LENIN: A STUDY OF THE UNITY OF HIS THOUGHT

GEORG LUKACS' SHORT STUDY of the thought of Lenin written in February 1924, just after Lenin's death has been well worth the republishing. At the time he wrote Lukacs had come strongly under the influence of Hegel and he performs something of a dialectical dance around his subject. Lenin is presented as an outstanding example of the revolutionary dialectical thinker who sees the main trends of the time behind specific events, a thinker able both to comprehend the revolution as the fundamental problem and to apply this understanding concretely to day to day happenings.

The memoir is interesting also as an indication of the perspective in which Lenin's achievements were seen by Communist contemporaries. There is a succinct summary of the stages by which Lenin proceeded from a recognition of the long-term revolutionary role of the Russian working class and of the peculiar weaknesses of the Russian bourgeoisie (which all Russian marxists shared) to an assertion of the counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie, imposed on it by the approach of the proletarian revolution. Conclusions that Lenin drew from this, such as the need for the proletariat to dissociate itself from the bourgeoisie in the struggle against tsarism and to establish its independent class aims, determined his revolutionary strategy and tactics until 1917. Lukacs then discusses three cardinal aspects of Lenin's thought on the revolutionary party, on imperialism and on the state.

The chapter on the vanguard party of the proletariat is of particular interest, if the question of the relevance of Leninism for the international revolutionary movement is to be considered. In Lukacs' discussion it becomes apparent that a merging of the Leninist and Stalinist models of the party had already begun by 1924. He states that Lenin's idea of party organisation contains as fixed poles, the strictest selection of party members on the basis of their proletarian class consciousness and solidarity with all the oppressed, and, further, that the Menshevik concept of organisation weakened both poles, reduced them to compromises and created a confused tangle of different interest groups. The whole burden, however, of Lenin's relentless attack on Menshevik organisational principles was that they essentially reflected the bourgeois ideology of the Mensheviks, as expressed in the compromising and frequently confused reformism of their programme and tactics. Equally, Lenin always recognised that strict selection of party members on the basis of their class consciousness was no guarantee against sectarianism, as was shown in his long and rather unsuccessful struggle to convince the working class, semi-anarchist otzovist members of the Bolshevik faction that they should combine legal with illegal work. For Lenin, the question of organisation was always dependent on that of policy.

One of Lukacs' observations on the proletarian party has a markedly Stalinist flavour. He says that if the proletarian party is not organised so that the correct
and appropriate class policy is assured, the allies who flock to the side of the proletariat in a revolutionary situation can bring confusion instead of support. This implies that by definition a rightly organised party will not allow incorrect views to prevail: if incorrect views do prevail (that is, views disagreed with), one can argue that the party is wrongly organised. In the historical context, the role of allies in a revolutionary situation is indeed a crucial one and can influence the way in which power is seized by the revolutionary class and with what slogans and what political programme, but the organisation of the party will not assure the correctness of the class policy, only understanding by the revolutionaries of the historical process in which they are involved will do that.

The extent to which Bolshevik ideas on organisation varied in the years from 1903 to 1917 in response to changing political conditions was suggested by Lenin in *Left Wing Communism* when he spoke of the rapid succession in that period of different forms of the movement, legal and illegal, peaceful and stormy, underground and open, circles and mass movements. It is not generally known that in March 1907 when the Social Democratic party had a mass membership and still enjoyed a semi-legal existence as a result of the 1905 revolution, there was a re-organisation of the Petersburg City organisation, supported by the Bolshevik faction, under which the city conference (not committee), elected directly on the basis of one delegate for fifty members, became a standing body numbering some hundreds and meeting at least twice a month. Elections for conference were to be held every six months. The Stolypin coup of June 1907, ushering in a period of savage repression, put an end to this interesting experiment in open democratic organisation of the revolutionary party.

