

PROCEEDINGS.

Lenin International Conference:

*Self-Determination,
Technique and Power.
Barcelona, 26, 27, 28
June 2024*

E-BOOK
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Executive Summary

The Lenin International Conference 'Self-determination, Technique, and Power' was held in Barcelona on 26, 27 and 28 June 2024. The organisation was carried out by the Historical Materialism Studies Group of the Catalan Society of Philosophy (Institute for Catalan Studies), along with the Faculty of Philosophy of the Universitat de Barcelona (UB), and transform! Europe, as being the main partner. The conference was also supported by other institutions, such as *Fundació Neus Català, Centre d'Estudis Unitat Popular, Fundación Terra e Tempo, Iratzar Fundazioa, Centre de Cultura i Documentació dels Països Catalans, and Fundación de Investigaciones Marxistas*. About fifty presentations were read by scholars and students from more than thirty academic institutions around the world. Also, three symposiums were organised as part of the conference. Plenary lectures were read by Tamás Krausz (University of Budapest), Mònica Clua-Losada (University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley), Stefano Petrucciani (University of Rome, Sapienza), Michael Brie (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation), Albert Noguera (Universitat de València), Manuel Delgado (Universitat de Barcelona), Marxlenin Pérez Valdés (University of La Habana), and Kevin B. Anderson (University of California, Santa Barbara). More than one hundred people attended the conference, strengthening Marxist Studies network and facilitating international academic exchange. In this edited volume you will find the nine contributions that were accepted by the Scientific Committee to be published as the conference proceedings.

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MARCH 2025

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1. Preface

Bringing Lenin out of his honourable isolation

By Marga Ferré, President of transform! europe

The centenary of Lenin's death in 2024 has gone rather unnoticed considering that we are talking about one of the figures in the history of humanity who has most shaped it and who has most influenced its future. There have been some events, some commemorations and some biographies, but nothing commensurate with the dimension of what Lenin has represented. Samuel Mercer of the University of Liverpool spoke, at the Conference we are presenting, of "the honourable isolation of Lenin's philosophy" and that is precisely what this Conference has sought to reverse.

The international conference "Lenin: Self-Determination, Technique and Power" held on 26, 27 and 28 June 2024 at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Barcelona was, therefore, almost an exception. A brilliant exception for two reasons: on the one hand, to commemorate the thought of a revolutionary in a university and, on the other, to try (and succeed) in restoring Lenin as an author, as a thinker and, therefore, as a subject of political philosophy.

These were the reasons why Transform Europe decided to support the project: to look at our history and the thinkers who have shaped it from an analytical, scientific and rigorous point of view. A Conference that brought together in Barcelona more than 70 thinkers from different parts of the world who addressed Lenin's theoretical contribution, based on his thought and his enormous influence on contemporary

history. Perhaps that is why the presentations at the Conference were so varied, ranging from the state, power, art, self-determination, decolonisation, aesthetics and, perhaps one of the most interesting parts of the Conference, his influence on revolutionary praxis in different parts of the world.

A Conference that sought to bring Lenin out of a deliberate oblivion, from the intuition that what they do not forgive Lenin is not that he made a revolution, but that he won it. I interpret that the intention was to bury him under the rubble of the Berlin Wall in order to demolish, like the fallen statues, his symbolic capital: the very powerful idea that power can be contested.

Michael Brie in his speech during this Conference said that one of his "seven reasons for not leaving Lenin to our enemies" is to recover the analysis of the epoch and the question of power; I imagine that this is why in all recoveries of Lenin's thought the echoes of the century that he modelled, the 20th, resound in the problems that we are tackling in the 21st.

A recovery of Lenin as an author, from the perspective of political philosophy, seems to us to be a necessary, fascinatingly interesting and historically repairing contribution to our common heritage. We are grateful to the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Barcelona and the Institute for Catalan Studies for their contribution to making this possible.

2. Introduction

By Roger Castellanos Corbera (Coord.), Joan Morro (Co-Ed.), Arnau Mayans (Co-Ed.)

From the Catalan Society of Philosophy's Historical Materialism Studies Group (*Grup d'Estudis de Materialisme Històric de la Societat Catalana de Filosofia*), a subsidiary of the Institute for Catalan Studies (*Institut d'Estudis Catalans*) we present this collection of the proceedings of the Lenin International Conference (*Congrés Internacional Lenin*) 'Self-determination, Technique, and Power' (*Autodeterminació, Tècnica i Poder*), which was held in Barcelona on 26, 27, and 28 June 2024¹.

The Historical Materialism Studies Group was established at the end of 2023, with the founding objective of addressing the critical study of the Marxist philosophical tradition, both in the Catalan and international spheres, from the classical school to its contemporary expressions, including critical theory, as well as the receptions and philosophical influences related throughout the history of thought.

In this sense, the centenary of Lenin's death offered us an unbeatable opportunity, one of high intellectual potency, to organise an international conference which had the aim of reinstating the Bolshevik leader's figure and thought in the academic scene, in order to make a critical and updated balance from an interdisciplinary perspective open to the international scientific community.

Because a key idea of this conference has been to make it clear that Lenin's thought is currently valid, we need to go beyond affinities and phobias, both irrepressible when we talk about someone of his intellectual and political stature, to recall that he is a seminal author who has known how to understand like no other the correlation between theory and practise, as well as demonstrating that the meaning of said correlation is historical and conflictive. Not only are what we do and think two sides of the same coin, but they form a discordant unfolding across classes and nations. In addition, we add that Lenin's diagnosis refers to our present's basis.

We have been able to corroborate this in these intense days' various panels, which have included the participation of dozens of both

Bachelor and doctoral students, researchers, and professors from all over the world, providing us with some very relevant contributions which not only confirm Lenin's present validity, but also reveal themselves as essential elements for explaining our contemporary dynamics.

Surely what best sums up what we have just said is what Lenin conceptualised as imperialism. If philosophy is the attempt to rationally clarify controversial concepts, those linguistic expressions that become dialectically and which the philosopher tries to understand, in order to intervene in their possible understandings, Lenin undoubtedly produced philosophy, despite not being a professional philosopher.

The controversial nature of imperialism's conceptualisation, in Lenin's case, is evident in several aspects: his paying attention to this concept comes from Hobson and Hilferding, authors with whom he disagrees in philosophical terms and from whom, however, he draws a series of ideas which allow him to update Marx's legacy. However, we can recognise that each of the readings on imperialism involved a political action plan incompatible with the other two. Despite not denying at any time that there were imperialist policies before capitalism, which is why we can speak of Roman or Spanish imperialism without contradicting Lenin, he categorically affirms that there is a modern imperialism which is recognised in national oligarchies and financial interests; it has cosmopolitan pretensions in both cases. Lenin argues that this kind of imperialism, the modern one, is genuinely capitalist, but this does not imply that wherever there is or has been capitalism there is or has been modern imperialism. In fact, this is why he links it with one of its phases, namely, the one he lived through and that the October Revolution answered. In addition to distinguishing between modern and previous kinds of imperialism, and maintaining that capitalism has not always been imperialist, but that it is in his time, his life and works implicitly contain the conviction that both capitalism and imperialism, whether modern or not, can cease to exist.

¹The Introduction to this volume has been traslated into English by Kiranjitsingh J. Dogra Ferre.

Nevertheless, it will not cease to exist out of thin air or as a result of an almost natural evolutionary process, as advocated by those Lenin called vulgar materialists; he had also learned this from Hegel in 1914, as illustrated by authors such as Georg Lukács, Raya Dunayevskaya or Kevin B. Anderson. Contrary to optimism and contemplative pessimism, Lenin calls us to action which, in his sense, is incomprehensible without the philosophical questions relating to both theory and practise.

Basically, because Lenin's thought is framed within the tradition of materialist philosophy. From Greek materialism, it has been argued that thought depends on action, and that it is not mere conduct or reflex; yet Lenin, following Marx, turns this tradition around. Lenin understands that action is what we humans do as a sociohistorical construct—not solely as a corporeal or evolutionary one, as does a simple organism, or as a psychological abstraction, according to the Robinsonian myth. Said construct is only understood as a result of the radically dialectical development of labour. Marxist materialism is born and explained as a result of radical changes in labour relations. It is not purely coincidental that Marxism as historical materialism appears jointly with the Industrial Revolution. None of this escapes Lenin's philosophical and political considerations. What is more, historical materialism can be explained from itself. Even so, what Lenin understands by modern imperialism, despite being part of an analytical apparatus, is the result of a series of coordinated activities with general implications. In fact, Leninism can be understood as an update of a materialism resulting from, and critical of, modern imperialism. Without this, Leninism is unthinkable.

Returning to the question of Lenin's activity, then, we have stated that he is not in fact a professional philosopher: he is not a professional who, within the framework of division of labour, specialises in intellectual labour as the material basis of his life's self-sustainment. Yet he is neither professional from a methodological nor formal point of view: we do not find in Lenin a compendium of philosophical treatises, a systemic citation and reference apparatus, use of abstract language, or an argumentation style inaccessible to the uninitiated. Namely, Lenin's complexity lies in its simplicity, because in every speech, in every article, and in every opuscle,

ideas of great philosophical depth are reflected, but expressed in a language and form purposely accessible to the masses. His philosophical notebooks are a good proof of this depth. Let us ask ourselves what the literacy rate of the Russian workers and peasants was at the time, let us ask ourselves to whom his philosophy was directed: to specialised academic circles or to those to whom revolutionary action was organically interpellating?

Thus, just as we can say that Lenin is not a professional philosopher, we can affirm with the same forcefulness that he is a fully-fledged philosopher; one of an action-oriented philosophy. Let us remember Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach: 'The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question'.

Following what has been stated, it is clear that Lenin's attempt to clarify controversial concepts is not confined solely to imperialism and philosophy; the same applies to materialism. Indeed, all materialism is philosophical, but not all materialism is historical, and this cannot be understood without Lenin's contributions, which entail the analysis of the concrete reality of the contradiction between thought and action in three logical dimensions:

- Universal: our world is traversed by expansive and exploitative capitalist dynamics.
- Particular: capitalist dynamics are recognised in conflicting classes and national relations.
- Singular: classes and nations make up individuals who take sides apart from 'free wills'.

Contemporary authors of international acclaim such as Lukács, Althusser or Žižek have dedicated monographs to Lenin, underlining his intellectual legacy despite his texts not conforming to those of the academic literary canon. In this sense, taking up Bernard Williams' distinction, it must be said that this legacy does not only belong to the history of ideas, but to the history of philosophy. The fact is that the problems which Lenin confronts and responds to are not those of a past time, of an almost anecdotal or museum-like nature, typical of the scholar. Conversely, his texts conceptualise the root of our existing contradictions, helping us

to critically understand the interventions which characterise us, and to think about what we do in our day to day.

Lenin, as an author, establishes diagnoses and precepts on the basis of who we are. We can synthesise all this in three main theses:

2.1 Nations' self-determination

We live in a world of struggling nations, where it is necessary to allow them all to attain their respective self-determination; this is a fundamental point of historical materialism in the wake of Leninism. The reasons are not romantic or fetishistic; conversely, nations' self-determination enables avoiding modern imperialism's expansion, which entails an institutional and hierarchical coordination of 'canonical nations' which are recognised for having a constitutional-industrial state at the service of a national capitalist class with obvious imperialist interests. Nations' self-determination is, in Leninist terms, one of two legs in the march against imperialist policies.

The other leg refers to the alliance established by socialist internationalism. The non-canonical nation which does not determine itself will cease to exist because it will be absorbed by a canonical nation for the dominating imperialism's greater glory; its human, natural, and technical resources will remain subordinated to the capitalist class interests. However, to go against this, it is necessary that the various self-determined nations share a necessarily postcapitalist geopolitical articulation, i.e. guaranteeing their strategic, structural, and cultural independence from the prevailing imperialism. This is what Lenin projected with the USSR until his death, a century ago.

The aforementioned proposal is not in good health, but it is worth noting that its alternatives are seriously intellectually backward. The distancing from Leninism, and the consequent lack of philosophical finesse, seem to lead us to the nineteenth century. Think of the false dilemma which arises with the current dichotomy between the nation-state and globalism. Whether with the voices of Trump, Le Pen, Silicon Valley gurus or the Davos Forum, we are presented with a superficial dialectic which ignores everything we are saying; precisely omitting the reality of the Catalan Countries, diluting the Catalan nation in an actually existing capitalist articulation.

2.2 Modern technique's singularity

a. Any attempt to understand or intervene in our world without previously understanding modern technique's singularity is doomed to fail. This is an idea which we can infer from both Marx's *Capital* and Lenin's studies on imperialism while exiled in Switzerland. The distinction between modern and previous technique is ontologically correlated to that between modern and previous imperialism. Following the Marxian lexicon, traditional technique depends on tools, which subordinate to the worker, while modern technique depends on machinery or technologies, which subordinate the worker.

b. Machinery or technology entail that the labour processes respond to criteria not only pre-established according to a tradition, of the kind that, to exemplify, only the carpenter knows how to act as one because he has learned so at home, but to those of programmed automation articulated at the service of class interests as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Likewise, the involved processes and interests are not static, as they vary according to the disruptive general innovations. Marx focused on the technologies of mechanisation and communications and Lenin extended the study to those of electrification; it is not a coincidence that he said that 'Communism is Soviet Power plus electrification'.

c. From this, three general and apparently anticapitalist positions are derived. Firstly, one which Marx and Lenin criticised, against anarchists and Christians, for saying that machinery is intrinsically colluded with capitalism, and, therefore, must be rejected. Secondly, another, characterised by social democracy and Stalinism, according to which it is necessary to create national industries with a national proletariat, who carry out a progressive national ideal mediated between directions and operations. Finally, the one that warns that technology is ambiguous and changing; today we are not in the era of electrification, not even in the automotive one, but in that of digitalisation. Thus, present anticapitalists must understand the need to subordinate it to nations' self-determination and to socialist internationalism.

2.3 Revolutionary consideration of power

a. Both Lenin's conception of power and Marxism in general draw from an eminently

materialistic tradition which does not begin with Marx; it especially dates back to Machiavelli, as Gramsci and Althusser highlighted. What the Florentine writer brilliantly grasped is that the essence of power is not to guarantee a series of relationships in terms of included and excluded, of governors and governed, according to a criteria based on race, lineage, or gender; rather, it is about uniting human relations under regulatory directions which do not seek to eradicate the dialectics between virtue and fortune, between what we do, more or less consciously, and what affect us as a people.

b. The leadership Machiavelli recognises in the *Prince* is that which Lenin recognises in the Party, understood as the organisation of professional revolutionaries. This naturally implies the acceptance of power and, accordingly, of all the means to make it truly effective, including the statal and technological ones, which endowed historical materialism with something which was partially pending, and made possible the first triumphant socialist experiment in history following the October Revolution. Nevertheless, this implies that power is not limited to the established order, exerting it only in parameters which range from preserving the status quo to liberalising it; it can also be revolutionary.

c. Lenin insisted on this in his last writings. He saw that leftism generated movements

contrary to the postcapitalist revolution, just as how conservatives and liberals had historically supposed. By extension, it hindered nations' self-determination and socialist internationalism, by appealing to 'free wills' accompanied by 'rightist and leftist' claims aside from nations, classes and capitalist dynamics; which places leftism under an idealistic philosophy, obliged for the existing conditions. Today, we can add entrepreneurship, transhumanism, and fleeing progressivism: various individualistic ideologies which disguise the crudeness of power in the name of freedom, in a manner that is as friendly as it is naive.

To conclude these reflections from the Historical Materialism Studies Group, we emphasise that Lenin is valid because he calls into question both what we are and can become. He conceptually, critically, and articulately answers a series of hierarchical and contradictory activities which shape a reality, ours, one largely based on what he actively contributed to understanding and revolutionising; this is why we must turn to his legacy as that of a contemporary author which academia must know how to value. Thus, the main reason for organising this conference is to commemorate the centenary of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov's death; below, you will find some of the talks which have been selected to be published as the Conference's Proceedings, with the invaluable support of our *transform! europe* comrades.

"Contemporary authors of international acclaim such as Lukács, Althusser or Žižek have dedicated monographs to Lenin, underlining his intellectual legacy despite his texts not conforming to those of the academic literary canon. In this sense, taking up Bernard Williams' distinction, it must be said that this legacy does not only belong to the history of ideas, but to the history of philosophy."

3. Form and Reflection.

*Lenin and the Literary
Theory of Russian
Formalists*

By Luis Felip López-Espinosa

3.1 Introduction

Lenin's name is inseparable from the history of the communist movement, from Marxist politics and theory. Few academics or militants would agree, however, to emphasise the problems of language, literature, or linguistics as subject matters in the vast work by this revolutionary. When he reflects on languages, his concerns are more related to the issue of oppressed nationalities and Russian chauvinism. After the Revolution, the cultural politics sponsored by Lenin ignored the issues approached by the avant-gardes and prioritised the huge challenge of the literacy efforts instead. There remain some isolated reflections on the use of language in the Party and its literature, as well as a handful of articles on Tolstoy.

Nevertheless, the Russian Revolution meant an unprecedented cultural outbreak where artistic avant-gardes met revolutionary utopias and where literary and linguistic theory, which during the last years of tsarism had been striving to break away from academic tradition, were placed at the centre of debates in which figures as Trotsky and Lunacharsky would take a stance. The short period of the so-called Russian Formalism, whose influence can be tracked in Prague school's structural linguistics, in semiotics, and in contemporary continental philosophy, would start complex debates on the relationship between language, history, and society that are still alive. The reaction to Formalism and the shameful censorship inflicted on literary and linguistic research since the 1930s in the Soviet Union still haunts a Marxist theory that has been trying for more than a century to get rid of commonplaces about infrastructure and superstructure in order to put the relation between culture and society in its rightful place.

In the following pages, we will offer a brief overview of formalist proposals, of how they developed their theses regarding Marxist criticism, and of the intermediate place of Lenin's short forays into art and literary theory. We will end with the meeting points of the 'formal method' and the Leninist approach in order to overcome the cliché of literature as a *mere reflection* of society.

3.2 Russian Formalism and Marxist Literary Criticism

The years 1915-16 are particularly fruitful in the field of linguistics, with the publication of Saussure's *Course* (Saussure 1916) and the establishment of the two currents of the so-called Russian 'formalism': Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915) and OPOJAZ or Society for the Study of Poetic Language (founded in Petrograd in 1916).

Formalism was born under the influence of avant-garde art, of futurism, with its primacy of form over content and its dismissal of realism (Domínguez Caparrós 1994, 328). It defended the autonomy of literature in relation to reality and, analogously, the autonomy of the literary theory itself, whose object are the texts themselves (in a broad sense) and the internal processes of language that make a discourse a literary work. Therefore, the fundamental aspect of Formalism is not related with the dogmatism of a 'formal method', but with the literary theory as an autonomous science studying the intrinsic facet of literary materials (Eichenbaum 2012, 32-33). This approach is opposed to the old literary theory which made use of a hotch-potch of disciplines external to its object: philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, sociology... (Eichenbaum 2012, 36-37). Formalists' literary theory, however, seeks support in a science internal to its object: linguistics.

Viktor Shklovsky, considered one of the main propagandists of the formalist movement, supports two fundamental theses. The first of them, against symbolism, lies in understanding the poetical technique as production, as a set of formal procedures that arrange and create the verbal material in order to produce an object which is perceived in an aesthetic manner (Shklovsky 2012, 79). He thus disagrees with the theses of Potebnja, one of the primary representatives of literary theory at the end of the 19th century, who argued that the poetic function of language consisted in symbolisation, in the evocation of thoughts through the creation of images.

The second thesis is related to the automatism of perception and the demystifying function of art. Art distorts conventional objects so as to renew our way of looking at them. On a principle of economy of mental effort, usual actions become unconscious and automatic (Shklovsky 2012, 82). As soon as we recognise an object, we stop experiencing it as a living reality before us. By promoting innovative artistic artefacts, art allows for 'experiencing the object's course'

(Shklovsky 2012, 84). Hence Russian Formalism is rather a *functionalism* where the art object is defined as such inasmuch as it serves the purpose of critical distancing and makes the thing itself appear in its specific nature (Sanmartín Ortí 2006, 99).

Marxist critiques would not take long to arise. In 1923, Trotsky considers that some elements of the formal method are useful. In its defence of art as the result of self-sufficient pure forms, Formalism is 'the first scientific school of art' (Trotsky 1979, 127). But Formalists refuse so accept that the contributions of their method have a merely accessory or statistical value, against the only point of view that provides it with a meaning: the social and psychological one. For Marxists, art plays a derivative, utilitarian role in the development of society and history.

