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A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

The book Capital superseded, containing the two pages it never could: the Preface that gave official Marxism its most quoted and most misused passage. With Maurice Dobb's introduction, the discarded 1857 methodological draft, and Engels's own review.

Karl Marx

Introduction to This Edition

Almost nobody reads this book, and almost everybody has read one page of it. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy came out in Berlin in 1859, eight years before the first volume of Capital, and Marx himself treated it as a first instalment he would supersede: the analysis of the commodity and of money that opens it was reworked, at greater length and with a sharper eye, into the opening of Capital, and the later book quietly retired the earlier one. What did not get retired was the Preface. Two pages of it — the passage that begins "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will" and ends with the sentence about the prehistory of human society drawing to a close — became the single most quoted, most examined, and most misused piece of writing in the whole of official Marxism. This edition is worth having because it lets you read those two pages back inside the book they came from, and read the book back inside the caution the Preface itself contains.

Marx wrote the Critique in London, in the poverty of the 1850s, as the first published fruit of nearly fifteen years' study. The plan behind it was enormous and it was never finished. "I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order," he announces on the first page: "capital, landed property, wage-labour; the State, foreign trade, world market." Six books were intended; this instalment covers the first two chapters of the first, on the commodity and on money, and no further part in that form ever appeared. Marx abandoned the six-book architecture and began again on the four-volume plan that became Capital. So the Critique is a fragment of an abandoned design, valuable now for two things it does supremely and for the trouble the first of them caused.

The present text is the one prepared in Moscow: Progress Publishers' edition, translated from the German of Marx/Engels, Werke, Band 13, by S. W. Ryazanskaya. It is generous in what it gathers. It carries an Introduction by the

English Marxist economist Maurice Dobb, written in 1970; it prints, as an appendix, the "Introduction" of 1857 — the discarded methodological draft, found among Marx's papers and first published by Kautsky in 1903 — and Engels's own review of the Critique from Das Volk; and it closes with the notes of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and three full indexes. Reference marks appear here as [Note 1] and so on; the page-bottom notes are Marx's own, marked with an asterisk, and the editors', marked with a letter and closing "—Ed.". It is a properly equipped scholarly edition, and its apparatus is where the argument of this introduction has to be made.

What the book does supremely, first, is state the materialist conception of history in the most compressed form Marx ever gave it. "The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies," he writes, is that relations of production "appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production" form "the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." Then the motor: "At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution." There is nothing else in nineteenth-century thought that packs so much into so little. As an agenda for research it is inexhaustible; generations of the best historical work have been done by taking one clause of it seriously.

The second thing the book does supremely is method, and here the edition's own additions carry the weight. The appended 1857 "Introduction" is Marx thinking aloud about how political economy should proceed — why the apparently

concrete "population" is an empty abstraction until it is broken down and rebuilt, why "the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete is simply the way in which thinking assimilates the concrete". Engels's review states the same point as a principle: the way to grasp a developed subject is "the logical method... only stripped of the historical form and diverting chance occurrences. The point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought." Dobb's Introduction, the best short thing in the volume, sees exactly this and says so plainly — "the focus of attention of the Critique is methodological" — and reads the book as the workshop in which the method of Capital was forged rather than as a set of conclusions to be memorised.

All of which can make it easy to forget that most of the book is neither manifesto nor method but hard economic analysis. The two chapters proper — on the commodity and on money — are the first systematic statement Marx ever published of the labour theory of value, and they are the direct rehearsal of Capital: the sentence that opens the first chapter here, "The wealth of bourgeois society, at first sight, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity," is the sentence Marx set, almost word for word, at the head of Capital eight years later. Between the chapters he inserts two remarkable historical excurses — "Historical Notes on the Analysis of Commodities" and the "Theories of the Standard of Money" — in which the doctrines of Petty, Steuart, Ricardo and the rest are not refuted from outside but placed, each shown as the theoretical reflex of a stage of the thing it studies. This is the materialist conception turned on the history of economics itself, and it is the Critique's quiet proof that the method of the Preface can actually be worked.

Now for what does not work, or rather for the trouble the compression caused. The Preface is written in the indicative of natural science — "conditions", "corresponds", "determines" — and its architectural metaphor of a foundation and a superstructure rising on it invites a reading in which the economy is a machine and everything else is its exhaust. Marx's own practice never worked that way: his histories are full of politics, religion and ideology acting back on the foundation, and the Preface itself, if read to the end of the sentence, says that ideological forms are the medium "in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" — the fighting-out is not an epiphenomenon, it is where history happens. But a slogan does not have an end of the sentence. The other dangerous compression is the line, endlessly cited, that "no social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones

before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society." Read as a caution against wishful voluntarism it is wise. Read as a law, it becomes a guarantee that history advances on rails and that revolutions must wait their turn — and that reading, made by the Marxists of the Second International, was the standing argument against every attempt to make a socialist revolution in a country that was not yet "ripe".

The remarkable thing is that Marx built the antidote into the very book the poison was extracted from. He explains, in this same Preface, that he has suppressed the general introduction he had drafted "since on further consideration it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which still have to be substantiated". The man who wrote the founding text of "historical materialism" withheld his own methodological overture because he distrusted turning results into a system before they were earned. The 1857 "Introduction" printed at the back of this volume is that withheld draft. The edition thus contains, a few hundred pages apart, both the aphorisms that were made into a catechism and the author's explicit refusal to let his method harden into one. No note connects the two.

Which is the question this edition, for all its equipment, does not put to itself: was the state that canonised these two pages consistent with them? It taught them as the core of "dialectical and historical materialism", the compulsory philosophy of a great power, and the debt is visible on this publisher's own list — A. F. Sheptulin's Marxist-Leninist Philosophy (1978), F. Konstantinov's The Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy (1979), the ABC primers of historical materialism — which take the 1859 Preface as the charter of the science and cite this very work by name. And having taught it, the doctrine did to Marx's text precisely what Marx warned against: it froze a research programme into a ladder. The Preface names, "in broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production" as "epochs marking progress in the economic development of society" — four named forms, offered as illustration, not as a staircase every people must climb. Soviet orthodoxy reduced them to a single obligatory sequence of five stages, primitive-communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist, through which all societies must pass in order.

And it did something sharper than simplify. It deleted one of the four. The "Asiatic mode of production" — Marx's name for societies in which no private landed class stands between the direct producers and a centralised state that pumps the surplus out of them through taxes and forced labour — was argued about freely by Soviet scholars into the early 1930s and then

closed down, the term effectively banned from Soviet discussion for a generation. The reason is not obscure. A mode of production whose ruling class is the state itself, an apparatus of officials living off a surplus it extracts from a labouring population it does not own but does command, was an uncomfortably exact description of the society doing the deleting. The category that Marx had put in the founding proof-text of the whole doctrine turned homeward, and so it was quietly removed from the founding proof-text. The reflexivity test that a genuine science must survive — can its own concepts be turned on the society that holds them? — was failed by administrative decision. The notes to this very edition pass the Asiatic modes without a word; they are scrupulous about the newspapers Marx wrote for in the 1840s and silent about the one epoch on his list that no longer had a home.

None of this is a charge against Marx, and the fatalist reading of the Preface is not the only one available in it. The same passage that was used to prove socialism must wait was refuted in practice by the Bolsheviks in 1917 and in theory by the tradition that defended them. Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development — the observation that backward countries do not repeat the stages of advanced ones but telescope them, importing the latest forms into the oldest conditions — is the materialist conception of history used as a method rather than obeyed as a timetable, and it is the direct answer to the unilinear ladder. It is no accident that the same regime that imposed the five stages also anathematised uneven and combined development and the permanent revolution: a doctrine that has made the sequence of stages into holy writ cannot allow that a peasant empire might leap. The living Marxism and the embalmed one part company on exactly the reading of this Preface.

So what is the Critique worth now, beyond its place as the rehearsal for Capital? Its value is the value of a method kept honest. The materialist conception of history is the most powerful instrument the social sciences possess for asking how the way people make their living shapes the way they think, rule and fight — provided it is used as Marx used it, as a "guiding principle" of inquiry that must earn its results, and not as Marx feared it would be used, as a set of results announced in advance. Read the two famous pages with the sentence about "fighting it out" left in, and the withheld introduction at the back, and the Critique stops being a catechism and becomes what Dobb saw it as: a workshop. The doctrine that canonised the Preface could recite that men's social existence determines their consciousness while forbidding anyone to ask what social existence had produced the consciousness of its own ruling stratum. The book supplies

both the guiding principle and the standard by which the users of it can be measured — including the state that printed it, in millions of copies, in the languages of the world, while striking from the list the one mode of production that looked too much like itself.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Value, Price and Profit

Marx before an audience of working men in 1865, answering a fellow councillor who argued that wage rises were pointless - and setting out the basis of the theory of surplus value in public for the first time, two years before Capital. The way in, for anyone who finds Capital forbidding.

