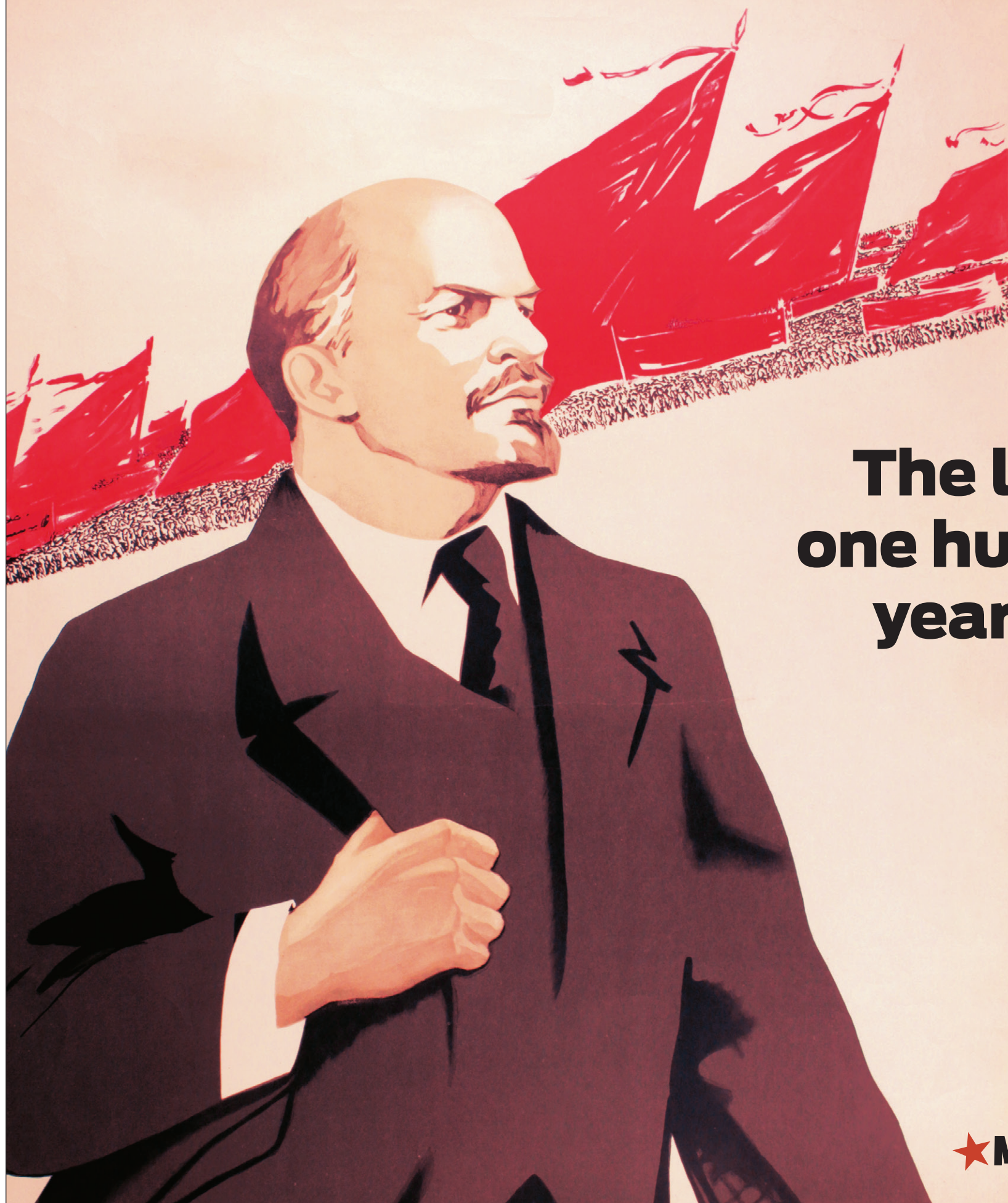
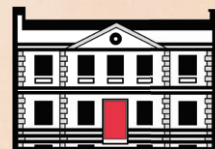


Lenin 100



**The legacy
one hundred
years on...**



Marx Memorial Library

 **Morning Star**
For Peace and Socialism

Lenin 100

Lenin's legacy lives on today

The analysis of monopoly and imperialism that Lenin developed is even more relevant now than when first written argues, writes **JOHNNIE HUNTER**

COMRADE LENIN famously noted that “There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”

Communists and indeed all those dedicated to bringing about a new world have inevitably thought, at one time or another, on what Lenin might think or say about the 100 years that have passed since his death.

So much has changed. So much has transpired for humanity and for the global communist movement which Lenin played such a decisive role in creating.

The centenary of Comrade Lenin's passing inevitably and quite rightly leads us to evaluate his life, his achievements and his legacy today.

Lenin's indisputable individual brilliance, his foundational contribution to our ideology and his iconic status in our propaganda can easily lead us to forget that Lenin was a man who lived, worked and struggled.

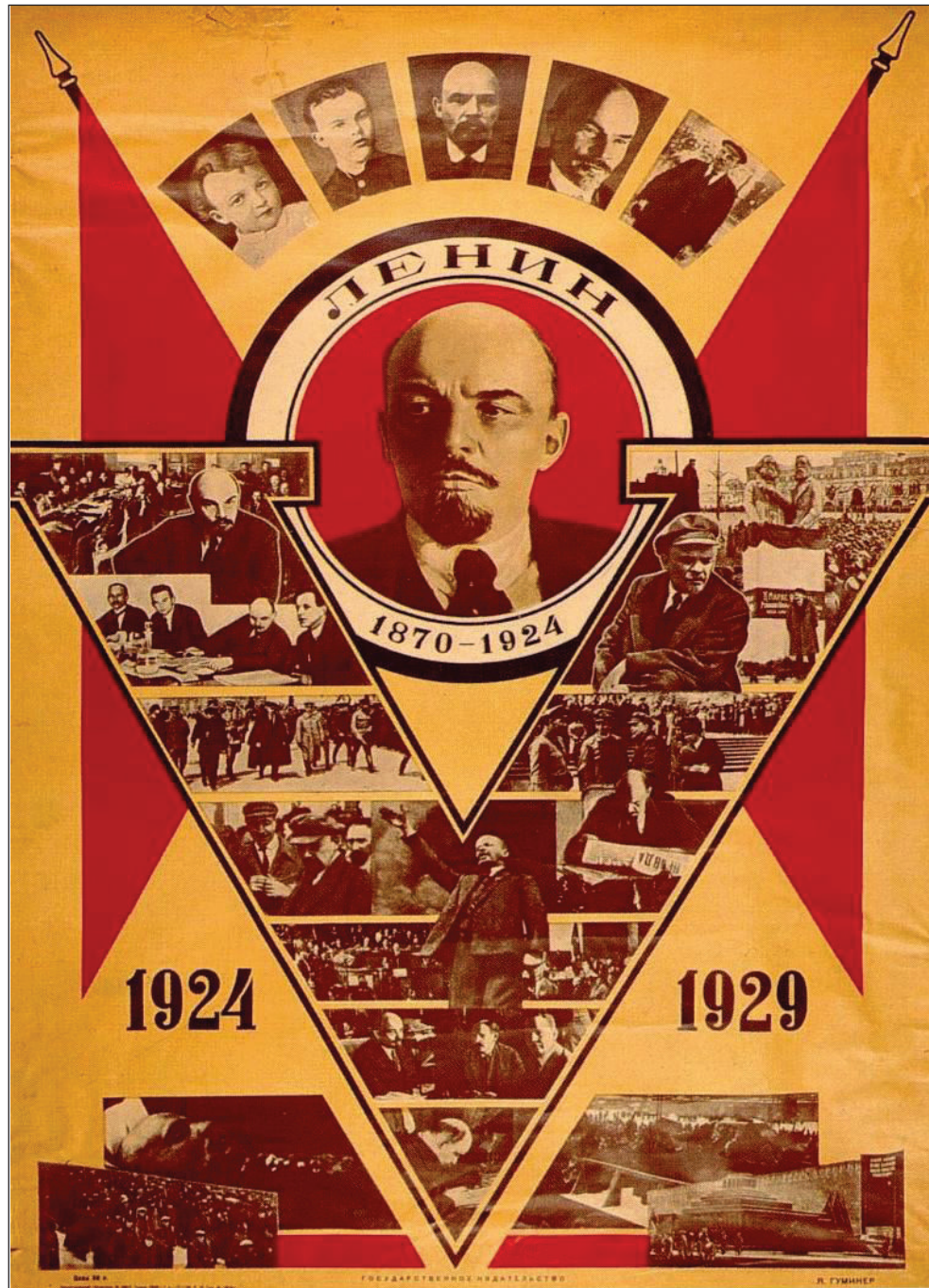
Lenin was a key figure in the growing labour and socialist movement in Russia. It was during this period, through tireless work and study, building on the ideas of Marx and Engels, that Lenin developed and refined fundamental concepts of the communist movement – imperialism, state monopoly capitalism and the need for a vanguard party of the working class.

