**Lenin - a real Marxist or an imposter?**

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In May 1887 Sasha, the older brother of the future leader of the Russian revolution, the architect and first head of the USSR, Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov (Lenin), was hanged together with four comrades for plotting to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. In the same year, a few months later Lenin enters Kazan University to study law and in December he is expelled for participating in a student demonstration. Released but under a police supervision Lenin almost gets himself arrested by frequenting a Marxist group led by N. E. Fedoseyev. In July 1889, the police arrest Fedoseyev, he commits suicide and Lenin turns to the writings of the first Russian to identify himself as a “Marxist” - Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov. In 1895 Lenin is arrested again for strike agitation and locked up in prison.

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In 1896, from cell #193, Lenin started his monumental work on “The development of capitalism in Russia” (1899). For the formation of his ideas Lenin drew upon over 500 different books, abstracts, research papers, reviews and articles; a research that lasted more than three years covering everything that had been written on Russian economics.

At the time the conventional thought was that the abolition of serfdom in 1860s has already created the conditions for non-capitalist development of Russia centred around the peasant commune, and that the limitations of the domestic market would render the development of capitalism in Russia impossible (Milios, 1999). In contrast, Lenin believed that Russia was already a capitalist country, “Russia is a capitalist country…”; and because of this Russia was ready for revolution, “The only way to end the exploitation of the working people is through the class struggle of the proletariat” (Lenin, cited in Milios 1999). He saw capitalism emerging from and because of class struggle.

Was Lenin a Marxist? The intuitive answer is no, as Marx’s political theory proclaims that socialism will inevitably emerge from capitalism in the process of its maturation because of the inherent in it contradictions. Even so, Marx was not as dogmatic. In 1881, in a letter to the Russian socialist Vera Zasulich, he wrote: “I restricted, therefore, this historical inevitability to the countries of western Europe” (Lenin, cited in Milios 1999). And Lenin’s logic was no different, “No Marxist has ever regarded Marx’s theory as some universally compulsory philosophical scheme of history, as anything more than an explanation of a particular social economic formation” (Lenin, cited in Brinkley 1998). In 1894 he wrote, “No Marxist has ever argued anywhere that there ‘must be’ capitalism in Russia ‘because’ there was capitalism in the West” (Lenin, cited in Milios 1999). Was Lenin a Marxist? Yes, Lenin was a Marxist theorist.

Furthermore, in Lenin’s framework capital is to be regarded as a specific social relation of exploitation and dominance (Milios, 1999). Per Milios, Lenin considered that not the form of production relations but the exploitation of capitalists is what defines capitalism. Was Lenin a Marxist? Yes, Lenin was still a Marxist theorist. In Brinkley (1998) Marx’s socialism is inevitable as capitalism, although the foundation of socialism, exploits the people. The bourgeois revolution’s promises of freedom end up with a ruling class exploiting the people, and therefore, people must smash the capitalist regime and bring socialism culminating in communism where freedom and abundance will “wither away” the state (Brinkley, 1998).

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Was Lenin a Marxist in “What is to be done” (1902)? In this pamphlet, Lenin maintained that no revolutionary movement can be durable without a stable organisation of leaders and that the broader the mass which is spontaneously drawn into the struggle, the more urgent is the necessity for such an organisation, because the broader the mass the easier is for any demagogue to attract the backward sections of the mass (Lenin, 1988). Such an organisation must consist of people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activities and has a narrow membership as this would make it more difficult for the autocratic state to catch them (Lenin, 1988). Lenin argued that class political consciousness can be brought only from without, from outside the sphere of economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers (Lenin, 1988).

This is very different from Marx’s thesis that “emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves” (Marx, cited in Draper 1971 ). Lenin’s thesis was exactly the opposite, namely that the working class will not spontaneously become political and that Marxists should form a political party, or "vanguard", of dedicated revolutionaries to spread Marxist political ideas among the workers. Shandro (1995) though sees no opposition of ideas. He considers the thesis of "consciousness from without" as a reflection of the realities of the process of the formation of working-class consciousness, and thus, a theoretical commitment to the political autonomy of the working class. Yet, Lenin denied that workers could attain socialist consciousness and struggle for the achievement of socialism on their own. In the Marxist theory, workers don’t need to know anything about Marxism to develop “absolutely independently” socialist consciousness (Lenin, cited in Mayer 1997). Was Lenin a Marxist? No, Lenin was an autocrat.

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In “The development of capitalism in Russia” (1899) Lenin saw the class struggle as the predicator of socialism. In less than 20 years, in “The State and Revolution” (1917) his views will have evolved to the point that the main element of Marx’s teaching was not the class struggle, "A Marxist is one who extends the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat” (Lenin, cited in Lerner 1939). The proletariat will destruct the bourgeois state power, replace parliamentary democracy by the commune to become "a working-body, executive and legislative at the same time" (Lenin, cited in Lerner 1939). Per Lerner, in Lenin’s view the proletariat would have control on political power and share this with no other classes. When the goal is achieved the bourgeois state is destroyed, the old society dispensed with, a new completely classless and stateless society will emerge (Lerner, 1939).

