
‘The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism’ by V.I. Lenin was first published in *Prosveshcheniye*, no. 3 (March 1913). The text has been taken from Lenin’s *Collected Works*, vol. 19, pp. 21–28.

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Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (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 organizational work. Lenin’s writings are not only his own words, but the summation of the activity and thoughts of the thousands of militants whose paths crossed his own. It was Lenin’s remarkable ability to develop the experiences of the militants into the theoretical realm. It is no wonder that the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács 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, socialists were caught unawares. They did not know what to do. They were disoriented. Five years later, V.I. Lenin wrote, the ‘revolutionaries lagged behind’ this upsurge, both in their ‘theories’ and in their activity; they failed to establish a constant and continuous organization capable

of leading the whole movement’. Lenin felt that this lag had to be rectified.

Most of Lenin’s major writings followed this insight. He worked out the contradictions of capitalism in Russia (The 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. When the Russian Revolution of 1905 collapsed, Lenin took to Novaya Zhizn (12 November 1905) to argue that the ‘survivals of serfdom’ formed a ‘cruel burden on the whole mass of the peasantry’; the ‘proletarians under their red banner’, he wrote, ‘have declared war on this burden’. It was not enough, Lenin argued, for the workers to fight for the peasants’ demands, and it was not enough for the independent demands of the peasantry—for land—to be met; what was necessary was to deepen the unity between the workers and the peasants in the fight ‘against the rule of capital’ and for socialism. There was no sense in being naïve about the fact that there were class relations within the ‘peasantry’, and that the small farmers had their own vested class interests in their small private holdings. Lenin’s study emphasized the differentiation of the peasantry, in order to understand that the small farmers had a closer class allegiance to the landlords in terms of the defence of private property and in terms of the right to exploit landless agricultural workers. Lenin saw with steely-eyed clarity that the development of worker-peasant unity had to fully grasp the complexities of the countryside, otherwise the movement for socialism would be derailed in a petty bourgeois direction.

Opponents of tsarism other than the Bolsheviks (such as the social democrats, the agrarian radicals, the Socialist-Revolutionaries [SR], and the Mensheviks) stopped far short of the socialist project. 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. His theoretical assessment was elaborated 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 and advance society into socialism.

These two texts from 1896 and 1905 show Lenin avoiding the view that the Russian Revolution could leapfrog capitalist development (as the populists—národík—suggested) or that it had to go through capitalism (as the liberal democrats—the Kadets, for example—argued). Neither path was possible or 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 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. Rosa Luxemburg, equally dismayed, wrote, ‘workers of the world unite in times of peacetime; in times of war they slit each other’s throats’. Frustrated by the betrayal of the social democrats, Lenin wrote an important text—*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*—which developed 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 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 colonization—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 sustained by the Leninist theory of imperialism. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, for instance, argue that there is no geo-political rivalry left, that there is only the extension of the sovereignty of the constitution of the United States on a world-scale. This is what they call Empire. What the people—the multitude—must do, they suggest, is to contest the terms of this constitution but not the fact of its global aspiration. Others argue that the world has flattened, so that there is no longer a Global North that oppresses a Global South, that the elites of both regions are part of a global capitalist order. This is the kind of theory that Karl Kautsky advanced in the name of ‘ultra-imperialism’. Lenin responded sharply to Kautsky and this theory of ‘ultra-imperialism’, saying that Kautsky noted that ‘the rule of finance capital lessens the unevenness and contradictions inherent in the world economy, whereas in reality it increases them.’ Elements of Lenin’s text are, of course, dated—it was written a hundred 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.

Finally, Lenin spent the period from 1893 to 1917 studying carefully the limitations of the party of the old type—the social democratic party. If you spend any time in Lenin’s *Collected Works* during the decades before the 1917 Russian

Revolution, you will find thousands of articles and reports on how to strengthen mass work and party building. In Lenin’s 1899 text—*Our Programme*—he makes the point that the party must be involved in continuous activity and not rely upon spontaneous or initial (*stikhiiinyi*) 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). Lenin developed bold ideas for the construction of a worker-peasant party, including the role of the class-conscious workers as the vanguard of the party and the importance of political agitation amongst workers to develop a genuinely powerful political consciousness against all tyranny and all oppression. The workers need to feel the intensity of the brutality of the system and 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 in his own theory that Lenin wrote his audacious pamphlet—*Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* This was written a few weeks before the seizure of power. And as events unfolded in 1917, Lenin constantly tried to theorize the dynamic of change. The revolution of February 1917 had overthrown the tsar; it had brought to power the liberals. Lenin tracked two developments of equal importance: first, that the liberals—under Kerensky—were preparing to betray the revolutionary aims and return Russia to the war, and therefore to retain the entire tsarist system;
second, that the revolutionary proletariat—and its main parties—remained alert and active, and had strengthened their political form through the Soviets. The worker-peasant-controlled Soviets became a centre of ‘dual power’ against the liberal-dominated Duma (Parliament). What this meant to Lenin, as he wrote in several of his essays in this period, was that the Soviets had to defend the revolutionary aims and to take power. In September 1917, Lenin wrote that for a Marxist, ‘insurrection is an art’; Lenin and the Bolsheviks marshalled their forces, and in October 1917 they struck, and completed the Russian Revolution of 1917.

BUILDING A STATE

No revolution is ‘completed’ just by seizing power. There was much work to be done in the immediate period after Lenin and his comrades took control of the collapsed tsarist state. A close reading of Lenin’s 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.

The most important text here is The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government (April 1918), which lays out the agenda for the USSR in its first few years. The other texts show Lenin’s general attitude towards state construction and to the challenges faced by the USSR—surrounded by hostile powers—in this period. Lenin’s Better Fewer, But Better (1923), written towards the end of his life, is one of the most honest and reasonable texts on the problems faced by the new government and society.
In his last public appearance—at the Moscow Soviet on 20 November 1922—one can see Lenin’s personality in full display. There is Lenin’s confidence and his humanness. There is Lenin’s honesty and his ambition:

We still have the old machinery, and our task now is to remould it along new lines. We cannot do so at once, but we must see to it that the Communists we have are properly placed. What we need is that they, the Communists, should control the machinery they are assigned to, and not, as so often happens with us, that the machinery should control them. We should make no secret of it and speak of it frankly. Such are the tasks and the difficulties that confront us—and that at a moment when we have set out on our practical path, when we must not approach socialism as if it were an icon painted in festive colours. We need to take the right direction, we need to see that everything is checked, that the masses, the entire population, check the path we follow and say, ‘Yes, this is better than the old system.’ That is the task we have set ourselves. Our Party, 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. We have proved that this is no utopia but a cause which people live by. We have all seen this. This has already been done. We must remake things in such a way that the great majority of the masses, the peasants and workers, will say, ‘It is not you who praise yourselves, but we. We say that you have achieved splendid results, after which no intelligent person will ever dream of returning to the old.’ We have
not reached that point yet ... Socialism is no longer a matter of the distant future, or an abstract picture, or an icon. Our opinion of icons is the same—a very bad one. 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."

By 1921, Lenin’s health had deteriorated dramatically. In May 1922, he suffered his first stroke. He died on 21 January 1924 at the age of 53. Over a million people came to pay homage to Lenin over three cold days in January before he was interned in a mausoleum in Red Square, where his body remains.

Everything that Lenin wrote a hundred years ago is not to be taken as gospel. It is a guide. Circumstances change, developments must be studied carefully. It was Lenin who taught us that ‘the very gist, the living soul of Marxism [is] a concrete analysis of a concrete situation’. What we learned from Lenin is his method and his discipline, his sharp awareness of class in terms of his understanding of politics and policy. Revolutions do not repeat themselves in all their particulars, nor do revolutionary processes. Different historical conjunctures, the concrete situations, require different historical revolutionary dynamics. We have Lenin over our shoulders; he is our inspiration and model.

To the Russian
  Communist Party,
    I dedicate this poem

The time has come.
  I begin
    the story of Lenin.
Not
  because the grief
    is on the wane,
but because
  the shock of the first moment
has become
  a clear-cut,
    weighed and fathomed pain.
Time,
  speed on,
    spread Lenin’s slogans in your whirl!
Not for us
  to drown in tears,
    whatever happens.
There’s no one
  more alive
    than Lenin in the world,
our strength,
our wisdom,
surest of our weapons.

People
are boats,
although on land.

While life
is being roughed
all species
of trash
from the rocks and sand
stick
to the sides of our craft.

But then,
having broken
through the storm’s mad froth,
one sits
in the sun
for a time
and cleans off
the tousled seaweed growth
and oozy
jellyfish slime.

I
go to Lenin
to clean off mine
to sail on
with the revolution.

I fear
these eulogies
line upon line
like a boy
    fears falsehood and delusion.
They'll rig up an aura
    round any head;
the very idea—
    I abhor it.
that such a halo
    poetry-bred
should hide
    Lenin’s real,
    huge
    human forehead
I’m anxious lest rituals,
    mausoleums
    and processions,
the honeyed incense
    of homage and publicity
should
    obscure
    Lenin’s essential
simplicity.
I shudder
    as I would
    for the apple of my eye
lest Lenin
    be falsified
    by tinsel beauty.
Write!—
    votes my heart,
    commissioned by
the mandate
of duty.