But Lenin was not an academic or a theoretician who opined from the comfort and safety of an armchair.

Lenin's ideas were tested in practice and in the fire of struggle. For all of the experience and understanding gained, he paid a dear price – hunted by the tsarist authorities and forced into exile, including here in Britain, where he worked at what is today the Marx Memorial Library.

Lenin would of course go on to lead the Great October Socialist Revolution – one of the single most important events in human history, an event which smashed centuries of tsarist autocracy, birthed the world's first socialist state and opened a new era, the era of international proletarian revolution.

The Soviet state which Lenin helped to found would go on to make stunning achievements in human development, in science and the arts, women's liberation, minority rights, the defeat of fascism and in the ide-



ological and material support for decolonisation.

But in 2024 the Soviet Union is gone and has been for decades. Capitalism has proven itself to be more adaptable than was anticipated a century ago.

What does this mean for Lenin's legacy? If Lenin were alive today he would not lament or slump in defeat over the fate of the Soviet Union.

Nor would he content himself with navel-gazing, harking back to a halcyon time or endlessly rehashing battles past.

Lenin would not expect this of the movement he inspired.

Lenin would again ask

himself and the movement – “What is to be done?” and then set about doing it with a singular determination and an invincible will to win.

The analysis of monopoly and imperialism that Lenin developed is even more relevant today than when first written. Lenin's concept of a vanguard communist party has proven itself to be a powerful and, so far, the only model of leading the struggle to take and hold working-class state power and begin the advance on the path to socialism.

The destruction of the USSR by imperialism does not vitiate Soviet socialism's count-

less achievements. The lessons gained by that first experiment are carried forward and applied in the many socialist states and the communist parties which continue to advance today.

Lenin's legacy did not die with the Soviet Union. It lives on today in the world historic movement that he forged.

For all those determined to change the world and create a society free from exploitation and oppression, Lenin's ideas and guide to action have only been vindicated and become more fundamental in the century that has passed.

Lenin lives – live like Lenin.

LENIN is commonly perceived solely as a revolutionary activist who applied Marxist theory to the practice of revolution – a successful one! However this is not the whole story. Lenin was an important theoretician who developed Marxist theory in three important and linked areas.

First, Lenin's theoretical construction of the October Revolution itself. The two revolutions in 1917 were planned and executed through the combination of theory and practice. As George Lukacs put it, the October Revolution was the point at which “theory bursts into praxis.” This was not a spontaneous “uprising,” it was carefully planned in accordance with Marxist theory applied concretely to Russian reality.

Second, Lenin's theory of imperialism. Lenin himself gave the briefest possible definition of imperialism as the monopoly stage of capitalism. “Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.”

This analysis had important repercussions within European labour movements. It helped to explain the left/right split in the movement prior to 1914 – a split which was solidified into open rupture as a result of World War I. In Russia opposition to WWI was particularly important in building the worker-peasant alliance, since the peasantry formed the bulk of the hapless conscripted Russian army.

As the debates within the Second International showed, those who rejected or failed to understand Lenin's analysis of imperialism supported the war and all that led up to it. As a result right-wing labourites failed to support the Bolshevik Revolution. The split

within social democracy was complete when the Third International was formed in 1919. The Russian Revolution effectively defined the division as that between communists and social democrats.

Third, Lenin's analysis of the agrarian question and the role of the peasantry. The Bolshevik revolution itself could not have succeeded without this analysis which in itself amounted to a major theoretical contribution to Marxism. The concrete application of this analysis was a key factor explaining the October Revolution.

Until 1917 Marxists had always understood that a socialist revolution was expected to occur in the most advanced capitalist country because industrialisation had resulted in the massive expansion of the working class – the class which would play the leading role in the fight for socialism. But in Russia the working class was the minority class, 80 per cent of the population were peasants. Arising from this commonly accepted Marxist view, Russian exceptionalism is usually explained by asserting that the Bolshevik Revolution happened because Russia was “the weakest link in the imperialist chain.” However this explanation, while true, is inadequate, largely because it fails to understand both the “peasant question” and correspondingly the importance of the Bolshevik Party.

These two points are linked because the forging of a worker-peasant alliance by the Bolsheviks was not only central to the success of the revolution, but it also signified an important new advance within historical materialism. To quote the Indian Marxist Prabhat Patnaik, it marked “a new theoretical departure within Marxism” and therefore the October Revolution was and is inspirational for the revolutionary struggles in the countries of the colonised and neocolonial world. It was an original development of Marxist theory because hitherto the peasantry had been written off as a reactionary force, often using the example





FROM DUAL POWER TO REVOLUTION: Lenin and Bolshevik leaders in Red Square, 1918, and (below left) the February Revolution in Russia begins in 1917 with a Bolshevik demonstration in the streets of St Petersburg

of the French peasantry; citing as evidence their negative role in the 1848 revolution and the 1871 Paris Commune.

Lenin analysed the Russian peasantry in a different way. The emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861 meant that the peasantry was a comparatively new and very numerous social force. Lenin studied this in two important books – *The Agrarian Question in Russia* (1908) and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899). In summary, he rejected the view of peasantry as single homogeneous group and instead distinguished within them three economic groups.

The richest peasants, the kulaks, accounted for around 12 per cent of the rural population. Next came the middle peasants at 7 per cent (a steadily diminishing group). Finally, the largest group, ever-increasing numerically, the poor peasants, accounting for 81 per cent of the rural population. They farmed very small plots which yielded insufficient to sustain them and, as a result, they were dependent on wage labour. In sharp contrast to the peasantry as a whole, the big landowners, 0.002 per cent of the rural population, owned 27 per cent of land.

Lenin also noted that capitalism was growing in the Russian countryside, and that capitalist relations in agriculture steadily

Marxism-Leninism and the Russian Revolution

Professor **MARY DAVIS** examines Lenin's contribution to Marxist theory and practice and how it relates to the great events of 1917

ily undermined the commune (the "mir"). This was evidenced by the Stolypin (Russian prime minister 1906-11) "reforms" to stem the tide of discontent following the 1905 revolution. However, the reforms backfired. The government attempt to destabilise the commune in order to promote agrarian capitalism increased peasant poverty, thereby stimulating greater disaffection. The effect of Stolypin's reforms cemented the symbiotic alliance of the big landowners and capitalists.

Lenin described this as the "Prussian path" in agriculture. By this he meant capital in alliance with landowners (Junker landowners and the industrial bourgeoisie in the Prussian case). This marginally benefited the kulaks and middle peas-

ants, but increased the woes of the largest group – the poor peasants. Instead of relieving the situation in the countryside this added a new dimension to peasant tensions. Poor peasants (the overwhelming majority) maintained a desire to see the redistribution of noble estates, regarding this as the only real solution to the problem of land hunger.

Hence Lenin's new revolutionary strategy was initiated – a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." This was not a mere slogan – it was based on a Marxist analysis of Russian political economy in which capitalist relations of production, in both heavy industry (with massive amounts of British and French

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Soviets of workers, soldiers and peasants sprung up throughout Russia in which Bolsheviks played the leading role

investment) and in agriculture, were now dominant.

Lenin's analysis was of critical importance because it recognised that the revolution in Russia would not follow a similar path to other European countries. Capitalism had arrived late in Russia and consequently the bourgeoisie had lost its potential to inspire a bourgeois insurgency as in Britain and France. The Russian bourgeoisie was dependent on maintaining a firm alliance with the land-owning ruling class, an alliance which withstood the first revolution of 1917, but was crushed by the Bolshevik Revolution eight months later.

When Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917 he published an important document, known as the April Theses. This

set out the Bolshevik policy to transform the current Russian bourgeois/landowner republic – the product of the February 1917 revolution – into a socialist state. In effect, it turned into the demands around which revolutionary workers, soldiers and peasants rallied.

It identified the February revolution as a transitional stage (termed "dual power") to a full socialist revolution, after which landed estates and banks would be confiscated and nationalised and production and distribution would be under the control of workers' soviets. Soviets (councils) of workers, soldiers and peasants sprung up throughout Russia in which Bolsheviks played the leading role. By October the "dual power" was defeated bloodlessly. The socialist revolution was triumphant.

As we mark the centenary of Lenin's death we can confidently state that the use of the term Marxism-Leninism, far from being a dogmatic formulation, is an accurate representation of Lenin's contribution to Marxist theory and practice. Its result was the creation of the first socialist state based on the active support of the majority of the population – workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks were, in word and deed, a revolutionary vanguard party guided by the most advanced theory – Marxism-Leninism.

■ Professor Mary Davis is secretary of the Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School.

 Lenin 100

What did Lenin have to say about socialism and war?

Writing as a new era of imperialist war was unfolding, Lenin grasped how military conflict is an essential part of the class struggle – a point that’s still relevant today, writes **LINDSEY GERMAN**

THE most famous slogan associated with Lenin is “Bread, peace and land” – the simple demands posed after Russia’s February revolution in 1917 overthrew the tsar but when the working class and peasantry still faced the privations of war. The October Revolution, led by the Bolsheviks, took Russia out of the first world war.

Opposition to war was not new to Lenin or to the socialists of Europe. His political activity developed as a new and terrifying era of wars was beginning: the Spanish American war which began in Cuba in 1898, the Boer war between Britain and the South African Boers in 1900, and the Russo Japanese war in 1904, where Russia’s defeat led directly to the 1905 revolution, the “dress rehearsal” for 1917.

These wars marked the beginning of a new era of imperialist war. The latter part of the 19th century had been characterised by expansion of capital throughout Europe and North America. In addition it was the era of a new colonialism – notably the “scramble for Africa” where a number of European powers grabbed the land and resources of the continent.

Capital was constantly in the search for new markets and this led to a growing hunt for them in the colonies and other countries beyond the existing centres of capitalism. Since capitalism is based on competition, then this competition increasingly moved beyond the domestic sphere to competition between countries and empires. This was accompanied by increases in arms spending and the development of new and sophisticated weaponry.

Socialists recognised that a much bigger imperialist war was coming closer as a result of the competition between different empires. In 1907 the Stuttgart conference of the Second International – the body organising the socialists internationally – opposed war. Its resolution argued that war was the outcome of capitalist competition in the world market, and that the working class should oppose it. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg wanted a general strike against war to stop it happening before it began but this was not included, reflecting differences within the movement which became much



IMPERIALIST MIGHT: The Russian tsar inspecting a piece of artillery based on the eastern front in 1916

more overt, despite repeated commitment to oppose war.

Lenin was horrified when, at the outbreak of the first world war, this stand collapsed within days of the different European empires declaring war on each other. Right up to that point, there were mass protests against war, including in London’s Trafalgar Square, but these were followed by rapid capitulation by nearly



ANTI-WAR: Rosa Luxemburg (above) and Lenin (below right) wanted a general strike against war to stop it

all the working-class parties – the main exception being the Russian. In Germany, with the largest socialist party in Europe, only Karl Liebknecht voted against war credits in the Reichstag. When the former “pope of Marxism,” the theoretician Karl Kautsky, supported the war, Lenin at first believed the newspaper article containing the news was a forgery.

The anti-war socialists were a tiny minority and their own views were often confused. Lenin developed some of his most important ideas at this time. He was not a pacifist but believed instead that the working class had to wage war on war. In 1915, during the depths of isolation, Lenin wrote a pamphlet called Socialism and War:

“Socialists have always condemned war between nations as barbarous and brutal. But

our attitude towards war is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within the country; we understand that war cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and socialism is created; and we also differ in that we fully regard civil wars, ie,

wars waged by the oppressed class against the oppressing class, slaves against slave-owners, serfs against land-owners, and wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as legitimate, progressive and necessary.”

This makes the fundamental point: war is part of the class struggle, just as much as strikes over economic conditions. Workers cannot fight their employers at home



Pic: Marx Memorial Library’s photo library

while falling in behind their own national ruling class in killing fellow workers from another country; in adopting their chauvinistic views that the enemy are all those of another nation, rather than seeing that the ruling classes of all countries are the enemies of all workers. Lenin studied the theoretician of war, Clausewitz, who famously said that “war is the continuation of politics by other means.” For Lenin, this meant all politics, not just those between the major powers, but the politics of class struggle itself.

He therefore talked about turning “the imperialist war into a civil war” – that the war must be fought on the domestic front and socialists should call for the defeat of their own ruling class. This was put most famously by the German socialist Karl Liebknecht when he said “the main enemy is at home.” In 1916 Lenin wrote his book Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism, where he theorised the process of colonisation, the search for markets and export of capital. In it he, as the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs pointed out, made a concrete analysis of a concrete situation. In other words, he linked imperialism with its political consequences and crucially “the theory of the concrete class forces which, unleashed by imperialism, are at work within it.”

The contradictions created by imperialist war were growing as its full horror was revealed: soldiers mutinied and opposed conscription, there were shortages of food and housing. Strikes broke out among key sectors of workers, for example in Britain and Germany in 1917. The Irish staged the first revolt against the British empire at Easter 1916.

Most dramatic was the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in February 1917. Lenin’s April Theses stressed the need for working-class revolution as the only means of ending the war and that this required class struggle at home – the civil war against Russia’s rulers and then throughout the belligerent countries.

Lenin understood that to achieve peace socialists and the working-class movement need to oppose all wars but ultimately also fight to overthrow the system which produces war.

■ Lindsey German is an anti war campaigner, socialist.

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Workers cannot fight their employers at home while falling in behind their own national ruling class in killing fellow workers from another country

Breaking up the state and ‘lopping off’ the parasites:

JONATHAN WHITE

examines the meaning and significance of Lenin’s vision of workers’ power

BETWEEN July and August 1917, at a critical juncture in Russia’s revolutionary process, as power hung between the provisional government and the emerging soviets, Lenin appeared to take time out of the struggle to develop the classic analysis that he published in *State and Revolution*. In the process he forged an analysis which is of enduring importance for Marxists and the working-class movement.

Lenin’s immediate concern was more practical: to continue his ideological battle against the revisionism that had led the eminent Marxists in the Second International to throw their weight behind imperialist slaughter in 1914 and to convince his comrades in the Bolshevik Party that the time had come to take state power and inaugurate the world’s first dictatorship of the proletariat.

With the February revolution and the implosion of tsarism, Lenin believed, the Russian working class faced a simple choice – forward movement

in the revolutionary process or a relapse into autocracy: the dual power situation could not hold. So the Bolsheviks and their growing majority within the key sections of the Russian working class had to be won to an understanding of the importance of the dictatorship of the proletariat because this was the precondition of any progress.

What exactly is the dictatorship of the proletariat and why is it so important to Lenin? First, it is the form of political rule of the working class in a revolutionary situation. When the ruling class is unable to rule in the old way and the working class and its allies are unwilling to be ruled in the old ways, it is possible for power to pass from one class to the other. At the point when power, and most importantly state power, passes into the hands of the working class, leaving it in a position to dictate the direction and pace of change in society, then the working class can and must begin the dictatorship of the proletariat and make possible the transition from the capitalist to the socialist mode of production.

Second, the dictatorship of the proletariat is a new political form. It can’t just be a government in the state apparatus, nor can it simply take over the state apparatus intact. It has to be “a state that is ceasing to be a state.” What does this mean? In *State and Revolution*, Lenin went back over Engels and Marx’s writings on the state, recovering their unique and dialectical understanding of its essence. The state is a special body that comes into being with the division of society into antagonistic classes under

Pic: Courtesy Marx Memorial Library, London



capitalism. This antagonism is what creates the need for “special bodies of armed men,” supposedly floating above society and free of partial interests, but in reality guaranteeing the everyday economic exploitation of the capitalist order.