Karl Marx

Introduction

A reader who knows this work by its usual name will notice something odd before reading a word of it. Marx's daughter Eleanor published the text in London in 1898, from the manuscript of two talks her father had given to the General Council of the International thirty-three years before, and she called it Value, Price and Profit. That is the title under which most of the English-speaking world has read it ever since. The Progress edition reprinted here keeps almost everything Eleanor and her husband Edward Aveling did to the manuscript — including, as the volume's own note admits, the chapter headings Aveling supplied for a text Marx had left largely unbroken — and changes only the title, to Wages, Price and Profit. A small edit; but titles are arguments in miniature, and this one quietly moves the centre of gravity of the book. It is worth beginning there, because the whole story of how the Soviet state handled Marx's economics can be read in that single substituted word.

What the work is, and when it was made

In the spring of 1865 a member of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, John Weston — a follower of Robert Owen and a man of transparent good faith — put a case to his fellow councillors that must have alarmed every trade unionist present. A general rise in wages, Weston argued, could do the working class no good: employers would simply raise their prices to recover the cost, so real wages would stand exactly where they had begun, and the unions that fought for higher pay were therefore expending their strength on nothing. Marx answered him in two sittings, on the 20th and 27th of June 1865, in English, before an audience of working men. He did not spare their patience — he opens by apologising for the "severe test" he is about to set it — but he wrote for them, not for economists, and the result is the most compact and approachable statement of his mature economics that he ever made. It was composed two years before the first

volume of Capital appeared, and, as the edition's own editors concede, it "set forth for the first time in public the basis of his theory of surplus value." For anyone who finds Capital forbidding, this hundred-page argument remains the best door into it.

Weston's fatalism was not an eccentricity, and that is why Marx troubled to answer it at such length. It was a homespun version of a doctrine that hung over the whole labour movement of the 1860s: the wage-fund theory of the orthodox economists, which held that the sum available for wages was fixed in advance, so that what one worker gained another must lose and the class as a whole could gain nothing. On the Continent the same fatalism wore a radical costume as Ferdinand Lassalle's iron law of wages — the claim that wages are chained forever to the bare minimum of subsistence — a formula that would, ten years later, be written into the German party's Gotha Programme and draw Marx's scorn there too. If either version were true, the trade unions had no reason to exist and the young International no economic case to make. Marx's two evenings before the General Council were, in that sense, a defence of the point of organising at all.

The manuscript stayed in a drawer until Eleanor Marx found and printed it. Progress reproduces her English text — the source note here reads simply, "Printed according to the English pamphlet" — and adds the numbered notes of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, the body in Moscow charged with editing the founders' works. No translator is named, and none is needed: the words are Marx's own English.

What is strong in it, and what is not

The strength of the piece is that it does its demolition and its construction at once. Weston's error, Marx shows, rests on two unstated assumptions — "that the amount of national production is a fixed thing," and "that the amount of real wages ... is a fixed amount" — and both are false; production grows, and the share of it going to labour is not fixed by nature

but fought over. From there Marx builds, in plain steps, the argument that would fill *Capital*. Value is set by the labour-time a commodity contains. What the worker sells is not "labour" — there is, Marx insists, "no such thing as the Value of Labour in the common acceptance of the word" — but labour-power, the capacity to work, whose value is the cost of the worker's upkeep. The capitalist buys that capacity at its value and then sets it to work for longer than it takes to reproduce that value; the unpaid remainder is surplus value, the single source of profit, rent and interest alike. Weston's price-panic collapses: a rise in wages, Marx concludes in the first of his closing resolutions, "would result in a fall of the general rate of profit, but, broadly speaking, not affect the prices of commodities." Wages and profits divide a sum that the workers themselves have produced; they do not conjure new prices out of the air.

What the reader should not expect from so short a work is the full architecture of *Capital*. The categories arrive already formed, without the long derivation that makes them secure. The value of labour-power, Marx notes in passing, is not fixed by biology alone: it rests on a "traditional standard of life," for "it is not mere physical life" that the wage must maintain — but that historical and social dimension, which does so much work in *Capital*, is named here rather than unfolded. And because Weston was an easy target — an honest muddler, not a formidable opponent — the polemic never has to strain against a serious defence of the wage. These are the limits of a brilliant primer, not faults. The more interesting tension lies at the very end, and it is one the Soviet editors would seize on. Having proved that unions are indispensable, Marx warns that they can also be misused: "Trades Unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital," but "they fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it." And so the famous close: the workers "ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'" instead of the "conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!'" It is a call to raise the sights of the movement. It can also be read, if one wishes, as an instruction to hold the daily struggle cheap beside a distant final aim — and that is precisely how it would come to be read.

Was the state that canonised it consistent with it?

Return now to the title. The Institute's note on the work is unusually candid; it records that Aveling "provided titles for the introduction and the first six chapters which had no

headings in the manuscript," and that "in the present edition all these headings except the main one have been retained." The one heading Moscow declined to keep was the only one that mattered — Eleanor's Value, dropped in favour of Wages (following the German translation's Lohn, Preis und Profit). The effect is to nudge the book from Marx's theoretical breakthrough, the analysis of value and surplus value, toward the narrower register of the wage question and the trade-union platform. The same note tells the reader what to take from the work: that Marx "stressed the necessity of its subordination"—the subordination of the workers' economic struggle—"to the ultimate aim of the proletariat—abolition of wage slavery." Resistance is granted; but its point is subordination to a goal defined elsewhere, by others.

Read in the country that printed it, this is a remarkable thing to hand a worker. For the analysis Marx offers is not a museum piece about Victorian England; it is a general anatomy of any society in which people live by selling their labour-power to an employer who appropriates their surplus labour. In the Soviet Union of 1969 and 1973, when this volume went through its printings, there was exactly one employer. The worker still sold labour-power for a wage; the wage was still governed, as Trotsky observed of that society, by "the customary norms of wage payment — that is, to the distribution of life's goods in proportion to the quantity and quality of individual labor"; and the surplus was appropriated, invested and distributed by a state that stood above the producers. Stakhanovism — the cult of the record-breaking piece-worker — the steep piece-rates, the widening hierarchy of Soviet pay, all of it fell squarely within the frame Marx had drawn: living labour set to work beyond the value of its own upkeep, the difference retained by the one who commands the means of production. The pamphlet that taught workers to ask who lives on their unpaid labour was issued by a régime with a pointed interest in their not asking the question at home. Trotsky put the conclusion without euphemism: a state "compelled to defend inequality ... by methods of compulsion" thereby remains "a 'bourgeois' state, even though without a bourgeoisie." The category was Marx's own; the apparatus that reprinted his primer simply arranged for it to face outward only.

None of this is a charge against Marx, and none of it vindicates Weston's descendants — the economists who still tell workers that their wage is set by iron laws and their unions are a nuisance. The degeneration of the Russian revolution had objective roots: isolation after the German revolution failed, a ruined and exhausted country, the wager of building socialism in a single backward state. But the use made of this text was a

choice. To keep the "abolition of the wages system" as a watchword for export while presiding at home over a permanent wages system, complete with its differentials and its record-breaking piece-workers, is not Marxism applied; it is Marxism embalmed — turned into a slogan aimed safely abroad. The Institute's note stops precisely where the honest question begins.

Why this Marxism still speaks

Strip away the retitling and the disciplinary gloss, and what remains is one of the most durable short arguments in the whole literature of the movement. Its claim is simple and still unwelcome: that wages, prices and profit are not independent forces balancing in a market but three shares of a single quantity, the labour of the many, most of it unpaid. That claim cuts two ways at once, which is why no establishment has ever been comfortable with it. It cuts against the market economist for whom the wage is a fair price freely struck — Marx's "conservative motto" dressed in new mathematics. And it cuts against every state that ever called the mere transfer of the employer's role to itself an emancipation. The question the pamphlet forces — who works, who appropriates the surplus, and by what right — is the measure of a wage system, any wage system, including the ones that flew the red flag.

That is the inheritance worth carrying forward. The unions Marx addressed are still, at their best, "centres of resistance," and still tempted, as he warned, to fight only "the effects" and never the cause. His counsel — to organise the daily defence without mistaking it for the goal — is neither a licence to despise reforms nor an order to defer life to a far horizon; it is the harder task of doing both. Read against the single word Moscow changed on its title page, Value, Price and Profit keeps its edge intact. It still tells working people where their wages come from, and it still asks the one question a wages system of whatever colour would rather they did not.