In 1924, Formalism is the object of intense criticism. Lunacharsky (1979, 77) does not hesitate to describe it as escapism. In similar terms to Trotsky's, the Narkompros commissar understands the literary work as a psychological reflection of the social class or of the various classes that influence an author (Lunacharsky 1974, 13). This class determination is 'the content of the work, the social essence which it embodies' (Lunacharsky 1974, 14). Thus, the Marxist critic must not turn a blind eye to the form of the literary work, but he or she has to understand it in light of its content. The work of art should be expressive and convincing when conveying such content.

Therefore, the privilege of expressivity brings Lunacharsky closer to Tolstoy's 'infection' theory (Erich 1974, 151; Lunacharsky 1985, 123). Art is ideological inasmuch as the artist's intense experience has to be conveyed, by emotional means, to the greater amount of recipients possible. The artistic discourse, strong and full of images, has the function of moving the masses, of stirring consciousnesses with the ideas of scientific socialism. It must be an art of agitation and propaganda (Lunacharsky 1985, 125).

3.3 The Response to Critics: Formalist Studies on Lenin's Rhetoric

In 1924, in response to Trotsky's attacks, Viktor Shklovsky had organised an issue of the avant-garde magazine *Lef* on the figure of Lenin. That issue significantly opened with a poem where Mayakovsky rejected the reduction of Lenin to

an icon, to merchandise, to an image. Lenin, the poet claimed, would still be our contemporary. That ideological shift of the formalists was a risky bet in a context where the cultural politics of the Soviet State had developed against the avant-garde art and the Proletkult current, led by Lunacharsky and Bogdanov.

In his essay on 'Lenin as Decanonizer', Shklovsky analysed a usual practise in Leninist discourse. As previously stated, art has the function of liberating the object from the perceptive automatism to which the economy of mental effort leads us. The very same problem appears in what Lenin describes as the 'revolutionary phrase', 'helpless snatching at this or that modish petty expedient instead of participation in the class struggle' (Lenin 1981, 419). Abstract slogans that become stiff and are irrespective of the given state of affairs (Lenin 1986, 357).

According to Shklovsky (2018, 152), 'as for the 'element of language', [...] Lenin had a peculiar attitude toward it that could be described as ironic pushback.' Lenin's discourse proceeds by dissolving, by obsessively defining terms and referring them to the state of affairs. He often descends into banality and coarseness, occasionally resulting in vulgarity. He casts our look toward the concrete situation.

Eichenbaum (2018) also underlines the ironic nature of Lenin's style. His speeches have a double rhetoric function: agitating masses, confronting his opponents. Even though Lenin's style might appear restrained, as if language were never a concern for him, when arguing he is very aware of his adversaries' style. Thus, any philosophical or poetic phraseology, any lofty discourse are ridiculed.

These reflections on Lenin aim to respond to Marxist critiques. They have the appearance of an acceptance of Marxism and even adopt the canonising tone they claim to reject. But they reduce Lenin to the merely critical and negative aspect of rhetoric procedures, as if their main interest were in analysing the discourse and not its adequacy to a concrete situation, a mere 'externality' of discourse. The figure of Lenin hoisted in these texts, by opposing to the so-called Leninism of his epigones, aims to avoid an uncomfortable core of Lenin's legacy: the *theory of reflection* and its simplistic transposition into the concerns of literary theory in a form/content or text/context scheme.

Having said that, is it possible to find meeting points between Lenin's understanding of the theory of reflection before the literary work and the 'formal method'? Can we characterise the Marxist view of literature, beyond these simplistic schemes? In order to do so, we must go back to the literary theory outlined in Lenin's texts on Tolstoy and their peculiar interpretation of literary reflection.

3.4 A Mirror Which Does Not Reflect: Lenin on Tolstoy

In 1908, Lenin began his first essay on Tolstoy by warning that it might seem a bit far-fetched to speak of the great Russian author as a mirror of a revolution, that of 1905, which he neither understood nor cared about: 'How can something be called a mirror which gives so obviously incorrect a reflection of events?' (Lenin 1983b, 212).

In this and the four other essays he wrote about Tolstoy between 1910 and 1911, Lenin reflects on the contradictory nature of Tolstoy's work. The realist painter of Russian life and the religious fanatic. The accuser of capitalist exploitation and the landowner. The author criticising corruption and repression but also the fatalist who rejects any revolution. Such contradictions are not casual, but rather express those of the late 19th century Russia. His moral critique of capitalism was not new. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it expressed the change in the views of the peasant Russia (Lenin 1983c, 41).

Tolstoy was the reflection of the protest against the breaking down of peasant life, against land expropriation and the disintegration of the traditional feudal bonds. Also, against political helplessness, the peasants' inability to rise up in an organised way against the power of tsars, the typically Russian tendency towards accepting any suffering with a Christian sense of resignation and self-sacrifice.

Tolstoy's work was not relevant because it contained a philosophical-religious system, but because it expressed the contradictions of the peasants. In its positive facet, it is utopian and reactionary. Its religious and moral principles are an 'ideological reflection' of the old order (Lenin 1983d, 107). But, at the same time, it includes elements which are useful to the revolutionaries.

According to Lenin, Tolstoy is a prophet and a ridiculous reformer; however, he is magnificent

when giving voice to Russian peasants in the days leading up to the bourgeois revolution. It is not brilliant, then, when he 'solves' problems, but when he reflects the contradictions of that peasant subject. His work, mistaken in the ideological level, is a faithful mirror of the immaturity of this contradictory subject.

Lenin's reading may be contrasted with that of Shklovsky. For the latter, through art — instead of the unconscious mechanism of recognition — we might be able to *see* things without prejudice. Poetic art 'restores to us the fresh, child-like vision of the world' (Erich 1974, 108). This acknowledgment of the clean look against social conventions and perceptive automatisms resurfaces in Shklovsky's biography of Tolstoy in 1963, many years after the silence imposed in the USSR regarding the original theses of Formalism.

In Tolstoy's great novel *Anna Karenina*, self-deception appears as recurrent theme. We can see it in Levin, the landowner attempting to restore the natural order of things in a society marked by industrialisation. Levin tries to justify his daily life by means of religion, even though he is not a true believer. The quest for an authentic life fails in Tolstoy's novel and its characters sink in a lifeless existence. As Shklovsky underlines (Shklovsky 2019, 471), such self-deception appears time after time in the novel through the image of 'squinting,' of a superficial look through which the characters try to avoid facing their everyday life, their social role, their family or love sorrows.

However, whereas for Shklovsky the problem lies in how the characters face their vision of things and manage to reconcile their revelation with everyday life, for Lenin such a revelation cannot happen in Tolstoy's novel. The mechanism for unveiling unconscious automatisms becomes in turn an unconscious mechanism which blurs the image of things. The immediate appears mediated, the mirror fails to reflect phenomena accurately, and the intended innocent look collides with the opacity intrinsic to all perception.

Therefore, Lenin does not attempt to detail the reactionary and revolutionary elements in Tolstoy's work. No literary representation of phenomena is true in itself, as opposed to the elements that would attach us to error or deception. The work should be apprehended as a contradictory whole. In this reading, the author's

intention and psychology are secondary to the unintentional reflection of the epoch.

For Lukács (1965, 189), the problem raised by Tolstoy in his work is that of the contradiction between life and capital. His solutions are at best reactionary and mistaken. But, as Lukács and Lenin point out, the correctness lies in the very statement of the problems and in the reflection of social contradictions. Its limits are what enable to contemplate, beyond the reactionary surface, the very conditions of possibility of the revolution.

According to Lukács, the great realist work is that which reflects the trends of the social process. However, this does not involve a mere enumeration of individual facts and data, but rather the ordering of elements from the point of view of the social totality (Lukács 1965, 191). A literary work does not reflect reality as a photograph or a photocopy would do, element by element and on its superficial level — instead, such reflection will depend on how its internal relations reproduce social relations as a whole (Lukács 1974, 36).

When we speak about art, then, it would be absurd to look for a *reflection* of society. However, even *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, where Lenin advocates what philosophy calls 'naïve realism,' denies that the reflection of sensations and perceptions in consciousness should be understood in terms of identity: 'Social being and social consciousness are not identical [...]. A reflection may be an approximately true copy of the reflected, but to speak of identity is absurd' (Lenin 1983e, 359). That is why art also *reflects* social reality, but without pursuing an *exact* copy of it.

In any case, Lenin's theory of reflection conditions marxists to a theory of the work of art traditionally focused on the social and historical genesis. A genesis, however, which, as we see in his commentary on Tolstoy, is difficult for Lenin himself to track and never has the schematic and mechanical clarity described by Trotsky or Lunacharsky.

Lenin's aim is fundamentally political. He does not pursue a general theory of literature. On the other hand, the literary work on which Lenin reflects — precisely because it is a literary work born from a very specific context — is politically relevant because it 'does not reflect' the context accurately. In that flawed mirror, the proletariat

finds an instrument for understanding its epoch. Lenin challenges all schematism whereby a work addressed to the proletariat, of proletarian content, should be a work *written by* a proletarian. Lenin breaks with the psychologistic approach, by understanding the autonomy of the work in relation to the author and by largely focusing his analysis on the reception by the spectator, on the prominence, then, of society and history. But he also breaks with art as mere propaganda, by agreeing with Lukács on the idea that the art forms of bourgeois realism can be more useful, even where they fail to reflect phenomena, for thinking about the social totality.

3.5 Conclusions: Failed Approaches between Literary Theory and Marxist Criticism

In the late 1920s, some stances of the formalists evolved into a proto-structuralism that attempted to recover its bonds with sociology. In his 1927 essay, Tynianov not only stressed his rejection of traditional literary theory because of its 'individualistic psychologism' (Tinianov 2012, 123), but also defined the literary work as a system with its own historicity, interrelated with other systems and conditioned by them (Tinianov 2012, 139). In a 1928 article he coauthored with Jakobson, this evolution into what would later become the Structuralism of the Prague Circle is more palpable. Formalist synchronicity is discarded in order to open the study field to diachrony and history (Tinianov and Jakobson 2012). As Bennett points out (2003, 29), an echo of this approach can be found in Althusser's concept of 'instances' or levels of social practise, which interact with one another within a complex, structured whole, thus dismissing the mechanical base-superstructure determination.

Likewise, Roman Jakobson's ideas permeated not only Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, inspired by the phonological method in order to lay out his theory on the elementary structures of kinship (Dosse 2004, 71), but also Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. For Lacan, metaphor and metonymy are the two major operations in the formation of the unconscious, which is 'structured as a language' (Lacan 1991, 28).

Based on this characterisation of Lacan's unconscious, Althusser (1975) developed his version of the ideology theory. Similarly to the unconscious, ideology is eternal, *non-historical*

or rather omni-historical, as it represents the imaginary relation of the individuals with their real conditions of existence. For Althusser, the core of this ideology is the notion of subject. It is difficult not to find a family resemblance, a certain similarity, between Althusser's theory and Shklovsky's notion of unconscious automatisms. Subjectivity is nothing but a *recognition*, an unconscious habit produced through the individuals' participation in ritual practises.

In his analysis of Lenin's essays on Tolstoy, Macherey lingers on the metaphor of the mirror that does not reflect. Tolstoy's work is faithful to the facts of the revolution for the same reason: because the perfect reflection, without edges or contradictions, is *precisely* what characterises *ideology* (Macherey 1974, 131). In its unfinished, contradictory nature, by questioning a historical-ideological starting point, literature reflects the character of an epoch, and it does so aside from the author's intentions, whose function is secondary to the text.

This poses a problem: by letting go of psychologism and the artist's autonomy, French Marxist Structuralism devoted itself to the autonomy of the Text and its capacity to transcend its own ideological limits. Lenin

never claimed that the literary work should necessarily articulate a contradictory reflection of its time in order to be a non-ideological work. He only claimed that Tolstoy did so. Nor did Lenin ever consider that a work of art *can* or *should* not be ideological. Deautomatisation might appear seductive to us and stresses a fundamental fact of the poetic function – art must draw attention to its form. But to centre the literary character of the work on the unexpected is as unilateral as to set it on its moral value.

As stated above, it is true that Lenin never showed a serious concern about art or literature. He did not need to. Where he does, he is demonstrating that Marxism avoids coarse mechanistic schemes and pursues a global understanding of social phenomena. However, this point of view of totality, which is rejected by Structuralism as a Hegelian relic, could not be replaced by any of the resources that it developed in its later stage. Neither Barthes's pleasure of the text, nor Foucault's genealogy, nor the rhizomatic ontology of post-structuralism were able to return totality or history to us. They never managed to close the gap which early Formalism tore and which, in its more brilliant moments, the linguistic revolution of the 20th century left open.

"In any case, Lenin's theory of reflection conditions marxists to a theory of the work of art traditionally focused on the social and historical genesis. A genesis, however, which, as we see in his commentary on Tolstoy, is difficult for Lenin himself to track and never has the schematic and mechanical clarity described by Trotsky or Lunacharsky"

4. Lenin as Democratic Theorist

By Renzo Llorente



4.1 Introduction

While Lenin's considerable achievements as a political theorist are recognised by adherents and detractors alike, his analysis of *democracy* is seldom examined, let alone defended, in the extensive academic literature on democratic theory. Even more surprisingly, discussion of this aspect of Lenin's thought is also largely absent from the scholarly literature on 'Leninism': anyone who consults, for example, such authoritative works as Neil Harding's *Leninism* (1996) or Marcel Liebman's *Leninism under Lenin* (1975), will find only superficial treatments of Lenin's theorisation of democracy; and the same is true even in the case of those commentators who, like Paul Le Blanc (2008), are not only sympathetic to Lenin and Marxism, but explicitly associate Lenin's thought with, and emphasise the Bolshevik leader's commitment to, democracy.¹

Yet, however easy it may be to understand the neglect of Lenin's work on democratic theory in light of the relative dearth of democracy in the Soviet Union and the many apparently 'anti-democratic' passages and remarks in Lenin's vast oeuvre, the fact is that Lenin's analysis of democracy contains a number of theses and insights which can serve to enrich and orient contemporary socialist thought. These theses and insights, as developed in some of Lenin's most important texts on democracy and in particular in two texts published in 1918, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* and *The State and Revolution*, include arguments against the notion that democracy constitutes an intrinsic good; a critique of both the political practise and ultimate political aims of liberal socialism; and a vigorous restatement of the Marxist view that a communist society represents a social arrangement that in some sense lies 'beyond' democracy. A careful consideration of these ideas confirms that Lenin's thought remains a valuable resource for the theory and practise of socialism in the twenty-first century. This is, at least, what I wish to argue in the following pages.

¹It may be worth adding here, lest the reader assume that this neglect is characteristic only of older works, that one of the most recent collections of essays on Lenin's thought, The Palgrave Handbook of Leninist Political Philosophy (Rockmore et al. 2018), does not contain a single chapter devoted to Lenin's views on, or theorization of, democracy. The even more recent collection of essays edited by Joffre-Eichhorn et al. (2021), which includes both scholarly and non-scholarly texts on Lenin, contains no entry for 'democracy' in the index, even though this index is quite extensive, covering more than a dozen pages. / ² For an example of this view as expressed by a figure from the other end of the political spectrum, see Mao (1977, 388). / ³ Arneson (1993) offers one example of this sort of approach to the question of democracy.

4.2 Three Important Ideas

Let me begin with the first thesis (or claim) just noted, which holds that contemporary political democracy, understood as a formal political arrangement and including the most advanced versions of liberal democracy, does not constitute an intrinsic good. Of the three theses or ideas that I have mentioned, this one is, no doubt, the one that Lenin defends least explicitly, but it is undoubtedly present in his works and is, as I will argue below, an extremely important idea.

So, what, exactly, does this thesis hold? To say that democracy does not constitute an intrinsic good is to claim that it is not inherently valuable. One may effectively express the same idea by saying that democracy is not valuable for its own sake, or an 'end in itself.' Democracy is, rather, a merely instrumental good, something of value as means to other ends, or other goods. In denying that political democracy constitutes an intrinsic good, Lenin defends a view which is in fact held by thinkers representing a variety of political outlooks. For example, Joseph Schumpeter, normally regarded as a conservative, contends that democracy is merely a 'method,' a certain mechanism—or what he calls an 'institutional arrangement' for decision-making—and, as such, cannot be reckoned an 'end in itself' (1976, 242).² The method may or may not serve to achieve a goal, but it is the goal that we value for its own sake. (This goal might be, say, justice, however one chooses to define it.)³ In any case, Lenin's main reason for maintaining that political democracy is not an intrinsic good derives from the classical Marxist conception of the state: As Lenin reminds us in the *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, "The state, even in a democratic republic, is nothing but a machine for the suppression of one class by another" (1965, 322); and as 'democracy is a form of the state,' to quote *The State and Revolution*, 'it represents... the organised, systematic use of force against persons' (1964, 477). Lenin's point, in short, is that all states represent instruments of class domination and oppression (see, e.g., Lenin 1972, 105, 116) and, accordingly, political democracy, insofar as it involves state structures,

arrangements and institutions, is likewise an instrument of domination and oppression. But whatever else it may be, an instrument of domination and oppression should surely not be regarded as an intrinsic good.

Now, even if one agrees with Lenin's position, one might reasonably ask why this question should matter to anyone other than philosophers and theoretically-minded students of politics. In fact, clarity on this question *is* important, for many people, including many on the Left, plainly seem to hold a very different view, which is one reason, I submit, that we hear appeals to democracy as frequently as we do, or that so many take such appeals as seriously as they do. But the belief that we should value political democracy for its own sake is actually highly problematic, for an excessive commitment to 'democracy' as such (as embodied, for example, in contemporary liberal-democratic practises) can represent an obstacle to the adoption or implementation of measures that promote socialism and communism yet diminish 'democracy.' If, on the other hand, we resist the tendency to absolutise the value of democracy and instead judge its value in instrumental terms, we shall likely be more receptive to initiatives and actions which, while at odds with some of the principles and priorities of political democracy as it is understood in contemporary liberal democracies, would advance the cause of, and bring us closer to, socialism and communism. In his polemic with Kautsky, Lenin asks, 'Is the dictatorship of the proletariat possible *without infringing democracy* in relation to the *exploiting class*?' (1965, 256; emphasis in the original). Needless to say, this is, for Lenin, a rhetorical question; and as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is, for Lenin, synonymous with a state that both initiates the transition to socialism and represents a higher form of democracy, namely, 'proletarian democracy,' we should not hesitate to infringe liberal democracy when the dictatorship of the proletariat requires as much. The conviction that democracy is an intrinsic good will generally tend to discourage or hamper such 'infringements.'

The second idea mentioned at the outset is Lenin's critique of both the political practise and ultimate aims of liberal socialism. The condemnation of liberal socialism that emerges from this critique appears far more explicitly in Lenin's works than the first idea I that have discussed; Lenin excoriates Kautsky, after all, precisely because the latter interprets, or rather

distorts, Marx in such a way as to turn him 'into a common liberal' (1965, 241). But Lenin's critique of liberal socialism is not only more explicit than his rejection of the belief that democracy constitutes an intrinsic good; it is also more directly relevant to contemporary debates among socialists and contemporary socialist activism.

What does Lenin's critique of liberal socialism—which is, I believe, a reasonable way of characterising the position that Lenin both ascribes to Kautsky and rejects—consist of? First of all, Lenin criticises Kautsky's construal of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' which is, for Lenin—and as everyone familiar with the Bolshevik leader's response to Kautsky will recall— 'the very essence of proletarian revolution' and, indeed, 'the very *essence* of Marx's doctrine' (1965, 231, 233; emphasis in the original). According to Lenin, Kautsky's rendering of this idea thoroughly distorts Marx's thinking, in that it fails to acknowledge that the dictatorship of the proletariat involves force and violence directed against the bourgeoisie, and that in exercising such power, the proletariat is not subject to any legal restrictions (1965, 236). For these reasons, the dictatorship of the proletariat entails the effective elimination of democracy for those comprising 'the class over which, or against which, the dictatorship is exercised' (1965, 235) (which is another point that Kautsky's interpretation of Marx's thought obscures).