Over time, this state machinery becomes perfected, developing a bureaucracy, a standing army and in many cases a democratic shell through which the state projects its supposed independence. However, the state remains parasitic on the bourgeoisie through networks of material ties that bind it to

the existing order. The form and substance of the state are inextricably tied to the capitalist mode of production.

For this reason, Marx and Engels had argued that the attack on the state must be twofold. First, it must be seized as a whole and its force turned against capitalist class resistance. Second, its concentrated force must be dissolved back into society as the revolution progresses so that it withers away.

In *The Civil War in France*, Marx argued that the Paris Commune represented the first proletarian experiment in

dissolving state power in this way. Writing in 1917, Lenin saw the emergence of the soviets – elected committees of workers’ deputies in factories, military units and among peasants – as a material development of the utmost importance: “The soviets are a new state apparatus which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants; and this force is not divorced from the people, as was the old standing army, but is very closely bound up with the people.”

The soviets drew workers into government, drew the

organs of the state closer to the people and trained them in exercising both executive and legislative functions. “Compared with the bourgeois parliamentary system,” Lenin said, “this is an advance in democracy’s development which is of worldwide, historic significance.”

Third, the dictatorship of the proletariat had to uproot the property relations of capitalist society. Marx had explained this in *The Civil War in France*, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and elsewhere.

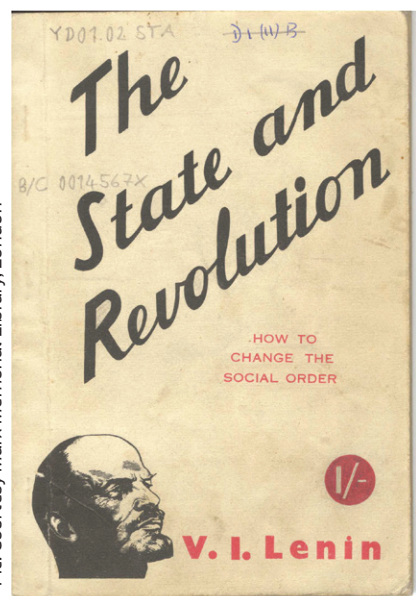
Lenin now applied it to the more developed conditions of 1917. Drawing on this analysis of imperialism, Lenin argued that a new stage of capitalist development had been reached, characterised by the emergence of large monopolies, finance capital and new levels of state intervention aimed at keeping capitalism going.

This “state monopoly capitalism,” as he called it, represented “the threshold of socialism” because it presented the working class with new instruments of social production, only requiring to be freed from the straitjacket of monopoly capitalism and private relations of production: “In addition to the chiefly ‘oppressive’ apparatus – the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy – the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connections with the banks and syndicates, an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work, if it may be expressed this way. This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrested from the control of the capitalists; the capitalists and the wires they pull must be cut off, lopped off, chopped away from this apparatus; it must be subordinated to the proletarian soviets; it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nationwide.”

The working-class movement today faces the challenge of contesting once more the state power of capital across the globe. And, once again, capitalism and its state have developed in important ways that we need to take account of. The importance of Lenin’s analysis was born out in the historical developments that followed.

The Soviet Union, the Peoples’ Democracies and the endurance of China, Cuba and others give us a rich vein of historical experience to mine. The working-class movement can only benefit from understanding Lenin’s approach and applying it to the present in the light of a century’s worth of experience in trying to make workers’ power a reality.

■ Jonathan White is author of *Making our Own History: A Users’ Guide to Marx’s Historical Materialism* (Praxis Press, 2021).



Pic: Courtesy Marx Memorial Library, London

 **Lenin 100**

THIS weekend, Lenin, his life and legacy, will be celebrated right across the world. The leader

of the first socialist state will be celebrated for his practical revolutionary role but also for his contribution to Marxist theory, particularly in the areas of imperialism and internationalism, the role of the party, the state and revolution, democracy and dictatorship, the struggle for peace.

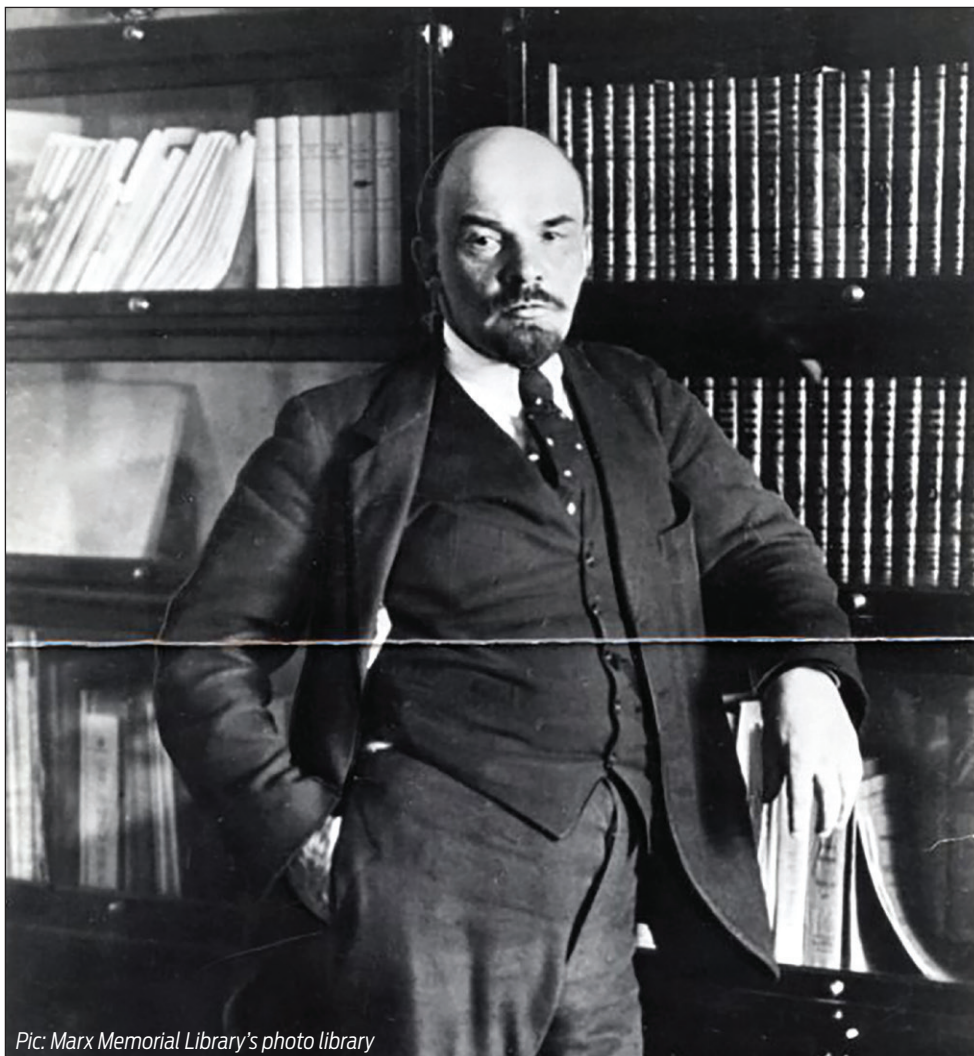
However, he should also be celebrated for his contribution on the questions of trade unions, the role they play in class struggle, and the attitude that Marxists should take towards them and work alongside or within them. Lenin was the first Marxist to really concretise Marx and Engels' views on the potential role that trade union struggle, and economic struggle more broadly, could play in the development of class consciousness and advancing proletarian revolution.

While Marx, and particularly Engels towards the end of his life, had begun to develop a detailed theory of the role of trade unions, and on the other hand were clear that the "constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable," they had not mapped out clearly the relationship between the two, or the role members of a revolutionary working-class party should play in relation to trade unions.

Indeed, the resolution to the London Congress of the First International in 1871, which the above quote is taken from, continues in relation to trade unions, "this combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economic struggles ought at the same time to serve as a lever for its struggles against

Lenin and trade union movement

The economic struggle and how it relates to broader revolutionary struggle is a key part of Lenin's thinking, writes **ROBERT SMALL**



Pic: Marx Memorial Library's photo library

the political power of landlords and capitalists."

