

# Lenin's Life and Work

BY KARL RADEK.

FOR the first time in the history of humanity the news of the death of a statesman not only thrilled the whole world, but went to the heart of millions in every country, and among all peoples. There are countries in which millions mourn for him, other countries in which his mourners number only a few hundred thousand, and again others in which they count but a handful. But there is no people among which there was not someone who said, on the 22nd of January: "My leader is dead."

The death of Lenin gives the proletarian idea an enormous impetus in every country. In every country the proletarians have learnt to fight for the fragments of Lenin's ideas which have reached them in our letters and resolutions. When they had tested these ideas by their own experience, and had seen in them the truth of their life, they were reassured. They knew that the ship of international revolution was being steered by this genius of the international proletariat. And they had faith in his captaincy. But now everything is changed. Every member of the working class who is accustomed to think is now fully engrossed with the thought of how he can best learn from the work and life of Lenin, how he may find in Lenin's books the weapons for his struggle, how he may learn to employ these weapons self-reliantly. In this regard there can be nothing so characteristic as the words spoken by a German communist on hearing of the death of Lenin: "Do not give us a selection from Lenin's works, give us all Lenin's works in the most important European languages, so that we can appropriate to ourselves his manner of thought and his methods, by means of our own independent work."

Many years will pass before we can erect this monument to Lenin, even in the leading countries of the labour movement, before we can enable the European workers to enter into their full inheritance of knowledge of the life and works of Lenin. Until this has been accomplished, it is the task of the Communists to show what historical role has been played by Lenin, and to draw the outlines of his ideas, however roughly and generally.

Karl Marx's teachings are laid down in his books. His correspondence represents an adequate commentary to his works. Lenin has left dozens of books behind him. When his letters are collected, these will fill dozens of volumes more. But the most important commentary to Lenin's teachings is Lenin's completed work: the creation of the Russian Communist Party and the struggle of this Party for power. It was Lenin's methods which enabled the proletariat to maintain its power under the most difficult circumstances, and it is his methods which Lenin has bequeathed to the Russian proletariat, not only as a means for the maintenance of power, but as a means for the solution of those tasks for the sake of which the working class of Russia seized power.

Marx took part in the revolution in Germany in '48. But as the proletarian elements were too weak in this revolution he could not play any decisive role. The revolution of 1848 in Germany was in itself a belated birth. It came too late to be victorious as a bourgeois revolution, and altogether too early to be led by the proletariat. The revolution of 1848 was followed by decades of reaction, and during this period Marx could only play the part of spectator, and study the mechanism of the bourgeois world. This reactionary period was followed by the epoch of national struggles, in which the proletariat could again play no leading part. Then the meteor of the Paris Commune appeared on the horizon. Marx's mind alone was capable of grasping the meaning of this transient phenomenon. But here again there could be no question of a leading role for Marx.

After the Paris Commune, and until the death of Marx, reaction reigned in Europe. The revolu-

tionary tasks of the bourgeoisie had already been fulfilled in the West. Slowly and despondently the proletariat began to build up its armies again. It gathered together in small groups in different countries, its scattered movements could not be centrally guided. Marx's whole genius exhausted itself in the study of the fundamental laws of development of the bourgeois world and the proletariat which was bound up with it. He was given no opportunity of testing his ideas as the leading genius of revolution in the fire of a civil war.

Lenin stood with both feet on the ground of Marx's teachings, which he understood more profoundly and thoroughly than any other follower of Marx. But Lenin prepared himself, from the first day of his activity onwards, to become the practical leader of the communist revolution. He devoted his whole life to working out those tasks which were not solved till the year 1917: to the preparation of that great breach broken through the front of the international bourgeoisie in October 1917. It is thirty years come next spring that the youthful Lenin wrote as follows in his work: "Who are the Friends of the People?"

"The Social Democrats devote the whole of their attention and activity to the working class. When the vanguard of the working class has possessed itself of the ideas of scientific Socialism, the ideas of the historical role have become widespread and have created firm organizations among the working class, converting the present scattered economic struggles of the workers into a conscious class struggle—then the Russian worker, who is at the head of all democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism and lead the Russian proletariat (by the side of the proletariat of every country) along the straight path of open political struggle, to the victorious communist revolution."

The study of Lenin's teachings on the communist revolution demands above all the study of the methods practised by Lenin as leader in the struggle of the Russian proletariat for power.