All Moscow’s
   frozen through,  
   yet the earth quakes with emotion.
Frostbite
   drives its victims  
   to the fires.
Who is he?
   Where from?
   Why this commotion?
Why such honours
   when a single man expires?
Dragging word by word
   from memory’s coffers
won’t suit either me  
   or you who read.
Yet what a meagre choice
   the dictionary offers!
Where to get  
   the very words we need?
We’ve
   seven days  
   to spend.
twelve hours  
   for diverse uses.
Life must begin—  
   and end.
Death won’t accept
excuses.
But if
it’s no more
a matter of hours,
if the calendar measure
falls short
‘Epoch’
is a usual
comment of ours,
‘Era’ or something
of the sort.
We
sleep
at night,
busy
around
by day,
each grinds his water
in his own pet mortar
and so
fritters life away.
But if,
single-handed,
somebody can
turn the tide
to everyone’s profit
we utter
something like
‘Superman’,
‘Genius’
or ‘Prophet’. 
We
don’t ask much of life,
won’t budge an inch
unless required.
To please
the wife
is the utmost
to which we aspire.
But if,
monolithic
in body and soul,
someone
unlike us
emerges,
we discover
a god-like aureole
or appendages
equally gorgeous.
Tags and tassels
laid out on shelves,
neither silly
nor smart—
no weightier than smoke.
Go
scrape meaning
out of such shells—
empty as eggs
without white or yolk.
How, then, apply
such yardsticks to Lenin
when anyone could see
with his very own eyes:
that ‘era’
cleared doorways
without even bending,
wore jackets
no bigger
than average size.

Should Lenin, too,
be hailed by the nation
as ‘Leader
by Divine Designation’?

Had he
been kingly or godly indeed
I’d never spare myself,
on protest bent;
I’d raise a clamour
in hall and street
against the crowds,
speeches,
processions
and laments.

I’d find
the words
for a thundering condemnation,

and while
I’d be trampled on,
I and my cries,

I’d bomb
the Kremlin
with demands
for resignation.
hurling
  blasphemy
    into the skies.
But calm
  by the coffin
    Dzerzhinsky*
    appears
Today
  he could easily
    dismiss
      the guard.
In millions of eyes
  shines nothing
    but tears,
not running down cheeks,
    but frozen hard.
Your divinity’s decease
  won’t rouse a mote of feeling.
No!
  Today
    real pain
      chills every heart.
We’re burying
  the earthliest
    of beings
that ever came to play
  an earthly part.
Earthly, yes;
  but not the earth-bound kind

* Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky—then People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs.
who’ll never peer
    beyond the precincts of their sty.
He took in
    all the planet
        at a time,
saw things
    out of reach
        for the common eye.
Though like you and I
    in every detail,
his forehead rose
    a taller,
    steeper tower;
the thought-dug wrinkles
    round the eyes
        went deeper,
the lips looked firmer,
    more ironical than ours.
Not the satrap’s firmness
    that’ll grind us,
tightening the reins,
    beneath a triumph-chariot’s wheel.
With friends
    he’d be
    the very soul of kindness,
with enemies
    as hard
        as any steel.
He, too,
    had illnesses
        and weaknesses
to fight
and hobbies
    just the same as we have,
reader.
For me it’s billiards, say,
    to whet the sight;
for him it’s chess—
    more useful
    for a leader.
And turning
    face about
    from chess
    to living foes,
yesterday’s dumb pawns
    he led
    to a war of classes
until a human,
    working-class dictatorship
    arose
to checkmate Capital
    and crush its prison-castle.
We and he
    had the same ideals to cherish.
Then why is it,
    no kin of his,
    I’d welcome death,
crazy with delight,
    would gladly perish
so that he might draw
    a single breath?
And not I alone.
Who says I’m better than the rest?
Not a single soul of us,
I reckon,
in all the mines
and mills
from East
to West
would hesitate
to do the same
at the slightest beckon.
Instinctively,
I shrink
from tram-rails
to quiet corners,
giddy
as a drunk
who sees the lees.
Who would mind
my puny death
among these mourners
lamenting
the enormousness
of his decease?
With banners
and without,
they come.
as if all Russia
had again
turned nomad for a while.
The House of Unions*

* A historical public building in the centre of Moscow where Lenin lay in
trembles with their motion.
What can be the reason?
   Wherefore?
   Why?
Snow-tears
   from the flags’ red eyelids
   run.
The telegraph’s gone hoarse
   with humming mournful rumours.
Who is he?
   Where from?
   What has he done,
this man,
   the most humane
   of all us humans?

☭ ☭ ☭

Ulyanov’s short life
   is well known
   to men in
every country
   among every race.
But the longer biography
   of Comrade Lenin
has still
   to be written,
   rewritten
   and retraced.
Far,

----------------------------------------------
state in January 1924.
far back,
two hundred years or so,
the earliest beginnings
of Lenin go.
Hear those brazen,
peremptory tones
with their century-piercing motif?
It’s the grandfather
of Bromley’s and Goujon’s,’
the first
steam locomotive.
Capital,
His Majesty,
uncrowned,
as yet unknown,
declares
the gentry’s power
overthrown.
The city pillaged,
plundered,
pumped
gold
into the bellies
of banks,
while at the workbenches,
lean and humped,
the working class
closed ranks.
And already threatened,

* Bromley’s and Goujon’s—foreign-owned engineering works in old Russia; after the revolution they were nationalized, renamed and considerably expanded.
rearing smokestacks
to the sky,
'Pave your way with us
to fortunes,
grip us tighter!
But remember:
he is coming,
he is nigh,
the Man,
the Champion,
the Avenger,
the Fighter!'
And already
smoke and clouds
get mixed together
as when mutineers
turn orderly detachments
into crowds,
until
the tokens of a storm
begin to gather—
the sky brews trouble—
ugly smoke blacks out the clouds.
'Mid beggars
a mountain of goods arises.
The manager,
bald beast,
flips his abacus,
blurts out 'crisis!'
and pins up a list:
'DISMISSED: …'
Fly-blown
pastries
in dustbins found graves.
grain—
in granaries
with mildew cloyed,
while past
the windows
of Yeliseyev’s,“
belly caved in,
shuffled the unemployed.
And the call
came rumbling
from shack and slum,
covering
the whimper of kiddies:
‘Come, protector!
Redressor, come!
And we’ll go
to battle
or wherever you bid us!’

Hey,
camel,
discoverer of colonies!
Ahoy,
caravans
of steel-hulled ships!

* A big food-dealer with huge shops in Russia’s principal cities.
March through the desert, sunsets following, cleave through the billows on east-bound trips!

Shadows of ominous ugly black start patching the sky over sun-kissed oases.

Hear the Negro with whip-lashed back murmuring among the bananas and maizes:

'Oo-oo,
  oo-oo,
    Nile, my Nile!

Splash up a day like a crocodile, let it be blacker than I at night

With fire like my blood, as red and as bright, for the fattest bellies both white and black to fry and sizzle, to split and crack!

Each and every ivory tusk
hack and poke them
from dawn to dusk.
Don't let me bleed in vain—
if only for descendants
come,
O Sun-Faced,
deal out justice and defend us!
I'm through;
the God of deaths won't wait—
I've lived my while.
Mind my incantation,
Nile, my Nile!' From snow-bound Russia
to sun-scorched Patagonia
mechanical sweat-mills went grinding
and groaning.
In Ivanovo-Voznesensk,
the loom-twirling city,
brickwork mammoths shook with the ditty:
'Cotton-mill, my cotton-mill,
Gins and looms a-buzzin',
It's high time he came along,
Another Stenka Razin!'†

* A big textile centre, scene of mass strikes and revolutionary upheavals for many years.
† Stepan Razin—leader of a peasant uprising in the 17th century.
Grandsons will ask,
   'What does Capitalism mean?'
just as kiddies
   today,
   'What's a Gendarme, Dad?'
So here's
   capitalism
   as then he was seen,
portrayed
   for grandsons
   full-size in my pad.
Capitalism
   in his early years
wasn’t so bad—
   a business-like
   fellow
Worked like blazes—
   none of those fears
that his snowy cravat
   would soil
   and turn yellow.
Feudal tights
   felt too tight
   for the youngster;
forged on
   no worse
   than we do these days;
raised revolutions
   and
   with gusto
joined his voice
in the Marseillaise.
Machines he spawned
from his own smart head
and put
new slaves
to their service:
million-strong broods
of workers
spread
all over
the world's surface.
Whole kingdoms
and counties
he swallowed at a time
with their crowns
and eagles
and suchlike ornaments,
fattening up
like the biblical kine,
licking his chops,
his tongue—
parliament.
But weaker
with years
his limb-steel became,
he swelled up
with leisure and pleasure,
gaining in bulk
and weight
the same
as his own
beloved ledger.
He built himself palaces
ne’er seen before.
Artists—
hordes of ’em—
went through their chores.
Floors—
à l’Empire,
ceilings
Rococo,
walls—
Louis XIV,
Quatorze.
Around him
with faces
equally fit
to be faces
or the places
on which they sit,
keeping the peace,
stood buttock-faced
police.
His soul
to song
and to colour insensate—
like a cow
in a meadow abloom with flowers—
ethics
and aesthetics
his domestic utensils
to be filliped with
in idyllic hours.
Inferno and paradise
both his possession,
he sells to old dames
whose faculties fail
nail-holes from the Cross,
the ladder of Ascension,
and feathers
from the Holy Spirit's
tail.
But finally
he too
outgrew himself
living
off the blood and sweat
of the people.
Just guzzling,
snoozing
and pocketing pelf.
Capitalism
got lazy and feeble.
All blubber,
he sprawled
in History's way.
No
getting over
or past him.
So snug
in his world-wide
bed
he lay.
the one way out
   was to blast him.