To rephrase, the two main themes in Lenin’s pamphlet are the inevitability of a violent revolution and the uniqueness of each national experience (Lerner, 1939). Per Lerner (1939), Lenin emphasized on the fact that Russia was "one of the most backward of European countries" and "socialism cannot triumph directly or immediately". The author outlines that Lenin would see the one-party dictatorship as the medium for transition to socialism in Russia. The "dictatorship of the proletariat would be a centralized dictatorship which must "demand the strictest control" and would convert "all citizens into workers and employees of one huge 'syndicate' . . . the state of the Soviets” (Lenin, cited in Lerner 1939).

Lenin once have said, “The state is an organ or engine of violence. . . . when the state becomes a proletarian state .. . we will be fully and unreservedly in favour of a strong state power and of centralism." (Lenin, cited in Theen and Harding 1982). Again, in Theen and Harding (1982), an official party text proclaimed that "A dictatorship of the working class cannot be secured except in the form of a dictatorship of its progressive vanguard, that is the Communist Party." Lenin’s definition for dictatorship was "nothing more or less than power unlimited by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force" (Theen and Harding, 1982). At the time of the Revolution Lenin objected a coalition with democratic socialists, his colleagues accused him of wanting to install "a purely Bolshevik government by means of political terror," and Lenin confirmed that they were right (Theen and Harding, 1982). Was Lenin a Marxist? No, Lenin was an outright dictator; and oppressor.

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When Marx studied capitalism, he did this in its early stage, in a period where competition was free and the world market expanding. Later, in the beginning of the new century the free competition is replaced by monopoly capitalism and the fight to dominate the world market increases. The monopoly capitalism is the focal point of high finance, large industry and the national government. The monopoly capitalism controls industrial ownership and directs the national economy. More surplus capital is generated and exported beyond the national borders in the form of investments and loans to less developed countries. This leads to a struggle between the supra- and mullti-national monopolies to control the world market. Imperialist wars become inevitable. The world has already been divided up by the imperial great powers and the competing monopolies struggle to repartition the world. The economic disparity between competing monopolies and the differences in the development of competing imperial powers is what will make imperialist wars inevitable. The business and government eventually will engage in geopolitical conflicts as they colonise the less developed countries. At the time, Lenin was looking for an answer of why socialist revolutions in the West had not already occurred as foreseen by Marx. He discovered that capitalism have reached a new stage - the stage of imperialism; Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917). The proletariat approaches its highest stage, the stage of revolution, in unison with the capitalism entering its highest stage. Lenin’s economic theory of imperialism is a command for immediate action because it shows that world war and revolution are dialectically related.

In Brinkley (1998), the world war is the World War I in the event; it would "spark" revolution in the West by shocking the Western proletariats out of their self-satisfied stupor. Brinkley argues that the question Lenin would have asked himself is, how, if only the vanguard could do that, and there was no vanguard in the West, how could his vanguard do it from Russia? Lenin thought, continues the author, that in 1917 when the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia they would trade peace for the freedom all colonies, a condition which no capitalist country could accept. As per Brinkley, the Western governments will reject the peace, the brutal conflict will provoke contempt in the people, and make workers aware of the true imperialist nature of the war; they will rise and overthrow their governments. The author affirms that in 1917 Lenin was not looking to make peace but merely proposing peace to spark revolution to destroy capitalism. Further he goes saying that once this succeeded, Russia would have been able to proceed safely with its own monumental task of "building socialism" and could even expect to get help from the now socialist West, which would also free and aid its colonies. Brinkley makes the important conclusion that Lenin had rescued Marxism from oblivion and had shown how the whole world would now experience the triumph of socialism. Despite the fact, that Lenin’s predictions were wrong, the failure of the revolution in the West threatened to ruin the whole enterprise, as Lenin had said (Brinkley, 1998). But Lenin, per Brinkley, did not conclude that his theory was wrong, merely that new tactics based on that theory would be necessary for Russia to survive in a hostile capitalist world and be ready to spark revolution in the West when the next opportunity came along. Was Lenin a Marxist? No, Lenin was, presumably, an imperialist.

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Lenin might have distorted the ideas of Marx to advance his political purpose and suit his interpretation of the circumstances in Russia to justify the break out of revolution. Lenin might not have been a brilliant theorist. But what undoubtedly, he was, is a great practitioner of a revolution, someone who added practice to Marx's theory. Lenin could be seen as someone who saved Marxism from extinction. In Rosa Luxemburg’s words “Marx, in his scientific creation, has outstripped us as a party of practical fighters. It is not true that Marx no longer suffices for our needs. On the contrary, our needs are not yet adequate for the utilization of Marx’s ideas” (Luxemburg, cited in Ri͡azanov 1927). Without Lenin, Marx could have been forever forgotten.

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