While recognising there is a role for trade unions to play, as a "lever" for political struggles, it says nothing about how this is to be achieved or indeed, who Marxists should respond when the "combination of forces" constituting trade unions do not play this role, or indeed play the opposite role, one of dampening down political struggle and ameliorating the worst excesses of capitalism, making a minor modification of the status quo more acceptable to the workers.

Lenin starts from the perspective that Marxists recognise the economic struggle as a key component of working-class struggle and that broad trade unions are the most effective form of organisation for this aspect of the struggle. However, at the same time, he argues that, "the economic struggle can bring about a lasting improvement in the conditions of the masses of the workers, and a strengthening of their truly class organisation, only if this struggle is properly combined with the political struggle of the proletariat" (Draft resolution to the RSDLP unity congress of 1906). This point is crucial because, as Lenin argues throughout his writings, revolutionary class politics will not arise spontaneously from the working class but must be consciously developed within the class by a Marxist party guided by the most advanced revolutionary theory.

On this basis, Lenin argues that the role of the Marxist party in relation to trade unions consists of five tasks. First, to promote the formation of "non-party trade unions" within which the broad mass of the working class can be organised. Second, to "induce" all party members to join the relevant trade union for their respective trade, industry, area of work. Third, to educate workers who belong to trade unions about class struggle and socialism, developing their revolutionary class consciousness. Fourth, to win a "virtually leading position" in these broad trade unions through the activity of the party and its members. Fifth, and finally, to bring these broad unions "under certain conditions" into direct contact with the revolutionary party.

On this final point, Lenin is clear that this does not mean compromising the broad nature of the trade unions, or confus-

ing their role with that of a revolutionary party, but rather bringing them into contact with the party as a force leading the revolutionary struggle of the workers.

Lenin is often quoted out of context, in support of the idea that economic class struggle leads "spontaneously" to the development of political consciousness and revolutionary class consciousness. For example in 1896, in his draft and explanation of the social democratic party programme, when he says that the struggle for higher wages "develops workers' political consciousness" and "spurs the workers on to think of state, political questions." Or in his 1899 article on strikes, when he argues that, "every strike brings thoughts of Socialism very forcibly to the workers' mind."

However, in these and other cases he is clear that this does not happen without the conscious intervention of a Marxist party. Lenin's entire political approach was to fight, on the one hand against the economist position that socialism is inevitable and we simply have to sit back and wait for the conditions to be right, and on the other against the spontaneist position that militant economic activity alone will develop the consciousness of the workers. It is the combination of the experience of economic struggle and an engagement with Marxist political education which provides the basis for the development of revolutionary class consciousness.

This has three key lessons for Marxists today, experiencing the first genuine strike wave for several decades:

- It is not enough to simply engage in economic struggle, to simply carry out trade union work. That work must be guided by revolutionary theory, and directed by a revolutionary Marxist party. Its focus should be to achieve a leading position in the movement through actions and leadership.

- Marxists must combine this trade union work with conscious political education of the mass of workers in the trade union movement. Militant trade union action is necessary but not sufficient to develop class consciousness. It must be connected directly to opportunities for political discussion and education.

- The focus of Marxist trade union work is directly on the broad mass of workers organised within unions, developing their consciousness and sharpening their struggle. While it is necessary to criticise reactionary approaches, it is not about shouting from the sidelines about the "betrayal" of the "leaders." It is about elevating class conscious workers to the leadership of the movement and building the strength of the entire class to take on the bosses and the state.

In quotes...

compiled by Simon Renton

Churchill

Reflecting on Lenin's death, Churchill wrote: "Their worst misfortune was his birth, their next worst – his death."

The Guardian:

January 23 1924: "His death is a blow not only to the Communist party but to all Russia. Even the enemies of the Revolution are unable to disguise their respect for one of the greatest figures in Russian history."

Soviet government:

A government communique: "This most painful blow which has overtaken the workers of the Soviet Union since the time of the conquest of power by the workers and peasants of Russia will be a profound shock to every workman and peasant not only in our Republic but in every country. The widest masses of toilers of the whole world will lament the loss of their greatest leader."

Arthur Ramsome, Manchester Guardian

Wednesday January 23 1924 "… while he had about him the air which made even

the simplest people realise that he was a man very much out of the ordinary, he took considerable delight in washing dishes and minding the babies..."

"Lenin's personal success in bringing about the New Economic Policy may be regarded as the last result of his victory over those who thought the Revolution would do better to die dramatically in the spring of 1918."

Joseph Stalin

Speech January 26 1924 "… Lenin never regarded the Republic of Soviets as an end in itself. He always looked on it as

an essential link for strengthening the revolutionary movement in the countries of the West and the East, an essential link for facilitating the victory of the working people of the whole world over capitalism. Lenin knew that this was the only right conception, both from the international standpoint and from the standpoint of preserving the Republic of Soviets itself. Lenin knew that this alone could fire the hearts of the working people of the whole world with determination to fight the decisive battles for their emancipation."

Lenin in London

Recent archival discoveries have shed new light on Lenin's visits to the British capital between 1902 and 1911, writes **ROBERT HENDERSON**

THE life of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, founder of the world's first socialist state, has been documented in more detail than perhaps any other historical figure – as proof, one need only cite the remarkable 13-volume Biographical Chronicle, compiled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Institute of Marxism-Leninism between 1970 and 1985. But even that meticulously compiled work is not exhaustive – for example, comparatively little is recorded there concerning the six visits Lenin made to Britain between 1902 and 1911.

Fortunately, in recent years some exciting archival discoveries have been made which throw more light on both the political and private life of Lenin during that period, and it is fitting that on the centenary of his death some of these discoveries should be published here.

There were two political figures in particular who featured prominently in Lenin's life during his early visits to London whose names have been all but ignored by historians. These are the Russian social democrats Apollinariya Yakubova and her husband Konstantin Takhtarev, a young couple, previously known to Lenin from his time in St Petersburg, who had settled in the British capital three years before his first arrival in April 1902.

The two warmly welcomed Lenin and his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya to their home in King's Cross and helped them



HISTORIC: A copy the Daily Worker (the Morning Star's predecessor) pictured in the Marx Memorial Library's Lenin Room with Iskra and the British Worker; and (below right) a general view of the Lenin Room

find their first flat in Holford Square. (During his subsequent visits to the capital Lenin would invariably seek out lodgings either in the boroughs of Camden or Islington.)

It was Takhtarev who took him to Clerkenwell Green, who introduced him to Harry Quelch, manager of the 20th Century Press, and who acted as interpreter, allowing the two to draw up plans for the publication of Lenin's journal Iskra (The Spark). Indeed, in her reminiscence of her husband, Krupskaya does briefly allude to their intimacy with the young couple, recalling that during this period she and Lenin were constant visitors to Takhtarev's flat in Regent Square.

When Lenin made his second visit to London in 1903 for the famous 2nd Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), it was Takhtarev, again aided by his wife, who organised the conference venues in such a way as to ensure that proceedings were con-

ducted in total secrecy. Sadly, shortly thereafter, due to political (or perhaps personal) differences, the paths of the two couples diverged, never to cross again.

When Lenin next arrived in London two years later for the 3rd Party Congress, measures were again put in place to safeguard the delegates' privacy and, indeed, this congress has often been offered up as proof of the Bolshevik leader's uncanny ability to move freely around Europe, rarely letting his cloak of invisibility slip. However, as a recent discovery in the archives of the Hoover Institution shows, his every movement and those of his associates during this stay were, in fact, tracked by a Russian police spy whose meticulous reports not only named most of the delegates, but also pinpointed the location of all six of the congress venues scattered across the capital.

The next meeting of the RSDLP in London would be its 5th Congress, which was held in a Christian socialist church in Islington from May 13 to June 1 1907. With almost 400 individuals in attendance, any attempt on this occasion to avoid the attentions of the press or police would have been in vain. Yet, despite this, until recently,

Dalston – some 15 minutes' walk from the congress venue.

As for Lenin, the exact address of his lodgings has been variously (and wrongly) given as "Kingston Square" and "Kensington Square." In fact, we can now say with some certainty that during this period he lived in a flat in King Square, Islington (possibly no 10), which was situated a mere 20-minute walk from the congress venue.