I know,
   your critics’ll
      grip their whipsticks,
   your poets’ll go hysterical:
   'Call that poetry?
      Sheer publicistics.
No feeling,
   no nothing—
      just bare rhetoric!' 
Sure,
   'Capitalism' rings
      not so very elegant;
   'Nightingale'
      has a far more delicate sound.
Yet I'll go back to it
   whenever relevant.
Let stanzas
   like fighting slogans resound!
I've never
   been lacking in topics—
      you know it,
but now's
   no time
      for lovesick tattle.
All
   my thundering power of a poet
is yours,
    my class
    waging rightful battle!
'Proletariat'
    seems
    too clumsy for using
to those
    whom communism
    throws into a fright.
For us, though,
    it sounds
    like mighty music
that'll rouse
    the dead
    to get up
    and fight.
Sumptuous mansions
    huddle closer, shivering.
Up their storeys
    goes the cry of basements, quivering;
'We'll break free
    into the sky's
    wide-open blue,
out
    of the abysmal stone blind alley.
He will come—
    a worker's son all through,
a leader yet unborn,
    the proletariat to rally.'
Look,
    the world's already small for Capital's ambition;
with his billion-dollar
diamond-studded hands,
doomed
to dream of gain
until perdition,
Capital
goes grabbing other lands.
Off they march,
in clashing steel,
athirst for pillage.
"Kill!"
they shriek;
two moneybags must come to clutches.
Soldiers’ graveyards
blot out every village,
each town
becomes a workshop
making crutches.
When it’s over
they lay their tables,
unfinicky.
Victory’s
the cake they carve and share.
But—
hearken to the burial mounds’ ventriloquy,
to the castanets of bones
picked clean and bare.
"You will see us once again
in war aflare.
Time will not forgive
the bloody crime."
He is coming—
    sage and leader-
    to declare
war on you,
    to end war for all time.'
Lakes of tears
    spread out
    to flood the globe.
All too deep
    grow blood-mires,
    all too copious.
Till at last
    lone day-dreamers
    began to probe
the probabilities
    of fancy-bred utopias.
But—
    philanthropists—
    they got their brain-pans cracked
against the adamantine rock
    of actual fact.
How could
    footpaths
    blazed by random spurts of brilliance
serve as thoroughfares
    for all the suffering millions?
Now Capitalism
    himself,
    the blundering thief,
can’t tame them,
    so his cogs’ wild tempo rises.
His system’s carried
like a yellow
wilted leaf
over the giddy ups and downs
of strikes and crises.
What to make
of all this
gold-fed circus,
whom to blame
and on whose side
to stand?
The million-headed,
million-handed
class of workers
strains its brains
itself to understand.

Capital’s days
were eroded and gnarled
by time
outblazing
searchlight arcs,
till time
gave birth
to a man named Karl—
Lenin’s
elder brother Marx.
Marx!
His portrait’s gray-framed sternness
grips one.
But what a gulf
between impressions
and his life!
What we see
immured in marble
or in gypsum
seems a cold old man
long since past care and strife.
But when the workers took—
uncertain yet in earnest—
the first short steps
along their revolutionary path,
into what a giant,
blazing furnace
Marx
fanned up his mind and heart!
As if he’d drudged whole shifts
in every factory himself
and,
callousing his hands,
each tool and job had handled,
Marx caught
the pilferers
of surplus value
with their pelf.
red-handed.
Where others quailed,
eyes dropped too low
in awe
to peer up
even as high
    as a profiteer’s umbilicus,
Marx undertook
    to lead the proletariat
        into class war
to slay the golden calf,
    by then a bull,
        immense and bellicose.
Into the bay of communism,
    still fogged
        with blinding mystery,
we thought
    the waves of chance alone
        could bring us
            from our hell.
Marx
    disclosed
        the deepest
            laws of history,
put
    the proletariat
        at the helm.
No,
    Marx’s books
        aren’t merely print and paper,
not dust-dry manuscripts
    with dull statistic figures.
His books
    brought order
        to the straggling ranks of labour
and led them forward,
full of faith and vigour.
He led them
and he told them:
'Fall in battles!
The proof of theories
are concrete deeds.
He'll come
one day,
the genius of practice,
and guide you on
from books
to battlefields!'
As he wrote
his last
with fingers trembling,
as the last thoughts
flickered in his eyes,
I know,
Marx had a vision
of the Kremlin
and the flag
of the Commune
in Moscow's skies.

Like melons
the years
came on in maturity.
Labour
grew out of childhood
at length.

Capital’s
bastions
lost security
as the proletarian tide
gained momentum and strength.
In a matter
of several years or so
inklings of gales
into tempests grow.
Uprisings break out
as the climax of wrath,
revolutions
come in their aftermath.
Ruthless
are the bourgeois’ bestial ways;
crushed
by Thiers’ and Galliffet’s*
inhuman hammer,
from Paris,
from the wall
of Père Lachaise†
the shadows
of the Communards
still clamour:
’Look and listen,
comrades!
Learn
from our debacle!

* The French Prime Minister Thiers and General Galliffet headed the operations against the Paris Commune of 1871.
† Paris cemetery where Communards were shot and buried.
Woe to single fighters!
    Let our lesson
    not be missed.
Only by a party
    can the enemy be tackled,
clenching
    all the working class
    in one great fist!’
‘We leaders!’
    some’ll say,
    then turn about and sting.
Learn to see
    beneath the words
    the spotted skin!
There’ll be a leader
    ours to the least thing,
straight as rails, simple as bread,
    prepared to go through thick and thin.
A pot-pourri
    of faiths and classes,
    dialects
    and conditions,
on wheels of gold
    the great world
    creaked along.
Capital,
    a very hedgehog for contradictions,
bristling with bayonets,
    waxed fat and strong.
The spectre of Communism
    haunted Europe,
withdrew, then roamed again throughout its girth.
For all these reasons
in Simbirsk,
    half-way from Moscow to the Urals,
Lenin,
    a boy like any other,
came to birth.
I knew a worker—
    he was illiterate—
hadn’t even tasted
    the alphabet’s salt,
yet he
    had listened
    to a speech by Lenin
and so
    knew
    all.
I remember a story
    by a Siberian peasant;
they’d seized land,
    held it
    and worked it
    into very heaven
They’d never even heard,
    much less read Lenin
but were Leninists all,
    from seven to seventy-seven.
I’ve been up mountains—
    not a lichen on their sides.
Just clouds
   lying prone
      on a rocky ledge.
The one
   living soul
      for hundreds
         of miles
was a herdsman
   resplendent
      with Lenin’s badge.
Some’ll call it
   a hankering for pins.
Fit for girls—
   makes a frock
      look a bit more rich.
But that pin’ll scorch
   through shirts
      and skins,
to the hearts
   brimful
      of devotion to Ilyich.
This couldn’t
   be explained
      by churchmen’s
         hooks and crooks;
no God Almighty
   bade him
      be a saviour.
Working
   step
      by step
Look down
at Russia
    from a flying plane.
She's blue
    with rivers
    as if
lashed all over
    with a willow cane
or striped
    by a seven-tail whip.
But bluer
    than a river
    ever looks through its rushes
were the bruises
    of landlord-ridden
    Russia.
Take a sidelong view
    of the woebegone land:
wherever
    you cast your eyes
mountains,
pit-heads
    and prisons stand
propping up
    her skies.
But worse than jail,  
    worse than war in the trenches  
was the lot  
    of those  
        who slaved at her benches.  
There were countries  
    richer by far,  
        I’ve heard,  
more beautiful,  
    more sane,  
but never have I met  
    in the whole wide world  
a land  
    more full  
        of sorrow  
            and pain.  
Yet pain and contempt  
    can’t be borne  
    forever.  
Land and Freedom!  
    the cry grew strong,  
until lone rebels,  
    believers  
        in individual terror  
took to dynamite,  
    bullet  
    and bomb.  
It’s well  
    to finish  
        the tsar at a shot,  
but what
if the bullet
    goes wide?
And Lenin’s brother
   Alexander
is caught
preparing
  regicide.
Shoot a tsar,
    and another
with all his might
will strain
  to break
  the record in tortures.
And so
   Alexander Ulyanov
one night
was hanged
  by the light of Schlüsselburg torches.*
Then his brother,
   a seventeen-year-old youth,
swore an oath
  that was firmer
    than any.
‘Brother,
we’ll take up
  the battle for truth
and win,

* Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin’s elder brother, a member of the Narodnaya Volya revolutionary society, was arrested on the eve of an attempt to assassinate the tsar, and executed, after court martial, at the Schlüsselburg Fortress, place of execution of many Russian revolutionaries.
but by other means,'
pledged Lenin.

Your usual hero—
look at the statues—
struts like a peacock:
'I'll show you
which is which!'
Not such was the feat,
arduous,
plain,
undramatic,
chosen
as the task of his life
by Ilyich.
Together with men
from the mills and mines
he sought
to raise wages
to a decent level,
looked for ways
of fighting
deductions and fines
and teaching good manners
to a foreman-devil.
But the struggle's
not merely
for some such claim—
to sweep up a puddle
and then go slow—
satisfied
by a trifle.
No—
Socialism’s the aim,
Capitalism
the foe
and the weapon
no broom
but a rille.
The same things
again
and again
and again
he hammers down
into the work-dimmed brain.
And tomorrow
those
who’ve at last understood
pass it on,
making
the lesson
good.
Yesterday it was dozens,
today it’s hundreds,
tomorrow
thousands
into action rising,
till the whole working world
will start rumbling like thunder
and break
into an open uprising.
We’re no longer timid
as newly-born lambkins;
the workers’ wrath
condenses
into clouds,
slashed
by the lightning
of Lenin’s pamphlets,
his leaflets
showing
on surging crowds.
The class
drank its fill
of Lenin’s light
and,
enlightened,
broke
from the gloom of millennia.
And in turn,
imbibing
the masses’ might,
together with the class
grew Lenin.
And gradually,
enriched
by the fertile communion,
they bring
young Vladimir’s pledge
to realization,
no longer
each
  on his own,
  but a Union
of Fighters
  for Working Class
  Emancipation.*
Leninism spreads
  ever wider
  and deeper.
Lenin’s disciples
  work miracle after miracle.
the underground’s grit
  traced in blood-drops
  seeping
through the dust
  and slush
  of the endless Vladimirka.†
Today
  we spin
  the old globe
  our way.
Yet even
  when debating
  in Kremlin armchairs
there’s few
  won’t suddenly recall a day
filled
  with the groans

* Name of earliest Marxist workers’ organization in Russia; embryo of the Communist Party.
† The highway by which political convicts were driven from Moscow to Siberia.
of chain-gang marchers.
Remember
the none-too-distant past:
beyond the eye-hole,
trams, droshkies, cars . . .
Who of you,
let me ask,
didn’t bite
and tear
at prison-bars?
We could smash out
our brains
on the walls weighing on us:
All they did was mop up
and strew sand.
’It wasn’t long but honest,
Your service to your land . . .’
In which of his exiles
did Lenin
get fond
of the mournful power
of that song?