In addition, Lenin criticises Kautsky—whose thought contains and articulates, I should perhaps emphasise, some of the basic postulates of liberal socialism—for employing a supra-class notion of democracy. 'It is natural for a liberal to speak of "democracy" in general', Lenin remarks, 'but a Marxist will never forget to ask: "for what class?"' (1965, 235). Yet Kautsky, Lenin observes in another passage, 'talks like the liberals, speaking of democracy in general, and not of *bourgeois* democracy' (1965, 232; emphasis in the original).

In my view, both of Lenin's criticisms of liberal socialism remain extremely relevant today, for many contemporary socialists, including not a few who consider themselves Marxists, tend to describe and advocate socialism as though it were a variant of liberalism. They do this in part by ignoring what we can still learn from Lenin's treatment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and in part by ignoring Lenin's insistence on the need to always conceive of democracy in class terms.

Consider Lenin's views on the dictatorship of the proletariat. Given how different political conditions are today, as compared with those that Lenin encountered in the first decades of the twentieth century, it is understandable if we hesitate to endorse Lenin's rather vehement insistence on the magnitude of the violence involved in the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the same time, if we really wish to imagine something like the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, a situation in which 'state-power was in the hand of the working class, and used with all the force necessary to prevent it being seized from them by the class which formerly exercised its authority' (to use Harold Laski's helpful characterisation of this concept [1982, 64]), we clearly have to imagine a scenario in which 'democracy,' as generally understood and practised in liberal-democratic countries today, will be curtailed for members of the capitalist class. As I have argued elsewhere, both the transition to socialism, and socialism and communism themselves, 'will be "democratic" in ways that constitute major departures from the liberal democracy of contemporary liberal-democratic capitalist societies.' This is this case, I claimed, because

it will almost certainly be necessary to curtail or restrict some of the capitalists' liberal-democratic political rights—e.g., the scope of their freedom of expression—in order to ensure successful approval of laws that would abrogate their property rights. In other words, effectively and successfully eliminating the economic power of the capitalist class may require antecedent measures to minimise its political power, which is to say, may require restrictions on its liberal-democratic political rights (Llorente 2021).

But many contemporary socialists seem not to understand this, as they maintain that a workers' state could restrict or even abolish many of the capitalists' *property* rights, or *economic* rights (which democratic socialists typically regard as inessential, defeasible rights), while fully respecting all of the capitalists' liberal-democratic *political* rights—something

which Lenin's thought rightly regards as an impossibility. Many contemporary socialists believe, in short, that there exists a more or less uncomplicated liberal-democratic path to socialism. This mistaken belief arises, I submit, from a failure to appreciate liberal democracy's structural impediments to the establishment of socialism, which Lenin's analysis of Kautsky brings out so forcefully.

Lenin's insistence on the importance of consistently bearing in mind the class character of different concepts of 'democracy,' and of specifying *which one* we mean in employing the term, is also of great relevance to contemporary discussions of socialism, as a great deal of contemporary literature on socialism, and certainly many of the texts produced by self-styled 'democratic socialists,' is marred by imprecise and ambiguous invocations of 'democracy.' So it is that contemporary socialists sometimes employ what is, in effect, (and to use Lenin's language [e.g., 1965, 324]), a 'class concept' of 'democracy,' and specifically a socialist, post-liberal notion of democracy; this is the case, for example, when they insist on the importance of 'economic democracy' or champion 'workers' rule.' At other times, however, contemporary socialists' writings assume, and defend, a standard liberal notion of democracy. And sometimes they tend to conflate the two types of democracy.⁴ One problem, then, is that many contemporary socialists do not consistently and systematically specify the *type* of democracy to which they are referring when they use the term 'democracy,' and the reason for this seems to be that, ignoring Lenin's caveat, they often fail to bear in mind the class character of different conceptions of democracy. That is, they typically neglect to ask, as Lenin puts it in his incisive criticism of Kautsky, 'Democracy for what class?' or even 'What kind of democracy?' As a result of this lack of clarity and equivocation when it comes to the term 'democracy,' or rather the blurring of its class nature, many contemporary socialists mistakenly treat socialist and bourgeois (or liberal-democratic) conceptions of democracy as though they were compatible.⁵ (To the extent that these distinct conceptions of democracy come into conflict, incidentally,

self-proclaimed 'democratic socialists' almost invariably prioritise the principles that define liberal democracy. But an analysis of this phenomenon lies beyond the scope of the present essay.)

The third element of Lenin's analysis of democracy mentioned earlier, and third lesson for today's socialists and communists, is his emphasis on the idea that a communist society represents a social arrangement that in some sense lies 'beyond' democracy, whether we have in mind democracy in its 'proletarian'/'socialist' or 'bourgeois' form. Lenin states this idea on various occasions in *The State and Revolution* and perhaps most succinctly in a section titled, not coincidentally, 'Engels on the Overcoming of Democracy': 'It is constantly forgotten,' Lenin writes, 'that the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy; that the withering away of the state means the withering away of democracy' (1964, 460).

Lenin's treatment of this issue is especially valuable for two reasons. First, Lenin elucidates a corollary of the Marxist theory of the state that is often forgotten, if noticed at all, which is the following: If a communist society is a stateless society, then it is, eo ipso, a society that is devoid of *any* type of political democracy in the sense of a particular institutional arrangement, with a formal system of regulations and procedures, etc. This conclusion is inevitable, so long as we use 'democracy' to refer to some form of state structure and, in addition, embrace the Marxist notion that the state is destined to 'wither away' during the transition to communism (cf. Lenin 1964, 402).

The second reason that Lenin's treatment of the question of democracy and communism remains valuable and relevant today has to do with a more general theoretical consideration—as opposed to the more or less logical point just noted—that should lead us expect the disappearance of political democracy: When every member of society has sufficient experience in performing state functions and services, government will cease to be necessary. As Lenin observes in summarising this idea, 'The more complete the democracy, the nearer the moment when it becomes unnecessary' (1964, 479); or again, and to use a philosophical formulation familiar to those who work in the Marxist tradition, 'quantity turns into quality' (1964, 477), as the maximisation of

democracy leads to, and makes possible, a form of social organisation that transcends political democracy (which is no longer necessary). In short, to the extent that we achieve a thoroughgoing democratisation of social life, our political practises will cease to resemble those which define and structure 'democratic' societies today.

Before concluding this discussion, I should perhaps emphasise that Lenin is by no means dismissing liberal democracy, or, for that matter, any form of political democracy, outright. To the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges (in, for example, *The State and Revolution*) that democracy has been very valuable in the workers' fight to achieve their emancipation (Lenin, 1964, 476). His basic point is, quite simply, that Marxists should not conceive of democracy as the ultimate goal, but rather as 'only one of the stages on the road from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to communism' (Lenin, 1964, 476). In one sense, this is but another of putting the first idea considered above: that democracy is not an intrinsic good, but rather constitutes a good whose value is, ultimately, instrumental in nature; and this is, again, the reason that we need not necessarily shrink from supporting measures that might diminish 'democracy.' But here I wish to underscore another implication of Lenin's thesis: it is a mistake to identify the goal of socialists and communists with 'democracy.' Without question, achieving human emancipation requires the use of political democracy during a certain historical period, but we should not assume that human emancipation is any sense synonymous with any familiar form of political democracy.

4.3 The Continuity between Marx, Engels, and Lenin

The three views, or theses, that I have discussed show, in my opinion, that with respect to the question of democracy, Lenin's thought remains a valuable resource for the theory and practise of socialism in the twenty-first century. Of course, one might argue that the credit for these ideas, to the extent that they are still relevant and worth defending today, really belongs to Marx and Engels, as Lenin's texts merely serve to clarify and expand upon ideas already advanced by the creators of historical materialism. While there is certainly much truth to this claim, as Lenin would be the first to admit, I believe that it would be a disservice to Lenin to downplay his

⁴ See Llorente (2021) for a more detailed treatment of this topic. / ⁵ This question is also discussed in Llorente (2021). I think that one could show, incidentally, that many who identify as 'democratic socialists' tend to accept the separation of 'the economic' from 'the political,' which is so characteristic of liberal thought yet so alien to, and inconsistent with, the Marxist tradition, and that this tendency is the source of some of the problems mentioned here. But a lengthier treatment of this question is beyond the scope of the present article.

very substantial contribution to elucidating and, above all, *systematising* Marx and Engel's views. Another, very different response to Lenin's views, especially if one identifies with the Marxist tradition but is inclined to repudiate Lenin's thought, would be to challenge Lenin's claim that we can indeed attribute these views to Marx and Engels. Let me conclude by briefly addressing this question.

It is clear, in my view, that Marx and Engels do indeed espouse all three of the views that I have considered in this brief summary of Lenin's contribution to democratic theory. Take the thesis that democracy is not intrinsically valuable. In his 'Principles of Communism,' Engels tells us that

democracy would be quite useless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means of carrying through further measures directly attacking private ownership and securing the means of subsistence of the proletariat (1976, 350)

One could hardly wish for a clearer statement of the view that democracy is of merely instrumental value. As for the rejection of liberal socialism, one could adduce, for example, Marx and Engels's treatment of liberalism as a historically conditioned ideological phenomenon (in, for example, *The German Ideology*),⁶ or cite

Marx's approving description, in *The Civil War in France*, of the Paris Commune's transcendence of a political arrangement involving the 'separation of powers.'⁷ Finally, with regard to the contention that a communist society represents a social arrangement that in some sense lies 'beyond' democracy, we could recall Engels's evocation, in *Anti-Dühring*, of a world in which 'the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things' (1987, 268), or Marx's dismissal, in his 'Critique of the Gotha Programme,' of 'vulgar democracy, which sees the millennium in the democratic republic,' which in reality merely represents the 'last form of state of bourgeois society' (1989, 96).

One could, in fact, cite many other texts and passages to illustrate the continuity between Marx and Engels's approach to democracy and that of Lenin, but it is not possible to do so within the constraints of the present essay. In any event, the examples that I have provided should, at the very least, help to dispel the scepticism of any who are apt to question Lenin's identification of his views on democracy with those of Marx and Engels. But whatever the exact relationship between these three thinkers' ideas, Lenin's general perspective on democracy remains, one hundred years after his death, a view which today's socialists and communists would do well to embrace, develop, and defend.

⁶ In this text, Marx and Engels refer to 'the correlation of liberalism with the real interests from which it originated and without which it cannot really exist' (1976, 196). / ⁷ The Paris Commune, Marx notes, 'was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time' (1986, 331).

"Lenin is by no means dismissing liberal democracy, or, for that matter, any form of political democracy, outright. To the contrary, he explicitly acknowledges (in, for example, The State and Revolution) that democracy has been very valuable in the workers' fight to achieve their emancipation"

5. Lenin as Theorist of the Autonomy of the Political?

*On a Recent
Misunderstanding*

By Alberto Destasio



5.1 Introduction

In the recent Italian Marxist debate, some authors (like Carlo Formenti) have considered Lenin as the theorist of the autonomy of the political.¹This operation had already been accomplished by Mario Tronti in *Operai e capitale*, in which Lenin is the one who discovered the laws of a ‘political rationality *absolutely autonomous* from everything’ (Tronti 2019, 288). To be understood: autonomous from the level of struggles and capable of targeting a further level of class conflict, namely the State. The political aim of this reading is easily discernible: through the valorisation of the Soviet experience of the NEP, Leninism becomes a theoretical-organisational model for bringing the wild market economy (with its destructive effects on the sovereignty of nations) back to the political control of the State. An abstract, state-centric ‘re-politicisation of the economy’ is thus seen as the best strategy to combat the capitalist economy. This reading of Lenin’s thought provided a strict separation between Lenin’s theoretical reflection on the NEP and Lenin of *State and Revolution*, seeing in the former a realistic correction to the utopianism of the latter. Formenti, in fact, like Losurdo, has judged the problem of the extinction of the State as a mythological and messianic remnant of a typically nineteenth-century philosophy of history, which views history as a progressive liberation from all forms of natural and political domination (Losurdo 1997, 182-205). Formenti says also, with regard to Tronti, that there is a convergence between the Schmittian and Leninian conceptions of the political, ‘an option, Formenti says, that has been reproached by a left-wing culture accustomed to looking at the finger instead of the moon’ (Formenti 2024).²

The purpose of this short paper will be to show the theoretical and political inconsistency of such a proposal. In the first place, we have to say that a text such as *State and Revolution* and the texts from 1918 to 1922 are *not* in contradiction

because they are on two different theoretical levels: the former, speaks of the forms of development and dissolution of the State as an instrument of class dictatorship; the latter, speaks of the economic empowerment of the workers’ State after the tremendous crisis caused by wartime communism, civil war and, of course, the failure of Revolution in Europe; the first, investigates the *morphological movement* of the State as an instrument of dictatorship; the second, discusses about the realisation of the socialist hypothesis in a given historical context. As we will try to demonstrate immediately with a quick analysis of some texts from 1918-1922, Lenin’s theorisation of a tactic of proletarian state capitalism *is not* in direct contradiction with the Marxian and Leninist idea of the withering away of the state. But let’s move now on to the texts. Obviously, I will not be able to cover the complex economic and political history of this period of the Soviet experience here. Here I will limit myself to reflecting on certain concepts and theoretical-political categories employed by Lenin.

5.2 State and Revolution, and NEP

In the 1919 text, *Economy and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Lenin writes that the transitional period from capitalism to communism cannot but contain the traits or peculiarities of *both* these forms of social economy. In Russia, the dictatorship of the proletariat, which requires an intensification of the class struggle, faces three forms of social economy, namely capitalism, small-scale commodity production, and communism, corresponding to three essential social forces, namely the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeois peasantry, and the proletariat (Lenin 1974, vol. 30, 107-118). This means that, in the early years of Soviet Russia, the class division of society is *far* from being overcome: hence the *dictatorial* form of the proletariat’s political power through the party. The monopoly capitalism of the socialist state is required by the *non-uniform*

class structure of Russian society. Soviet power must be able to govern the still existing plurality of classes, and at the same time, enhances the economic strength of the nation in order to overcome feudal backwardness. The Soviet state is not yet *the self-government of the whole of society*, but the proletarian government of still existing classes and the respective economic traits of these classes. Lenin does not get lost in an illusory proletarian government of developed, virgins, capitalist elements as in western countries without workers control, as Bukharin put it in the pages of *The Political Economy of the Transitional Period against* the hypothesis of proletarian state capitalism (Bucharin 1979, 134). After all, even the working class, Lenin admitted, is fragmented and unprepared to exercise its dictatorship directly.

In the 1921 text, *The Tax in Kind*, Lenin says that the necessity of transitioning to state capitalism in Russia has a *profound* economic reason, namely the various economic and social forms existing in Russia: patriarchal peasant economy, small-scale commodity production, private capitalism, state capitalism, and socialism. Lenin notes, in this regard, that the struggle is not between state capitalism and socialism, but between the first three elements and state capitalism and socialism, because both the petty bourgeoisie and the peasant economy do not tolerate either state interference in their affairs or state control over capitalism, that is, a more advanced and rationalised form of capitalist economy, as Friedrich Pollock noted in his studies on the planification of economy (Pollock 1973). Lenin, in short, always holds firm to the concrete economic situation of Russia, which cannot be forced and changed by a voluntaristic act. Lenin asserts that capitalism is a gigantic step forward, leading to a more secure path to socialism, since ‘socialism is inconceivable without the technique of large-scale capitalist industry, organised according to the latest word of modern science, without a systematic state organisation that subjects tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a single norm in the process of production and distribution of products’ (Lenin 1974, vol. 32, p. 339). Here there is no vague idea of reconciling capitalism and socialism, but rather the necessity of imposing a worker’s political direction on the economic development of capitalism towards more organised forms. We could say with a formula: *a worker acceleration of capital*. This, in the NEP period, will lead to

the management, by the workers’ state, of the development of productive forces through the opening to private capitalism, and the concession system. The investment of capitalists in Russia, as well as the concession of industries to capitalists, will lead to an increase not only in industrial production, but also in the working class, necessary for the implementation of social revolution in the transitional phase. This phase of retreat, this tactical withdrawal, which in 1921 also forced the establishment of buying and selling and the circulation of money regulated by the state, is a moment of the war *against the bourgeoisie*. Lenin binds to refunctionalise questions of political economy to the political government of the workers’ state. This process, it goes without saying, is not linear. Lenin is well aware that the bourgeois enemy may take over: the NEP is a contradictory and dangerous phase.

In the text *End of the Retreat* from the XI Congress of the Russian Communist Party on March 27, 1922, Lenin claims the experimental nature of this socialist state capitalism, in the establishment of which, he says, ‘we must proceed on our own’, without models (Lenin 1973, vol. 33, 259-326). This means that state capitalism in a socialist state³ is irreducible to state capitalism in a capitalist state. Hence the uselessness of leafing through the old books. In *The Impending Catastrophe*, state monopoly capitalism, where corporations and trusts work for all the people, ‘inevitably and unfailingly means a step, the march towards socialism’ (Lenin 1977, vol. 25, 323-369). It is important to see in these statements, against the accusations Lenin received from Bukharin and other left-wing communists, and against socialsciovinist,⁴ not a rigid exaltation of state capitalism as the ultimate stage of socialism, but rather its dialectical character as a step, a stage, a moment, of a transitional process. Moreover, the theme of the extinction of the state, that is of communism, in which the experienced masses *know how* to govern and direct the state and the economy, does not cease to return as a dialectical correlate in the writings from 1918 onwards. In a text such as *The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Power*, Lenin reasons on the need to learn from the more advanced capitalist states (e.g. Germany and America), the administration and management of the productive machine, scientific progress, the Taylor system (Lenin 1972, vol. 27, 235-277). Only once the Soviet state has modernised will it be able to dispense with the bourgeois technicians and scientists (initially

¹ We will refer below to a series of texts recently published by Carlo Formenti in his blog Per un socialismo del XXI secolo, particularly: Comunismo, democrazia, liberalismo, 19 October 2021 (Formenti 2021), Che cosa ho imparato da Mario Tronti, 19 August 1923 (Formenti 2023), and Antonio Negri. Un uomo che voleva assaltare il cielo alzandosi sulla punta dei piedi, 1 January 2024 (Formenti 2024). / ² According to Tronti, who here goes to Schmitt’s trolling, ‘in Lenin’s political criterion there is no longer the iustus hostis: the just enemy disappears, the entire bourgeois cosmos becomes altogether the enemy to be put down by all means’ (Tronti 2023, 245). We will see shortly how far Lenin is from both this terrorist revolutionary romanticism and any mysticism of revolution. In Lenin there is always a lucid dialectical assessment of the measures to be taken against the ‘class enemy’, starting with an analysis of the concrete situation. A text like Leftism, Childhood Illness of Communism demonstrates this. / ³ On this subject, see Giacché 2017, 54-81. / ⁴ The debate with these currents was recently analysed with great care in Krausz 2015.

paid as an elite administrative class) and leave the knowledge of government to the masses capable of running the entire society. Lenin's insistence on the problem of the education of the masses in the administration of things implies the persistence, albeit undercurrent, of the theme of the extinction of the state as the ultimate goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁵

5.3 Communism and Organisation

In *Communism, Democracy, Liberalism* (Formenti 2021), it is no coincidence that Formenti brands the distinction, revived by Álvaro Linera, between state socialism (state monopoly of the means of production) and control from below of social richness as messianism and utopianism. But, on closer inspection, at stake in this distinction is the difference between socialism and communism. A difference that, from Formenti's point of view, should coincide as such with a messianic perspective. Thus, it seems that the *possible socialism* proposed by Formenti, and in fact coinciding with a state capitalism controlled by a socialist political force, entails the *impossibility of communism*. Yet,

socialism should be understood, dialectically, as a transitional phase that, among other things, educates the masses in the regulated administration of society and prepares the objective conditions of the property relations and real appropriation that should characterise the communist mode of production. In short, it is as if Formenti refuses even to think about the most avant-garde and unheard-of aspects of Marx and Engels' political theory, namely: 1) the irreducibility of the organisation of society to the state-form; 2) the fact that the communist (i.e. no-longer-statual) organisation of society is more rational and efficient than the statual one.