Lenin would return to London on two more occasions; first, in the summer of 1908 when he would spend a month at the British Museum Library conducting research for his book Materialism and Empirio-criticism, and, lastly, in November 1911 when he arrived to deliver a lecture on "Stolypin and Revolution" at a hall in London's East End. Shortly afterwards he crossed the Channel and returned to Krupskaya in Paris.

Lenin had arrived in Britain for the first time in 1902 and nine years later, had left never to return. One cannot help but wonder what impressions the country and its capital had made on him over these years. As detailed in the reminiscences of his colleagues and of Krupskaya, Lenin, long before his arrival, had formed firm opinions on the inequities of such bourgeois capitalist conurbations as London – the yawning divide between rich and poor – the "two nations" that he brought to the attention of Trotsky and others. His various visits to the capital merely served to rein-

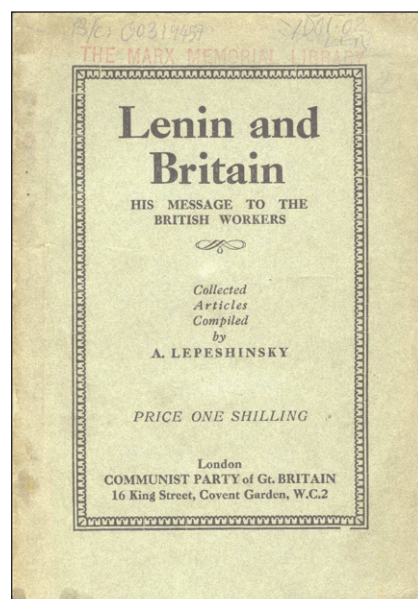
force these pre-existing beliefs.

Max Beer, a German socialist friend, would later make an interesting and appropriate comparison. To him, Lenin was "a socialist Peter the Great who took from Western learning just as much as he needed for the transformation of Russia" and "though living and studying for years in central and western Europe and admiring much of what he found there, his heart and his spirit would always reside in his Russian land, in the midst of its workers and peasants."

■ Robert Henderson is author of *The Spark that Lit the Revolution: Lenin in London and the Politics that Changed the World* (Bloomsbury).

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His every movement and those of his associates during this stay were tracked by a Russian police spy



All pics: Courtesy Marx Memorial Library, London



Lenin 100

Lenin walks around the world...

CARLOS MARTINEZ examines the thought of the great revolutionary leader and the globalisation of Marxism

THE original slogan of the communist movement, “Workers of the world unite” – the rallying cry and final phrase from the Communist Manifesto, written by Marx and Engels in 1848 – was put forward at a time when the nascent communist movement was geographically limited to Europe and North America, and focused almost exclusively on the industrial working class.

Lenin’s study of global political economy, and particularly of the dynamics of monopoly capitalism and the emergence of modern imperialism, led him to an acute understanding of the expanded – global – applicability of Marxist thought.

Study of imperialism

Marx had already outlined the economic dynamics of an emerging international capitalism in Volume I of Capital, first published in 1867: “A new and international division of labour springs up, one suited to the requirements of the main industrial countries, and it converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminently industrial field.”

By the end of the 19th century, the extraordinary concentration of capital and the supremacy of finance capital had brought the era of “free-market” capitalism to an end and ushered in an era of monopoly capitalism – in which phase capitalism remains.

Having dominated and saturated the home market, monopolies were increasingly driven

abroad in pursuit of profit. Lenin wrote in Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism that “the export of capital greatly affects and accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported.” Export of capital stimulated the incorporation of the “chiefly agricultural” economies of the global South into the world capitalist system, introducing industrial production and creating a social class that had no option but to sell its labour power – the working class.

With the internationalisation of capital and the subjugation of the greater part of the planet by a handful of wealthy nations, capitalism became more and more militarised. Extreme force was needed to keep colonies and “spheres of influence” under control, and furthermore was a key feature of the rising competition between the imperialist countries for control of the world’s land, labour, natural resources and markets. Such competition was the basis for World War I.

Lenin understood that, with capitalism having “grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries,” the capitalist class of the metropolis had become an enemy not just to the working class in the advanced capitalist countries but to the broad masses of the oppressed in all countries. “Imperialism is leading to annexation, to increased national oppression, and, consequently, also to increasing resistance.”

This analysis provided the theoretical basis for a strategic unity of the socialist and national liberation movements,

on which basis Lenin and the Bolsheviks proposed the development of a worldwide united front of the working class and all peoples oppressed by imperialism. Such a united front would be capable – indeed still is capable – of taking the fight to the oppressors, of defeating imperialism, of establishing national independence and sovereignty for the peoples of the global South, and thereby opening the possibility for a global advance to socialism.

Hence at the second congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920, “Workers of the world unite” was updated to “Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite.”

In Lenin’s report to the Third Congress of the Comintern in June 1921, he enthused: “The revolutionary movement among the hundreds of millions of oppressed peoples



Having dominated and saturated the home market, monopolies were increasingly driven abroad in pursuit of profit



of the East is growing with remarkable vigour.” He elaborates on this in his letter, Better Fewer But Better, the last document he wrote:

“In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.”

Summing up this theoretical contribution in his 1924 book Foundations of Lenin-

ism, Joseph Stalin wrote that “the interests of the proletarian movement in the developed countries and of the national liberation movement in the colonies call for the union of these two forms of the revolutionary movement into a common front against the common enemy, against imperialism” and, further, that “the victory of the working class in the developed countries and the liberation of the oppressed peoples from the yoke of imperialism are impossible without the formation and the consolidation of a common revolutionary front.”

Imperialism and the split in socialism

Unfortunately, the pursuit of a global revolutionary anti-imperialist front was not a consensus position in the com-

munist movement of the time. Many of the large workers’ parties in the West rejected – explicitly or implicitly – such a strategy and worked towards a tacit alliance with their “own” imperialist ruling classes.

The material basis for such an alliance was provided by the superprofits of imperialism. The “high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries” opens up “the economic possibility of corrupting the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives form to, and strengthens opportunism” (Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism).

Further: “A few crumbs of the bourgeoisie’s huge profits may come the way of the small group of labour bureaucrats, labour aristocrats, and petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers. Social chauvinism

and opportunism have the same class basis, namely, the alliance of a small section of privileged workers with “their” national bourgeoisie against the working-class masses.” (Lenin, Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International).

Lenin labelled this phenomenon social chauvinism – “socialism in words, chauvinism in deeds” – and described it as “the utter betrayal of socialism” and “complete desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie.” In his 1916 article Imperialism and the Split in Socialism, he wrote that “the opportunists (social chauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie precisely towards creating an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa,” and that “objectively the opportunists are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who have been bribed out of imperialist superprofits and converted to watchdogs of capitalism and corruptors of the labour movement.”

He pointed out that the ruling classes themselves perfectly well understand and deliberately implement this strategy.

Indeed, he cites the notorious colonialist Cecil Rhodes, writing in 1895:

“I was in the East End of London yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry for ‘bread, bread, bread,’ and on my way home I pondered over the scene and I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism. My cherished idea is a solution for the social problem, ie in order to save the 40 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced by them in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists.”

Lenin concluded that, to defeat the social chauvinist trend and to move forwards with the global class struggle, communists must go “lower and deeper”; must seek out, educate and organise the most oppressed sections of the

working class, “who are more oppressed than before and who bear the whole brunt of imperialist wars.” These strata are far less corruptible; are far more capable of learning “to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.”

Success of Leninism in practice

In words and deeds, the Bolsheviks pursued the global anti-imperialist front, seeking (in Lenin’s words) to “convert the [masses of the oppressed countries] into an active factor in world politics and in the revolutionary destruction of imperialism” (Third Congress of the Communist International).

This effort bore historic fruit. The Soviet Union rendered indispensable support to the national liberation and socialist movements in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

In his 1960 essay, The Path Which Led Me To Leninism, Ho Chi Minh movingly describes his years in Paris in the early 1920s, participating in the

debates between the Leninists and the social chauvinists.

“My only argument was: ‘If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with the colonial people, what kind of revolution are you waging?’ ... At first, patriotism, not yet communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.”

Similarly, Mao Zedong stated in 1949, just two months before the proclamation of the People’s Republic, that “it was through the Russians that the Chinese found Marxism. The salvos of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism. The October Revolution helped progressives in China, as throughout the world, to adopt the proletarian world outlook as the instrument for studying a nation’s destiny and considering anew their own problems.”