The peasant—
’twas urged—
would blaze his own tracks
and set up socialism
without hitch or wrangle.
But no—
Russia too
goes bristling with stacks;
black beards of smoke
round her cities tangle.
There’s no god
to bake us
pies in the skies.
The proletariat
must head
the peasant masses.
Over capital’s corpse
Russia’s highroad
lies,
with Lenin
to lead
the toiling classes.
They’d promise heaps,
wordy liberals and SRs,’
themselves
not loath
to saddle workers’ backs.
Lenin made
short work of their yarns,
left them bare as babies
in the blaze of facts.
He soon disposed
of their empty prattle
full of ‘liberty’,
‘fraternity’

* Socialist-Revolutionary Party, a petty-bourgeois organization preaching individual terror; after the October Revolution it degenerated into a gang of plotters opposing Soviet power.
and suchlike words.

Arming
  with Marxism,
  mustering for battle,
rose the only
  Bolshevik Party
  in the world.

Now,
  touring the States
  in a de luxe coupe,
or footing it through Russia—
  wherever you be
they meet you,
  the letters
  R.C.P.
with their bracketed neighbour,
  B.

Today
  it’s red Mars
  astronomers are hunting,
telescopes
  scanning the sky from a high tower.
Yet that modest letter
  on paper or bunting
shines to the world
  ten times redder and brighter.

Words—

* Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—name used from 1918 to 1925.
even the finest—
   turn into litter,
wearing threadbare
   with use and barter.
Today
   I want to infuse
   new glitter
into the most glorious of words:
   PARTY.
Individual—
   what can he mean
   in life?
His voice
   sounds fainter
   than a needle dropping.
Who hears him?
   Only, perhaps,
   his wife,
and then if she’s near
   and not out shopping.
A Party’s
   a raging
   single-voiced storm
compressed
   out of voices
   weak and thin.
The enemy strongholds
   burst with its roar
like eardrums
   when cannon
   begin their din.
One man alone
feels down and out.
One man alone
won’t make weather.
Any old bully
can knock him about—
even weaklings
if two together.
But when
we midgets
in a Party stand—
surrender,
enemy,
fade
out of sight!
A Party’s
a million-fingered hand
clenched
into one fist
of shattering might.
What’s an individual?
No earthly good.
One man,
even the most important of all,
can’t raise a ten-yard log of wood,
to say nothing
of a house
of a house
ten stories tall.
A Party means millions
of arms,
brains,
eyes
linked
and acting together.
In a Party
we'll rear our projects to the skies,
upholding and helping
one another.
The Party’s
the compass
that keeps us on course,
the backbone
of the whole working class.
The Party
embodies
the immortality of our cause,
our faith
that will never
fail or pass.
Yesterday an underling,
today
whole empires I’m uncharting.
The brain,
the strength,
the glory of its class,
that’s what it is,
our Party.

Lenin
and the Party
are brother-twins.

Who’ll say
which means more
Lenin
and the Party
are the closest kin;
name one
and you can’t but imply
the other.

Crowns and coronets
still galore,
bourgeois
still blacken
like wintering crows.
But labour’s lava
already starts to pour:
see—
through the Party’s crater
it flows.

January 9.
Gapon,*
the ‘people’s friend’,
debunked.
We fall
in the rifles’ crackle.

Tall tales

* On 9 January 1905, the gendarmes, killing hundreds, scattered a peaceful manifestation carrying a petition to the tsar. The priest Gapon, its leader, had organized a whole system of police-sponsored workers’ circles, spreading the belief that the tsar was unaware of their miserable conditions.
about the tsar’s royal mercy
   end
with Mukden’s bloodbath
   and Tsushima’s debacle.*
Enough!
   No belief left
      for twaddle and twiddle.
The Presnya†
   takes to arms,
      done with ballyhoo.
It seemed
   the throne
      would soon snap across the middle
and forthwith
   the bourgeois easy chair too.
Ilyich is everywhere.
   Day after day
he fights
   with the workers
      through 1905,
standing nearby
   on every barricade,
innerving
   the revolution
      with his vigour and drive.
But soon
   came the treacherous trick:

* Mukden, Tsushima—sites of land and naval battles in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), where tsarism sustained military defeat from the Japanese; one of the main events that set off the revolution of 1905, disclosing the decay of the regime.
† An industrial district in Moscow where the street-fighting began in 1905.
Hey Presto!
Red ribbons
  blossomed
    like a virgin’s cheek.
The tsar
  from his balcony
    read the Manifesto.*
Then,
  after a ‘free’ honey-week,
the speeches,
  the singing,
    the hooraying and hailing
are covered
  by the treble bass of
cannon:
    on the workers’ blood goes sailing
the tsar’s butcher-admiral
  Dubasov.†
Spit in the faces
  of white dross who tell us
about the Cheka’s‡
  blood-dousings!
They ought to have seen
  how, tied by the elbows,
workers
  were flogged to death
    by thousands.

* On 17 October 1905, the tsar issued a manifesto promising certain civil rights—a subterfuge aimed at allaying popular indignation.
† Admiral Dubasov—governor-general of St. Petersburg, headed operations against the insurgent workers.
‡ Cheka—Extraordinary Commission headed by Dzerzhinsky; crushed counter-revolutionary plots in the first years of Soviet power.
Reaction ran amuck.  
    Intellectual bunglers 
withdrew, 
    recluses,  
    and became the meekest, 
locked themselves in 
    with blinking candles 
and smoked incense, 
    god-damn God-seekers.*
Even Comrade Plekhanov† himself 
raised a whine:
'It's the Bolsheviks' fault; 
    it's theirs, the muddle is. 
Shouldn't have taken up arms 
    at the time 
and blood wouldn't swirl, 
    as it does,  
    in puddles.'
But here 
    with his courage 
    never failing 
Lenin 
    cut 
    into the traitors' wail:
'O yes we should have— 
    I'll repeat it daily— 
only far more resolutely—

* Some of the intellectuals earlier supporting the revolutionary cause lost heart after the defeat of the revolution and abandoned the militant principles of the movement, indulging in 'God-seeking', i.e. religious mysticism.
† Georgi Plekhanov—prominent Marxist scholar and theoretician, who in 1905 drifted to the right and broke with Lenin.
and wouldn’t have failed.
I see
the hour of new upheavals
arriving
again
to bring out
the working
classes.
Not defence
but attack
should become the driving
slogan
of the masses.’
That nightmare year
with the bloody bath
and the massacre
of the workers’
insurgent millions
will pass
and appear
as preparatory class
for the hurricanes
of future rebellions.

And Lenin
once more
turns exile into college,
educating us
for the coming battle.
teaching others,
    himself gaining knowledge,
regathering the Party,
    unmanned and scattered.
Year after year
    the strikes scored higher:
a spark
    and the people'd
    flare up again.
But then
    came a year
    that put off the fire—
1914
        with its deluge of pain.
It’s thrilling
    when veterans
        twirl their whiskers
and, smirking,
        spin yarns
        about old campaigns.
But this wholesale,
    world-wide
        auction of mincemeat—
with what Poltava
    or Plevna*
        will it compare?
Imperialism
    in all
        his filth and mud,

* Poltava (Ukraine, 1709) and Plevna (Bulgaria, 1877)—cities near which big historic battles were won by Russian forces.
false teeth bared,
    growling and grunting,
quite at home
    in the gurgling ocean of blood,
went swallowing up
    country after country.
Around him,
    cozy,
    social-patriots and sycophants.
raising heavenwards
    the hands
    that betray,
scream like monkeys
    till everyone’s sick of it:
‘Worker—
    fight on—
    on with the fray!’
The world’s
    iron scrap-heap
    kept piling
    and piling,
mixed with minced man’s-flesh
    and splintered bone.
In the midst
    of all this
    lunatic asylum
Zimmerwald’
    stood sober alone.
Ever remembered

* The international socialist conference held in Zimmerwald (Switzerland, 1915) took a resolute stand against the imperialist war.
is the speech Lenin made
above the world uproar
raising on high
a voice
far louder
than any cannonade,
thoughts more inflaming
than any fire.
On one side
were millions
writhing in the labour
of war
to bring would-be victory
forth,
on the other—
against
both cannon and sabre—
one man
of ordinary
stature and girth.
'Soldiers!
The bourgeois
betray and sell you,
send you to slaughter
as a thousand times before.
Enough of it!
Hear what I tell you:
Turn this war
among nations
into civil war.
What are we,
peoples,
    arguing for?
Put an end
    to catastrophes,
    wounds
    and losses.
Raise the banner
    of holy war
against
    the world-wide bosses!' It looked as though,
    infernally booming,
the cannon would sneeze
    and blow him away.
Who'd ever find
    the fragile human?
Who would remember
    his name?
'Surrender!'
    one country roared to another.
Looked as if they'd go on fighting
    for millennia.
But at last it was over,
    and lo,
    no winners
except for one—
    Comrade Lenin.
Imperialism,
    damn you!
You've exhausted our patience,
    once fit for angels.
Rebellious Russia
  has rammed you
through—
  from Tebriz to Archangel.
An empire’s no hen—
  no joke bagging it,
the two-headed,
  power-vested,
    hook-beaked eagle.
And yet
  we spat out
    like a finished fag-end
their dynasty
  with all trappings,
    regal and legal.
The nation
  scrambling out of the mire,
huge,
  famished,
    blood-crust all over it—
would it go on
  dragging chestnuts from the fire
for the bourgeois,
  or would it go Soviet?
‘The people
  have broken
    tsarist fetters.
Russia’s boiling,
  Russia’s ablaze!’
Lenin read
  in newspapers and letters
in Switzerland
   where he lived those days.
But what could one fish
   out of newsprint tatters?
O,
   for an airplane
      skyward to speed—
home,
      to the aid
         of the workers in battle—
that
   was his only longing and need.
But at last
   at the Party’s bidding
      he’s on wheels.
If only
   the murderous Hohenzollern’ knew
that the German goods waggon
   under German seals
carried
   a bomb
      for his monarchy, too!