So, contrary to what Formenti says, the development of the productive forces does not depend on a 'infatuation with technology' (in Formenti's words), but it is the necessary objective condition for the transition⁶ to socialism, which requires an efficient organisation of production, the presence of specialised and disciplined workers, and a high level of technical and scientific development to be subordinated to the interests of society as a whole. For Lenin, the problem lies not only in the amount and intensity of political power, or in the

economic means, but also in the technical skill and governmental ability of the working class: its ability to lead and maintain the transition. As is evident from these quick references, the state's political governance of socio-economic forms in the transitional phase is not inspired by a vague idea of the autonomy of the political, but by the dialectical relationship between political class struggle and economic development.⁷ The need for socialist state capitalism depends on the peculiar economic structure of Soviet Russia, its petty-bourgeois and backward character.⁸

In Formenti's hypothesis, on the contrary, a state that controls the market and redistributes products and resources, a state capitalism with a strong welfare state (in the model of the Hegelian state), seems to coincide with the transition to socialism itself. But, on closer inspection, state control of the economy, state intervention in the economy, *is not* socialism as such. Indeed, a distinction must be made between social and economic intervention by the capitalist state (often motivated by the intensity of cycles of struggle and inherent to the class nature of the state) and socialism.⁹ And speak, as Formenti does, of a strong more democratic state makes *no sense* from Lenin's point of view, both because a strong state without workers' control remains a bourgeois and capitalist state, and because a democracy *sans phrase*, a democracy whose class character is not specified, is the revisionist ideology of pure democracy that Lenin contested in Kautsky.

Thus, in our view, the position like Formenti's fails to grasp the complex dialectic, within Lenin's thought, between internationalism and the national question,¹⁰ between the development of productive forces and the

establishment of socialism, between the extinction of the State and the State as a *necessary dictatorship of the proletariat*,¹¹ between politics and economics. For Lenin, politics is the state condensation of society's contradictions, the space of their resolvability, not a generic and voluntaristic act of breaking the time continuum, nor, still less, the Schmittian friend-enemy distinction, which is always exercised *against* an external enemy, in order to conquer it, *after* the internal enemy has been silenced through violence, that is, in the case of Schmitt's Germany, the socialist forces (Schmitt 2007). We do not think that the Leninist conception of the political struggle separated from the economic struggle can be rubricated under the category of 'autonomy of the political' (in Tronti's sense). The political struggle, although independent of the tradeunionist struggle and involving different figures (the professional revolutionaries), points to the state because the state is the 'field of relations between all the classes' *of society*: the state is the political-organisational summit of society (Lenin 1977, vol. 5, 422). That is why the revolutionary organiser must address 'all strata of the population'. In this sense, for Lenin, there is no autonomy of the political as a decisionist irruption that subdues the savage force of the economy under its command. Politics, for Lenin, is the point of condensation and control of exploitation that invests the whole of society and the economic sphere.

'Politics is the concentrated expression of the economy', says Lenin. Politics, as long as it exists, and as long as there are classes, is that element which allows a *particular class* to maintain its domination, *thus also* its economic tasks (*Once Again on Trade Unions*, Lenin 1973, vol. 32, 70-108).

⁵ For a comprehensive reading of the NEP period that focuses on Lenin's awareness of the risks of bureaucratism, see Le Blanc 2023, 157-177. On the relationship between the extinction of the state and the overcoming of the distinction between manual labour and intellectual/organisational labour, Antonio Negri insists in his recent preface to the new Italian edition of *State and Revolution* (Negri 2022) / ⁶ If we bear these brief passages in mind, we understand that Formenti makes a complete nonsense when he argues that in Lenin there is 'the idea of a revolutionary will that abruptly interrupts the 'normal' flow of historical events, imposing the reasons of social reproduction against those of economic progress, which makes the revolution of 17 present conservative rather than progressive characteristics in the bourgeois sense' (Formenti 2024). / ⁷ On Lenin's conception of the dialectic as knowledge of the contradictions of a social whole in the present moment, see Budgen, Kouvelakis, Zizek, 2007, 101-205. / ⁸ If, on one hand, Massimo Cacciari denies (wrongly in our opinion) the merely tactical-conjunctural character of the NEP, on the other hand he rightly states that the NEP represents the Leninist challenge of accepting and governing the contradiction between economic development and institutional forms, which makes total arbitrary control of objective economic legality by a certain political (albeit socialist) power impossible (Cacciari, Perulli 1975, 11-35). / ⁹ Concerning these functions, necessary for the reproduction of class relations by the capitalist state, Bucharin wrote in his 1915 essay *Toward a Theory of the Imperialist State*: 'To the extent that the organisations of state power are constructed according to a plan and are consciously regulated (something that occurs only at a certain stage in the state's development), to the extent, in other words, that one can speak of the state's having a purpose, that purpose must be defined by the interests of the ruling classes and their interests alone. This situation is by no means contradicted by the fact that the state fulfils, and has fulfilled, a variety of socially useful functions. The latter are simply a necessary condition, the *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of state power. Thus, the 'socially useful activities' of the state are essentially the conditions for prolonging and promoting to the utmost the exploitation of the enslaved classes of contemporary society, above all, of the proletariat. In their politics the ruling classes are guided by certain calculations, and the principle of the economy of forces prevails within the state organisation as well. The state builds railways, undertakes irrigation works, erects schools, etc. Why? Because this is the only way to facilitate the further development of capitalist relations, to ensure that a greater mass of values is created and flows into the pocket of the capitalist class, to guarantee that the process of exploitation will proceed even more smoothly and quietly. The state undertakes a number of sanitary measures, comes forth as the 'protector of labour' (factory legislation, etc.). Why? Again, not because the enslaved proletarians have pretty eyes, but because it is profitable for the ruling class, under certain conditions, to take this approach. The ruling class acts either in its own direct interest (e.g., the contemporary state is interested in good soldierly material and therefor occasionally has nothing against measures that somewhat retard national degeneration), or else out of strategic considerations in the class struggle against the oppressed. In the latter case the state power makes concessions because otherwise the process of exploitation would not proceed so smoothly. In this case the governing principle is still the interests of the ruling classes, which are merely hidden under a pseudonym – the interests of the 'nation', the 'people', the 'whole.' And the state is still the organisation of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class' (Bucharin 2015).

¹⁰ In this regard, it seems to me that Formenti fails to grasp the contradictory nature of the nation state and the even positive aspects of its tendential overcoming. In the nation state he sees (in my opinion abstractly) only a sort of lifeline against the de-territorialising processes of capitalist globalisation. Why abstractly? Because it is as if he equates the national and anti-imperialist self-determination struggles of developing countries (whose importance is duly intercepted) with the western nation-states, as if Italy had the same 'need' for national self-determination as Palestine! Not to mention the fact that the capitalist nation-state has been and continues to be an unparalleled device for the exploitation of force-labour. Just take a look at the Italian situation: the removal of the citizenship income has served to 'liberate' (in the Marxian sense) huge quantities of very cheap force-labour. / ¹¹ We agree with Althusser when he states that the concept of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is not a tactical concept, but a scientific concept, i.e. a necessary outcome of the Marxian analysis of capitalist society as a society still divided into classes (Althusser 2016).

6. The Theory of Realisation in the Thought of Lenin

By Albert Ferrer Sánchez



6.1 Introduction

In *Capital*, Karl Marx maintained that ‘the value of every commodity produced in a capitalist regime [...] is represented in the formula; M (value of the commodity) = c + v +p’ (Marx 1978, 34). In this formula, the ‘c’ represents the value of constant capital, that is, of the means of production used in the manufacture of the merchandise (raw materials, wear and tear of fixed capital, etc.). On the other hand, the ‘v’ represents the value of consumer goods equivalent to the salary received by workers. Finally, the ‘p’ represents the surplus value obtained or appropriated by the capitalist. According to Marx, the latter is equivalent to the surplus value created by workers, that is, the work performed after reproducing the value of labour power and replacing expenditure in constant capital.

In the seventh section of book one of *Capital*, Marx analyses the reproduction of capital, that is, the process that a particular capitalist must follow to restart the process of valorisation of capital. Firstly, the capitalist acquires labour power and means of production in the market through capital in the form of money. Then consume both commodities in the production process to create new use value. Finally, realise the value of the new commodity by exchanging it for its monetary equivalent. Once the capital cycle has concluded, the bourgeois has an increased amount of capital in the form of money. In this case, you have two options: completely consume the surplus value by exchanging it for consumer goods or consume only a part and dedicate the rest to making a new, larger investment. In the first case, we will be faced with a phenomenon called ‘simple reproduction’ of capital. On the other hand, if you reinvest a part of the surplus value obtained, a process called ‘extended reproduction’ or ‘capital accumulation’ will take place. In the second case, in addition to transforming surplus value into capital – which Marx calls ‘capitalised surplus value’ – the capitalist will require an increased amount of means of production and labour power that must be available in the market.

In Book Two of *Capital*, Marx examines the complete cycle of capital, which he calls ‘turnover.’ At first, it addresses the question of reproduction from an individual point of view, that is, taking isolated capitalists as a reference. On the other hand, in the third section, it examines the process from a general

point of view, that is, considering the capital of society as a whole. To do this, it divides social production into two branches: one would be responsible for manufacturing means of production (Section I) and the other would produce means of consumption for capitalists and workers (Section II). According to Marx, this distinction is not important to study the process of individual reproduction of capital because all capitalists –regardless of the sector in which they operate– carry out the rotation process in the same way. On the other hand, on a social scale, the reproduction of capital requires the restitution of consumed goods both in terms of value and in material terms. In other words, once the cycle is completed, the capitalist must possess the monetary capital necessary to acquire the necessary means of production and labour power and resume production, but he must also find the necessary goods – in the appropriate material form. in the market. Therefore, when studying the reproduction of capital from a social point of view, the material differences between commodities cannot be ignored. For the cycle to operate uninterruptedly, the different branches of production must maintain an adequate proportion between them so that the cycle operates uninterruptedly.

Marx analyses the circulation of social capital – that of capitalist society as a whole – starting from a theoretical assumption that I have alluded to previously: simple reproduction. To do this, establish an example in which the capital gain rate (p/cv) is 100% and the global value of capital is 9,000:

- I. 4.000c + 1.000v + 1000p = 6.000 means of production
- II. 2.000c + 500v+ 500p = 3.000 consumer goods

As can be seen, the product of the first section must be equal to the sum of the constant capitals of both sections (4,000c + 2,000c= 6,000 I). At the same time, the second section supplies the means of consumption to the entire society, that is, to the capitalists and workers of both sections (3,000II = [1,000v+1,000m]I + [500v+500m]II)1. Likewise, the productive interdependence between the different branches means that the demand for means of production in sector II conditions the dimension of c+v in sector I (2,000c2= 1,000v1+1,000p1). In short, the

simple reproduction of capital is fulfilled in mathematical terms when the demand for means of production in sector II coincides with the value of the surplus value consumed by the capitalists in sector I and the variable capital received –in the form of wages– by the sector I workers.

However, simple reproduction is an ideal theoretical assumption and therefore cannot take place at an empirical level for two reasons. Firstly, competition forces capitalists not to completely consume their surplus value and to dedicate a part of it to increasing production and/or introducing technical improvements so as not to be displaced by other capitalists. Secondly, capitalists must also dedicate part of the product to replacing the consumed fixed capital (machinery, buildings, etc.). As Marx rightly indicates, the fixed capital existing in society does not fully participate in the valorisation process, since it only transfers a part of its value to merchandise: that which is consumed in a cycle. In the assumption of simple reproduction, individual capitalists carry out the replacement of fixed capital by reserving a part of the annual product: that consumed in constant capital. Subsequently, they renew their fixed capital by acquiring a certain asset (machinery, tools, building) of value equivalent to the amortised asset. However, in the real process of reproduction, capitalists do not dedicate themselves to renewing the fixed capital present in the economy, but to constantly increase it. If they did not do so, they would not find the goods necessary to replace obsolete or worn-out fixed capital. In short, the renewal of fixed capital is incompatible with the assumption of simple reproduction and, consequently, requires a process of expanded reproduction of capital. In the same way as in the seventh section of Book One, Marx deduces expanded reproduction from simple reproduction. To do this, it meant a reduction in the consumption of the capitalists as well as a reduction in the amount of means of production consumed by sector II and an equivalent increase in the consumption of constant capital of sector I. After this arrangement, the bourgeois of sector I They can allocate a part of the surplus value to expand production and find available certain means of production that would have been totally consumed in simple reproduction.

Marx assumes that the capitalists of section I accumulate half of the extracted surplus value

(500m) and consume the other half (500m). Following the distribution of value in section I, this accumulated surplus value must be divided into two parts: 400 for means of production (c) and 100 to hire new workers (v). According to Trier, the acquisition of means of production worth 400 units does not present great difficulty, since section I has produced a surplus worth 500 units. However, the corresponding increase in variable capital by 100 monetary units is not enough: the additional workers must also find the corresponding means of subsistence, and these can only be taken from section II. Therefore, if 100 additional means of subsistence are required for the workers in section I, the equation must be formulated as follows: 4,000 + 1,000v + 1,000m. This additional 100v must have been produced by section II. To do this, the capitalists located in this branch use 100c that had been available from the previous year. As a capital composition of 2:1 is assumed, section II must also employ an additional number of workers worth 50v. Therefore, your equation must take the following formula: 1,600 c + 800v + 800m = 3,200. Once the accumulation is completed, the new scenario can be described mathematically as follows:

- Simple reproduction model:
 - I. 4.000c + 1.000v + 1.000p=6.000
 - II. 2.000c + 500v + 500p= 3.000
- Expanded reproduction model (Starting situation)
 - I. 4.000c + 1.000v + 1.000m = 6.000
 - II. 1.500 c + 750v + 750m = 3.000
- Expanded reproduction model (After first year)
 - I. 4.400c + 1.100v + 1.100m = 6.600
 - II. 1.600c + 800v + 800m = 3.200
- Assuming annual rotation cycles, Marx carries out a series of simulations for successive years assuming the rate of surplus value (p/cv) and the organic composition of capital (cc/cv) are constant:
 - Expanded reproduction model (After the second year):
 - I. 4.840c + 1.210v + 1.210m = 7.260
 - II. 1.760c + 880v + 880m = 3.520
 - Expanded reproduction model (After the third year):
 - I. 5.324c + 1.331v + 1331 m = 7.986
 - II. 1.936c + 968v + 968m = 3.872
 - Expanded reproduction model (fourth year):
 - I. 5.856c + 1.464v + 1.464m = 8.784
 - II. 2.129c + 1.065v + 1.065m = 4.259

In short, Marx modifies the scheme of simple reproduction to explain the expanded reproduction of capital on a social scale assuming increased consumption in the section in charge of manufacturing constant capital. Therefore, the German thinker considers that accumulation in sector I is faster and, consequently, sets the general pace of global accumulation. Thus, the abstinence of capitalists and the capitalisation of a part of the surplus value generates an increase in the number of total commodities and improves the consumption capacity of society as a whole. If the reproductive process took place in this way, the accumulation of capital would be continued.

6.2 Lenin and the Realisation of Surplus Value

After the posthumous publication of the Second Book of *Capital* in 1885, Marxists debated the validity of the expanded reproduction schemes described in the third section of said work. One of the most prominent was Mijaíl Tugán-Baranowski (1865-1919). According to this Ukrainian economist, Marxist schemes on the expanded reproduction of capital demonstrate that the accumulation of capital does not depend on the income and personal consumption of capitalists and workers, since the production of goods creates its own demand. In other words, productive consumption – carried out by Section I of the Marxist scheme of reproduction of capital – is sufficient to carry out the whole of social production: ‘The demand for commodities is, in a certain sense, independent of the magnitude of consumption.’ total and at the same time increase social demand for goods, however absurd this may seem from the point of view of ‘good sense’ (Tugan-Baranowski 1914, 237). Consequently, within the framework of a capitalist economy, crises would not come from insufficient consumption of the different social classes, but from an inadequate proportion between the different branches of production. In other words, since production creates its own market, crises can only arise due to a disproportion between the different productive sectors and, consequently, could be avoided through a production organisation plan:

As a result of our abstract analysis of the process of reproduction of social capital, the conclusion has emerged that given a proportional distribution of social

production, there cannot be any surplus social product. [...] If the extension of production is tragically unlimited, we have to admit that the extension of the market is equally unlimited, since given the proportional distribution of social production, there are no other limits to the extension of the market than the productive forces of which society provides (Tugan-Baranowski 1914, 237-238).

For his part, Lenin also addressed the question of realisation in several texts. In an article entitled ‘Observation on the problem of the theory of markets’, the Russian revolutionary examines the controversy that arose between Tugan Baranowski and Sergei Bulgakov about the role of markets in the capitalist mode of production. Starting from the schemes of the Third Section of the Second Book of *Capital*, both analysts rejected the theories of the so-called ‘Russian populists’ (Piotr Struve, Nikolai Frantsevich Danielson –nicknamed Nikolai-on–, Woronzow, etc.). For the latter, the capitalist mode of production could not take over all of Russia’s industrial branches due to the lack of domestic consumption and the poverty of the agrarian classes. On the other hand, Tugan-Baranowski and Bulgakov considered that the sector dedicated to producing constant capital generated its own demand. Thanks to this, its expansion allowed the increased reproduction of social capital without the need to increase the consumption of the popular classes and without resorting to foreign consumers. For this reason, these authors did not attribute the need to export goods to insufficient demand in the domestic market, but to the excess development of the national industry.

In the text to which we have referred, Lenin assumed each of the previous propositions. However, the Bolshevik leader argues with Tugan-Baranowski about the compatibility of the theory of realisation – described by Marx in Book II of *Capital* – and the contradiction between consumption and production pointed out by the German thinker in Book Three of *Capital*. As I have noted previously, Tugan-Baranowski believed that the expanded reproduction of capital did not depend on the consumption of workers and capitalists, but on the productive consumption carried out by the sector dedicated to manufacturing means of production. Therefore, from their point of view, crises – interruptions in the expanded reproduction of

capital – could not be attributed to the lack of effective demand for means of consumption. On the other hand, for Marx, the realisation of capital at the social level could be interrupted by two factors: the lack of proportionality between the different branches of production and the contraction between the production capacity and the consumption capacity of society. According to Lenin, by pointing out two contradictions, Marx did not correct the theory of realisation, nor did he consider it impossible from a theoretical point of view. In other words, for the Bolshevik revolutionary, the tendency towards the unlimited expansion of production usually collides with the consumption capacity of the masses, but this does not prevent the expanded reproduction of social capital because this depends on the growth of Section I, that is, the branch dedicated to producing constant capital. In short, Lenin criticises Tugan-Baranowski for considering the Marxist analysis of realisation (Second Book) and the Marxist analysis of the relations between production and consumption (Third Book) to be contradictory, but he assumes the doctrine of the Ukrainian economist according to which interruptions in the expanded reproduction of capital cannot be due to a lack in the consumption capacity of the masses (Lenin 1893. In Marx 1987, 497-498).

Lenin concludes his article by stating that the expanded reproduction of capital is a coherent possibility in theoretical terms despite the contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production. In his opinion, doubting this possibility implies denying the progressive character of the capitalist mode of production in relation to the forms of production prior to it. In other words, in his opinion, the expansion of capital plays a positive role by overthrowing ‘backward’ or ‘obsolete’ forms of production and laying the foundations for a superior form of social organisation: socialism. Consequently, questioning its ability to impose itself on archaic modes of production constitutes a veiled defence of them, that is, a ‘reactionary’ attempt to restore the modes of production prior to capitalism:

[...] it would be a gross error to want to deduce from this contradiction of capitalism (or from other contradictions inherent to it) the impossibility or regressive nature of the capitalist regime in comparison with other previous economic systems [...]. The development of

capitalism can only be conceived through a series of contradictions, and the pointing out of these contradictions only clarifies for us the transitory historical character of capitalism, the conditions and causes of its tendency to transform itself into a higher form (Lenin 1893. In Marx 1987, 499).