In turn, the Chinese communists have played a crucial role in developing Lenin’s ideas of anti-imperialism and applying them in practice. The overthrow of imperialist domination and the construction of socialism in China, Korea and Vietnam represented a profound shift of the revolutionary centre of gravity in the world towards the East and the South. The radical governments emerging in the Sahel and Latin America today represent a continuation and deepening of this process.

Such are the outcomes of a revolutionary strategy based on the slogan “Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite.” The outcomes of class collaborationist social democracy in the West are, it is fair to say, less impressive.

Lenin lives

Lenin was, above all, a revolutionary Marxist, and there are two famous quotes from Marx which to a significant degree encapsulate Leninism today: “A nation that oppresses another cannot itself be free,” and “Labour in the white skin can never free itself as long

as labour in the black skin is branded.”

To be Marxist-Leninists in the 21st century means to return to a strategy of a worldwide united front between the socialist countries, the oppressed nations, and the working class in the imperialist countries. It means standing up for Palestine. It means continuing the fight for a united Ireland. It means opposing the campaign of containing and encircling China. It means opposing Nato. It means supporting the emerging multipolar trend. It means standing with Cuba, with Vietnam, with the DPRK, with Laos, with Venezuela, with Nicaragua, with Syria, with all countries defiantly standing up against imperialist hegemony. It means opposing racism, sexism and all forms of exploitation and oppression, rejecting collaborationism and social chauvinism, going “lower and deeper” and fighting resolutely for a socialist future.

■ Carlos Martinez is co-editor of *Friends of Socialist China* and author of *The East is Still Red* (Praxis Press).

Marx Memorial Library & Workers’ School LENIN 100: Dimitrov Coat Appeal

This coat tells a fascinating story – featuring Lenin, Pollitt, Dimitrov and even the Spanish Civil War! - but as it reaches its 100th birthday, it is in urgent need of repair.

Your donation will fund its professional conservation and display case, so we can tell this story for generations to come.

As we mark centenary of Lenin’s death in 2024, why not gift a donation to this wonderful artefact? £3,000 will enable us to preserve, repair and re-mount the coat, protecting it from future degradation. As MML continues to work broadening its audiences and promoting its displays, we want this coat and its story centre stage. Can you help make a difference?



The story behind the coat:

In January 1924, Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain was in Moscow.

During his stay, Lenin died and Pollitt attended his funeral. The snow lay thick on the ground and Pollitt did not have a coat. So, Georgi Dimitrov, who later led the Communist International from 1934-43, lent him the coat on display and invited Pollitt to return it when he next came to Moscow.

Twelve years later, in 1936, Sam Russell (aka Sam Lesser) was to go to join the International Brigade in Spain via a trip to Moscow. Pollitt asked him to return the coat to Dimitrov. When he tried, Dimitrov’s response was “Tell Harry to keep it as I have two coats already”.

The coat went with Russell to Spain and when he tried to return it to Pollitt on his return, Pollitt said, “Keep it as I have one already”. And so it stayed with Sam until his died in 2010 when his family donated it to the Library.

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 Lenin 100

A hundred years since we lost Comrade Lenin

What does Lenin say to us in today's post-Soviet world and what is his legacy, asks **VIJAY PRASHAD**

VLADIMIR ILYICH ULANOV (1870-1924) was known by his pseudonym – Lenin. He was, like his siblings, a revolutionary, which in the context of tsarist Russia meant that he spent long years in prison and in exile. Lenin helped build the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party both by his intellectual and his organisational work.

Lenin's writings are not only his own words, but the summation of the activity and thoughts of the thousands of militants whose path crossed his own. It was Lenin's remarkable ability to develop the experiences of the militants into the theoretical realm that shaped what we call Leninism. It is no wonder that the Hungarian Marxist Gyorgy Lukacs called Lenin "the only theoretician equal to Marx yet produced by the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat."

Building a Revolution

In 1896, when spontaneous strikes broke out in the St Petersburg factories, the socialist revolutionaries were caught unawares. They were disoriented. Five years later, Lenin wrote, the "revolutionaries lagged behind this upsurge, both in their 'theories' and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organisation capable of leading the whole movement." Lenin felt that this lag had to be rectified.

Most of Lenin's major writings followed this insight. Lenin worked out the contradictions of capitalism in Russia (*Development of Capitalism in Russia*, 1896), which allowed him to understand how the peasantry in the sprawling tsarist empire had a proletarian character. It was based on this that Lenin

argued for the worker-peasant alliance against tsarism and the capitalists.

Lenin understood from his engagement with mass struggle and with his theoretical reading that the social democrats – as the most liberal section of the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats – were not capable of driving a bourgeois revolution let alone the movement that would lead to the emancipation of the peasantry and the workers. This work was done in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905). *Two Tactics* is perhaps the first major Marxist treatise that demonstrates the necessity for a socialist revolution, even in a "backward" country, where the workers and the peasants would need to ally to break the institutions of bondage.

These two texts show Lenin avoiding the view that the Russian Revolution could leapfrog capitalist development (as the populists – *narodniki* – suggested) or that it had to go through capitalism (as the liberal democrats argued). Neither path was possible nor necessary. Capitalism had already entered Russia – a fact that the populists did not acknowledge – and it could be overcome by a worker and peasant revolution – a fact that the liberal democrats disputed. The 1917 Revolution and the Soviet experiment proved Lenin's point.

Having established that the liberal elites within tsarist Russia would not be able to lead a worker and peasant revolution, or even a bourgeois revolution, Lenin turned his attention to the international situation. Sitting in exile in Switzerland, Lenin watched as the social democrats capitulated to the warmongering in 1914 and delivered the working-class to the world war.

Frustrated by the betrayal of the social democrats, Lenin wrote an important text – *Imperialism* – which devel-

oped a clear-headed understanding of the growth of finance capital and monopoly firms as well as inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist conflict. It was in this text that Lenin explored the limitations of the socialist movements in the West – with the labour aristocracy providing a barrier to socialist militancy – and the potential for revolution in the East – where the "weakest link" in the imperialist chain might be found.

Lenin's notebooks show that he read 148 books and 213 articles in English, French, German, and Russian to clarify his thinking on contemporary imperialism. Clear-headed assessment of imperialism of this type ensured that Lenin developed a strong position on the rights of nations to self-determination, whether these nations were within the tsarist empire or indeed any other European empire. The kernel of the anti-colonialism of the USSR – developed in the Communist International (Comintern) – is found here.

The term "imperialism," so

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It was Lenin's remarkable ability to develop the experiences of the militants into the theoretical realm that shaped what we call Leninism

central to Lenin's expansion of the Marxist tradition, refers to the uneven development of capitalism on a global scale and the use of force to maintain that unevenness. Certain parts of the planet – mostly those that had a previous history of colonisation – remain in a position of subordination, with their ability to craft an independent, national development agenda constrained by the tentacles of foreign political, economic, social and cultural power.

In our time, new theories have emerged that suggest that the new conditions no longer can be understood by the Leninist theory of imperialism. Some people on the left reject the idea of the neocolonial structure of the world economy, with the imperialist bloc – led by the United States – using its every source of power to maintain this structure. Others, even on the left, argue that the world is now flat and that there is no longer a global North that oppresses a global South, and that the elites of both zones are part of an international bourgeoisie. Neither of these objections stand when confronted with both the increasing levels of violence perpetuated by the imperialist bloc and by the increasing levels of relative inequality between North and South (despite the growth of capitalist elites in the South).

Elements of Lenin's Imperialism are, of course, dated – it was written 100 years ago – and would require careful reworking. But the essence of the theory is valid – the insistence on the tendency of capitalist firms to become monopolies, the ruthlessness with which finance capital drains the wealth of the global South, and the use of force to contain the ambitions of countries of the South to chart their own development agenda.

One of Lenin's most vital interventions, which appealed to those in the colonies, was the idea that imperialism would

Pic: Pavel Zhukov/CC



never develop the colony, and that only the socialist forces in collaboration with the national liberation sections would be capable of both fighting for national independence and then advancing their countries to socialism. Lenin's fierce anti-colonial determination drew his ideas to those in the colonised world, which is why they rallied so enthusiastically to the Comintern after 1919.