Petrograd citizens
   still kept skipping,
exulting
      in glee ephemeral.
But already.

* The dynastic name of German Kaiser Wilhelm II.
red-ribboned,
   in martial frippery,
the Nevsky* swarmed
   with treacherous generals.
Another few months
   and they’ll reach the limit:
it’ll come
   to policemen’s whistles.
The bourgeois
   already itch to begin it,
already
   the fur
   on the beast’s back bristles.
At first
   mere fry
   at which one might scoff,
then big sharks
   emerged
   to swallow
   the nation.
Next
   Dardanelsky,
   née Milyukov,†
and finally
   Prince Mikhail‡
   agog for coronation.

* Nevsky Prospekt—central thoroughfare of Petrograd.
† One of the leaders of the Russian counter-revolutionary forces; during the First World War advocated war until victory and annexation of the Dardanelles straits.
‡ Brother of Nicholas II; made claims to the throne immediately after the tsar’s abdication.
The Premier*
  wields power
    with feathery splendour:
none of your commissar’s snarling.
Sings in a tenor
  maidenly tender,
even kicks up hysterics,
  the darling.
We hadn’t yet tasted
  the sorriest crumbs
of February’s
  freedom-prodigies
when
  ’Off to the front,
    working thingamagums!’
the war-boys
  began prodding us.
And to crown
  this picture
    of passing beauty,
traitors and doublecrossers
  before and after that.
SRs and Savinkovs†
  stood on watchdog duty
with Mensheviks‡

* Kerensky, A.F.—Socialist-Revolutionary; from July 1917 headed the bourgeois Provisional Government. In August 1917 Premier Kerensky ordered Lenin’s arrest, secretly planning his murder.
† Boris Savinkov—one of the leaders of the SR Party; after the revolution headed several counter-revolutionary plots.
‡ Mensheviks—opportunistic minority in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.
as the Tell-Tale Cat.*

When suddenly
into the city
    sleeeking with blubber,
from beyond
    the broad-banked Neva,
from Finland Station
    through the Vyborg suburb
rumbled
    an armoured car.
And again
    the gale,
        momentum gaining,
set the whirlwind
    of revolution spinning.
Caps and blouses
    flooded the Liteiny:†
‘Lenin’s with us!
    Long live Lenin!’
‘Comrades,’
    and over the heads
        of the hundreds clapping
forward
    a guiding hand
        he thrust,
‘Let’s cast off
    the outworn Social-Democrat trappings
Chuck the capitalists
    and their yes-men

* The Tell-Tale Cat—folklore cat that could speak and tell stories.
† Liteiny Prospekt—one of Petrograd’s main streets.
into the dust!
We voice
the will
of the toilers
and tillers
of the whole world.
Now’s the hour.
Long live the Party
of communism builders,
long live
armed struggle
for Soviet power!’
For the first time ever
without ado
before the flabbergasted
human ocean
arose
as a routine job to do
once unattainable
socialism.
There,
beyond the factories roaring,
there, on the horizon
with blinding force
it shone
before us,
the Commune
of tomorrow
without bourgeois,
proletarians,
slaves
or lords.
Through the tangle
of tethering
yes-men’s tenets
Lenin’s speech
came crashing like an axe,
indented with uproar
every minute:
‘Right,
Lenin!
It’s time to act!’
Kshesinskaya’s palace,*
earned by twiddling toes.
today’s invaded
by boots
steel-heeled.
It’s here
the factory multitude
flows
in Lenin’s smithy
to be tempered
and steeled.
‘Munch your pineapples,
chew your grouse!
Your days are over.
bourgeois louse!’
Already we demanded
the wherefore and why
from those

* Kshesinskaya—prima ballerina of the Mariinsky Theatre; the tsar’s favourite, whose palace, a present from the tsar, was taken over by the revolutionary masses.
who, lording it,
quaffed and guzzled.
and during
the dress rehearsal of July*
tickled their gizzards
with revolver muzzles.
The bosses bared fangs,
their looks spelt murder;
'Rioting slaves!
We'll show 'em'!
they thundered.
'Lenin to the wall!' Kerensky penned the order;
'To jail with Zinoviev!'†
and the Party went underground.
Ilyich's in Finland,
at Razliv,
safe and sound,
hidden securely in a twig shelter.
It won't betray him to the pack of hounds ready
to snap him up in the welter.
Lenin's unseen.

* On 3–4 July 1917, Petrograd workers, soldiers and sailors held a peaceful demonstration demanding complete transfer of power to the Soviets. It was dispersed by gunfire at the orders of the Provisional Government.
† Zinoviev, G.Y.—joined the Russian Social-Democratic movement in 1901. After the Second Congress of the RSDLP (1903) Zinoviev joined the Bolsheviks.
and yet he’s near, 
and time and events 
don’t stand.

Every slogan 
is Lenin’s idea, 
every move 
is guided 
by Lenin’s hand.

Each word 
by Ilyich 
finds soil most fertile 
and falling 
forthwith 
promotes 
our cause, 
and see— 
alongside 
with Leninist workers 
millions of peasants 
into its orbit it draws. 

And when 
it remained 
but to mount barricades, 
having chosen 
a day out of many. 
back to Petrograd 
to the workers’ aid 
with 
‘Comrades, 
we’ve waited enough!’ 
came Lenin.
'The yoke of capital,  
hunger’s prodding,  
the banditry of wars  
and thieving intervention  
will seem  
in time  
mere moles on the body  
of Grandma History,  
escaping attention.’  
And looking back  
from the future  
on this day  
the first thing seen  
will be Lenin’s figure,  
from millennia  
of slavery  
blazing the way  
to the age of the Commune  
through want  
and rigour.  
These years of privation  
will sink into the past  
and the summer  
of the Commune  
warm this globe of ours,  
and the huge,  
sweet fruit of happiness  
at last  
will mature  
from the crimson  
October flowers.
And then
the readers
    of Lenin’s behests,
as the yellowing pages
    they peruse,
will feel a hot tide
    well up in their breasts,
and in their eyes—
    hot tears,
        long since out of use.
When I look
for the grandest day
    of my life,
rummaging
    in all
        I’ve gone through and seen.
I name without doubt
or internal strife
October 25,
    1917.
The Smolny* throbs
    in a buzz of excitement.
Grenades
    hang on seamen
        like partridges.
Bayonets zigzag
    like flashes of lightning.
Below stand machine-gunners
    belted with cartridges.

* Historic building accommodating the Petrograd Soviet; headquarters of the October uprising.
No aimless shuffling
    in the corridors;
with bombs and rifles
    no one’s a novice.
‘Comrade Stalin
    wants to see you.
    Here’s
the orders:
armoured cars—
    to the General Post Office.’
‘Comrade Trotsky’s*
    instructions.’
‘Right!’
    —he dashed forward
and the man’s
    navy ribbons
flashed:
    ‘Aurora’.†
Some run with dispatches,
others
    stand arguing,
still others
    click rifle-bolts—
    no two figures
    the same.

And here,

* Trotsky, L.D.—joined the Bolshevik Party on the eve of the October Revolution. After the October Revolution became the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and later, People’s Commissar of Army and Navy Affairs. In 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Party and deprived of Soviet citizenship for anti-Soviet activities.
† Aurora—famous battleship whose salvo signalled the beginning of the revolution.
no token
of greatness
or grandeur,
brisk
but inconspicuous,
Lenin
came.
Already
led
by Lenin
into battle,
they didn’t know him
from portraits
yet;
bustled,
hollered,
exchanged banter,
with a quickfire of oaths,
hail-fellow-well-met.
And there,
in that long-wished-for
iron storm
Lenin,
drowsy with fatigue,
it would seem,
pacing,
stoPping,
hands clasped behind back,
dug his eyes
into the motley scene.
Once I saw him
stabbing them
  into a chap in puttees,
dead-aiming,
  sharp-edged
    as razors,
seizing the gist
  as pincers would seize,
dragging the soul
    from under words and phrases.
And I knew,
  everything
    was disclosed
      and understood,
everything
  those eyes
    were raking for:
where
  the shipwright
    and miner stood,
what
  the peasant and soldier were aching for.
He kept all races
  within his sight,
all continents
  where the sun goes setting
    or dawning:
weighed the whole globe
  in his brain
    by night
and in the morning:
'To all,
every
and each,
slaves of the rich
one another
hacking and carving;
to you we appeal
this hour:
Let the Soviets
take over
government power!
Bread
to the starving!
Land
to the farmers!
Peace
to the peoples
and their warring armies!