In 1899, Lenin tangentially addressed the question of realisation in a work entitled *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. In this work, the Bolshevik revolutionary debated with the so-called Russian ‘populists’ about the capacity of the Russian internal market to absorb the manufactured products of the national industry. According to the ‘populists’ – Nicolai-on and his followers– the realisation of surplus value is usually very problematic because increased production – resulting from productively reinvesting the surplus value not consumed by the bourgeois – does not find consumers in the internal market. For this reason, capitalists are constantly pushed to place their products on the foreign market. However, populist theorists continue, Russia faces two simultaneous problems: the lack of an articulated internal market – a result of poverty and the lack of consumption of peasants – and a very weak insertion into the world economy. From the combination of both factors, populists deduce the lack of economic dynamism of the Russian capitalist mode of production and its inability to subject the entire national production to its economic laws. Lenin frontally rejects this doctrine. In his opinion, resorting to the foreign market does not resolve the question of realisation, but rather moves the problem to another sphere and makes it more complex: ‘Clearly, in this case, foreign trade must be abstracted, since including it will not advance even one step. apex the solution to the problem; it only postpones it, raising it in relation to several countries instead of doing so in relation to just one’ (Lenin 1972, 24). For this reason, Lenin maintains the theoretical assumptions established by Marx in Book II of *Capital*: a closed economy and two classes of consumers (bourgeoisie and proletariat). Furthermore, he criticizes Nicolai-on and the populists because, by transferring the problem of realisation to a planetary scale, they do not identify who would be the consumers of those exported products. In other words, they do not find an economic agent that can exchange the exported goods for an equivalent in terms of value (Lenin 1972, 24). In conclusion, according to Lenin, Marx did

not deny the possibility of realising capitalised surplus value in the internal market, although he was aware of the permanent contradiction between the development of the productive force of labour and the consumption capacity of the proletarian masses. For this reason, he did not attribute capitalist crises to underconsumption, but to excess production. In the words of the Russian revolutionary, Marx pointed out 'the indicated contradiction between the unlimited desire to expand production and limited consumption', but it is absurd to conclude that 'Marx did not admit the possibility of realising surplus value in capitalist society, which explains the crises,' due to insufficient consumption, etc.' (Lenin 1972, 36). Curiously, Lenin formulates this proposition after reproducing a quote from Marx in which the German considers underconsumption as the ultimate cause of crises: 'The ultimate cause of all real crises is always poverty and the limitation of mass consumption. that oppose the tendency of capitalist production to develop productive forces [...]' (Marx, *Capital*, Book III. In Lenin 1972, 35).

After ruling out insufficient consumption as the cause of the crises, Lenin reiterates that the process of capital valorisation can only be interrupted by a possible disproportion between the different industrial branches. In other words, according to the Russian revolutionary, the difficulties in realising the value of commodities do not arise from an unfair distribution of the social product, but from an inefficient distribution of capital between the different productive branches. For Lenin, these imbalances can be corrected either through a migration of capital between the different sectors of the national economy or through the export of capital abroad:

This only indicates the lack of proportionality in the development of the various industrial branches. With another distribution of national capital, the same amount of products could be produced within the country. But for capital to abandon one industrial branch and move on to another, a crisis in that branch is necessary; And what causes can keep capitalists, threatened by said crisis, from

seeking foreign markets, from seeking subsidies and permission to facilitate exports, etc. (Lenin 1972, 44)

Finally, Lenin attributes the emergence of the world market to the expansive nature of the capitalist mode of production. As I said before, Lenin considered this expansive tendency as a factor of progress, since it laid the foundations for large-scale socialised production. In this sense, the development of the capitalist economy on a global scale would constitute an advance with respect to previous modes of production. Consequently, socialists should not advocate the restoration of pre-capitalist modes of production based on consumption (Lenin 1972, 44-45).

6.3 Conclusions

Lenin assumed the Marxist models of expanded reproduction of capital as valid. In his opinion, these describe capitalism in ideal terms and there is no logical reason to think that the accumulation process cannot occur in a sustained manner over time, although capitalist production is crossed by multiple contradictions. On the other hand, the Russian revolutionary also assumed the Tugan-Baranowski hypothesis according to which the production of constant capital creates its own demand because this economic sector grows faster than the sector dedicated to the manufacture of consumer goods. Consequently, under capitalist conditions, economic crises would not arise from a lack of effective demand from final consumers, but from a disproportion between the different branches of industry. In other words, the circulation of capital would not be interrupted by the contradiction between increasing production and decreasing consumption, but by the lack of economic planning derived from the contradiction between the social nature of production and the private nature of investment and appropriation of the surplus. Unlike Tugan-Baranowski, Lenin did recognise the existence of a contradiction between production capacity and consumption capacity at an aggregate level, although he granted them a secondary role in the creation of crises. Curiously, Marx – on whom Lenin claims to base his analysis of realisation – identified scarcity of consumption as the ultimate cause of crises.

"Lenin attributes the emergence of the world market to the expansive nature of the capitalist mode of production. As I said before, Lenin considered this expansive tendency as a factor of progress, since it laid the foundations for large-scale socialised production"

7.

Colombia:

Crisis, State, and Violence

By Camilo Builes Aristizabal

7.1 Introduction

In order to develop a series of research hypotheses that provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the Colombian primary sector economy and state violence, we will first adopt a Leninist perspective on the state and power. This political theoretical framework will serve two purposes: first, to facilitate comprehension of the class social dynamics within which the various confrontations are situated; and second, to provide a framework for orienting potential resolutions.

In *The State and the Revolution*, as in other works, Lenin presents a conception of the state and power based on Marxist theory. This approach is based on a materialist conception of history and the specific forms in which power is organised in different societies. When we refer to the state, we are talking about a modern, centralised state with complete control over its territory. ‘The state is an organ of class domination, an organ of oppression of one class by another. It is the creation of the ‘order’ that legalises and entrenches the ‘order’ of the class (Lenin 2009, 29).

In this synthetic statement, several elements are in motion. Initially, the state is characterised as an instrument of class domination and a guarantor of the reproduction of the conditions of possibility of the capitalist system. Marx explicitly identified the means by which bourgeois ideology was imposed, noting that it, like all class ideologies, is presented as a general interest, and yet conceals the fact that it is nothing more than the mystification and idealisation of the prevailing relations of production (Marx 1971). Secondly, the text reveals the instrumental role of the state in regulating the dynamics of production within a society. Given the inherent material opposition between the interests of different classes, the state serves to channel this internal conflict through a system of domination. In this context, it becomes evident that there is an intrinsic relationship between power and the state, which can be described as fundamentally instrumental. This relationship can be summarised as the violence of one class against another. In contrast to the concept of violence as described by Arendt, which ultimately concludes that violence is a means of domination by one class over another, this analysis posits that violence is intrinsic to the relationship between power and the state.

There is thus an intrinsic relationship between power and state, fundamentally of an instrumental order, which can be summarised in the violence of one class to another. Unlike conceptions of violence such as that of Arendt, who, ultimately, after analysing its relationship with power, ends up showing a relationship of opposition between these two (Arendt 2006, 77), for Lenin violence is an inalienable part of the nature of the State, it is not an institution that uses the instrument of violence, it is an instrumental institution that is itself violent. There are no ‘peaceful’ states that reconcile the interests of the different social classes in their unity, this is basically an oxymoron and an attempt of the current ideology to manifest itself as beyond the dynamics of interests between social classes. Violence is not a variable that can be added or removed from the state apparatus; it has been constituted by and for violence from the outset.

7.2 Historical Background

With these considerations in mind, let us move on to analyse the nineteenth-century historical background of state violence in Colombia. The nineteenth century in Latin America is distinguished by the political and economic reorganisation of the newly liberated republics that emerged following the end of Spanish colonial rule. In many instances, this was accompanied by an increase in liberalisation (as observed in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina) and/or a rise in centralisation (as seen in Brazil). In Colombia, the territorial and economic reorganisation occurred concurrently with nine civil wars and failed attempts to establish a centralised authority throughout the republic. However, the pivotal event marking the transition to modernity was the expropriation of lands anchored to the structures of colonial possession, both large and small properties, through war and the liberal reform of disentanglement. Posada (1968, 30) says:

In the Decade of 1870-1880 land grant titles were issued over 33 million hectares. Of these, only 8% was given to peasants; the rest was distributed to the large landowners (...) between 1885 and 1895, 4.6 million hectares were awarded to the regime’s validates. And at the beginning of this century, by war merits, by purchase of war titles or by other concepts, many feudal lords were made or others were

strengthened with the succulent delicacy of 10 million hectares.

This process, with far-reaching social implications, serves as a direct precursor to the era under investigation, spanning the first half of the 20th century and the onset of *La Violencia*. One of the most significant consequences of this extensive period of violence is the emergence of a surplus population that is unable to sustain itself economically or reproduce its way of life. This population will constitute the majority of settlers in the Andean highlands and eastern plains. although, as Grand (2014) has pointed out, part of the business and landowners decided to participate in this colonisation by subsidising expeditions and appropriations in search of gold. This resulted in the consolidation of a contrast between smallholdings and large-scale land concentration. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were 200,000 peasant families engaged in agricultural activities on 700,000 hectares of land, with an average farm size of 3.2 hectares. The majority of these families were concentrated in the departments of Boyacá, Cauca, and Nariño. Despite the prevalence of smallholdings, which constitute 63% of the coffee land, a significant concentration of coffee plantations can be observed on only 13% of the farms. This situation acts as a barrier to technological progress, as it allows the continued subsistence of the large semi-feudal landowners in the face of dispersed colonists, who are easily exposed to violence and lack sufficient productivity to constitute a powerful force. The landowners were able to exploit this phenomenon by expropriating the productive reforms made by the settlers on their lands, using violence and in collaboration with intermediaries (Posada 1968).

7.3 International Division of Labour, Imperialism and Crisis

The international division of labour represents a historically specific mode of production that has led to the segmentation of global production into distinct commodity-based sectors. This approach has resulted in the allocation of industrial and high-value added goods production to a select few regions, while the majority of countries have been assigned the role of raw material producers. In Latin America, the international division of labour has imposed a role as an agro-exporter, frequently of monocultures, which implies a fundamental dependence on North America

and industrial Europe (Burlatski 1988). This phenomenon can be observed in Colombia in a number of ways, with the case of coffee serving as a particularly illustrative example. Following a period of growth in the international market due to the decline of former coffee producers (Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Haiti, etc.) resulting from the decline of colonial institutions and their significant legacy (Posada 1968), Colombia would rise the exported goods as 65% by 1927. Although Brazil would continue to dominate the coffee market, the European powers would instigate the growth of trade with Colombia as a counterweight to the accelerated progress of Brazilian monopoly capital in this branch.

A fundamental characteristic of imperialism in the capitalist era, as Lenin points out, is not only the establishment of colonies worldwide, always rooted in the search and extreme competition for raw materials, but also the establishment of semi-colonial countries which, despite enjoying formal freedom in their political institutions, find themselves in a situation of financial dependence and political subordination. This is due to the substantial increase of financial capital and its fusion with monopoly industrial capital, which allows it to exploit dispersed capitals, rooted in places with lower average productivity ratios (Lenin 1917). Throughout the twentieth century, Colombia exhibited a consistent pattern of subordination to the U.S. sphere of influence, a trend that was particularly evident at the beginning of the century. In 1954, Colombia imported \$518.2 million from the United States, while exporting \$420 million, with coffee representing 84% of that total. This dynamic would result in the deterioration of the technification of the various sectors of the economy, depreciation of the purchasing power of the peso, and the consequent deepening of dependence. This dynamic of dependence would intensify in various sectors, leading to a denationalisation of the economy. Similarly, U.S. investment accounted for 25% of textile protection, while in extractive sectors, they engaged in land acquisition, with 400,000 hectares under foreign control in the oil and mining sectors. Additionally, in the credit sector, both private and public debt constrained the growth of the national economy (Posada 1968). One of the significant challenges associated with the implementation of the agro-export model is its high reliance on fluctuations in international commodity prices. In comparison to larger industrial blocs, the model’s bargaining

power is constrained due to its lack of political cohesion and its limited impact on the global product market. The coffee crises are primarily attributable to overproduction, an excess of product in relation to contracted demand, which can be attributed to the same dynamics that facilitated its growth initially. The initial significant crisis of overproduction occurred between 1879 and 1887, with equilibrium being reached the following year through the boom in Brazil. In 1929, the global economic crisis resulted in a significant decline in coffee exports, which fell from 136.9 million dollars in 1929 to 32.7 million dollars in 1932. Similarly, the Argentine and Brazilian markets collapsed due to this crisis, which revealed the significant drawback of the agro-export model: its inability to ensure long-term sustainability and its tendency to experience violent oscillations. The crises of overproduction result in a corresponding decline in participation in the international market. Given the cyclical nature of this phenomenon, it is likely to worsen with each wave. Furthermore, the introduction of new competitors, such as those from African countries including Kenya, Uganda, and Congo, serves to exacerbate the situation. The disintegrating effect of the crises will be felt throughout the country, both in 1879 and 1887 as an immediate consequence of these movements (Garces 1959).

7.4 Violence: Revolution and Counterrevolution

By the 1930s, the cyclical crises that contributed to the destruction of small landowners, leaving labour unemployed and increasing social conflict with the colonists had reached a very high point. The conflicts in the *Sumapaz hacienda*, in the southwest of Cundinamarca or in the southeast of Tolima were some of the many examples. Sanchez (1985, 122) says:

But it was not only against the dispossession of their plots or improvements that the colonists had begun to rebel in an organised manner. There were a series of forms of political and social domination that were part of the hacienda, and whose abolition could not have been undertaken independently of the struggle for land and vice versa.

The relations of production and national development arising from the agro-export bonanza were beginning to touch the bottom

of their antagonism. This given that with the role of intermediaries ‘Coffee did not demand a change in the existing forms of land and therefore did not break a single vertebra of the traditional and dominant latifundism in the country. The bourgeoisie was able to nurture its development without having to resort to an agrarian reform that confronted it with the landowners’ (Posada, 1968, p. 18). With Law 83 of 1931, which formalised the right of peasants to form associations, a process of massive association to the unions and peasant leagues began to be regularised. This process would culminate in the government of Alfonso López Pumarejo, a liberal president who would attempt the agrarian reform in Colombia, Law 200 of 1936 established two things, the social function of the land and the regularisation of property. Made with the purpose of emancipating settlers and tenants, nothing could have been more different, as it ended up laying the foundations for the country’s historical violence.

This frustrated revolution is the channelling of a latent conflict in the productive structure, which would be resolved as a revolution in reverse, with the usurpation of land by Colombian landowners from settlers and landlords. It became a reorganisation of titles obtained by violent usurpation, with the supposed consideration of the productive use of these acquisitions. At the same time, the law, which left intact the classic semi-feudal property in the country, introduced wage labour in a forcibly accelerated manner, destroying the traditional regime of sharecroppers and tenants, which was pointed out as the detonator of the conflict (Sanchez 1985).

Causing depopulation and relative backwardness in agricultural production, it did not take long to produce a counter-reform, the 1944 law, which in substantial terms attempted to reintroduce the old leasing methods, to the detriment of salaried work, and which provided the landowner with strong guarantees against the appropriation of plots of land and rapid vacancy when the contracts expired (*Revista cafetera de Colombia* 1947). But this counter-revolution could not be carried out in a purely legislative manner ‘to impose this new order on a peasantry that had measured its strength against the land concentration in the two previous decades (...) a direct intervention of the repressive apparatus of the state was needed: violence takes on its most hidden meaning’ (Sanchez 1985, 210). State violence, both through

the law and through repressive agents, will be a constant in Colombia and will remain as a base until the 21st century. The state begins to play a more active role in the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of forms of property,

which, as we have seen, rather than being progressive, are profoundly reactionary. As we can see in Table A, in this time the changes of property possession are massive.

Hectare Sizes	Number of properties	Percentage	Occupied surface	Percentage
Less than 5	459.380	55.97	950.9	4.18
More than 5 & less than 20	230.550	28.09	2.434,4	10,73
More than 20 & Less than 100	101.384	12,35	4.746,1	20,92
More 100 & Less than 500	25.072	3,05	7.521,6	33,15
More than 500	4.456	0,54	7.035,5	31,02

Table A. Rural property size distribution 1955

Source: Poveda, G (2005). *Historia de la economía colombiana*, Medellín, UPB, P. 467.

This should also be understood in relation to a process of massive proletarianisation and displacement to the city. Gaviria (2018, 209-222) says:

Although it seems certain that the violence in Colombia resulted in more than 300,000 deaths, victims of the bipartisan confrontation, the precise number of displaced persons who, in the midst of the horror, abandoned their plots of land, is unknown. The exodus produced

by fear generated a recomposition of rural property in the country, with huge numbers of dispossessed and new owners -few- of the land.

The process of violence was a form of resolution to the tensions over the productive structure in Colombia, which in complicity with the state expropriated peasant masses and tried to relaunch the processes of accumulation of landowners’ properties. The economic crises have as a substitute the struggle for territorial

reorganisation and productive capital, which in this case is mainly a conflict of land possession. Crises, as Marx rightly points out, are resolved in a violent way involving readjustments in the social structure, upheavals, downturns, endangerments, etc. There is a basic problem with the agro-export model, which invites us to think that it is its ups and downs that mark the compasses of the social struggle. And that, in a paradigmatic way, they sustain forms of property that imply the growing dispossession of some together with the accumulation of others. This is one origin of the high inequality in Colombia.

The State is an agent involved in this process, which, being the patrimony of some privileged classes, acts as a personal army. This does not imply the incompleteness, perversion or misuse of the institutionality as a whole, as a classical theory of violence may think. It is not the irregularity of the state function in these cases, it is rather what its primary character has become. 'It is evident that in Colombia the political institutions did not fulfil exactly the expressed purposes, and yet they were eminently effective, without losing the political characteristics. They were functional in another sense: in the imposition of the will of a group' (Borda 1962, 401)

7.5 Conclusions

Given the close relationship between models based on the primary sector and public violence, we have sought to elucidate the specific content of the Colombian state. However, by conceptualising this dynamic as a matrix analogous to dozens of other nations, it becomes possible to discern a potential point of exit from this dynamic. The process of oscillation of raw materials and their dependence on the large markets of Western powers is accentuated to the extent that competing political entities are fractioned, as they are more exposed to crises and have less negotiating power. It is crucial to comprehend the potential for a collective future for primary producers, wherein the strategic direction of goods production within these sectors could prove pivotal in global production. The primary sector is the foundation upon which all other sectors are built; it is the indispensable backbone of the economy. In light of the prevailing circumstances of fragmentation and competition, it is possible to propose the principles of association and reason as guiding forces.

"This frustrated revolution is the channelling of a latent conflict in the productive structure, which would be resolved as a revolution in reverse, with the usurpation of land by Colombian landowners from settlers and landlords. It became a reorganisation of titles obtained by violent usurpation, with the supposed consideration of the productive use of these acquisitions"

8. The Leninist Legacy in Italian *Operaismo* in the 1960s

By Marco Cerotto

8.1 Introduction

In this paper I aim to investigate the legacy of Lenin's teachings in the formation of Italian *Operaismo* of the 1960s, to understand and problematise which aspects of Lenin are welcomed, and which are criticised, and finally I will seek to outline which Leninist legacies were accepted by the Communist party and which ones by Italian *Operaismo*.¹

If the historical-philosophical debate has focused more on the element of the rupture between *Operaismo* and official Marxism, it is very important to investigate the reception of Lenin's writings in critical Italian Marxism. Investigating this rupture means, a priori, excluding the contribution of Lenin to the formation of *Operaismo* from the moment in which Lenin inserted himself into the cultural tradition of classical Marxism. While it is true, on one hand, that *Operaismo* founds itself by developing a total critique of traditional Marxism, the Italian Marxist historicism. It is equally true, on another hand, that it is continuously compares itself with the philosophical thought of Marx and his main interpreters, but also with this so-called 'Western Marxism' and Critical Theory, developing an original reflection that tended to surpass even this theoretical legacy.

8.2 Raniero Panzieri, the Quaderni rossi and the Leninist Legacy

From a theoretical point of view, I've already clarified how Italian *Operaismo* developed, mainly through its critique aimed at historicism. We know, however, of the other important results of these historical political events of the years immediately preceding its birth. Before the so-called *unforgettable '56* as defined by Pietro Ingrao, another very significant event occurred in Italy a year earlier, symptomatic of the crisis of Marxism: the defeat of the election of the internal commissions of the FIOM, the largest union of the Italian proletariat, within the largest industrial plant, the Fiat. If the defeat of the Fiom confirmed the unprepared political nature of the workers' union in the face of new industrial developments, in comparison the reaction to the XXth Congress of the CPSU (The Communist Party of Soviet Union), and to the Soviet invasion of Hungary confirmed Marxist party's willingness to change: as both were

convinced of the necessity of a shift. However, this shift was made in the direction of a social-democratisation of the workers' parties: the Socialist party, in fact, moved closer to the Christian Democrats, while the Communist party reaffirmed the validity of their political strategy: 'the Italian and democratic path to socialism'. Italian *Operaismo* was born with the founding of the journal *Quaderni rossi* in 1961 in Turin, by Raniero Panzieri and his group, known as 'the sociologists' or 'the Turin group', and by Mario Tronti and his group, known as 'the philosophers' or 'the Rome group'.