HISTORY

The Civil War in France

Marx on the Paris Commune, written in the days around its fall and read to the International two days after the last barricade: the recallable official, the workman's wage, the citizen army, and the conclusion that the working class "cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery".

Karl Marx

Introduction to This Edition

Of all the books the Soviet state chose to reprint, this is the one that condemns it most exactly. The Civil War in France is Marx's address to the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Paris Commune of 1871 — the seventy-two days in which the workers of a great city took the government into their own hands, and the two months in which a French army, with Prussian permission, shot them down. Marx wrote it in English, in white heat, in the days around the Commune's fall, and read it to the Council on 30 May 1871, two days after the last barricade. It is the least abstract thing he ever wrote about the state, and the most dangerous to the state that published it. For what Marx praised in the Commune was the dismantling of exactly the kind of power that ruled from Moscow: a standing army, a permanent bureaucracy, a caste of officials raised above the people they governed.

Read the pages that follow and the point is unmistakable. The Commune's first act, Engels records in his 1891 Introduction to this edition, was that "the Commune abolished conscription and the standing army, and declared the sole armed force to be the National Guard." Its officials were elected and subject to recall, and every servant of the Commune, high and low, drew a worker's pay: "the public service had to be done at workmen's wages." It made, in Marx's words, "cheap government, a reality, by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure — the standing army and State functionarism." Above all, Marx drew from it the lesson he thought decisive, the sentence Lenin would build a book upon: "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." The existing state — "the centralized State power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature" — is not a neutral instrument to be captured. It has to be broken and replaced by something the Commune sketched in outline: a self-governing association of producers in which the "Communal Constitution would have restored to

the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the State parasite." Here was, Marx believed, "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour."

This is a genuinely great text, and the tradition from which this introduction is written honours it without reservation. It is Marx at his most concrete and least doctrinaire, reading a workers' creation rather than lecturing it — so much so that he revised the Communist Manifesto in its light, noting in the 1872 preface that the working class could not simply take over the old state. The Commune's dead earned the sentence Marx gave them: "Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class." None of that is diminished by asking, as we must, what the Moscow imprint on the spine was doing to the argument between the covers.

Begin with the edition itself. This is the Progress Publishers text — Moscow, first printed in 1948 and reprinted, the copyright page records, in 1952, 1961, 1968, 1972, 1974, 1977 and 1979 — a mass pamphlet issued in the language of international circulation for four decades. Its title page carries a small but telling instruction: "Translated from the German." Marx wrote the Address in English; the Institute of Marxism-Leninism has here rendered it back into English out of the German text of the collected Werke, so that even Marx's own English prose is standardised to the Moscow master-copy. It is why the reader meets "the economic emancipation of labour" where the 1871 original reads "economical." A trifle — but it is the trifle that reveals the machine: nothing, not even the founder's own words in his own language, stands outside the editorial control of the apparatus.

The selection tells more. What you hold is the finished monument — Engels's Introduction, the two Addresses on the Franco-Prussian War, the polished Third Address — and nothing of the workshop. Marx wrote two long drafts toward The Civil War in France, and they are more radical, more

searching and far more tentative than the final text: it is in the drafts that he worried at the Commune's mistakes and reached furthest in describing what should replace the state. The pamphlet prints none of them. The apparatus that framed these classics preferred its Marx resolved and lapidary, the conclusions without the doubts — which is the opposite of how Marx actually worked, and the beginning of turning a method into a catechism.

Then there is the honest reckoning with Marx himself, which the Soviet edition cannot offer and this one must. The Address is a work of advocacy written under fire, and its celebration outruns its subject. The Commune was not, in the main, a Marxist government; its majority were Proudhonists and Blanquists, and its practical measures in social and economic life were cautious — it never seized the Bank of France, never marched on a disorganised Versailles, and governed for barely two months before the massacre. Marx knew this. A decade later, writing privately to a Dutch socialist, he described the Commune as merely the rising of a single city in exceptional circumstances, whose majority had been in no sense socialist and could not have been. The gap between the public monument and the private judgement is not a scandal; it is the measure of Marx's honesty, and it is precisely what a state cult of the Commune had to erase. The strength and the overstatement are the same act of will: Marx made the Commune bear more theoretical weight than its brief life could support, and in doing so he gave the movement its most durable image of what workers' power might look like — an image drawn from below, not decreed from above.

And that is where the misuse begins, because the image is the exact negative of the regime that reproduced it. Lenin took this text as the foundation of *The State and Revolution* in 1917, quoting the Commune against every socialist who wanted to inherit the old machine intact; the Bolsheviks named the Communards their ancestors and set the Commune in every school primer. Then the state they built became, point for point, the thing the Commune had abolished. Where the Commune made every official elective and recallable, the Soviet apparatus was appointed and irremovable. Where the Commune paid its servants a worker's wage, the Soviet bureaucracy became a privileged stratum whose real incomes were, as Trotsky observed, so far above the workers' that the state kept them a statistical secret. Where the Commune dissolved the standing army into the armed people, the Soviet Union maintained one of the largest standing armies and political polices in history — and, in one of the very years this pamphlet was reprinted, 1968, sent that army into Prague to crush a movement for socialist self-government. The book

abolishing conscription and the standing army went to press in Moscow the same year the tanks rolled.

The word that carries the indictment is Marx's own: parasite. The Commune, he wrote, would have freed society of the "State parasite" that fed upon it. Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, seized on exactly that word and vowed to liquidate the thing it named. Trotsky, tracing the degeneration in *The Revolution Betrayed*, found the parasite reborn in the Soviet bureaucracy — and he measured it against the Commune's own yardstick, the three conditions Lenin had drawn from Marx and which Trotsky sets down in his chapter on socialism and the state: "(1) not only election but recall at any time; (2) payment no higher than the wages of a worker; (3) immediate transition to a regime in which all will fulfill the functions of control and supervision so that all may for a time become 'bureaucrats', and therefore nobody can become a bureaucrat." By 1948 every one of those conditions had been reversed in fact while the text stating them was distributed by the million. The Commune was not the licence for the Soviet state; it was the standing charge against it.

None of this is to hand the argument to the liberal or the anarchist who reads the Commune's failure as Marxism's refutation, or the Soviet degeneration as the seed already present in Lenin's use of this text. It was not. Lenin came to *The Civil War in France* to arm a genuine workers' revolution, and the anti-statism he took from it was real — *State and Revolution* is, if anything, more libertarian than its author's later practice. The degeneration had objective causes that this pamphlet's editors could never name: the isolation of the revolution once the German rising failed, the ruin and starvation of the civil war, the physical destruction of the very working class that was to rule, and, upon that exhausted ground, the usurpation of power by an apparatus that made itself society's master and then its cult. Lenin spent his last active months fighting the swelling bureaucracy he had hoped to abolish; he lost, and the victors embalmed him and turned his self-correcting thought into "Marxism-Leninism," a doctrine to be recited. The Commune suffered the same taxidermy. Frozen into a founding icon, hung in every Soviet classroom, it was honoured in exact proportion as it was contradicted — the safest possible ancestor, because a martyr cannot object to what is done in its name.

So read *The Civil War in France* first for what it is: the greatest of Marx's political writings, the record of the moment when working people governed themselves and paid for it with their lives, and the clearest statement anywhere in his work that the emancipation of labour means the dismantling of the

state as a power standing over society. Then read it against the imprint that carried it. Every measure Marx praised — the recallable official, the workman's wage, the citizen army, the abolition of the bureaucratic parasite — is a test the state publishing this book had failed. That is the reason it is worth reprinting now, cleared of the framing that made it a monument to its own betrayer. The Commune is not the ancestor of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is the accuser it could never silence, and this little book, reprinted so faithfully for so long by the state it convicts, is the evidence in its own hand.