The bourgeois, busy
drinking their fill of
soldierly blood,
shrieked in a frenzy:
‘At ’em,
Dukhonin and Kornilov,
show ’em what’s what,
Guchkov* and Kerensky!’

But both front and rear
surrendered without a shot
when the decrees†

* Dukhonin and Kornilov—White generals, Guchkov—minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government; leaders of the planned coup that aimed at preventing the imminent revolution.
† Decrees on Peace and Land and Decision on the Formation of a
hailed down on them, scorching.
Today we know who showed whom what’s what;
even at illiterates’ hearts they got,
into steel determination forging.
From near unto far it went rolling,
mounting from a whisper to a roar:
’Peace to cottages poor and lowly,
war on palaces, war, war, war!’
We fought in all factories, humble and famous,
shook ’em out of cities like peas,
while outside the October wildfire left flaming manors for landmarks marking its triumphant stride.

..............................................................

Workers’ and Peasants’ Government—the first to be issued by the revolutionary authorities.
The land—
    once a mat
    for wholesale floggings—
was suddenly seized
    by a calloused hand
with rivulets,
    hillocks
    and other belongings
and held tight—
    the long-dreamed-of,
    blood-soaked land.
The spectacled white-collars,
    spitting in spite,
sneaked off
    to where kingdoms and dukedoms
    still remain.
Good riddance!
    We’ll train every cook
    so she might
manage the country
    to the workers’ gain.

We survived
    for the time
    by printing,
    writing,
bellowing
    from the trenches
    into the German ear:
'Come out and fraternize!
   Finish fighting!
Enough!'
   and the front
   crumbled off into the rear.
Leaking in torrents
   that swelled out of trickles,
it seemed
   our boat was about to careen:
Wilhelm's boot,
   far heftier than Nicholas',
would smash the country
   to smithereens.
Then came the SRs
   with their infantile drivelling,
to catch the runners
   in their word-traps preposterous;
dragged them back
   with toy swords
   from the scrap-heap of chivalry
picturesquely to vanquish
   the iron-dad monsters.
But Lenin
   curbed
   the gamecocks' zest:
'The Party
   must shoulder
   the burden again.
We'll accept
   the breathing-space
of filthy Brest:*
Territory we'll lose,
    but time we'll gain.‘
And,
    so as the breathing-space
        shouldn’t kill us,
to be able,
    later,
        to knock them barmy,
let discipline
    and conscious resolve
        be our drillers.
Rally
    in the ranks
        of the Red Army!

Historians
    will stare
        at the posters with hydas:†
‘Did those hydas
    exist or not?’
As for us,
    that same hydra
        reached out to bite us
and a full-size hydra it was,

* The young Soviet Government was forced to sign the inequitable Brest Treaty with the Germans, which lasted only until November 1918, when the revolution in Germany overthrew the Kaiser.
† … posters with hydas—cartoons of the civil war depicted imperialism as a many-headed monster out to devour the Soviet Republic.
by god.
‘All dangers we’ll defy,
No limit to our courage,
And fighting we will die
For Soviet power to flourish!’

First comes Denikin.
Denikin gets a lickin’.

Repair work begins
on our ruined hearths.

Then Wrangel turns up
in the wake of Denikin;
the baron kicked out,
   Kolchak* comes en masse.

Our dinners—bark,
   beds—any old where,
yet forward
   the red-starred legion bursts.

In each lives Lenin,
   each feels Lenin’s care,
each along a front
   of eleven thousand versts.
That was its breadth—
   eleven thousand versts,
but who knows
   its depth and length?

Every door
   an enemy ambush nursed.

* General Denikin headed the first White Guard onslaught from the South; soon after his defeat, Baron Wrangel entered the Ukrainian steppes from the Crimea. Admiral Kolchak led the White armies based in Siberia. With equipment and financial backing from abroad, they successively and simultaneously attempted to smother the Soviet Republic.
every house
to be captured
took blood and strength.
SRs and monarchists
with their tongues and guns
sting,
the vipers,
or bite like hounds.
You don’t know the way
to Michelson’s?
You’ll find it
by the blood
from Lenin’s wounds.*
SRs talk better
than they pull a trigger.
their bullets
their own ribs ramming.
But a menace
beside which
bullets were meagre
was the siege
begun
by typhus
and famine.
Look at the crumb-collecting
flies:
by far
better off
than we were then.

* Allusion to an attempt on Lenin’s life by the SR terrorist Kaplan who chose the moment when Lenin was leaving a workers’ rally at the Michelson engineering works in Moscow, August 1918.
queueing
  in the freeze
  for a tiny slice
days
  on end.
Fancy
  a giant shipbuilding works
working for nothing
  but cigarette-lighters!
Jail 'em,
  hang 'em,
  cut their heads off,
how else
  could the workers earn grub,
  poor blighters?
But the kulaks
  had heaps of both butter and flour.
Kulaks,
  they weren't no boobies;
hid and hoarded
  till a fitter hour
their grain
  and their greasy rubles.
Hunger
  hits harder,
  kills surer than bullets.
You need a steel grip here,
  not cotton-wool lenience.
So Lenin sets out
  to fight the kulaks
by food requisition teams—
grim expedients.
How could the very notion
of democracy
at such a time enter
any fool’s head?!

At ’em
and none of your mincing hypocrisy.
Only iron dictatorship
to victory led.

We’ve won,
but our ship’s all dents and holes,
hull in splinters,
engines near end,
overhaul overdue
for floors,
ceilings,
walls.

Come,
hammer and rivet,
repair
and mend!

Where’s port?—
all the beacons gone dead in the harbour.

We careen,
crossing
the waves
with our masts.
There’s risk she’ll keel over,
such cargo to starboard:
the 100 million
peasant class!
While enemies howled
with malicious glee
Lenin alone
kept his nerve:
turned her twenty points leeward
and she
swerved upright
and entered port at a curve.
And at once,
surprisingly,
no more gale;
peasants cart bread
and at every step
the familiar ads:
WILL BUY—
FOR SALE—
—NEP*
Lenin winks:
we’re in fur repairs.
Get used to the yardstick—
nothing to fear.
The shore
rocks the crew,
weak with wear and tear:
‘Whoah!

* Abbreviation for the New Economic Policy proclaimed by Lenin, envisaging temporary permission for free private commerce, purposed to help the economy recuperate; the key positions in the economy being retained by the proletarian state.
Where’s the gale?
What’s the big idea?’

Lenin

points out

a deep bay

free of rocks

with the piers

of co-operatives

looming

over it.

And smoothly

into construction’s

docks

sailed

the colossal

country

of Soviets.

Lenin himself

heaves timber and iron

to patch up

the breaks and ruptures,

marks off and measures

with an all-seeing eye on

future co-ops,

shops

and management structures.

Then again

he resumes

his post

on the bridge:

Lights on
in front,
   at the sides
       and back!
Since now,
   systematic
       everyday
       siege
will replace
   both storm raid
       and surprise attack
At first
   we withdrew,
       discreet and sober.
Anyone disgraced—
   out without a word!
Now forward again—
   the retreat is over.
R.C.P.—
   crew aboard!
The Commune'll live centuries.
   What's a decade for her?
Forward,
   and this quagmire of a NEP
       will be past.
We'll move
   and build
       a hundred times slower
so a million times longer
   our edifice may last.
The morass
   of petty 'private enterprise'
still tethers
    the tempo
    of our advance,
but through the gathering clouds
    of the world-wide tempest
the first streaks of lightning
    already glance.
Old enemies drop
    and give place to new.
Yet wait—
    the skies
    over the world
    we’ll ignite.
But that
    is surely
    better
    to do
than
    to write about.
    Right?
Today,
    whether in the office
    of a director
or running a lathe
    at a public-owned factory,
we know—
    the proletariat is victor.
and Lenin
    the architect of victory.
From the Comintern
    to the hammer and sickle
on brand-new kopeks
  shining in glory,
our achievements
  and triumphs
double
  and triple,
filling page after page
  of Lenin’s great story.
Revolutions
  are the business of peoples;
for individuals
  they’re too heavy to wield.
yet Lenin
  ranked foremost
  among his equals
by his mind’s momentum,
  his will’s firm steel.
Countries rise
  one after the other,
fulfilling
  his predictions
  each in turn;
men of all races—
  white
  and dark-skinned—
rally
  under the banner
  of the Comintern.
The imperialists
  and bourgeois
  in their thinning crowds,
still pester the world
and lord it over it,
politely tip
their top hats and crowns
to Ilyich’s brain-child—
the Republic of Soviets.
Fearing no effort
or artifice by the rich,
on speeds our engine
in curling smoke.
When suddenly—
the shattering news:
Ilyich
had a stroke . . .
If
you exhibited
in a museum
a Bolshevik in tears,
all day
they’d flock in the museum
to see him.
Small wonder—
you won’t see the like in years.
With five-pointed stars
we were branded
by Polish voivodes.
Buried alive
neck-deep in the ground
by the bandits of Mamontov,*
burned up in engine fire-boxes

* White Guard general, notorious for brutality.
by Japanese marauders,
mouths plugged with molten tin,
threatened with bullets;
'Renounce it!' they bellowed,
but from
the hell-holes of burning gullets
'Long live Communism!'
was all that would come.
Row
after row,
in its might unreckoned,
this iron,
this steel,
the recess not over yet,
crowded
on January
the twenty-second
the five-storey building
of the Congress of Soviets.
Down they settled,
joking
and grinning,
affairs talked over
in business-like idiom.
Time to start!
Why aren't they beginning?
Here,
what are those gaps in the presidium?
Why are their eyes
red as box-stall plush?
Look at Kalinin*—
    hardly keeps his feet.
Something happened?
    What is it? …
    Hush!
What if it’s him?
    No, indeed …
Raven-like,
    the ceiling
      swooped upon us,
        lowering;
down dropped heads,
    bent floorward by their fears.
Of a sudden
    ghastly,
      blackly glowering
grew the swimming lights
    of chandeliers.
Silence choked the bell’s unneeded tinkle.
Up Kalinin got,
    by will alone.
Tears—
    go try and chew them
      from moustache and wrinkle;
they betray him,
    shining
      on the beard’s sharp cone.
Veins ablaze—
    no hope of quenching them;

* Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin—Chairman of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and later of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.
thoughts confused—
    like walls his head impenning;
‘Yesterday
    at 6.50 p.m.
died
    Comrade Lenin.’