Panzieri's essay *On the Capitalist use of Machines in Neo-capitalism* assumed particular relevance, because it synthesised years of research on the technological factory, but especially because it outlined a reading of neo-capitalism completely antithetical to that of Marxist historicism. In the essay, there is a reference to Lenin, but not in a constant mode as in Panzieri's subsequent writings. His theoretical insights are vast, starting clearly with Marx, passing through the critical sociology of this period, engaging with the reflections of Italian Marxist historicism, and concluding with the return to the classics: Marx, Engels, and Lenin. But if the reference to Lenin is not constant, then one must ask in what manner Panzieri references Marx, and if there is present a Marxist interpretation similar to the reading that Lenin outlined in his famous text *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and in cited by Panzieri in his writing, *A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism*.

The introduction of technological machines within the large factory was not praised because it corresponded to a modern and efficient process of capitalism from which the working class also benefited. Rather, it came to be considered as a phenomenon capable of unveiling the despotism of capital, which provoked a reification of the labor force without historic precedence. The labour force, losing all work skills, degraded to the mere function of 'surveillance of a machinery alien to it' (1961, 71), simply regulating productive time and methods and in this part, as I have already emphasised, the reference to Marx is constant.

Panzieri argues, citing Marx, that 'it is not the worker who uses the condition of the work but, vice versa, the condition of the work that

uses to the worker', a phenomenon considered intrinsic to all capitalist production, but one that became a 'technically evident reality' only within the automated factory. This conclusion led him to valorise the Marxian lesson of *Wage Labour and Capital*, since Marx had foreseen that wage increases were a phenomenon inherently integral to the capitalist process and technological progress. In fact, Panzieri added that capitalist development would favor an increase in both nominal and real wages. This reflection includes a reference to Lenin's legacy, who had clarified that:

The more rapidly that wealth increases, the more concretely develop the forces of production and the socialization of labour, the better the situation of the worker is, at least *insofar* as it can be better within the current system of the social economy (Pazieri 1961, 73).

Panzieri understands this Leninian reflection, developed in *A Characterisation of Economic Romanticism*, as the explanation of a danger of integration of the working class into private relations of production. That is, 'the increase in material conditions, in nominal and real wages, corresponds to the worsening of 'political dependence' (1961, 73). After this theoretical reflection on the new capitalist mode of production, the political proposal put forward by Panzieri was based on the worker's control, considered the only perspective capable of attacking the root of neo-capitalist despotism. And I believe that even in this political solution there is present a strong Leninist legacy.

To continue to trace the Leninist legacy in Italian *Operaismo*, I will now focus on another essay of Panzieri, *Plusvalue and Planning*, published in 1964. In this reflection, a few years after the analysis of the technological factory, Panzieri concentrates on the factory-social dialectic, arriving at the conclusion that planning is the fundamental form of capitalist development. In this essay, the comparison with Lenin is constant and is represented well in the critical-dialectical rapport. The works he takes under examination is *The Economic Content of Narodism and the Criticism of it in Mr. Struve's Book*. He underlines the importance of Leninist analysis in the capitalist development compared to that developed by the populists, from the moment in which Lenin observes that 'commodity production, as the most general

form of production, is realised only in capitalist production, in which the commodity form of the product of work is thus universal'. This argument leads to the realizatson, according to Panzieri, that in Lenin 'not only the product of work, but also the work itself, that is to say, the human labour force, assumes the form of the commodity' (1964, 271). Panzieri observes that in Lenin, the consideration of two themes in particular prevailed strongly, being the 'unity of capitalism' which materialised, in so much as 'social function' in its various levels that it passed through, namely 'from commercial capital and usury to industrial capitalism' and then the critique of 'economic romanticism' and to the interpretations of 'underconsumptionism of capitalism'. The merit of Lenin was to establish a distinction between the sphere of production and that of circulation, since the latter, according to the 'various utopian reactionaries' depended 'on the will of men' and their capitalist capacity.

However, the limit of Leninist reflection consisted, for Panzieri, in having identified 'the antagonistic character of development' purely in the relationship between 'the socialisation of production - anarchy in circulation', thus conceiving the 'contradictions within the processes of socialisation as a simple reflection of anarchy'. Panzieri recognises that Lenin's analysis focuses on the 'effects of the capitalist use of machines on the conditions of the working class'. Yet Lenin, according to Panzieri, fails to grasp that 'the laws of capitalist development' are realised in the productive sphere 'as capitalist planning'. The consequence of this limit in Lenin's analysis is that 'capitalist planning does not appear as the fundamental form in direct production' and instead anarchy prevails as a 'specific characteristic of capitalism' (1964, 273). After a critical-dialectical comparison with Lenin's reading of capitalist development, Panzieri directly analyses the Marxist reflection.

In his discussion of the second part of the first book of *Capital*, Panzieri aimed to demonstrate that the planning process may be intrinsic to the capitalist production process and that it manifested itself explicitly only with its own development. In fact, planning is necessary for capital 'to extend and reinforce its dominion over the workforce', but above all it acts as a limit 'to the negative consequences of chaotic movement and a clash of individual capital in

¹ All the quotes were translated by the author from the original sources.

the sphere of circulation’ (1964, 277). Continuing with an analysis of the third book of the *Capital*, Panzieri understood Marx’s lesson on circulation, which manifested at a certain level of capitalist development, as ‘the result and mystification of capitalist relationships of production’, managing ‘to hide completely its root and its real movement’. However, the analysis that Marx writes in the first book of the *Capital* focused on the contradiction ‘planning in the factory - anarchy in circulation’ and did not grasp, thus continuing, the extension of the capitalist plan from the direct sphere of production to that of circulation, that Panzieri instead attributed as a phenomenon capable of explaining the root of ‘plusvalue’.

Even the socialist prospective indicated by Marx did not coincide with the analysis of development of financial in-depth in *Capital*. That is, the thesis that distinguished the first book of Marx’s writing was based on the conception that capitalism simply became unsustainable when reaching its maximum degree of development, since ‘surplus productive forces come into conflict with the narrow base of the system’. But, with Neo-capitalism, as Panzieri observed:

Faced with the capitalist interweaving of technology and power, the prospect of an alternative use [...] of machines cannot [...] be based on a pure and simple overturning of the means of production... conceived as a shell that, at a certain level of the expansion of the productive forces, could be destined to fall simply because it has become too narrow: the relations

of production are *within* the productive forces, these have been ‘molded’ by capital. And therefore this is what allows the capitalist development to perpetuate itself even after the expansion of the productive forces has reached its maximum level. (1964, 281)

Therefore, Marx’s political perspective was appropriate for the analysis of competitive capitalism, but no longer with the development of financial capital. When arriving at the analysis of capitalism ‘in its recent form’, as Panzieri writes, it was possible to observe that neo-capitalism had acquired the ability to ‘self-limit’, managing to avoid the consequences of its own development even in the sphere of circulation. This reading emerges as one of the most important theoretical innovations of Italian neo-Marxism in the 1960s because it pushes beyond the analysis of the sphere of production and captures the most significant developments in circulation.

8.3 Mario Tronti, Classe operaia and the Leninist Political Strategy

It is important to now focus attention on the developments of the second laboratory of Italian neo- Marxism, the birth of the journal *Classe operaia* in 1964, by Mario Tronti and the splinter group of the *Quaderni rossi*. After the workers’ struggles of Piazza Statuto of 1962 in Turin, Tronti began to develop his ‘Copernican revolution’, asserting the primacy of class over capital and defining the theoretical trajectories of what emerged as an originality

in the philosophical thought of the *Operaismo*. Tronti had refuted the Marxist thesis that capital explains everything underlying it, and declared that in neo-capitalist development the highest point was represented by the working class and not by capital, thus carrying out a sort of ‘parricide of Marx’ (Corradi 2005, 106), according to Cristina Corradi’s definition. But also criticising, in this manner, Lukács’ theory on the difference between ‘class in itself and class for itself’.

Classe operaia was founded in January 1964 with a very clear theoretical-political prerogative: to seek a strategic path for the construction of an organisation of workers and revolutionaries. The issue of organisation assumed an absolute priority for the leadership group of *Classe operaia*, as they had argued that ‘capitalist development [was] subordinated to workers’ struggles’ (Tronti 2013, 87). It is therefore understood how the necessity to channel such struggles into a general strategy of a workers’ organisation dominated the entire discussion of *Classe operaia*. The reference to a scientific search for a political solution could be found in Lenin. Indeed, the first article published by *Classe operaia* was entitled *Lenin in England*. Tronti, after the theoretical development of the primacy of the class, traces the political strategy of Lenin, writing that ‘if the working class possessed a revolutionary political organisation, it is clear that it would aim to instrumentalise the highest point of capitalist reformism everywhere’ (2013, 89). However, noting the absence of this organisation, ‘the entire process lives as a function of capital’, and the workers’ struggle is absorbed by the systematic integration of capitalist strategy. Tronti concludes that the search for and discovery of a political organisation is of fundamental importance, and this element had already been established by Lenin, and even before him, as Tronti writes, ‘Marx had discovered, in his own human experience, that the most difficult point is the transition to organisation’ (2013, 90). If Lenin’s merit was to bring ‘Marx in Petersburg’, then Tronti’s point is to bring *Lenin to England*, scientifically seeking ‘a new Marxist practise of the workers’ party’. And here, therefore, *England* can be understood as representing the recent Neo-capitalism development, in Italy in particular, and in the occidental world in general. Yet, it didn’t take too long before even Tronti gradually began to believe in the absence of a revolutionary organisation, and therefore, the need for a ‘positive crisis’ functional to the

restructuring of the ‘old organisations’ (2013, 106) was relaunched, as written in the essay *1905 in Italy*, again with a clear reference to Leninist political strategy.

In fact, the first year of *Classe operaia* concluded in December with the article *Class and Party*, in which the perspective that the second experience of Italian neo-Marxism was taking began to emerge more clearly. The possibility of ‘preventing the process of explicit social democratisation of the communist party’ began to prevail, as Tronti wrote, despite the risks that would result from it, that is ‘personal sacrifices’, ‘theoretical setbacks’, and even ‘practical compromises’ (2013, 109).

From these writings of *Classe Operaia*, one can discern Tronti’s evolving analysis of the development of Italian neo-capitalism. From the conviction of the primacy of the class over capital (the Copernican revolution) and therefore the choice to re-seek the worker and revolutionary organisation, to the realisation of the phase of staticness in 1965-66, Tronti began to orient himself towards the Communist Party, which was preparing for the XIth Congress by elaborating new formulas, such as ‘single party’ and ‘party in the factory’, which left the *Classe Operaia* group hopeful of the possibility, as Aris Accornero expressed it, of ‘shifting it to split it’ (Trotta and Milana 2008, 430). This new strategy of Italian neo-Marxism has been defined as a *maneuver* of ‘mass entryism’, or ‘new type of entryism’, as Toni Negri defined it, because a part of the group decided to re-enter the Communist Party (Tronti, Asor Rosa, Massimo Cacciari). Another part of the group, however, was convinced of the historical delay of the analyses of *Classe Operaia* on class subjectivism, carefully observing that the figure of the mass-worker sanctioned the affirmation of an economic phase already in full transformation.

Meanwhile, a new revolutionary subject emerged in civil society that scientifically embodied the evolution of the capitalist mode of production and the consequent rationalisation extended to the social sphere. This is the social-worker theorised by the intellectuals who, in these years, was witnessing the dissolution of the second experience of Italian neo-Marxism and who would orient themselves towards the construction of a new political organisation: *Potere Operaio* (Worker’s Power).

¹ All the quotes were translated by the author from the original sources.

8.4 Conclusions

To conclude, I have concentrated on the analysis of the theoretical and political legacy of Lenin in Italian Operaismo, first in *Quaderni Rossi* and then *Classe Operaia*. I sought to underline a constant point to reference to Lenin both in the analysis of the development of capitalism - from which, as I have argued, a critical-dialectical confrontation emerges - as well as in the indication of a political strategy. Firstly, I highlighted the main theoretical dissonances between the analyses of the technological factory, the capitalistic use of new machinery, the transformation of producer subject, and those developed by historicist Marxism.

Subsequently, I focused on the Leninist political legacy in the experience of the *Quaderni Rossi*, which certainly results in being direct democracy, the workers' power in productive structures, as realised with the experience of the Soviets. Whereas the political legacy referred to by the Communist Party is the second stage of Lenin's strategy, namely the construction of the political party, the importance of the role of the external avant-garde in a strategic direction for the construction of the workers' state. Also, the Leninist political legacy absorbed by Tronti somewhat differs from that of Panzieri.

The main difference certainly rests in the different political-philosophical traditions of the two intellectuals: Panzieri was a socialist and culturally positioned within the tradition of revolutionary socialism, advocating the importance of an internal, not external, avant-garde that would be part of the revolutionary constitution process of the proletariat. However, Tronti was politically a communist and culturally raised in the historicist tradition although he later distanced himself from these thanks to the reflections of Galvano Della Volpe and Lucio Colletti. Tronti supported the importance of the external avant-garde but simultaneously indicated the necessity of unifying the mass moment of workers' struggles and exacerbating the reformism of capital to achieve a revolutionary break.

Italian *Operaismo* was truly a very important philosophical and political laboratory for the reworking of Marxist thought in the 1960s, during the rise of neocapitalism. On one hand, this critical Marxism, as I have already clarified, absorbed the legacy of non-dogmatic Marxism from previous decades, such as 'Western Marxism' and Critical Theory, but on the other hand, it constantly confronted the works of Marx and the teachings of Lenin to seek a way out of the crisis of Marxism, far from the reformism of traditional organisations.

"The main difference certainly rests in the different political-philosophical traditions of the two intellectuals: Panzieri was a socialist and culturally positioned within the tradition of revolutionary socialism, advocating the importance of an internal, not external, avant-garde that would be part of the revolutionary constitution process of the proletariat."

9. Contemporary Reading of The Right of Peoples to Self- determination

By Rubén Cela Díaz

9.1 Introduction

Lenin approached the right of peoples to self-determination based on the most advanced theoretical contributions by Marx and Engels, coinciding with their greatest stage of ideological and political maturity. He did so unfettered by preconceptions and dogmatism, starting out from concrete reality and seeking to be consistent with his vision of the need to conquer a world free from oppression or alienation, be they individuals or peoples.

Lenin's main theoretical contributions to the right of self-determination were written between 1912 and 1917. Much of his thinking in this respect is condensed in two key publications: *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, a compendium of some of his main writings on this subject, and *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, one of his most influential works. However, as with Marx, it was in the latter years of his life that he became more concerned with national conflicts which he approached from a Marxist perspective.

Lenin effectively provided an important theoretical impetus to the exercise of the right to self-determination by contributing to the enrichment of the Marxist theoretical corpus in this field. In our view, he made seven fundamental contributions.

- 1) A clear conceptualisation of the right to self-determination (Lenin 1972, 393–454).

Lenin grabbed the nettle and didn't shy from addressing the issue head-on, however onerous and despite the dissent and division that it gave rise to within Marxism. He was aware of the importance of the national debate and that it would be a crass error for Marxism to ignore it, undervalue it or fail to interpret it correctly.

For Lenin, nations that so wished should be able to exercise their right to self-determination. This is encapsulated in the respect for the democratic right of a nation without a state of its own state to secede should its people so wish. Therefore, for Lenin, the sole holder of the right to self-determination is a nation that has a social majority popular resistance movement that lays claims statehood.

- 2) The national question is not a problem of 'bourgeois democracy'. It is a problem of

the first order for communists and must be treated as such.

For Lenin, the right of people to self-determination cannot be a secondary or subsidiary issue to the class struggle. In this sense, he refuted the entire argument of other Marxists and, in particular, Rosa Luxemburg. For her, national questions should be subordinated to the class struggle since the basis of socialist politics was the defence of the interests of the working class and its struggle against the bourgeoisie and should not deviate from this. In this sense, and very much conditioned by the role of Polish nationalism, she opposed an internationalist view of the right of peoples to self-determination and spoke of the 'right to self-determination of the proletariat', an expression strongly contested by Lenin himself.

- 3) Colonialism and Marxism are incompatible.

Lenin struck a stance against all forms of colonialism and imperialism and considered them to be absolutely incompatible with Marxism, whereby it was a contradiction in terms to speak of any kind of 'progressive', 'humane', 'civilised' or 'socialist' colonialism (Lenin 1972, 17–51).

Lenin argued that colonialism and imperialism not only deny the possibility of normal development of the peoples they oppress, but also deform the lives of those who benefit from colonial rule (including the working class of the metropolis).

- 4) The nationalism of an oppressed nation is wholly dissimilar to the nationalism of an oppressor nation.

For Lenin it was a serious mistake to equate conceptually under the same label of 'nationalism' completely antagonistic situations, constantly insisting on the need to draw a clear distinction between the 'nationalism' of an oppressed nation and the 'nationalism' of an oppressor nation: the former being liberating in nature, whereas the latter is imperialist and as such they are antithetical.

- 5) Wherever there is an oppressed nation, the class struggle takes the form of a national liberation struggle.

Lenin comes to the conclusion that socialism must integrate the struggle for the national liberation of the oppressed peoples into its strategic drive, defending the need to promote a strategic unity between the nationalism of the oppressed and the proletariat of the imperialist states.

Several decades later, this would pave the way for many Marxists in the Third World and in stateless nations to find a Marxist reference that fitted their situation and their real struggle for the construction of a classless society and for the national liberation of their people, including Mao Zedong in China, Mariátegui in Peru, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in Cuba, Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, Amílcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Patrice Lumumba in Congo, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Samora Machel in Mozambique, all of whom were directly or indirectly inspired by the Leninist conception of imperialism and the right of peoples to self-determination.

- 6) Lenin draws a clear distinction between formal independence and genuine sovereignty.

Lenin drew a clear distinction between 'political annexation' and 'economic annexation', aware that it was not sufficient to overcome the former in order to free oneself from the latter. This was to become absolutely key in the future and is clearly connected, for example, with the process of achieving the 'second independence' of many Latin American states two centuries after they gained their formal independence.

- 7) Internationalism is not possible if it is not based on the right of self-determination.

Lenin understood that there could be no true internationalism if not based on the right of colonised nations to liberate themselves (Lenin 1972, 17–51).

9.2 The Leninist Theory of Nation in the 21st Century

While Marxist theory has come a long way in its analysis of the national question, it still has a long way to go. In order to make further progress, it is necessary to learn from the Leninist theory that we have just summarised and bring it in line

with our own time. We believe that this means taking on and politically defending the following key ten points:

- 1) There can be no democracy without sovereignty

Having a state (or at least state structures) is a necessary albeit insufficient condition for sovereignty in the 21st century. While statehood in and of itself is no guarantee of genuine sovereignty, a nation bereft of a state structures is guaranteed not to be able to decide in a sovereign fashion. And when a people do not decide for itself, another will decide for it. As such, regardless of outward appearances, in such contexts no democracy can never be complete and effective.

History has shown that sovereignty can exist without democracy. However, real democracy cannot exist in the absence of sovereignty. And history has also shown that democracy and national sovereignty are never irreversible. Maintaining them in the globalised phase of capitalism is an ongoing battle and the moment that it gives way, democracy and national sovereignty recede.

- 2) Today nationalism today is an inherently 'antisystemic' movement

We are fully aware that making such a claim, especially in Catalonia, is controversial to say the least. However, I believe that the nationalist movement of an oppressed nation has a profoundly antisystemic basis *per se* on the grounds that toady even the simple fact that a nation (with a state) claims to be able to determine how economic, social and political life is organised within its own borders, if it fails to fall in line agree with the global dictates, can become a pretext for international exclusion and sanctions. Any such movements become anti-system in practise in the face of a system moving in the opposite direction. In practise, even if a particular sovereigntist movement defends neoliberal economic and social positions for its country, this movement will continue to be incompatible with the role played by a process of national liberation within the framework of neoliberal globalisation. As right-wing as it may be, in order to move forward it will have to confront the main economic, political, media and military powers allied with a levelling

globalisation that denies the political rights of stateless nations and increasingly impinges upon the genuine sovereignty of nations that do have their own state.

Of course, not every sovereigntist movement need defend ideological and political positions that fall within the spectrum of the left. However, every (true) leftist movement has to be sovereigntist inasmuch as it defends the genuine right of peoples to self-determination. If we see the defence of democracy, equality, freedom, social justice, solidarity, internationalism, fraternity between peoples as elements characteristic of the left, then none of the above cannot be truly defended supported without upholding the right of peoples to self-determination. If we believe that the most important value for Marxism is the liberation of humanity from all forms of oppression, domination, alienation and degradation, we cannot coherently defend these principles without fighting national oppression.