The Housing Question

Engels on why the housing shortage is not a housing problem: the slums "are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere". Written against a Proudhonist who thought home ownership would free the worker, and still the sharpest thing written about urban renewal.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

Frederick Engels wrote *The Housing Question* as journalism, in the heat of a quarrel. It began as three series of articles for the Leipzig Volksstaat, the paper of the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party, published across 1872 and 1873, and Engels revised them for the separate book edition of 1887 whose text this volume reproduces. The occasion was a set of articles by a Proudhonist doctor, A. Mülberger, who proposed to cure the "housing shortage" of the new German industrial towns by turning the tenant into an owner — converting rent into the instalments of a purchase, so that every worker might in time possess his own cottage. Engels answered him in Part One; in Part Two he turned on the respectable bourgeois version of the same cure, the reform schemes of Dr. Emil Sax and the academic Kathedersozialisten — the professors' "socialism of the chair" — who hoped to quiet the social question with better sanitation and building societies; and in Part Three, provoked by a reply, he came back to Mülberger once more. The present edition — Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* in three volumes, Progress Publishers, Moscow — prints the whole polemic with the notes of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and it belongs to the moment just after the Paris Commune when Marx and Engels were fighting to clear Proudhon's inheritance out of the young workers' movement.

The book's strength is that it refuses to treat housing misery as a housing problem. To the reformers the shortage was a scandal to be abated by philanthropy and by-laws; Engels shows it to be a product — the necessary by-product of the headlong rush of capital and population into the industrial town. The famous pages on what he christened "Haussmann" have lost none of their edge. After the prefect who drove Napoleon III's boulevards through working-class Paris, Engels meant by the word "the practice, which has now become general, of making breaches in the working-class quarters of our big cities"; and he saw exactly what such improvement accomplishes. The slums, he wrote, "are not abolished; they

are merely shifted elsewhere" — the same necessity that bred them in one place breeds them in the next. It is a description of every "urban renewal" and every wave of gentrification since. Just as sharp is his demolition of the home-owning cure. Give the worker his cottage, Engels answers Mülberger, and you have not freed him but re-chained him: his wage will simply fall by what he no longer pays in rent, so that "the worker would pay rent for his own house, but not, as formerly, in money to the houseowner, but in unpaid labour to the factory owner for whom he works." The little house becomes a fetter binding him to his employer and his town. Behind all of it stands the thesis Engels states without hedging: "only by the solution of the social question, that is, by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, is the solution of the housing question made possible."

That same single-mindedness is the book's limitation. Engels is so determined to deny that housing is a "special" question standing on its own that he can sound as though he holds every partial reform in contempt — as though a drain laid or an eviction stayed were a distraction from the real fight rather than a thing that keeps people alive while the fight goes on. The polemic against Sax is often a polemic against palliatives as such, and the later socialists who built and defended council housing, rent controls and tenants' unions were doing necessary work that this text does not quite know how to value. And when Engels turns from diagnosis to cure he is airily brief. He assures Mülberger that there are "already" enough dwellings in the big cities "to remedy immediately all real 'housing shortage'" if only they were used judiciously — as if the problem were essentially one of distribution. The century that followed, capitalist and socialist alike, would show that industrial modernity generates an absolute shortfall of decent housing on a scale no redistribution of existing rooms could close: the shortage he thought a matter of rational allocation turned out to demand building on a heroic scale. His confidence that the antithesis of town and country was ripe for abolition carries the same forward-lean as the parliamentary optimism of his last years — the sense that the solution stood nearer than it did.

Which is just where this small book turns its uncomfortable face toward the state that canonised it. For Engels did name a first, transitional measure, and named it precisely: the shortage could be relieved at once "through the expropriation of the present owners by quartering in their houses homeless workers or workers overcrowded in their present homes. As soon as the proletariat has won political power," he added, such a measure would be on the order of the day. In the winter of 1917–18 the Bolsheviks did exactly this. They requisitioned the apartments of the propertied and moved worker families into them — the policy of *uplotnenie*, "consolidation," that produced the *kommunalka*, the communal flat in which several families shared one kitchen and one corridor. As an emergency act of a revolution besieged, blockaded and starving, it was defensible, and it was Engels's own prescription carried out to the letter. The betrayal lay in what came after. The *kommunalka* was meant as a measure of transition; it became a way of life for generations, the shared kitchen and the decades-long waiting list the ordinary Soviet experience of home. The state that reprinted Engels on the housing question with such care presided over one of the longest housing shortages of the modern age — while its own note to this very work singles out "the abolition of the antithesis between town and country" as the text's prophetic core. That antithesis the Soviet state did not abolish but entrenched: the internal passport and the *propiska*, the residence permit, bound a citizen to a place, and for four decades the collective-farm peasant was denied a passport altogether and could not lawfully leave for the town. The promise was printed; the queue was lived; and no note in the volume lets the one look at the other.

None of this is an argument against Engels; it is the measure of the distance between his text and its canonisers. The revolutionary current that Trotsky founded read the Soviet housing failure where Engels's own method points — not as proof that the analysis was wrong but as the mark of a revolution first isolated and then usurped. A backward country forced to industrialise at breakneck speed drew tens of millions into the cities faster than any regime could house them — Engels's period of "housing shortage" written across a continent — and a bureaucracy that chose heavy industry and its own privileged apartments over ordinary dwellings turned scarcity into a system. The *Revolution Betrayed*, and Ernest Mandel after it, located the failure there, in backwardness and bureaucratic usurpation, and not in any original fault of the October revolution. Read so, the living book is easy to recover. Its refusal to mistake home-ownership for freedom speaks straight to a capitalism that now disciplines whole populations through the mortgage; its account of "Hausmann" names the class content of every glittering redevelopment; and its central

insight — that the housing question is reproduced by the mode of production and cannot be solved inside it — is confirmed, not refuted, by a century in which neither the market nor the bureaucracy that betrayed the revolution could house the people decently. Engels wrote against those who promised to solve the housing question without touching the order that produces it. That is still the promise on offer, and this is still the answer to it.

MARXISM

Critique of the Gotha Programme

Marginal notes Marx posted to a friend in 1875, suppressed for sixteen years and cut before publication - and still the most concentrated thing he wrote about what comes after capitalism: fair distribution, equal right, and the test of the state.

Karl Marx

Introduction to This Edition

Marx never wrote a book called Critique of the Gotha Programme. In the spring of 1875 the two wings of German socialism — the Eisenachers, who looked to Marx, and the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle, who did not — agreed to merge at a congress in the town of Gotha. A draft programme was circulated. Marx, ill in London and not consulted, read it with fury, wrote his objections in the margins as he went, and posted them to Wilhelm Bracke on 5 May with a covering note asking that they be passed round the Eisenach leaders. Liebknecht, who thought the merger too far advanced to reopen, showed the manuscript to almost nobody; Bebel, who was in prison, never saw it. The congress adopted the programme, in the words of the Institute's note printed at the back of this volume, "with only insignificant corrections". Marx's marginal notes went into a drawer for sixteen years.

They came out because Engels wanted them out. In 1890 the party had resolved to write a new programme, and Engels judged the moment had come: "I think I would be guilty of suppression if I any longer withheld from publicity this important—perhaps the most important—document relevant to this discussion." He got it into *Die Neue Zeit*, the party's theoretical monthly, in January 1891, over the resistance of its publisher Dietz and its editor Karl Kautsky, who — as the Institute's note frankly records — "insisted on certain changes and omissions, to which he had to agree." Engels made further cuts himself: "I have omitted a few sharp personal expressions and judgements where these were immaterial, and replaced them by dots." The Social-Democratic deputies in the Reichstag were furious, and the letter to Kautsky that closes this volume's Gotha file is Engels standing his ground in the row that followed. So the most famous statement Marx ever made about what comes after capitalism reached the public as a private letter, censored twice, published sixteen years late by his executor against the wishes of the party it was written for.

The edition in your hands is Moscow's: Progress Publishers'

Selected Works in three volumes, Volume Three, first printed in 1970 and reprinted in 1973, following a Russian edition prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It assembles the whole Gotha file as a single unit: Engels's Foreword of 1891, Marx's covering letter to Bracke, the Marginal Notes in four parts, and two letters of Engels's — to Bebel in March 1875, written before the congress and making the same case independently, and to Kautsky in February 1891, written after the storm broke. The Marginal Notes are given, the edition states, "according to the manuscript" — that is, not from Engels's censored printing but from what Marx actually wrote. That is a real editorial service, and it should be said plainly before anything critical is said at all.

Begin with what the work does supremely well. Marx does not argue that the Gotha programme asks for too little. He asks what its words could possibly mean. Confronted with a demand for "a fair distribution of the proceeds of labour", he takes the phrase apart: "What are 'proceeds of labour'? The product of labour or its value?" And then: "What is 'a fair distribution'? Do not the bourgeois assert that the present-day distribution is 'fair'? And is it not, in fact, the only 'fair' distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production?" The decisive question follows: "Are economic relations regulated by legal conceptions or do not, on the contrary, legal relations arise from economic ones?" This is the whole method in three sentences. Fairness is not a standard that floats above production and can be applied to it; every mode of production generates its own idea of what is fair, and a socialist party that campaigns for fairness without touching production has borrowed its opponents' yardstick.