That year
    beheld a sight
    that ages won’t set eye on.
That day will keep
    its tale of woe
    forever throbbing.
Horror
    squeezed an anguished groan from iron.
The rows of Bolsheviks
    were swept
    with waves of sobbing.
What a weight!
    Ourselves
    we dragged out bodily.
Get the details!
    When and where?
    Why do they hide it,
    damn!
Through the streets and lanes,
    a white hearse modelling,
the Bolshoi Theatre swam.
Joy
crawls on like a snail.
Grief
will never go slow.
No sun shone.
No ice
gleamed pale.
All the world
from the newspapers’ pail
was cold-showered
with coal-black snow.
On the worker
bent at his gears
the news pounced
and bullet-like
burned.
And it seemed
a cupful of tears
on his instruments
overturned.
And the peasant,
weathered and wizened by life,
whom death
more than once
just missed,
swung round—
away from his wife,
but she saw it—
the dirt he smudged with his fist.
There were some—
no flint could be harder or colder,
yet they too
clenched their teeth,
   lips awry.
Children
   in a minute grew graver and older
and,
   childlike,
      the grey-bearded started to cry.
The wind
   to all the earth
      in sleepless anguish whined,
and she, the rebel,
   couldn't stand up to the notion
that here,
   in Moscow,
      in a frosty room enshrined
lay he—
   both son and father
      of the Revolution.
The end,
   the end,
      the end . . .
   All persuasion
useless!
Glass
   and beneath—
      the deceased.
It's him
   they bear
      from Paveletsky Station
through the city
   that he
from the lords
released.
The street’s like a wound
that’ll worsen and worsen,
so the ache of it
cuts
and hacks.
Here every cobble
knew Lenin
in person
by the tramp
of the first October attacks.
Here every slogan
on banners embroidered
was thought out
and worded
by him.
Here every tower
his speeches
applauded,
would follow him
anywhere,
staunch and grim.
Here Lenin
is known
both in works and offices.
Spread hearts
like spruce-tree boughs
in his way!
He led,
he steeled
with his victory-prophecies,
and see—
proletarians
have taken sway.
Here every peasant
holds Lenin’s name
dearer
than any
of kinsmen cherished
for the land
that at Lenin’s bidding became
his own—
da dream
for which grandsires
rebelled
and perished.
And Communards
from their graves
in Red Square
seemed to be whispering
‘Dear,
beloved,
live,
and no need for a lot more fair.
We’d die ten times
for fulfilment of it.’
Let the word
be pronounced
by a miracle-maker
for us to die
that he be awoken;
the street-streams would swell
    and flood their embankments
and all
    go to death
        with a joy unspoken.
But there aren’t any miracles.
    Only Lenin.
Lenin,
    his coffin
        and our bent shoulders.
This man was a human—
    as human as anyone.
So just bear it—
    the pain
        that in humans smoulders.
Never
    was there
        a burden more precious
borne along
    by oceans of people
than this red coffin
    borne by processions
on the drooping shoulders
    of marches and weeping.
The Guard of Honour
    had scarcely been formed
of heroes,
    heirs
        of his wisdom and strength,
when crowds,
    impatient,
already swarmed
through all the neighbourhood’s
breadth
and length.
Into a 1917 breadline
no hunger
could drive—
    better eat tomorrow.
But into this bitter,
    freezing,
    dread line
    kids,
    invalids—
all
    were driven by sorrow.
Alongside
    village and town
    were arrayed,
child and adult,
    wrung
    by their grief’s insistence.
The world of labour
    passed
    in parade,
the living total
    of Lenin’s existence.
Downcast,
    the sunbeams
dropped through the trees,
slanting down
    from the house-top slopes,
yellow
  as whipped-into-meekness Chinese
  bent with their sorrow,
  lamenting their hopes.
Nights
  swam in
    on the shoulders
      of days
muddling hours
  and confusing dates
and it seemed,
  not night
    with its star-born rays,
but Negroes
  were here
    with their tears
      from the States.
The frost,
  unheard-of,
    scorched one’s feet,
yet days
  were spent
    in the tightening crush.
Nobody
  even ventures
    to beat
hands together to warm them—
  hush!
The frost grips fast and tortures;
  as if
trying how tough
the love-tempered will is, 
cuts into mobs, 
and, freezing them stiff, as if 
sneaks in 
with the crowds 
behind the pillars.
The steps expand, 
grow up into a reef.
Silence.
Breathing and sighing stop:
how pass it, 
fearful beyond belief, 
that dismal, 
abysmal
four-step drop?
That drop
from the logic of farthing and penny, 
from ages 
of thraldom to His Majesty Gold;
that drop
with its brink—
the coffin
and Lenin
and beyond—
the Commune
in its glory unrolled.
Lenin’s forehead
was all you saw
and Nadezhda Konstantinovna*

* Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya—Bolshevik leader, and major theorist of education; partner of Lenin.
in a haze …
Maybe eyes less full of tears
could show me more.
It’s through clearer eyes
I’ve looked on gladder days.
The floating banners
bend
in the last
honours,
and, silken, sway.
‘Farewell to you,
comrade,
who have passed
from a noble life
away …’
Horror!
Shut your eyes
and blindfold pace
the infinity
of tight-rope grief.
As if
for a minute
left face to face
with the only
truth
worth belief.

What joy!
My body,
light as a feather,
drifts
    in the march-tune’s resonant stream.
I know
    for sure—
        from now and forever
the light of this minute
    in me will gleam.
What a joy it is
    to be part of this union,
even tears from the eyes
    to be shared en masse,
in this—
    the purest,
        most potent communion
with that glorious feeling
    whose name is Class.
The banner-wings
    droop
        one after another,
in tomorrow’s battles
    again to rise;
‘We ourselves,
    dear brother,
closed
    your eagle eyes . . .’
Shoulder to shoulder—
    not to fall!
Flags blackened,
    eyes reddening,
    tears agleam,
for the last farewell with Lenin
    came all,
slowing
down
    at the Mausoleum.
On went the funeral ceremonial.
Speeches flowed.
    Ay, speaking’s all right;
the tragedy is
    there’s a minute only—
how embrace him
    at one insatiable sight!
Out they file
    and with dread in their glance
look up
    at the glowering,
      snow-pocked disk:
how madly
    the dockhands on Spasskaya* dance!
A minute—
    and past the last quarter
      they whisk!
Stop
    at this news,
      mankind,
      and grow dumb
Life,
    movement,
      breathing—cease.
You,

* Kremlin clock-tower.
with hammer uplifted,  
    be numb.
Earth,  
    lie low  
    and, motionless, freeze.
Silence.  
    The end of the greatest of fighters.
Cannon fired.  
    A thousand, perhaps.
Yet all that cannonade  
    sounded quieter  
    than pennies  
    jingling in beggars’ caps.
Straining,  
    paining  
    each puny iris
I stand,  
    half-frozen,  
    with  
    bated breath.
In the gleaming of banners  
    before me arises  
    darkling,  
    the globe,  
    as still as death.
And on it—  
    this coffin  
    mourned by mankind,  
    with us,  
    mankind’s representatives,  
    round it,
in a tempest of deeds
   and uprisings destined
to build up
   and complete
       all this day has founded.

But now,
   from the bowing banners’
       red arch
comes the voice of Muralov:*
    ‘Forward
       march!’
The command’s so apt
   it needn’t be given:
our breathing firmer,
   more even
       and rare,
leaden bodies with effort
   driven,
we hammer
   our footsteps
       down from the square.
Each of the banners
   above our heads
in steadying hands
   soars up
       as it ought.
From our marching ranks

* Muralov, N.I.—then commander of the Moscow Military District.
the energy
spreads
in circles,
carrying through the world
one thought;
one thought
from a common anxiety
stemming
burns
in the army.
at the lathe,
at the plough:
it'll be hard for the Republic
without Lenin.
He's got to be replaced,
but by whom
and how?
'Enough of dozing
on bug-ridden mattresses!
Comrade secretary,
here's
our application:
put down
the whole of the factory
on the membership list
of the Party organization.'
Cold sweat
comes oozing
from bourgeois flesh
as they watch on,
grinding
their teeth.

400,000
from the workbench
fresh—
could the Party
bring Lenin
a welcomer
wreath?

‘Comrade secretary,
where’s your pen?
Replace means replace—
why squander words?
If you think I’m too old,
here’s my grandson then;
YCL-er,*
one of the early birds!’

Ahoy,
my Navy,
get into motion!
Off on your missions,
submarine moles!
‘Over sea
and over ocean
travel sailors,
merry souls!’
Hi there, Sun,

* YCL—The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, also called the Komsomol.
come and be witness!
Hurry on,
smooth out the wrinkles of mourning.
In line with parents,
children show their fitness—
Tra-ta-ta-ta-aa-aa!
sing their bugles in the morning.
'One-Two-Three,
Pioneers are we:
We aren't afraid of fascists—
Let them come and see!' 
In vain
old Europe
snarls like a cur.
'Back!'
we warn her,
'better be wiser!'