Ho Chi Minh read the Comintern's thesis on national and colonial issues and wept. It was a "miraculous guide" for the struggle of the people of Indochina, he felt. "From the experience of the Russian Revolution," Ho Chi Minh wrote, "we should have to people – both the working-class and the peasants – at the root of our struggle. We need a strong party, a strong will, with sacrifice and unanimity at our centre." "Like the brilliant sun," Ho Chi Minh wrote, "the October Revolution shone over all five continents, awakening millions of oppressed and exploited people around the world. There has never existed such a revolution of such significance and scale in the history of humanity."

Finally, Lenin spent the period from 1893 to 1917 study-

ing the limitations of the party of the old type – the social democratic party. Lenin's text – *Our Programme* – makes the point that the party must be involved in continuous activity and not rely upon spontaneous or initial [stikhiinyi] outbreaks. This continuous activity would bring the party into intimate and organic touch with the working-class and the peasantry as well as help to germinate the protests that then might take on a mass character. It was this consideration that led Lenin to work out his understanding of the revolutionary party in *What is To Be Done?* (1902). The remarkable intervention highlighted the role of the class-conscious workers as the vanguard of the party and the importance of political agitation among workers to develop a genuinely powerful political consciousness against all tyranny and all oppression. The workers, Lenin argued, need to feel the intensity of the brutality of the system and of the importance of solidarity.

These texts – from 1896 to 1916 – prepared the terrain for the Bolsheviks and Lenin to understand how to operate during the struggles in 1917. It is a measure of Lenin's confidence in the masses and to his theory that Lenin wrote his audacious pamphlet *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* a few weeks before the seizure of power.

Lenin 100



Building a state

Having prevailed, Lenin now had to confront the problems of building a socialist project in the former tsarist empire, which had been devastated by its avarice and by the war. Before the Soviets had time to organise themselves, the imperialists attacked from all directions. Direct interventions on behalf of the peasants and workers, as well as national minorities, prevented large-scale defections from the new revolution to the counter-revolutionaries armies. The peasants, with their limited means, held fast to the new beginning. But that was the point – the “limited means.” How does one build socialism in a poor country, with social development held down by the tsarist autocracy?

A close reading of *State and Revolution* (1918) anticipates the problems faced by the Soviets in their new task – they could not only inherit the state structure, but had to “smash the state,” build a new set of institutions and a new institutional culture, create a new attitude by the cadre towards the state and society. In April 1918, Lenin’s *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* summarises the work of the first few months and shows that the Soviets were well-aware of the deep problems that they had to confront.

Their revolution did not take place in an advanced capitalist country, but in what Marx had called the “realm of scarcity.” To increase the productive forces



MAKING A POINT: VI Lenin in Teatralnaya Square (then Sverdlov Square), on May 5 1920, where a parade of the Moscow garrison troops took place

Pic: Grigory Petrovich Goldstein/CC

and to socialise the means of production at the same time was a task of immense proportions.

“Without literacy,” Lenin wrote, “there can be no politics. There can only be rumours,

gossip, and prejudice.” What limited resources were there before the Soviet state went toward literacy, with the party cadre determined to ensure that they turn around the fact that only a third of men were literate and less than a fifth of women. Between the Likbez campaign and the policy of indigenisation (*korenizatsiya*), the use of regional and minority languages, the Soviets were able – in two decades – to ensure that literacy levels rose to 86 per cent for men and 65 per cent for women.

The centrality of workers and peasants to building Soviet Russia is often forgotten (Mikhail Kalinin came from a peasant family; Joseph Stalin came from a family of cobblers and housemaids). Education, health, housing and control over the economy as well as cultural activities and social development were the heart of the work of the new Soviet Russia, led by Lenin. No amount of right-wing drivel about the Soviet Union can erase the immense achievement of this workers’ state.

In the last year of his life, Lenin wrote four formidable texts: “On Cooperation,” “Our Revolution,” “How We Should Reorder the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection,” and “Better Fewer, But Better.” In these texts, Lenin acknowledged the difficulties in the process of transformation of capitalism to socialism. He wrote of the “enormous, boundless significance” of co-operative societies, the need to rebuild the productive base and to

build societies to advance the confidence of the masses. What Lenin indicated was the need for a cultural transformation, a new way of life for the workers and the peasants, and new and creative ways for the workers and peasants to have power over their society and to build their clarities in action. The workers have inherited the architecture of a hideous state, and this must be totally transformed. But how? Lenin’s reflection in *Better Fewer, but Better* is fiercely honest:

“What elements have we for building this apparatus? Only two. First, the workers who are absorbed in the struggle of socialism. These elements are not sufficient educated. They would like to build a better

apparatus for us, but they do not know how. They cannot build one. They have not yet developed the culture required for this; and it is culture that is required. Nothing will be achieved in this by doing things in a rush, by assault, by vim or vigour, or in general, by any of the best human qualities. Secondly, we have elements of knowledge, education, and training, but they are ridiculously inadequate compared with all other countries.”

In his last public appearance – at the Moscow Soviet in November 1922 – Lenin praised the achievements of the young Soviet Republic, but also cautioned about the hard path forward. “Our party,” he said, “a little group of people in comparison with the country’s total population, has tackled this job. This tiny nucleus has set itself the task of remaking everything, and it will do so.”

But this is not just the task of the party, but of the workers and peasants, who see the new Soviet apparatus as their own.

“We have brought socialism into everyday life and must here see how matters stand. That is the task of our day, the task of our epoch.”

The Soviet Union lasted only 74 years, but in those years, it experimented fiercely to overcome the wretchedness of capitalism. Seventy-four years is the average global life expectancy. There was simply not enough time to advance the socialist agenda before the USSR was destroyed. But Lenin’s legacy in not merely in the USSR.

It is in the global struggle to transcend the dilemmas that confront humanity by advancing to socialism.

■ Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor and journalist. He is the author of *Red Star Over the Third World* (Pluto Press) and *Washington Bullets: A History of the CIA, Coups, and Assassinations* (Monthly Review Press).

ONE OF US: Statue of Lenin in Schwerin, former East Germany
 Pic: Niteshift/CC

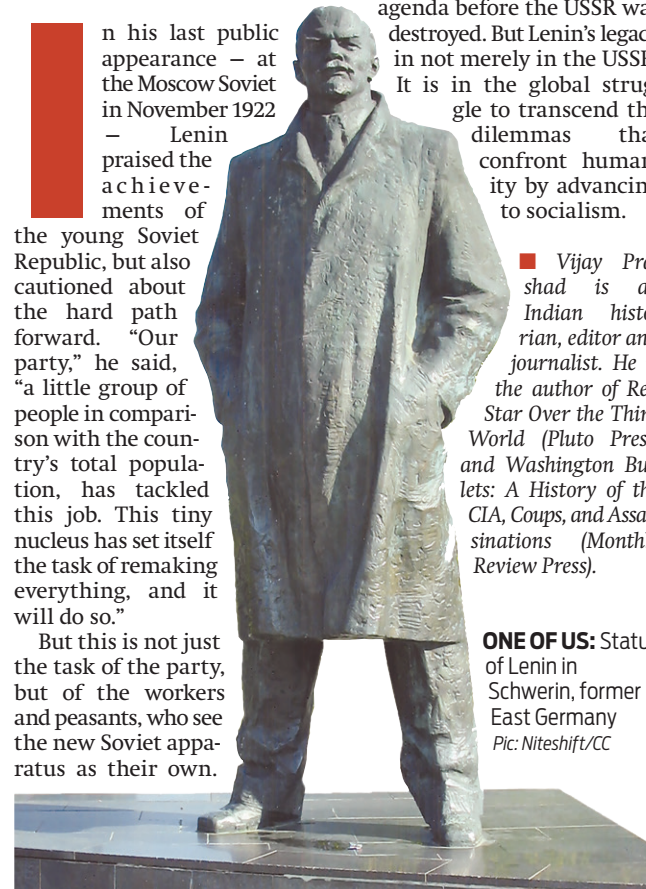


Lenin on September 15 1923, four months before his death

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“Without literacy,” Lenin wrote, “there can be no politics. There can only be rumours, gossip, and prejudice”





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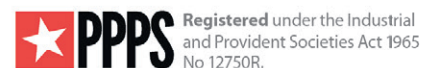
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