From there comes the most concrete passage Marx ever wrote about a socialist economy — and it is concrete precisely because he is being sarcastic about the word "undiminished". If the producers are to receive the undiminished proceeds of their labour, then nothing may be taken out; so let us see what must be taken out. From the total social product must come,

first, replacement of the means of production used up; second, an additional portion for expanding production; third, "reserve or insurance funds to provide against accidents, dislocations caused by natural calamities, etc." Only then is there a fund for consumption, and from that must come again the general costs of administration — which "will, from the outset, be very considerably restricted in comparison with present-day society" — then "that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc.", which on the contrary "grows considerably", and then funds for those unable to work. These deductions, Marx says, "are an economic necessity" and "in no way calculable by equity". Anyone who has ever had to answer the question of who pays for the hospitals under socialism has been handed the answer here, and it is a good deal more sober than most of what is written on the subject now.

The analysis of "equal right" that follows is the finest thing in the work. In the first phase of the new society the individual producer gets back, after those deductions, what he has given: labour in one form exchanged for an equal amount in another. That looks like the end of exploitation, and in one sense it is. But, Marx insists, "equal right here is still in principle—bourgeois right". It measures everyone by one standard, labour, and therefore treats unequal people as though they were equal — one worker is stronger, another has more children — so that "with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another". Formal equality generates real inequality. "To avoid all these defects, right instead of being equal would have to be unequal." Marx does not conclude that the defect can be legislated away; he concludes that "these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society", because "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society". Only when labour has become "not only a means of life but life's prime want" and the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly can "the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!"

The weaknesses are as real, and they follow from what the document is. It is marginalia: private, elliptical, written at speed and in anger by a sick man who expected perhaps a dozen readers. Sentences that later carried the weight of state doctrine are asides. The most consequential of them — "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary

dictatorship of the proletariat" — contains no institutional content whatever. Not a word here about how that state is composed, how its officers are chosen or removed, what limits it, or how it is wound up. Marx had answered those questions four years earlier, in detail, in *The Civil War in France*: officials elected and subject to recall at any time, paid workmen's wages, no standing army, no separate bureaucracy. Engels remembers it in his letter to Bebel — "The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word" — but Marx, writing in the margin, does not repeat himself. The sentence went out into the world alone, and it was as a lone sentence that it made its career.

The account of the two phases has a comparable weakness. The higher phase is defined by conditions — the end of the division of labour, the end of the split between mental and physical work, abundance — with no timetable attached and no mechanism specified for getting there. Marx, who ridiculed the utopians for describing the future, was right to refuse a blueprint. But a threshold that nobody can date is available to anyone who would rather not cross it. And on the political question at issue in 1875 Marx was, in the plainest sense, wrong: the merger he thought a betrayal produced within fifteen years the largest workers' party in the world, and Engels lived to concede in practice what he had denied in March. Marx's own maxim to Bracke — "Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes" — cuts against the document it introduces, and one suspects he knew it.

Which brings us to the question this edition cannot ask about itself. Here is a text about distribution and about the state, reprinted in 1970 and 1973 by a state that had rewritten both of Marx's answers into their opposites.

Take distribution first. For Marx, measuring reward by labour performed is "bourgeois right": a survival, a defect, "still constantly stigmatised by a bourgeois limitation", tolerable only because the young society cannot yet do better. For the Soviet Union it was not a defect but the constitutional definition of socialism. As Progress's own textbook *Political Economy* (A. M. Rumyantsev and others, 1983) records, quoting Article 14 of the Constitution: "The state exercises control over the measure of labour and of consumption in accordance with the principle of socialism: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.'" Marx's transitional embarrassment had become an official principle — and the principle was doing work. It licensed piece rates, Stakhanovite bonuses and a spread of incomes wider than in most capitalist countries. Trotsky had drawn the conclusion in

1936, using exactly Marx's category: the workers' state "assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic, insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom." His arithmetic in *The Revolution Betrayed* is Marx's argument extended: since wage differences in the USSR were greater, not smaller, than in capitalist countries, the differences were "determined, in other words, not only by differences of individual productiveness, but also by a masked appropriation of the products of the labour of others."

Then the state. Marx's formula for the transition is the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, and his test of freedom is severe: "It is by no means the aim of the workers, who have got rid of the narrow mentality of humble subjects, to set the state free... Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it." Engels, in the letter printed here, goes further: "the state is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down one's adversaries by force, it is pure nonsense to talk of a free people's state", and he proposes dropping the word altogether in favour of *Gemeinwesen* — "a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word 'commune'". Now set beside that what the publisher of this volume officially taught. The Party Programme of 1961 had retired the dictatorship of the proletariat and replaced it with the "state of the whole people". V. M. Chkhikvadze's *The Soviet Form of Popular Government* (Progress, 1972) explains the innovation and, in doing so, gives the game away: among the new tenets was "the idea of the proletarian dictatorship state growing into the state of the whole people", and this was needed because the founders "made no mention of the nature of the state during the transitional period from socialism to the higher phase of communist society." The founders had made no mention of it — so the gap could be filled with a state that was above society rather than subordinate to it, and that was not withering but growing. Progress's *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (1978) even supplies the calendar: dictatorship of the proletariat to 1934, transition from 1934 to 1960, the state of the whole people thereafter, "developing, as the building of communism advances, into communist public self-government."

The apparatus of this volume does not conceal any of this; it simply does not connect it. The Institute's notes are careful and often generous — they date the congresses, identify the newspapers, explain the *Kulturkampf* (Bismarck's campaign

against the Catholic Church, presented as a fight for secular culture), record Engels's own censorship and the Institute's publication of the complete text in 1932. What they never do is put a question. Note 1 introduces the work through Lenin, quoting his praise of Marx's "analysis of what might be called the stages of the economic maturity of communism", and identifies the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" as an "important proposition about the historical inevitability of a special stage of transition". Both statements are true. Both stop precisely where the reader's question begins: is the state that printed this book the one Marx described, and if the first phase has lasted half a century, who decides when it ends? On bourgeois right, on the deductions, on the subordination of the state to society, the notes are silent.

Why it turned out so is a question about circumstances before it is a question about doctrine. A revolution in a poor, largely peasant country, isolated when the German rising failed, its working class dispersed and killed in a civil war fought under foreign intervention, had no material basis for crossing any horizon at all; the emergency lasted long enough to become a structure, and the administering caste that rose out of the scarcity made its position permanent and then had to make the founders agree with it. The evidence that they never did is that the passages above went on being printed, in millions of copies, in the language of international circulation. A regime that had genuinely superseded Marx would have had no need of him. The canonised text is the measure of the betrayal, not its cause.

So what is this Marxism worth now? The critique of "fair distribution" is worth more than ever, in a politics that promises to redistribute what it will not touch the production of, and that keeps discovering that the redistribution does not stick. The analysis of "equal right" remains the sharpest short account anywhere of why equality before the law and equal pay for equal work reproduce inequality rather than ending it — an argument about any society organised on one measure, not only about 1875 or 1936. The deductions passage is a serious, unromantic answer to who pays for the schools and the hospitals, and it has the merit of being arithmetic rather than sentiment. And the test of the state is still the right test to apply, to Moscow in 1973 and to every state since: is it an organ superimposed upon society, or one subordinate to it? Marx supplied the yardstick, the Soviet Union printed it, and it has not yet been taken down.

PHILOSOPHY Anti-Dühring

The book Engels did not want to write, and the first connected statement of the whole Marxist position either founder ever made - philosophy, political economy and socialism, with a chapter by Marx. Its real target is not Dühring but every complete system that treats revision as heresy.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

This is the book that founded a world outlook, and its author did not want to write it. Engels says so in the first sentence of the first preface: "The following work is by no means the fruit of any 'inner urge'. On the contrary." Three years earlier Eugen Dühring, a lecturer at Berlin University who had gone blind as a young man and who wrote at enormous speed on everything, had announced himself a socialist — and not merely a socialist but the author of a complete new system covering philosophy, political economy and the shape of the society to come. In the German party this went down well. The party was new: the Eisenachers, who looked to Marx, and the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle, who did not, had merged at Gotha in 1875 on terms Marx thought a capitulation. Its recruits were mostly young. Dühring's confidence, his hostility to the Berlin professors and his readiness to supply a plan for the future won over Johann Most, Friedrich Wilhelm Fritzsche, the young Eduard Bernstein, and for a while August Bebel. Wilhelm Liebknecht wrote to Engels twice in 1875 asking him to deal with it, and other friends kept up the pressure. Engels gave in. "Nevertheless it was a year before I could make up my mind to neglect other work and get my teeth into this sour apple. It was the kind of apple that, once bitten into, had to be completely devoured; and it was not only very sour, but also very large."