Lenin’s
very death
has turned
into the greatest
communist-organizer!
Over the world-wide forest
of factory
stacks
like a giant banner
the huge
Red Square,
millions
of hands
welded into its staff,
soars
    with a mighty sweep
    into the air.
And from that banner,
    from every fold
Lenin,
    alive as ever,
    cries:
'Workers,
    prepare
    for the last assault!
Slaves,
    unbend
    your knees and spines!
Proletarian army,
    rise in force!
Long live
    the Revolution
    with speedy victory.
the greatest
    the justest
    of all the wars
ever
    fought
    in history!'
THE THREE SOURCES AND THREE COMPONENT PARTS OF MARXISM*

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

Throughout the civilized world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal), which regards Marxism as a kind of 'pernicious sect'. And no other attitude is to be expected, for there can be no 'impartial' social science in a society based on class struggle. In one way or another, all official and liberal science defends wage-slavery, whereas Marxism has declared relentless war on that slavery. To expect science to be impartial in a wage-slave society is as foolishly naïve as to expect impartiality from manufacturers on the question of whether workers' wages ought not to be increased by

* This article was dedicated to the Thirtieth Anniversary of Marx's death, and was published in Prosveshchenny (Enlightenment), a Bolshevik social, political and literary monthly published legally in St. Petersburg from December 1911 onwards. Its inauguration was proposed by Lenin to replace the Bolshevik journal Mysl (Thought), a Moscow publication banned by the tsarist government. Lenin directed the work of the journal from abroad and wrote the following articles for it: 'Fundamental Problems of the Election Campaign', 'Results of the Election', 'Critical Remarks on the National Question', 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination', and others.

The journal was suppressed by the tsarist government in June 1914, on the eve of the First World War. Publication was resumed in the autumn of 1917 but only one double number appeared; this number contained two articles by Lenin: 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?' and 'A Review of the Party Programme'.
decreasing the profits of capital.

But this is not all. The history of philosophy and the history of social science show with perfect clarity that there is nothing resembling ‘sectarianism’ in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose away from the high road of the development of world civilization. On the contrary, the genius of Marx consists precisely in his having furnished answers to questions already raised by the foremost minds of mankind. His doctrine emerged as the direct and immediate continuation of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism.

The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defence of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.

It is these three sources of Marxism, which are also its component parts that we shall outline in brief.

I

The philosophy of Marxism is materialism. Throughout the modern history of Europe, and especially at the end of the eighteenth century in France, where a resolute struggle was conducted against every kind of medieval rubbish, against serfdom in institutions and ideas, materialism has proved to be the only philosophy that is consistent, true to all the teachings of natural science and hostile to superstition, cant and so forth. The enemies of democracy have, therefore,
always exerted all their efforts to 'refute', undermine and defame materialism, and have advocated various forms of philosophical idealism, which always, in one way or another, amounts to the defence or support of religion.

Marx and Engels defended philosophical materialism in the most determined manner and repeatedly explained how profoundly erroneous is every deviation from this basis. Their views are most clearly and fully expounded in the works of [Friedrich] Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and Anti-Dühring, which, like the Communist Manifesto, are handbooks for every class-conscious worker.

But Marx did not stop at eighteenth-century materialism: he developed philosophy to a higher level, he enriched it with the achievements of German classical philosophy, especially of Hegel’s system, which in its turn had led to the materialism of Feuerbach. The main achievement was dialectics, i.e. the doctrine of development in its fullest, deepest and most comprehensive form, the doctrine of the relativity of the human knowledge that provides us with a reflection of eternally developing matter. The latest discoveries of natural science—radium, electrons, the transmutation of elements—have been a remarkable confirmation of Marx’s dialectical materialism despite the teachings of the bourgeois philosophers with their 'new' reversions to old and decadent idealism.

Marx deepened and developed philosophical materialism to the full, and extended the cognition of nature to include the cognition of human society. His historical materialism was a great achievement in scientific thinking. The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory, which shows how, in consequence
of the growth of productive forces, out of one system of social life another and higher system develops—how capitalism, for instance, grows out of feudalism.

Just as man’s knowledge reflects nature (i.e. developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man’s social knowledge (i.e. his various views and doctrines—philosophical, religious, political and so forth) reflects the economic system of society. Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat.

Marx’s philosophy is a consummate philosophical materialism which has provided mankind, and especially the working class, with powerful instruments of knowledge.

II

Having recognized that the economic system is the foundation on which the political superstructure is erected, Marx devoted his greatest attention to the study of this economic system. Marx’s principal work, Capital, is devoted to a study of the economic system of modern, i.e. capitalist, society.

Classical political economy, before Marx, evolved in England, the most developed of the capitalist countries. Adam Smith and David Ricardo, by their investigations of the economic system, laid the foundations of the labour theory of value. Marx continued their work; he provided a proof of the theory and developed it consistently. He showed that the value of every commodity is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time spent on its production.
Where the bourgeois economists saw a relation between things (the exchange of one commodity for another) Marx revealed a *relation between people*. The exchange of commodities expresses the connection between individual producers through the market. *Money* signifies that the connection is becoming closer and closer, inseparably uniting the entire economic life of the individual producers into one whole. *Capital* signifies a further development of this connection: man’s labour-power becomes a commodity. The wage-worker sells his labour-power to the owner of land, factories and instruments of labour. The worker spends one part of the day covering the cost of maintaining himself and his family (wages), while the other part of the day he works without remuneration, creating for the capitalist *surplus-value*, the source of profit, the source of the wealth of the capitalist class.

The doctrine of surplus-value is the cornerstone of Marx’s economic theory.

Capital, created by the labour of the worker, crushes the worker, ruining small proprietors and creating an army of unemployed. In industry, the victory of large-scale production is immediately apparent, but the same phenomenon is also to be observed in agriculture, where the superiority of large-scale capitalist agriculture is enhanced, the use of machinery increases and the peasant economy, trapped by money-capital, declines and falls into ruin under the burden of its backward technique. The decline of small-scale production assumes different forms in agriculture, but the decline itself is an indisputable fact.

By destroying small-scale production, capital leads to an increase in productivity of labour and to the creation of
a monopoly position for the associations of big capitalists. Production itself becomes more and more social—hundreds of thousands and millions of workers become bound together in a regular economic organism—but the product of this collective labour is appropriated by a handful of capitalists. Anarchy of production, crises, the furious chase after markets and the insecurity of existence of the mass of the population are intensified.

By increasing the dependence of the workers on capital, the capitalist system creates the great power of united labour. Marx traced the development of capitalism from embryonic commodity economy, from simple exchange, to its highest forms, to large-scale production.

And the experience of all capitalist countries, old and new, year by year demonstrates clearly the truth of this Marxian doctrine to increasing numbers of workers.

Capitalism has triumphed all over the world, but this triumph is only the prelude to the triumph of labour over capital.

III

When feudalism was overthrown and 'free' capitalist society appeared in the world, it at once became apparent that this freedom meant a new system of oppression and exploitation of the working people. Various socialist doctrines immediately emerged as a reflection of and protest against this oppression. Early socialism, however, was utopian socialism. It criticized capitalist society, it condemned and damned it, it dreamed of its destruction, it had visions of a better order and endeavoured to convince the rich of the immorality of exploitation.
But utopian socialism could not indicate the real solution. It could not explain the real nature of wage-slavery under capitalism, it could not reveal the laws of capitalist development, or show what social force is capable of becoming the creator of a new society.

Meanwhile, the stormy revolutions which everywhere in Europe, and especially in France, accompanied the fall of feudalism, of serfdom, more and more clearly revealed the struggle of classes as the basis and the driving force of all development.

Not a single victory of political freedom over the feudal class was won except against desperate resistance. Not a single capitalist country evolved on a more or less free and democratic basis except by a life-and-death struggle between the various classes of capitalist society.

The genius of Marx lies in his having been the first to deduce from this the lesson world history teaches and to apply that lesson consistently. The deduction he made is the doctrine of the class struggle.

People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises. Champions of reforms and improvements will always be fooled by the defenders of the old order until they realize that every old institution, however barbarous and rotten it may appear to be, is kept going by the forces of certain ruling classes. And there is only one way of smashing the resistance of those classes, and that is to find, in the very society which surrounds us, the forces which can—and, owing to their social position, must—constitute the power
capable of sweeping away the old and creating the new, and to enlighten and organize those forces for the struggle.

Marx’s philosophical materialism alone has shown the proletariat the way out of the spiritual slavery in which all oppressed classes have hitherto languished. Marx’s economic theory alone has explained the true position of the proletariat in the general system of capitalism.

Independent organizations of the proletariat are multiplying all over the world, from America to Japan and from Sweden to South Africa. The proletariat is becoming enlightened and educated by waging its class struggle; it is ridding itself of the prejudices of bourgeois society; it is rallying its ranks ever more closely and is learning to gauge the measure of its successes; it is steeling its forces and is growing irresistibly.
"The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defence of bourgeois oppression."

V.I. Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (22 April 1870 – 21 January 1924), was the chief theoretician of the revolution against the Tsarist empire and the head of the government of the Soviet Republic and then the USSR from 1917 to 1924. Gripped by the suffering induced by capitalism and by the hopes of a communist revolution, Lenin worked hard between the energy of Marx’s theories and the praxis of workers and peasants.

One hundred and fifty years after his birth, he and his ideas remain a beacon for revolutionaries the world over.

Three publishing houses—LeftWord Books (India), Expressão Popular (Brazil), and Batalla de Ideas (Argentina)—along with Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, have joined together to produce this book in honour of Lenin.

The book comprises Lenin’s essay ‘The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism’ (1913), which is a short and concise introduction to the Marxist method; the epic poem on Lenin written by his younger contemporary and revolutionary poet and artist Vladimir Mayakovsky (1924); and a short text by Vijay Prashad on the enduring relevance of Lenin’s ideas for us today.