The power of conviction evinced by Lenin in his actions as politician, and as leader of the proletarian Party, has been the subject of universal astonishment. Many have regarded this power of conviction as the result of his authoritative character, which rendered him a natural leader of men. Others have seen the source of his power of conviction in his unshakeable faith in Socialism. But the authoritative will does not only attract human beings, it can also have the effect of repulsing them, when the test of history shows that this will had led itself and others into false paths. Lenin's power as a leader lay in the fact that his Party comrades were always convinced that his will was leading them forward on the right historical path.

He could not find this right path through his faith in Socialism alone. Faith in Socialism was equally unshakeable in the leader of the English reformists, Keir Hardie, who led the English proletariat into false paths; and the leader of French socialism, Jean Jaures, too, was a profound believer in Socialism, as was also the most disinterested man of the II. International, Victor Adler, who guided the Austrian proletariat to the abysses of social patriotism. But despite their great faith, all these leaders did not stand the test of history. Socialism is no religion, Socialism is the science of the pre-requisites of the victory of the proletariat. The iron force of Lenin's conviction found its source in the fact that he had thought out Marx's social tenets as no scholar of Marx had ever done before, that these tenets had become part of his being, and that he applied them as no follower of the Father of Scientific Socialism has done. Lenin has not left behind him many works on the general principles of the Marxian teachings, for he was too fully occupied with the practical work entailed in the creation and leadership of a proletarian party in Russia. But it suffices if we remember how Lenin dealt with the questions of historical materialism in the above men-

tioned early work; we only need to compare his treatment of these questions with that of the contemporary writings of Plechanov and Kautsky, and we have ample evidence of Lenin's independent manner of solving the theoretical problems of Marxism. Two or three pages dealing with the difference between dialectics and eclecticism, and inserted apparently quite accidentally in the pamphlet issued by Lenin at the time of the discussion on the trade union question, show how modest he was in designating himself a scholar of Plechanov. Lenin was a great and independent Marxian thinker. And this was the premise enabling this man of iron to become the leading politician of the international proletariat.

Lenin as a thinker, Lenin as a politician of the Russian revolution, developed under conditions rendering the questions of revolution questions of practical struggle. This enabled him to stand head and shoulders above the other followers of Marx.

Lafargue developed in a petty bourgeois country over which had swept the storms of three revolutions, but in which Capitalism had not yet created the pre-requisites of the new proletarian society. Lafargue's great talent was not given the opportunity of developing into genius.

Kautsky, who was the first after Marx and Engels to try and apply Marxism independently, was only able to utilize Marxism for the purpose of studying the history of society. But with respect to living deeds, and to the questions of the German movement, Marxism only served him as a means of explaining to the proletariat that it is impossible either to circumvent or to spring over the class enemy, and that forces must be slowly collected for the decisive battle. According to Kautsky, this decisive battle was still at such a great distance that, when in his works he hesitatingly approached the subject of the seizure of power, of social revolution, he himself had grasped the contours of this question so vaguely, that he overlooked one of the most important tasks of the proletarian revolution—where the victorious proletariat is to obtain its bread on the day following its victory.

Plechanov, the brilliant interpreter of Marxist tenets, the brilliant defender of these tenets "against any kind of criticism," lived far from the spot where the tempest arose, far from Russia. And all his great interest in the revolutionary struggle in Russia proved insufficient to concentrate all the forces of his brain upon the study of the practical tasks of the revolutionary struggle of the Russian proletariat, and there can be nothing more characteristic than the fact, that after Plechanov had written "Our Differences of Opinion," he never devoted a single essay to the detailed study of one of the most important questions of the Russian revolution, the agrarian question.

Lenin, as theoretician and as politician, occupied himself from the first moment of his activity, precisely with the study of the most important fields of activity of the Russian proletariat, and with those main forces which were to participate in the Russian revolution. A comparison of the treatment of the agrarian question by Kautsky, Kschivitzky, and Compere Morel on the one hand, and Lenin on the other, graphically illustrates, not only, the difference between the economic conditions in Western Europe and in Russia, not only the peculiarities of the agrarian question in Russia and in Western Europe, but also the advantages possessed by Lenin as a revolutionary leader, over the chief representatives of revolutionary socialism in West Europe. Lenin not only studied the agrarian question from the point of view of explaining the destiny towards which Capitalism is developing, from the view-point of the correctness or incorrectness of Marxian theses as applied to the agrarian question, but above all from the view-point of the struggle of the proletariat.

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