Lenin carried on his most ferocious polemics against the Mensheviks from 1908 to 1914 on the question of the nature of the party. The significance of these polemics lies less in the particular issues on which they were fought than in the conflicting analyses made by the two factions of the balance of class forces and the weight of bourgeois influence upon the working class. Believing as he did, that the adoption of a reformist programme by the Social Democrats threatened the revolutionary orientation of the proletariat, he devoted all his energies to combating this. The area in which battle was joined was that of tactics and organisation of the party, whether it should remain an underground revolutionary body or seek to achieve a legal existence with a mass membership and form part of a united opposition to the autocracy. The question whether the party was to follow a course of revolutionary opposition, or be essentially reformist, or combine both tendencies within itself was of critical importance for the orientation of the class. The weakness and paucity of independent mass institutions, including those of the working class, in Russian society was illustrated in the emasculated trade union movement. The half life to which labour organisations were condemned after they were made legal in 1906 meant that the unions never provided alternative centres of reformist influence to the revolutionary political parties, as they did in Germany. The major struggle between revolutionary and reformist alignments was fought out within the Social Democratic party itself.

The point to which Lukacs frequently returns is Lenin's capacity to grasp all facets of a political situation, the ability to combine a concrete analysis with awareness of all new tendencies arising from the situation. A clear example of this ability may be seen in Lenin's explanation of the rising militancy of the working class after the mass shooting of workers on the Lena goldfields in 1912.
Rejecting the arguments of those who described the strikes as a struggle for the right to form trade unions, he wrote, “It is this general lack of rights typical of Russian life, this hopelessness and impossibility of fighting for particular rights, and this incorrigibility of the tsarist monarchy and its entire regime, that stood out so distinctly against the background of the Lena events as to fire the masses with revolutionary ardour.” It was indeed the incorrigibility of the tsarist regime, resisting reform and revolution alike, which accounted in large measure for the Russian workers, interested in the first place in the economic struggle to improve working conditions, deciding to follow the slogans of the revolutionary Bolsheviks, which combined the demand for the eight hour day with the overthrow of the autocracy.

The arid and frequently repeated estimate of Lenin’s contribution to revolutionary theory and practice as being that of a technologist of revolution and the disinterment of the stinking corpse of the Stalinist model of the party in order to pronounce the Leninist concept of organisation irrelevant today can come only from those who have never understood the dialectics of revolutionary thinking or who need to justify their own abandonment of a revolutionary position.

DAPHNE GOLLAN


DANIEL GUERIN’S BOOK is much inferior to anarchist sympathiser George Woodcock’s Anarchism. Besides including only half the material Woodcock does, omitting an index and being written in a sloppy and ambiguous style, it is as extremely tendentious as Guerin’s previous books about the French Revolution have been.

It is true that Guerin promises to let the anarchists speak for themselves by quoting copiously, but his main aim is to claim for the anarchist movement the creation of the notion of workers’ self-management and to deny that the terrorism of the late nineteenth century was really central to anarchism. So, where there are pages in Woodcock on the propaganda by the deed favoured by many anarchists in 1880-1914, there is practically no detailed investigation in Guerin of Costa, Brousse, Pouget, Ravachol, Henry, Cafiero and Malatesta. The object in claiming authorship of the workers’ self-management system is implied in the concluding sentences of the preface:

“Throughout this little book the reader will see two conceptions of socialism contrasted and sometimes related to one another, one authoritarian, the other libertarian. By the end of the analysis it is hoped that the reader will be led to ask himself which is the conception of the future.”

Everything is subordinated to this over-all wish to show 1) the commitment of anarchism to concepts of participatory democracy, and 2) to show the affinities between radical marxism and anarchist currents. Noam Chomsky emphasises this last point in his lengthy introduction. Since this means both twisting the historical facts and misunderstanding the theory of anarchism, Guerin cannot start with a chronological historical account and instead says lamely

“In place of a historical and chronological sequence an unusual method has been adopted in this book: the reader will be presented in turn with the