He wrote for two years, from May 1876 to July 1878. The book came out first as a serial in *Vorwärts*, the party's paper, and it came out against resistance: Dühring's supporters tried at the party congress in Gotha in May 1877 to stop the central organ printing it, and although they failed, much of the book appeared thereafter in the paper's scientific supplement rather than in the paper proper, at long intervals. Marx was closely involved. "I read the whole manuscript to him before it was printed, and the tenth chapter of the part on economics ('From Kritische Geschichte') was written by Marx but unfortunately had to be shortened somewhat by me for purely external reasons." What came out of this reluctant, obstructed,

jointly-supervised polemic was the first connected statement of the whole Marxist position that either founder ever made — and, in the three chapters Engels later lifted out as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, one of the most widely read socialist pamphlets of the century.

The text here is the one prepared in Moscow for the *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Volume 25 (1987), printed from the third German edition of 1894 and translated by Emile Burns, whom the volume names on a page of its own. With it come the 129 notes of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the page-bottom notes — some Engels's own, most the translator's, giving the German where the English cannot carry it. Reference marks in the text appear here as [Note 1], [a] and so on, so that they are not confused with the page numbers of Dühring's own books, which the edition also sets in square brackets.

Begin with what the book does well, and the first thing is an accident of form. Because Dühring had built a system, Engels had to answer across the whole of it, and so was forced to say positively what his own outlook held about nature, about knowledge, about morals, about the state, about value and about the future. Nobody had asked Marx or Engels to do that before. The result is uneven, but at its best it is very good indeed.

It is best on the historical character of truth. Dühring dealt in "final and ultimate truths"; Engels's reply is that a system claiming to be finished contradicts the method it claims to use: "A system of natural and historical knowledge, embracing everything, and final for all time, is a contradiction to the fundamental laws of dialectic reasoning." The same argument, turned on morals, produces the strongest pages in Part I. There have been three moral codes in modern Europe, Engels observes — Christian-feudal, bourgeois, proletarian — and each belongs to the economic order that produced it. "We therefore reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and for ever

immutable ethical law on the pretext that the moral world, too, has its permanent principles which stand above history." That is not relativism. Engels holds that there has been progress in morality as in everything else, and that the endpoint is real: "A really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life."

It is best, too, on force. Dühring derived property and class from violence; Engels sets against him the schoolroom picture Dühring himself had used, of Crusoe enslaving Friday, and asks what the enslavement is for. Friday is made to work more than he needs for his own keep, and the surplus is the point: the childish example "proves that force is only the means, and that the aim, on the contrary, is economic advantage." That answer has not been improved upon. Nor has the chapter on freedom, which takes Hegel's formula and gives it a use: "Freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends."

The weaknesses are equally plain, and they are mostly in Part I's chapters on nature. Engels was careful about what he was claiming — "there could be no question of building the laws of dialectics into nature, but of discovering them in it and evolving them from it" — but the illustrations he chose do not carry the weight later placed on them. A barley grain that germinates and yields many grains is offered as the negation of the negation; the homologous series of alcohols is offered as quantity turning into quality. Read as examples of a way of thinking, these are suggestive. Read as proofs of laws governing everything from chemistry to history, they are thin, and they invite exactly the master-key use of dialectics that Engels was warning against. He was also honest about the book's shelf life. By 1885 he thought readers would take "the polemic against the Dühring tenets merely for the sake of the positive conceptions developed alongside this polemic, in spite of the fact that the latter has now largely lost its point."

The deeper gap is in Part III, and it is the gap that matters most for what happened afterwards. Engels's account of the transition is famous and it is compressed almost to a slogan. "The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property. But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state." Then: "a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary ... State interference in social relations becomes, in

one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished'. It dies out." Every clause of that is an assertion about an outcome. There is nothing here about how the transitional state is composed, who staffs it, how its officers are chosen and removed, or by what test one could tell a state that is dying out from one that is settling in. Marx had answered those questions concretely seven years earlier in *The Civil War in France* — elected officials subject to recall at any time, paid workmen's wages, no standing army, no separate bureaucracy — and Engels knew it. In *Anti-Dühring* the institutions drop out and only the tendency remains. A tendency cannot be audited.

Which brings us to the question this edition does not put to itself. No other book of Engels's was so thoroughly turned into state property. Part I supplied the raw material for what the Soviet Union taught as "dialectical and historical materialism", the compulsory philosophical curriculum of a great power. The evidence is on this publisher's own list. Open V. Boguslavsky's *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (Progress, 1978), or A. F. Sheptulin's *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1978), or F. Konstantinov's *The Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1979), and the footnotes run "F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 60", "p. 109", "p. 141", page after page. These books are the reason the work was reprinted; they are also what the work was made to become.

The irony is not subtle, and it is worth spelling out because the apparatus will not. The *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism* quotes Engels's line that an all-embracing and final system contradicts dialectical reasoning — and it quotes it inside a textbook that is itself all-embracing and final, examinable, and not open to revision by its readers. The Institute's own preface to this volume charges Dühring with having "claimed to have created a new all-embracing system of philosophy, political economy and socialism". That is a fair description of Dühring. It is also a fair description of what was built on the book that answered him. And the maxim Engels borrowed from Spinoza to close an argument — *Ignorantia non est argumentum*, "Ignorance is no argument" — reads differently in a country where philosophy faculties had been used to settle questions in genetics, in physics and in cybernetics, and where the argument from ignorance had been backed by the state.

On the state itself the divergence is total. "The state is not 'abolished'. It dies out." That sentence was printed in Moscow throughout the years in which the state grew without

interruption: the constitution of 1936, which declared socialism achieved while the security apparatus reached its height; the doctrine that the state must be strengthened as socialism advances; and the Party Programme of 1961, which retired the dictatorship of the proletariat in favour of a "state of the whole people". Trotsky had made the point in 1936 in *The Revolution Betrayed*, quoting Lenin on the proletariat needing "only a dying state" and observing that the criticism "now attacks with redoubled force the Soviet idolators with their cult of a bureaucratic state which has not the slightest intention of 'dying away'."

Credit where it is due, because the volume earns some. It prints Engels's three prefaces entire, including the admission that the polemic has dated. It prints the work from the 1894 text. Its translator's notes are meticulous, down to recording that where Marx's manuscript of the tenth chapter wrote Confucius, the German printed edition has the homophone Confusius, "confuser". And its note on the slogan "a free people's state" — note 117, attached to the very passage on the dying-out of the state — sends the reader to Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, to Engels's letter to Bebel of March 1875, and to Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. That is a genuinely useful note, and it is also the exact place where the obvious question is not asked. There are 129 notes here. They are scrupulous about the 1870s and silent about the 1930s. The erasure is not done by cutting anything; it is done by not asking.

Why it turned out so is a question about circumstances before it is a question about doctrine. A revolution in a poor and largely peasant country, isolated when the German revolution failed, its working class scattered and killed in a civil war fought under foreign intervention, had no material basis on which any state could begin to wither; the emergency lasted long enough to harden into a structure, and the administrative caste that rose out of the scarcity made its position permanent and then required the founders to agree with it. The proof that they never did is that these sentences went on being printed, in millions of copies, in the languages of the world. A regime that had really superseded Engels would not have needed him.

So what is this Marxism worth now? Its permanent target was never Dühring, who is forgotten, but the type Dühring belongs to: the confident, complete system that has an answer for everything and treats revision as heresy. That type did not die with the nineteenth century, and *Anti-Dühring* remains the best short inoculation against it — including, awkwardly for its custodians, against the version of itself. Its account of morality as historical without being arbitrary is still the most useful

thing a socialist can say when told that some arrangement is simply human nature. Its account of force as means and economic advantage as end is still the standard reply to explanations of politics that stop at violence or at will. Its description of the anarchy of production — the "increasing organisation of production, upon a social basis" inside each firm, and none at all between them — remains the sharpest statement of why a system that plans brilliantly in detail lurches blindly in the aggregate. And the sentence on freedom is the one to keep: knowledge of necessity is not submission to it but the power of "systematically making them work towards definite ends". Engels called the transition "humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom". The state that canonised the phrase never took the leap. The book that supplies the phrase also supplies the standard by which that failure can be judged, which is why it is still worth reading, and why it was never safe.

