism: The Final Stage of Capitalism* is a splendid

analysis of the prevailing epoch, a brilliant unity of theory and action in Socialist interpretation. Then there is Lenin’s pamphlet, *The State and the Revolution*, a discussion of the determining problem of the proletarian revolution; and his numerous pamphlets and other works issued during the Revolution, and which are classics of the application of fundamental Socialism to the problems of immediate, dynamic action during a revolutionary crisis. This theoretical work of Lenin will yet become a source of inspiration in the coming reconstruction of Socialism, supplemented by the accomplishments of the proletarian revolution in Russia.

It is not in any sense a concession to the Carlylean theory of “the Great Man” to admit that each great epoch of history expresses itself, *focuses itself*, in a great individual: Marat individualized the proletarian tendency of the French Revolution, Marx individualized the theoretical coming-of-age of the revolutionary proletariat; and Lenin individualizes the proletarian revolution in Russia.

Greetings, men and women of the proletarian revolution in Russia! Greetings, Lenin, symbol of the oncoming revolutionary Socialism that will conquer in spite of all!

*Louis C. Fraina.*

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

*Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.*