3) The class struggle is multifaceted.

Seeing the class struggle exclusively as the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a reductionist binary view of the complexity of today's world and its conflicts and contradictions. We believe that the theory of class struggle in its most complete, mature and contextualised version in the present historical moment entails a general theory of social conflict and encompasses a wide variety of struggles.

4) In an oppressed nation the national contradiction is the fundamental contradiction.

One of the greatest relations of oppression that can exist in the world is that of one nation over another. In our opinion, the struggle against such oppression is an essential form of class struggle. This does not mean that class struggle as such will disappear, rather that in a nation that is denied its right to self-determination, the class struggle necessarily takes on the form of a national liberation movement.

Unfortunately, as Garrido (2017, 83) has pointed out, it was – and continues to be – all too common in the field of Marxism to prioritise

the concept of the ‘main contradiction’ in order to discredit any demand that fell outside of its immediate scope and even to portray any movement that refused to subordinate itself to its purportedly ‘pure’ class struggle as counterproductive. Fortunately, the National Liberation Movements (NLM) stopped asking the permission of the ‘authorised Leninists’ and took directly from Lenin himself much of what his European followers had jettisoned to the pint of considerably reducing the scope of his thought.

5) Nationalism is a necessary precondition for socialism in a denied nation.

No people will ever be in a position to undertake their journey towards socialism without first having their national aspirations met and, endowing them with the capacity to decide for themselves on everything that affects them.

Unfortunately, many Marxists have educated themselves politically in the belief that nationalism and Marxism are antagonistic in nature and never the twain shall meet. For them, nationalism is a bourgeois ideology contrary to proletarian internationalism and an obstacle to the construction of socialism. The idea of a nation was a cultural construct, an ideological by-product, developed by the bourgeoisie to serve its economic interests and nationalism was an instrument of the class domination that the bourgeoisie exercised over the proletariat, as a kind of cultural diversion to hide economic exploitation.

However, history has shown that far from being antagonistic, in the case of oppressed nations nationalism and Marxism are two sides of the same coin: the liberation of humanity. It is not possible to oppose the oppression of one class by another and not oppose the oppression of one people by another, because both the people and the class that oppresses another will never be truly free.

6) The advance of capitalism in its current globalised phase is inversely proportional to the advance of national sovereignty, democracy and social justice.

Over recent decades, it has become apparent that the advance of neoliberal globalisation is inversely proportional to the advance of

national sovereignty, democracy and social justice. Neoliberal globalisation affects the sovereignty of nations with a state of their own (and doubly so for stateless nations) in four major ways, namely: 1) the emergence of institutions (e.g. IMF, WB, WTO, GATT, etc.) and supra-state zones (such as the EU) which drive the centres of decision-making further and further away from the people; 2) large monopolies with greater economic capacity, influence (and even intelligence) than many states; 3) new forms of imperialist politics (for which neither armies nor traditional incursion are required); and 4) dispensing with state competences from the outside and recentralising from the inside, denying the plurinational character of many states around the world.

In the face of a unipolar neoliberal globalisation that limits the real sovereignty of the people, the call for a sovereigntist multipolarity that demands that no superpower be able to set itself up as the world leader or as the only ‘legitimate’ political and cultural expression is on the rise. This calls for the configuration of a new, more multipolar and multicentric world order in which the sovereignty of the nations that make it up is respected, be they stateless nations that are denied their right to self-determination or states whose sovereignty is undermined by other states, supranational structures or transnationalised capital.

7) One can't be truly internationalist without actively defending the right of peoples to self-determination.

Contrary to frequent claims, international does not mean anti-national any more than internationalism is synonymous with anti-nationalism. Quite the opposite: the existence of nations is a prerequisite for internationalism. True internationalism grounded in the very *raison d'être* of nationalism: peaceful, non-adversarial, fraternal and equal relations between all the nations on the planet.

Recognising national rights is a fundamental prerequisite for international solidarity. A healthy patriotism by no means incompatible with a necessary internationalism because the true patriot must fight for the advancement of individual countries as the basis for world progress.

8) A correct interpretation a coherent practise of Marxism are incompatible with the negation of the principle of self-organisation.

Marxism reached a fundamental conclusion: the liberation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself. The same reasoning applies to oppressed nations, whose national liberation will have to come from themselves, which only possible through their own forces. The solutions to the problems of a people's lack of sovereignty necessarily have to come from the people itself, regardless of whether they can count on the support and solidarity of others.

For a Marxist, the right to disobedience, defiance, resistance and rebellion against injustice and domination must form part of their ideology. When a people's chains take the form of the legal framework of a formal democracy, it has every right and indeed the obligation to break free from this repressive legal framework. Resistance becomes a right and from a Marxist perspective (or even solely from a purely democratic commitment) an obligation. And the way to do this is through self-organised resistance on a national scale.

Only through self-organisation will an oppressed people be able to liberate itself, to which end anyone who claims to defend the right of peoples to self-determination must defend in practise the setting up of political, trade union, cultural and social structures of self-defence and the advancement of national liberation on a national level.

9) Every form of imperialism/colonialism/ national oppression is inherently racist and exploitative.

Imperialism, colonialism and national oppression are to varying degrees the enslavement of the people: the dialectic of slave and master, of servant and overlord, applied to the relationships between peoples. It is the denial of the most inalienable right that human beings have: their own existence and freedom. It condemns human beings to a state of inhumanity. It involves the erasure of the essence of a people: its identity, dignity and freedom. Therefore, failing to acknowledge them is one of the most terrible violations of human rights. In practise, imperialism divides the planet hierarchically

between dominating and dominated countries in a kind of racism, not between people, but between peoples, which allows for the constant transfer of wealth from the peripheries to the metropolitan centres.

- 10) The necessary transition from globalisation to de-globalisation based on sovereigntist multipolarity.

Today we are living through an advanced phase (but with clear signs of exhaustion) of the imperialist phase of capitalism that Lenin described. On the one hand, we are experiencing a clear victory on the ground for neoliberal theses over Marxist ones. Today we can say that neoliberal thinking, after imposing itself in most countries around the world over socialism and less orthodox currents of capitalism such as social democracy, has become hegemonic around the globe. Over the last few decades, within the framework of an authentic 'neoliberal civilisation', reinforced by: 1) the disappearance of a large part of the experiments in real socialism; 2) the swing of a large part of the world's social democracy towards only net neoliberal positions; 3) an important network of opinion-makers who reinforce the idea that there is no alternative to the neoliberal model; and 4) a theoretical basis and a practical performance of neoliberalism capable of adapting to important changes in context (e.g. 'Keynesianism-pandemic' in the face of the consequences of COVID-19, green capitalism in the face of climate change, etc.). So far, all of this has only been partially mitigated by China's incredible economic and social progress and the realisation of the limitations, contradictions and consequences for the world's social majorities and poor nations of a globalised neoliberal model with no counterweight.

The world that we knew, and which was shaped and consolidated in the wake of the Second World War and accelerated after the fall of the Socialist Bloc is in full transformation. In its globalised phase, directed and controlled by an economic superpower such as the USA, capitalism is nearing its final days, which shouldn't be misconstrued to mean that it is going to disappear in one fell swoop, nor even in the short term. However, in the coming decades nothing will be the same in geopolitical terms as the last half-century.

9.3 Conclusions

Neoliberal globalisation is now showing clear signs of exhaustion. From our point of view, the most obvious of which are as follows:

1) increasingly recurrent systemic crises, with greater reach and faster propagation throughout the whole planet; 2) a crisis of legitimacy (the harbinger, amongst other things of the collateral rise of the extreme right throughout the world); 3) a realisation of the effects of the current model of production and consumption on the planet's ecological limits; 4) an increase in the divide between the centre and the periphery, but also in the increase of social inequalities within the centre itself; 5) the need to resort to more frequently to militarism in order to achieve its geopolitical objectives; 6) the increasing need to incur chronic and unaffordable public spending in order to maintain minimal services and investments; 7) the existence of a greater number of countries that question this model of globalisation and that work together in a more coordinated way; 8) the emergence of new players in the international arena: a major new global superpower such as China, new regional powers and new supranational entities and structures (CELAC, BRICs+, etc.); and 9) the beginning of the practical questioning of the dollar's monopoly as the only currency for international trade and reserve currency.

The world is changing at breakneck speed, not only in geopolitical terms but also technologically and culturally. In a single decade we are experiencing what for other historical moments took a whole century. And, as in any transitional phase, we are experiencing tremendously confusing, volatile times with profound changes that are happening extremely quickly.

In this context, far from disappearing, territorial sovereignty conflicts and demands for real sovereignty on the part of certain states will continue to exist and expand in this century, becoming one of the main sources of tension on the planet. Consequently, it would be advisable for the left, taking Lenin's later contributions as a point of reference, to be able to redefine and rethink the concept of sovereignty in the 21st century and to devise new mechanisms for resolving this type of conflict through peaceful and democratic means.

"The world is changing at breakneck speed, not only in geopolitical terms but also technologically and culturally. In a single decade we are experiencing what for other historical moments took a whole century. And, as in any transitional phase, we are experiencing tremendously confusing, volatile times with profound changes that are happening extremely quickly."

10. Communism is Soviet Power Plus Electronifi- cation

By Kiranjitshing J. Ferre Dogra

10.1 Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore further the eminently practical and political role which Lenin grants to science, and its technological products, with the aim of offering a new proposal, updated to our times, immersed in the information age, via the *electronification* neologism. I.e. said approach plans on going a step further than Lenin’s proposed electrification, as it aims at expanding his contribution by including the electronic field, and, consequently, that of computing (and all of its by-products), of present importance. Following Lebowitz’s characterisation of Soviet society (2012, 21-27), the current analysis is applied to both sociopolitical orders, namely, on the one hand, to the general level, where the aim is to put forth institutional/structural innovations for statal use (top-down), and, on the other hand, to the concrete level, focused on that pertaining to the proletariat’s flourishing (bottom-up).

Additionally, said technical renovation would serve as a lenitive for the tension resulting from conflicts of interest, namely, amongst the orchestra’s director (the Communist vanguard party leading the workers’ state) and the led (the proletarians), which Lebowitz denounces (*loc. cit.*). Therefore, Lenin’s conception of historical materialism would be modernised in a manner which, altering his quote titling this paper¹ (2012_a, 516), would formulate that Communism is Soviet Power plus electronification.

10.2 Statal Electronification

To start, we must set off from a situation where we have already achieved the implementation of Lenin’s electrical innovation (2012_a, 513-519), as it is the condition of possibility of the subsequent development here proposed, namely, that of conquering the domain of electronics. Amplifying said electrification consists in taking advantage of the scientific advances (belonging to the theoretical/epistemological), in a practical,

and, therefore, political manner, which supply the base on which to apply our suggested technological innovation. This is to be taken to its last consequences by the socialist state,² with the aim of maximising its emancipatory task, as is the case with the Leninist precedent (*loc. cit.*) regarding the novel electrical harnessing of the time: electrifying the territory, improving comrades’ material conditions, refusing its egotistical and capitalist administration.

Cornering electronics’ importance, we already immediately see how it transforms our lives, yet we deem essential a critical reflection of its necessary due socialisation³ (via an electronification process), similar to the aforementioned Leninist one (namely, of electrification). This is the case as we can only imagine how we could revert the dehumanising, lucrative, and private ends, exemplified, by a case amongst many others, with ‘the attention economy’ (Harris 2021), which underlies the majority of daily-used technological services. More specifically, said economy’s end, that of online services, is to obtain the precious, and evermore rare, resource of our attention/time. A ferocious competition ensues, which implicitly exploits our psychological weaknesses, in its turn forcing a mimetical attitude upon competing businesses, in a sort of arms race, exacerbating our already lacerated (digital) health, giving rise to technological progress guided by the mere private and indiscriminate economic gain of a minority.⁴

We need to question the first action most of us do daily upon waking up: surely the first thing we do to start the day off is checking our mobile phones, we are unaware of how naturalised it has become in our everyday routines. We must assess if it is really us who use/control said phone or if, conversely, it is it, or rather the companies behind it, which use/control us.⁵ The common understanding we have regarding what happens when accepting terms and conditions, when using said services, is that they are merely using us in order to extract all kinds of data

(of a more or less sensible nature). However, the creation of a highly-accurate profile, a sort of digital self, resulting from the algorithmic training, due to consenting to supply said data, becomes worrying; it is further exacerbated by the fact that it will be acquired by the highest bidder, and used to generate a greater marketing impact, and subsequent economic gain, by targeting the aforementioned users/profiles with advertisements (of products and services) or worse, with an intent to propagate ideology.

In short, thanks to a strong ideological apparatus, we are convinced that said applications have as an end interconnectivity, fostering our social relationships, yet, if we delve deeper in the working of their algorithms and their companies, these seem to have in mind enriching themselves with the contrary: a *divide et impera* social fragmentation. Therefore, we defend that other parameters (aside from economic gain through consented tailored manipulation) should be proposed with which to measure the impact of these services, whose objectives should align with those of their users, not against them. Thus, we argue for state control over said tools, of great potency, to revalue them as non-capitalist means, and not ends⁶ which exploit users, amidst an asymmetrical relation, privatively and privately, within an alienating economy/monetisation of attention, of dangerous global scope, driven self-interestedly and ideologically.

Returning to state policy, we consider that there is an alarming disregard of the grand technological power reached henceforth, and, moreover, it used precisely to further oppress, both at a software level (as seen above with Harris 2021), and at hardware one. Relating to the latter, we deem it necessary to put forth the problematic production process of our whole globalised technological apparatus, which includes the morally objectionable use of rare materials (European Commission 2011). It leads to both ecological problems, in terms of harming the natural environment, exemplified by the

entire extraction process, and to sociopolitical ones, directly affecting both workers and inhabitants. Consequently, we find it vital to replace said dubious processes in favour of other approaches which need not ab/use human⁷ or natural⁸ resources.

It is worth mentioning that, regardless of the existence of a human factor constantly threatening the revolutionary project, which is mitigated as best as we can, by installing anticorruption mechanisms, we should not desist studying which are the most pioneering and adequate tools for humanity’s decent progress. Thus, the need of a Statal Comite of Electronification, to critically supervise said progress, aligned with emancipatory Communist values, plausibly contemplating the combination of those originated from the orthodox legacy and those from (contemporary) humanists, such as Harris, to revert the inherited capitalist harm.

Next, we will exemplify how various fields would benefit from the resulting statal control, thanks to electronification, consisting in expropriating the present technological potential, which is concentrated in the hands of the few, as shown by the case of Silicon Valley and its respective North American governmental departments.⁹

Firstly, we will analyse a central concern to all statal infrastructure: following Lebowitz’s exposition (2012, 115-120), we argue for attempting to solve the problems arising from a centrally planned economy. I.e. electronic statal innovation was already considered under Khrushchev, yet minimised from Brezhnev and Kosygin onwards (Lebowitz, *loc. cit.*), which provoked a negative feedback loop and distrust between the state’s unattainable goals and proletarians, due to the ridiculous demands imposed upon them (top-down); undermining confidence in the Communist system (which is analytically bottom-up).

Thus, electornfication could allow settling the aforementioned deficiencies of a centralised

¹ ‘Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country’ (italicised in the original). / ² See Lenin (2020, 16-22, 83-100) for a detailed exposition of the transitional process from capitalism to Communism. / ³ See Korsch (1975) for a deeper study of the relation and difference between nationalisation and socialisation. / ⁴ NB it is not simply a case of new means of social communication as, compared with yesteryear’s, today’s compete in the attention economy, in an algorithmically aided fashion: exacerbating and fostering all kinds of populism, fake news, and polarization, appealing to sensationalism, based on our basic primal/‘fast’ cognitive system (Kahneman 2011, 20), exploiting it and benefiting from it, losing the more demanding reflexive class perspective analysis. / ⁵ Cf. Marcuse (2007) for an analysis of Communism and technology as a tool of dominance and alienation (without necessarily uptaking his political stance).

⁶ I.e. maximising our screen time (quantitative) rather than its use for connecting with others (qualitative). / ⁷ NB the inscription found on the back of many Apple products, which stated ‘Designed by Apple in California. Assembled in China’, reveals how many production processes are outsourced, as with their respective externalities, to other countries (frequently poorer ones), with the capitalist excuse of undergoing a voluntary charitable and benevolent act in aiding their development by offering precarious jobs. Yet, unsurprisingly, said outsourced country’s underdeveloped conditions are precisely due to the capitalist and colonial order! / ⁸ As forewarned by Marx (1982, 638): ‘Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth - the soil and the worker’. / ⁹ NB the importance of achieving technological independence (infrastructural) (Ramahandry et al. 2021) to avoid geopolitical coercion (superstructural) has become evermore salient.

planned economy via incorporating cybernetics, by disposing of greater control over the necessary gathering of relevant data (as opposed to that indiscriminate, ruthless, and privately lucrative one), aiding to identify which plans correspond with administrative/logistically realistically feasible predictions, all backed by indicators resulting from an analysis reliant on artificial intelligence (AI). Additionally, the data centres, which store said data, should also be under self-government, not only to avoid external coercion, but because it also allows for local responsibility, as they are under our jurisdiction; which opposes leaving current businesses with foreign headquarters uncharged, although they operate within our dominion.

Moreover, another relevant issue is the agricultural one. Nowadays, our food shortage problems are due to distributive rather than productive difficulties, as shown by the current logistical attitude of the European Union (EU), which negatively impacts (both socially and environmentally) the countries whose raw materials it imports (Ruiz 2022, 6-9). Nevertheless, as stated previously, it would be possible, with the right political change, to solve this by following results of logistical/economical calculations based on other patterns of consumption, ensuing distribution aligned with self-sufficiency, against capitalist exploitation.

Furthermore, concerning additional environmental issues, we argue for the use of technological innovation leading to red green energy: a socialisation of means of producing energy contrary to the dirty energy producing conglomerates' *modi operandi*, consisting in reaping colossal private economic benefit from charging exorbitant prices. I.e. the solution to the energy issue is not only one which takes for granted that it is a basic right, fulfilment of (fundamental) material conditions, of universal access, but one that, to achieve said purpose, must necessarily make use of technological advancements to regulate both production and distribution.¹⁰ What is more, this will be possible

by financing leading research in renewable energy sources, such as the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), whose still preliminary nuclear fusion model is actually based on the Soviet TOKAMÁK.¹¹

Finally, we give an overview of medical advantages¹² specifically to those relative to organ scarcity for transplants as illustrated by Anselmo *et al.* (2023), incorporated in the workers' state to streamline and distribute more equitably said medical process, covering one (namely, health) need out of many. This is exemplified by the use of blockchain technology (a type of distribution ledger technology (DLT)¹³, a decentralised database), AI algorithms, and electronic medical records (EMR), which benefit at least two different levels: firstly, on the patient's concrete one, regarding both organ donation and assignment, and, secondly, on the state's one, due to blockchain's immutability, additional cybersecurity techniques (e.g. hashing), and anticorruption mechanisms (Anselmo *et al. op. cit.*), institutional¹⁴ trust is strengthened.

10.3 Proletarian Electronification

This section briefly mentions benefits derived from the important and necessary state's electronification, previously described, yet not from an administrative or general point of view, but from a proletarian, specific, and quotidian one.

Regarding the individual scope, we argue that the fruits of technological innovation (from computing, telecommunications, etc.) must be considered as a right as, on an instructional level, it broadens the possibility of constantly forming revolutionary subjects.¹⁵ Said process would not be biased or oppressed by the current exploitative and commercial framework, solely based on immediate insertion into the (capitalist) labour market. This is achieved thanks to having immediate unrestricted access to vast sources (of information) which gather

our cumulative human knowledge, on top of an almost immediate communicative ability, both unprecedented facts which are decisive for our present and future.

I.e. precedent human wisdom derived from our cultural legacy is vital for our collective progress, resulting from its free disposition, levelling the playing field. Therefore, education, far from market-driven, should be understood as an accessible and continuous process,¹⁶ which requires updating both the current equipment¹⁷ indispensable nowadays,¹⁸ and the appropriate public institutions.¹⁹

Moreover, said public instruction can be pre-recorded and remote,²⁰ further aiding organising our lives, rejecting the capitalist divide of manual and intellectual (exploitative) labour. Currently, this is shown with *freely*²¹ available recordings (on YouTube) of whole subjects imparted by prestigious Ivy League teachers.