MARXISM

Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

Three chapters lifted out of Anti-Duehring at Paul Lafargue's request, and the most widely read socialist pamphlet of the nineteenth century. With Engels's 1892 Special Introduction to the English edition - the last substantial thing he published on the history of ideas.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

This little book was not planned as a book. In 1877 and 1878 Engels spent the best part of a year answering Eugen Dühring, a Berlin lecturer who had announced his conversion to socialism and presented the German public with a whole new system, complete with a plan for reorganising society. Dühring was gathering a following inside a party that had only just been stitched together at Gotha, and, as Engels put it, "it thus became necessary to take up the gauntlet thrown down to us, and to fight out the struggle whether we liked it or not." The reply ran to a fat volume of philosophy, economics and natural science — Anti-Dühring. Then, as Engels tells the story in the introduction printed here, "At the request of my friend, Paul Lafargue, now representative of Lille in the French Chamber of Deputies, I arranged three chapters of this book as a pamphlet, which he translated and published in 1880, under the title: Socialisme utopique et socialisme scientifique." That accident of publishing produced the most widely read work of Marxism there has ever been. By the English edition of 1892 Engels could report, with the satisfaction of a man who had spent forty years writing things few people read, that "this little book circulates in ten languages," and that he knew of no other socialist work, "not even our Communist Manifesto of 1848 or Marx's Capital," so often translated.

The edition in your hands is Moscow's: Progress Publishers' Selected Works in three volumes, Volume Three, first printed in 1970 and reprinted in 1973, following a Russian edition prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A publishers' note records that "The texts of all works included herein have been rechecked with the original sources kept in the Institute." The main text is given "according to the text of the authorised English edition of 1892"; the volume names no translator for it. In front of it stands Engels's Special Introduction to that English edition, which he wrote in English, in London, and dated 20 April 1892 — the last substantial

thing he published on the history of ideas, and much the best part of the book.

Begin with what it does supremely well. The pamphlet's real achievement is not that it defends socialism but that it historicises it. Engels turns the same method on his own side that Marx had turned on political economy: he asks where socialist ideas came from and what conditions produced them. His predecessors — Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen — are not treated as cranks to be dismissed but as men whose reach exceeded the grasp of their times. Their fault was a way of thinking, not a want of intelligence: "To all these socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power." A truth of that kind is timeless, so its discovery is an accident of who happened to think of it — which is why each founder produced a different absolute. The generosity here is exemplary. Engels wants the reader to see that the utopians could not have done otherwise, because the class antagonism they wanted to abolish had barely taken shape around them; and he wants the reader to keep everything in them that is worth keeping. It remains a model of how to read one's predecessors, and it is a good deal more generous than most of what has since been written about Engels.

The analytical core is equally durable. Production became social — carried on by thousands of hands in a single works, planned inside that works "upon a definite plan" down to the minute — while appropriation stayed private. From this "incompatibility of socialised production with capitalistic appropriation" Engels derives everything else, and he states the contradiction in the form that still bites: an "antagonism between the organisation of production in the individual workshop and the anarchy of production in society generally." Order within the firm, chaos between firms. Crises follow, not as accidents but as the system's way of correcting itself by destruction; and the concentration that crises drive on — into joint-stock companies, trusts, and finally state ownership — demonstrates that the owners have become superfluous, since "all the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by

salaried employees." Anyone who has looked at a modern corporation, planned internally with a precision that would astonish a Gosplan official and colliding with its rivals in an unplanned world market, will find the description exact.

The weaknesses are as real, and it is worth naming them plainly. The first is a consequence of how the book was made: three chapters lifted out of a polemic have to carry a whole worldview, and the compression shows. The summary Engels appends at the end — I. Mediaeval Society, II. Capitalist Revolution, III. Proletarian Revolution — is a brilliant piece of exposition that also reads like a staircase, and generations read it as one, as though history climbed by numbered steps to a landing marked socialism. The second is the word in the title. By "scientific" Engels means something precise and defensible: that after the materialist conception of history and the discovery of surplus value, "socialism became a science" rather than a moral wish. But a doctrine that calls itself a science acquires, once a party takes charge of it, the authority of a science — including the right to correct those who disagree, and to treat disagreement as error rather than as politics. That is not Engels's fault, but it is his word, and it travelled.

The third is the tone of the 1892 introduction on England, where Engels is at his most hopeful. The working class, he writes, "moves, like all things in England, with a slow and measured step, with hesitation here, with more or less unfruitful, tentative attempts there... while it gradually absorbs the substance." The judgement is shrewd about the England of 1892; the trouble is what the movement made of Engels's late optimism after his death, converting the expectation of steady advance into a law of nature which guaranteed that time was on socialism's side. That confidence held until August 1914, when the parties which had inherited it voted the war credits. And the fourth weakness is a phrase: "Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible." Possible, yes. But the sentence leaves open the two questions the following century made central — who does the planning, and to whom do the planners answer.

Which brings us to the question this edition cannot ask about itself. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* contains the sharpest warning against state ownership anywhere in the founders' writings, and it was reprinted for decades by a state that owned nearly everything.

Engels could hardly have been clearer. Against the "spurious socialism" that had arisen since Bismarck went in for state ownership of industry, he writes that "if the taking over by the

state of the tobacco industry is socialistic, then Napoleon and Metternich must be numbered among the founders of socialism"; otherwise the royal porcelain works, the regimental tailors' shops and — "as was seriously proposed by a sly dog in Frederick William III's reign" — the state's taking over of the brothels would be socialistic institutions too. He then states the principle: "The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers — proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with." And, in case the point could be missed: "State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution." The solution lies elsewhere, in society's actually taking possession — after which, in the book's most famous formulation, "the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished.' It dies out."

Set those sentences beside the country that printed them in 1970 and again in 1973. Nearly all productive forces had been taken over by the state; the workers who operated them drew wages from it; and the state, half a century after the revolution, had not begun to die out but had grown into the largest apparatus of administration and compulsion in the world. Engels's own test — does the taking over by the state end the wage relation, or does it merely give it a single employer? — was never put. The Institute's note on the work, printed at the back of this volume, summarises it accurately as showing that the contradiction of capitalism "can be done away with only through a proletarian revolution," which is true and beside the point. The reader is not invited to ask the next question.

The official answer, when one was given, was that the class character of the state had changed, so that Engels's warning applied only to capitalist states. It is not a foolish answer — a state resting on expropriated capitalists is not the state of the capitalists — but it substitutes a claim about origins for a test about the present, and Engels's whole method runs the other way. His criterion is not who holds the title deeds; it is whether the producers have taken control of the process. The reply from within the tradition came in 1936, in Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, and it is simply Engels's question asked in earnest. "The means of production belong to the state," Trotsky wrote. "But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy." As for the withering: "at the end of its second

decade of existence, it has not only not died away, but not begun to 'die away.' Worse than that, it has grown into a hitherto unheard of apparatus of compulsion."

Why it turned out so is a question about circumstances before it is a question about doctrine. A revolution in a poor and largely peasant country, left isolated when the German rising failed, its working class scattered and killed in a civil war and its industry wrecked, had no material basis on which persons could stop being governed. Out of that scarcity an administering caste raised itself above the society it managed and made its position permanent — and then had to make the founders agree. The evidence that it never did agree is that the passages above went on being printed. A regime that had genuinely superseded Engels would have had no need to keep him in print; a regime whose legitimacy rested on him had no choice, and so it published, year after year, in millions of copies, the standard by which it fell short. The canonised text is the measure of the betrayal, not its cause.

So what is this Marxism worth now? The state-ownership passage alone earns the book its place, because it cuts in both directions at once. It disposes of the Cold War's central confusion — that socialism and the state are the same thing — and the case against the Soviet Union can be built almost entirely out of Engels's own paragraphs. It equally disposes of the comfortable assumption, common again wherever a public utility is taken back into public hands, that nationalisation is by itself a step towards socialism. Engels's answer is that it may be a technical precondition and is nothing more; what matters is whether those who do the work control what they do. The analysis of order within the enterprise and anarchy outside it has, if anything, gained force in a world of planetary supply chains run to the hour by firms that cannot between them plan the climate they are altering. And the treatment of the utopians is a standing lesson in how to inherit: judge people by the conditions they worked in, and take what is usable.

Engels ends with the ascent "from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom." It was a promise, not a description, and it is still owed. Read this book, then, not as a catechism and not as a relic, but as the yardstick it always was — one that the state which reprinted it for forty years failed, and that has not been taken down.