Nevertheless, we also consider the problem of adult digital alphabetisation:²² if dismissed, we could generate isolation and social alienation by lacking the possibility of completing (statal/bureaucratic, financial, etc.) processes/paperwork or participating in an evermore digitalised society (concerning health, education, work, politics, etc.). Hence, to guarantee a successful electrification process, we propose following an updated version of the following Leninist quote: 'It should, however, be

realised and remembered that we cannot carry out electrification with the illiterates²³ we have' (2012_a, 518).

Respecting Lebowitz's criticism (2021, 21-27) of the imposition of the Soviet vanguard party's top-down rule, with our electronification proposal, proletarian engagement is returned to its maximum splendour. I.e. against solely top-down direction, we have seen examples of strengthening individual's autonomy, which necessarily contemplates their political organisation, where bottom-up actions arise. Thus, we bring forth Luxemburg's consideration that the proletariat dictatorship is that of class and not of the party (1961); i.e. her thoughts allow us to critically reconcile both of Lebowitz's directions, top-down and bottom-up (*loc. cit.*), via establishing a proletariat dictatorship constantly engaged with the Communist vanguard party, in control of the sociopolitical process.

Therefore, we propose reactivating and updating proletarian political action via electronification, quoting Lenin: 'Henceforth the rostrum at All-Russia Congresses will be mounted, not only by politicians and administrators but also by engineers and agronomists. This marks the beginning of that very happy time when politics will recede into the background, when politics will be discussed less often and at shorter length, and engineers and agronomists will do most of the talking' (2012_a, 513-514).

¹⁰ NB further study, and corresponding state intervention/correction (with electronification), is needed on the subject of the digital divide and energy poverty, especially as power requirements will not cease to grow in an evermore electronic world (Rozite et al. 2023). / ¹¹ Transliterated as 'tokamak'. / ¹² See Topol (2019) for an exhaustive compendium of medical benefits derived from implementing AI. / ¹³ DLT technology, thanks to its security and scalability, could boost transplants' programs and the reduce [sic.] black market, allowing a real integration between different national health systems with real-time auditability, thanks to its distributed, efficient, secure, trackable, and immutable nature' (Anselmo et al. op. cit., 9). / ¹⁴ NB to be understood in an ultimately supranational manner, refusing to embrace nationalist/capitalist logic/ideology, aided by the use of standardisation in interdepartmental communication. / ¹⁵ See Fisher (2021) for contemporary reflections on updating our educational institutions.

¹⁶ We follow the Leninist ideal: 'In order in renovate our state apparatus we must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter, or a fashionable catch-phrase (and we should admit in all frankness that this happens very often with us), that learning shall really become part of our very being, that it shall actually and fully become a constituent element of our social life' (2012b, 488-489). / ¹⁷ Exemplified in Catalonia with the Educat 1x1 policy (Jáimez 2011). Also, See De Luca (2024) for a European proposal of implementing fibre optics and 5G technology. / ¹⁸ See Castells (1996, 1997a, 1997b). / ¹⁹ Exemplified by eFilm, a free streaming service offered to Spanish library users. / ²⁰ As shown by the COVID-19 pandemic. / ²¹ NB the hidden cost is selling our data, as criticised by Harris (2021) (aforementioned). / ²² NB younger citizens are presumed knowledgeable enough to benefit from the previous solutions; if it is not the case, then they shall also suffer what ensues. ²³ NB the digital/electronified kind (in our case).

10.4 Conclusions

We have seen that electronification is a socialisation process of our societies' cybernetic elements, which is essential to go beyond capitalist ideology, only showing that, at best, positive social goals are achieved with the correct financing, yet it is insufficient as the technology in which to invest to attain said goals is chosen privately (for profit); we deem it imperative to redirect our scientific/technological triumphs for public benefit. Thus, we are contrary to the ideology which normalises scientific progress, leading to historicism. I.e. following our Marxist-Leninist legacy, we state that knowledge is political, contrary to the ideological bias of believing in technology's axiological neutrality,²⁴ as also foreseen by Afanasyev: 'However, scientific and technical progress is a social phenomenon which is inconceivable without the conscious activity of men and social institutions. [...] The direction in which science and technology develop and the ends for which the advance of scientific and technical progress are used depend on the society's character, on the economic relations and on the whole system of social relations' (Academy of Sciences of the USSR (*Academia de Ciencias de la U.R.S.S.*) 1974, 126-127).²⁵

Continuing, we have noted Lebowitz's distinction of two social orders, the statal, led by the Communist vanguard party, and the individual, pertaining to each proletarian (2012, 21-27), to explore some of the first consequences of implementing electronification. Though,

against his criticism of the orchestra's director monopoly (*loc. cit.*), we fail to see it as an inherent political problem of the Communist vanguard party, rather, it concerns one of its possible historical instances. Consequently, we must not forget that said revolutionary party must be built bottom-up, with its respective participation mechanisms as warrants against exclusive abusive top-down policies, engaging in a dialectical relationship. The aim is to obtain a positive feedback loop in said relationship, a virtuous circle between party and proletarian, resulting of the electronification process, displayed *mutandis mutatis* by Lenin: 'Thus every comrade who goes to the provinces will have a definite scheme of electrification for his district, a scheme for transition from darkness and ignorance to a normal life. [...] We must see to it that every factory and every electric power station becomes a centre of enlightenment' (2012_a, 528).

To conclude, we mention a biochemical application of electronic innovation: Foldit is a non-profit video game²⁶ with which, in addition to being entertained, we contribute to pioneering scientific research of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, and Alzheimer's. This illustrates how, via technological advancement, it is possible to create a video game without an economic end, tarnished by capitalism, but a humane one; originated from our inevitable dialectical interaction with technology as both players and research assistants, converse to the fears of automatisisation redundancy,²⁷ by restoring the ends from a Leninist perspective.

²⁴ See Arbonés et al. (2024, 3). / ²⁵ NB the translation is my own. / ²⁶ See Moscrop (2024) for the profitable industry's value. / ²⁷ See Graeber (2018), whose dedication gives away its content: 'To anyone who would rather be doing something useful with themselves' (italicised in the original).

"The direction in which science and technology develop and the ends for which the advance of scientific and technical progress are used depend on the society's character, on the economic relations and on the whole system of social relations' (Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Academia de Ciencias de la U.R.S.S.) 1974, 126-127)"

11. Language in Lenin's Works: *The Case of Catalan*

By Estel Alegret Vigas



11.1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to group all we know about Lenin's propositions around the question of language as, since it is a minor theme in Lenin's writing, it has not been too greatly discussed. That aside, the topic is adamantly relevant for Catalonia as, for centuries, it has experienced a language struggle which is perfectly depicted by Lenin's theory. In this sense, it is a topic which is constantly at the centre of Spain's political agenda, whether it is a right for Catalan speakers to be able to live fully in their native language. In order to tie these two strings together, I will define some of the terms Lenin uses to talk about the question of language. Afterwards, my focus will be on briefly analysing his theory around language. Moreover, an important part will also be to counteract the ideas that his contemporary liberals held around language, since Lenin thought explicitly against them. Not only that, but it will also be decisively relevant to understand Catalonia's struggle with its language as a minority spoken language. Throughout the paper, Lenin's theory will be tied to the case of Catalan as a minority language.

11.2 Key Concepts

As mentioned, I will start by defining some of the terms that lay around the topic of language in Lenin's doctrine. Those terms are: nationality and nation, democracy, and economic exchange.

11.2.1 Nation and Nationality

To begin with nation and nationality, in the seventh volume of the Collected Works, when Lenin is attempting to discern whether the Jewish was a nation, Lenin cites Karl Kautsky in agreement and declares that a nation must possess a territory and a common language:

And quite recently, examining the problem of nationalities in Austria, the same writer [Kautsky] endeavoured to give a scientific definition of the concept nationality and established two principal criteria of a nationality: language and territory [...] Absolutely untenable scientifically, the idea that the Jews form a separate nation is reactionary politically. Irrefutable practical proof of that is furnished by generally known facts of recent history and of present-day political realities. (Lenin 1977, 99-100)

As such, according to Lenin, the Jewish were not a nation because, for a person to have a certain nationality, they must be part of a group of people who share both a *territory* and a *language*. Moreover, these supposed nations exist inside of a State, which we will define as 'a political body as organised for civil rule and government'.

This relation brings us to two additional concepts: the national minority and the national majority. As their names quite clearly state, a national majority is a group of people who make up most of the population of a given State, so a national minority is a group of people who make up a lesser fraction of the population of that same State. As such, a national majority and minority cohabitate in one State.

An example, frequently used by Lenin, would be that of Switzerland. Switzerland is a State comprised of three main nationalities: the German, the French, and the Italian. German speakers are the national majority, since 63% of Swiss people speak German. Contrarily, French and Italian speakers are the national minority as, together, they make up about 30% of Switzerland's population.

This is easily related to Spain's reality: Spain, as per the definition that Lenin gives, would be a State comprised of various nations. This is so because there are groups of people which all speak the same language, different from Spanish, and share a territory amongst themselves. Despite there being more than one, the focus will be on the Catalan nation. The Catalan people share a *territory* and a *language*, making it fit into the definition of 'nation'. Furthering Lenin's analysis, it is clear that the Spanish is the national majority, as 96% of Spain's inhabitants are able to speak Spanish. On the other hand, the Catalan and the rest of them would all be national minorities.

Knowing this, it is just to say that Spain is a State which possesses a national majority: Spaniards; while it is also inhabited by other existing nationalities, although all of them are to be considered minorities in the context of the State of Spain.

11.2.2 Democracy

Moving on to the following concept to define: democracy. Democracy plays an important role in Lenin's system of ideas around language. The

democracy that Lenin talks about is one that is upheld by the working class, and one which does not afford any privileges to any nation or language. In such a democracy, oppression and injustice towards a national minority do not ever take place (Lenin 1977, 91-92). As such, Lenin's use of the term 'democracy' implies 'equality':

Social-Democrats, in upholding a consistently democratic state system, demand unconditional equality for all nationalities and struggle against absolutely all privileges for one or several nationalities. (245)

This is a relevant point, considering all the ideas that we will talk about are incomprehensible if we do not understand that a proletarian democracy is a sine qua non condition for Lenin's propositions about language and nations. It is also important to note that Lenin does not consider democracy an end goal, but it does seem to be a necessary method to get to national liberation.

It is quite relevant to make a stop here, as Spain does not enjoy a fully proletarian democracy. I state this firmly, as it is common knowledge that Spain's democracy is representative, which does not fit into the idea of being 'upheld by the working class'. This concept implies that the political structure would be a dynamic, class-based system of governance. It is obvious that Spain is not run by the proletariat, therefore the ideas that Lenin exposes here are hardly applicable to Spain's political situation. Spain also has a functioning monarchy, which further distances it from Lenin's idea of an egalitarian State. As for Lenin's definition, Spain's political structure does not make way for an oppression and injustice-free society. Moreover, there can be no equality in such a State. The consequences that this has had for Catalonia's case will be further explored throughout the paper.

11.2.2 Economic Exchange

The next concept to be construed is 'economic exchange' for its nuclear role in the relation between coexisting languages. Economic exchange refers to the commercial relations that a given State holds with another. These exchanges, in Lenin's thinking, are what will determine the dominant language, the language most important to be learnt in that state: 'The requirements of economic exchange will

themselves decide which language of the given country it is to the advantage of the majority to know in the interests of commercial relations' (Lenin 1977, 355).

This is a bit more complicated to analyse in the context of Spain, as it involves global economies, which kind of escapes the topic of this paper, but it certainly cannot be ignored. In any case, it is important to note that the reason why Spanish is a dominant language is much broader than just its function in the market. Nonetheless, it is a relevant language for the global market. Spanish is currently the second most spoken language in the world, and that is caused by its relevance in the global market: people feel it is useful to speak it to have further and better opportunities, therefore it is undeniable that it is a much more important language to know than Catalan, at least in terms of the global market. In this sense, it is not controversial to state that the market has determined Spanish to be the dominant language in the State of Spain.

11.3 Language in Lenin's works and the case of Catalan

To begin with the analysis of Lenin's propositions around language, it is very important to note that Lenin believed that language is an integral part of a nation's identity and existence, as I pointed to when defining the idea of nation. Lenin does find, though, that in his endeavour to unite all workers, *language is more of a dividing factor than a unifying one*. Noticeably, this means that Lenin had to find a way to favour the existence of various languages while ensuring that this would not prove divisive among workers. This is the reason why language is a talking point for Lenin.

So, as was introduced in the definitions, we now know that economic exchange is *the* deciding factor for a language's future. What is fundamentally being said here, is that no law would be able to force the learning of a language for the population more decisively than the market of a democratic state. This points to the idea that capitalism demands national uniformity: as such, language and territory ought to be homogeneous. If this is so, the development of the local market will be optimal (Lenin 1977, LCW20, 48). This is mainly due to the fact that language is the main way in which humans interact with each other. As such, language is the main vessel for economic exchange: sellers and buyers need to communicate, and that

extrapolates to all commercial intercourse (Lenin 1977, LCW20, 396-397). Furthermore, Lenin believed that citizens of any given democratic State regulated by its market would voluntarily adopt the majority language because it would be deemed more advantageous, *in relation to* said market. (Lenin 1977, LCW19, 355)

There is another significant idea here: the fact that the adoption will be *voluntary*. Lenin thought that an action which is taken freely is all the more powerful and firm (Lenin 1977, LCW19, 355). Consequently, the market of a proletarian democracy is the single most robust way of consolidating the imminence of a language.

As is obvious, this presents some problems to be dealt with, because all these ideas sound very liberal. Not only that, but I imagine that most of the readers could be thinking ‘*and what about the national minorities we were discussing before? Will they just disappear if they are not seen as necessary by commercial relations?*’. Those would be very valid questions. The short answer is no: the minority languages will not disappear. But this non-disappearance will have nothing to do with the market itself. In order to keep these languages alive, legal action must be taken by these proletarian democracies we were considering. So,

when proposing that the market should naturally choose the language learnt by most, one of the ways in which Social-Democrats aim to protect national minorities is the passing of laws that:

[...] declare inoperative any measure by means of which the national majority might attempt to establish privileges for itself or restrict the rights of a national minority (in the sphere of education, in the use of any specific language, in budget affairs, etc.), and forbid the implementation of any such measure by making it a punishable offence. (Lenin 1977, 246)

To encapsulate all this, I will say that the national majority of a democratic State will be chosen and solidified by the market’s requirements. Additionally, to keep cultures rich and national minorities alive, there must be laws aimed to protect any and all national minorities. This is because warranting the protection and progress of national minorities is an essential factor for complete equality, as stated by Lenin: ‘Guaranteeing the rights of a national minority is inseparably linked up with the principle of complete equality.’ (Lenin 1977, 42) With all of this information to stomach, this is a point in which the Catalan nation must

be brought up again. As was already stated, Spanish is a more valuable language to learn than Catalan, as has been historically decided by the market. But this does not kick Catalan out of the conversation, at all. Contrarily, as has been explored in previous lines, Lenin would unquestionably defend the right of Catalan people to speak their language. Not only that, but Lenin would position himself for the passing of laws that would protect Catalan against any sort of attacks against its existence. Moreover, were Spain to stop its offences against the Catalan language, the less problematic the coexistence of the two languages would be. This is so because, as Lenin states repeatedly, an action which is taken by force is much fainter than a voluntary action. As such, if Catalan people *just* had the liberty of choosing how they want to express themselves, the dispute between Catalan and Spanish would most probably disappear.

Aside from this, we now know that the use of different languages within workers is a dividing factor, and this decidedly poses a problem for the defence of the Catalan right to speak their differentiated language. Despite this, Lenin’s doctrine would still be useful to defend its existence: as *identity* is a very highly regarded value for Lenin. And language, as was exposed, is a crucial part of a nation’s identity, which is the main reason why Lenin believed that there should be laws to protect them. It could be *that* simple.

All of that aside, let’s continue considering Lenin’s doctrine. This next point will be relevant in order to understand the difference between Lenin and his liberal counterparts. Lenin was against there being an official ‘State’ language (Lenin 1977, LCW19, 245): and it is essential that we delve into this argument.

11.4 Relationship with Liberal Ideas

As I have just put forward, the main difference between Lenin and the liberal theorists of his time was their positions around the imposition of an official State language. To easily understand this discrepancy, I will use the fact that both Lenin and the liberals discussed by way of exemplifying their theories with Russia and Russian. For this reason, I will also use Russia and Russian to convey the arguments.

On the one hand, Lenin was of the opinion that the establishment of an official state language would accomplish nothing, but the rejection of

said language by the fraction of the population that didn’t hold it as their first language. To reiterate a previous point, Lenin is also of the belief that Russian – or any other language for that matter – gains importance and speakers when economic exchange deems it necessary. That being said, Lenin categorically disagrees with the idea that there should be *any* official language *anywhere*. (Lenin 1977, LCW19, 354-356) Liberals, on the other hand, believed that the Russian language was widely rejected because it had been forcedly implanted. Nonetheless, and Lenin points out that this is contradictory, liberals defended that there *should* be an official language in Russia – which ought to be Russian (Lenin 1977, LCW19, 355). As such, the liberal arguments for an official state language revolve around the idea that a state – in this case we are talking about Russia – must be indivisible and thoroughly united. To do that, liberals believed that an official state language is an utmost necessity (Lenin 1977, LCW20, 71). This is because liberals thought unity came through authority, and a language is as much of a relevant authority as any other State authority.

This ‘authority’ element is what Lenin argues against. Lenin agreed with the fact that Russian is a very culturally rich language, but Lenin was adamantly against the idea that population should be coerced to learn a language, or that they should be coerced to do *anything*, for that matter:

We, of course, are in favour of every inhabitant of Russia having the opportunity to learn the great Russian language. What we do not want is the element of coercion. We do not want to have people driven into paradise with a cudgel; for no matter how many fine phrases about ‘culture’ you may utter, a compulsory official language involves coercion, the use of the cudgel. We do not think that the great and mighty Russian language needs anyone having to study it by sheer compulsion. (Lenin 1977, 72)

As was said in the beginning of this paper, Lenin believed that coercion to learn a language made the coerced strongly resent the group that coerced them (Lenin 1977, LCW20, 73). As such, making any language the official state language would be the most counterproductive measure, if the objective is to truly expand the reach of said language.

11.5 Conclusions

After all, Lenin's ideas around the coexistence of different languages were heavily influenced by the problematic relationship between (1) his objective to unite *all workers everywhere*, (2) the fact that their different cultures divided them, and (3) the added complication that cultures, Lenin thought, must be protected, as they are a decisive part of a nation's identity.

Attempting to balance all these factors, Lenin reached the following conclusions. Firstly, that the manner in which the majority language is determined are the commercial relations that a given state upholds. Secondly, that the minority languages must, under all circumstance, be protected constitutionally. Lastly, as an added point, an official state language should never be approved, as it would prove to be the greatest antagonising factor for the working class.

This all quite obviously marries with all the ideas that have been put forward about the Catalan case. It is a fair analysis to state that Catalan people reject Spanish because of the imposition that it represents, and not because of the language itself. As has been shown by Lenin's arguments, anyone would prefer to speak the more dominant language, as it brings opportunity, and is just a smart choice overall. Nonetheless, no one would

choose to lose such an enormous part of their identity when learning a new language. And that is the centre of this discussion: language is not troubling *or* controversial, the political decisions around it are. When a state uses all of its power to diminish and extinguish a language, its speakers will not only reject the new language but defend their own even more robustly. Not only this, but a State's attempt to eliminate one of the nations that exist within its borders is *more* of a dividing factor for the working class, than language could ever be. Not only that, but the position of Spanish as the official state language, makes it all the more strenuous for it to be learnt and passed on voluntarily by Catalan speakers. So, ironically, it is a counterproductive measure, as Lenin's doctrine allows us to state. All of this in mind, the conclusion for this struggle is obvious: if the State of Spain aims to have a harmonious relationship with its nations, and grant themselves the privilege to be the unproblematic 'main' language of Spain, then Spanish must cease to be the official language of Spain, in addition to allowing all of the liberties necessary for Catalan, and all of the other minority languages for that matter, to prosper as they will. And to answer the question that was posed at the start: it evidently follows, with all that has been put forward here, that it *is* the right of Catalan speakers to persist in shielding their use of Catalan.

"Language is not troubling or controversial, the political decisions around it are. When a state uses all of its power to diminish and extinguish a language, its speakers will not only reject the new language but defend their own even more robustly. Not only this, but a State's attempt to eliminate one of the nations that exist within its borders is more of a dividing factor for the working class, than language could ever be"

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