PHILOSOPHY

Dialectics of Nature

Four folders of notes Engels never turned into a book, first published in Moscow in 1925: the forms of motion of matter, the refusal to reduce life to chemistry or mind to nerves, and the warning that nature takes its revenge. Translated by Clemens Dutt.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

Dialectics of Nature is not a book Engels wrote. It is a book the twentieth century made out of papers he left. Between 1873 and 1883 he filled four folders with articles, half-finished chapters, plans and loose notes on the natural sciences, meaning one day to draw them into a work that would do for nature what the materialist conception of history had done for society. He never did. In 1876 he broke off to answer Eugen Dühring, and Anti-Dühring took the years he might have spent finishing this; then Marx died, and the labour of bringing out the unpublished volumes of Capital took the rest. The folders went into a drawer. They were first published in Moscow in 1925, edited by David Ryazanov's Marx-Engels Institute — the same institute, in an earlier form, whose successors' notes fill the back of this volume. The story that Albert Einstein, shown the manuscript on the electricity chapter, judged it of no value to physics but of interest for the light it threw on its author, is true, and it is the right note on which to begin: what the reader holds is a workshop, not a monument. The present translation from the German is Clemens Dutt's, made for the house that became Progress Publishers, and it is a good one; the arrangement into "Plan Outlines", "Articles and Chapters" and "Notes and Fragments" is the editors', imposed on folders that had no such order.

That distinction matters more than it looks, because the whole later history of this book turns on the difference between what Engels was doing and what was done with him. What he was doing was ambitious and, at its best, admirable. He wanted to rescue the natural science of his day from the crude mechanical materialism that treated the world as so much matter pushed about by external force, and he wanted to do it without falling back into the idealism that made mind or spirit the author of nature. His instrument was the classification of what he called the forms of motion of matter — mechanical, physical, chemical, biological — each higher form arising out of the lower and irreducible to it. "A pure change of place is the lowest form of motion, while thought is the highest." This

is the living centre of the book, and it has worn far better than most nineteenth-century natural philosophy. Against every attempt to explain life as "merely" chemistry, or mind as "merely" the firing of nerves, Engels holds that the higher forms are real, that they have laws of their own, and that a materialism worth the name must account for emergence rather than explain it away. A century of work on complexity, on levels of organisation, on the ways wholes constrain their parts, has come round to something very like his instinct.

The famous chapter "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man" is the same instinct applied to ourselves. "Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source—next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth." From there Engels builds a materialist account of how a species made itself: the freeing of the hand, the discipline of tool-use, the co-operation that required speech, the brain that grew to serve them — humanity as its own product, not its own premise. And in the middle of it stands the passage that has made this the founding text of a whole current of ecological Marxism: "Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us." Written a hundred years before the phrase "ecological crisis" existed, it is one of the most quoted sentences Engels ever set down, and one of the least heeded by the states that claimed him.

The weaknesses are as real as the strengths, and they are not only the weaknesses of dated science — the caloric and the ether, the physics Engels wrestled with before it settled. The deeper difficulty is the one that made the book so useful to people who never read it carefully. Engels took the three "laws" that Hegel had spun out of pure thought — "The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; The law of the interpenetration of opposites; The law of the negation of the negation" — and argued that they are not laws of thought at all but "real laws of development of nature". Dialectics, on this reading, is not just a supple way of grasping change; it is a set of objective laws written into matter itself,

the same in a nebula, a chemical reaction and a revolution. Engels himself, at his most careful, guards against the obvious danger. Method, he insists in the old preface, works the right way round: "the interconnections are not to be built into the facts but to be discovered in them, and when discovered to be verified as far as possible by experiment." Nature is to be the test of dialectics, not its subject. But the book is unfinished, and its bolder formulations — dialectics as the master-science that adjudicates the others — sit unresolved beside its cautious ones. In a workshop that is no scandal. Sealed as scripture, the ambiguity became a licence.

For that is exactly what happened. Published in 1925, *Dialectics of Nature* arrived just as the young Soviet state was building an official philosophy, and it became a charter document of *diamat* — dialectical materialism, the codified world-view taught from the primary school to the Academy of Sciences. Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* of 1938 reduced Engels's tentative, groping folders to a numbered list of "features" to be memorised and applied. And once the doctrine claimed to deliver the real laws of nature, the Party that owned the doctrine claimed the right to settle the findings of the sciences. This is the point at which the reader must ask the question the volume's two hundred and twenty notes never ask: was the state that canonised this book consistent in its use of it? The answer is that it inverted it. In 1948, at the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Mendelian genetics was denounced as bourgeois, idealist and metaphysical, and the charlatan Trofim Lysenko's "Michurinist biology" was installed as the only science compatible with dialectical materialism — by a show of hands and a speech cleared in advance by Stalin. Soviet genetics was destroyed; Nikolai Vavilov, the greatest botanist the country produced, had already died in prison. Around the same years relativity and quantum mechanics were arraigned as "physical idealism", and cybernetics dismissed as a bourgeois pseudo-science, all in the name of the dialectics of nature. The irony is total, and it is worth stating plainly because the apparatus will not. Engels ridicules, in "Natural Science in the Spirit World", the eminent scientists — Crookes, Wallace — who let an a priori conviction override the evidence of their own experiments. Lysenkoism was that posture raised to the level of the state. A book whose one firm methodological rule is that interconnections must be discovered in the facts and verified by experiment was made the warrant for imposing them on the facts and punishing the experiment that disagreed. Philosophy was set to legislate to science — the precise thing Engels said philosophy must never again do.

Before that quarrel it is worth pausing on how much of the

science Engels actually got right, because the workshop is full of good tools as well as overreach. He grasped, before it was orthodox, that the physical forces were forms of a single convertible energy; he read the newly discovered cell as the unit from which the whole organic world is built up; he took Darwin's descent of species as settled and pushed it further than most of Darwin's followers dared, into the descent of humanity itself; he insisted that mathematics too has a history and a dialectic, that its "self-evident" axioms are abstractions from the world and not gifts from heaven. Where he is tentative he is usually tentative for good reasons, wrestling with a physics that had not yet found its feet. The trouble is never the particular judgements, most of which were shrewd; it is the general claim laid over them, that a philosophy could hand down the form all such judgements must take. Engels the working naturalist keeps testing; Engels the system-builder occasionally forgets his own rule. The edition, and the state behind it, remembered the system-builder and quietly retired the naturalist.

The editorial apparatus of this edition does its work in the same key, by smoothing rather than by cutting. Nothing is censored; the fragments are printed, the drafts included, the translator's notes are careful and often genuinely useful. But the framing turns a workshop into a finished chapter of the official world outlook, presents Engels's provisional classifications as established results, and — in two hundred and twenty scrupulous notes on the chemistry and astronomy of the 1870s — finds no occasion to mention what the book was used to do to the chemistry and biology of the 1940s. The erasure is achieved not by suppression but by silence: the notes are meticulous about the past and mute about the use. To read the reconstruction as the editors present it is to meet a lawgiver. To read the folders as Engels left them is to meet an experimenter who did not finish, and knew it.

Why it turned out so is a question about circumstances before it is a question about doctrine, and here the tradition from which this introduction is written parts company with two easy readings at once. It was not the "dialectics of nature" that shot Vavilov. A revolution isolated in a backward country, its working class dispersed and killed in a civil war fought under foreign intervention, its founding generation dead or driven out, threw up an administrative caste that made itself permanent and then required a philosophy that could not be answered back — a philosophy that settled questions rather than opening them. *Diamat* was that philosophy: not the living method of a movement, but the catechism of a bureaucracy. Trotsky, who defended dialectical materialism to the end of his life — against the pragmatists in his own American section, in

the letters gathered as *In Defence of Marxism* — defended it precisely as a tool of thought for people trying to change the world, not as a state metaphysics for people trying to freeze it. The difference between the two is the difference between Engels's folders and Stalin's *Short Course*. The Marxism that legislated genetics from a philosophy chair was the reification of Engels, and the standard by which that reification can be condemned is Engels's own rule, printed in this very volume, that the facts are the judges.

So what is this Marxism worth now, read against its own ossification? A great deal, and more than when it was official. The anti-reductionist core — the insistence that life is not "merely" physics and mind not "merely" biology, that each level of nature is real and lawful and yet materially grounded in the one below — is the part of Engels that speaks directly to a present crowded with attempts to dissolve the human into the neural and the neural into the algorithmic. The ecological Engels, who wrote that nature takes its revenge and was canonised by a state that drained the Aral Sea, is being read again by people who need exactly his combination of materialism and warning. And the method itself, taken as Engels took it at his best — as a way of following things in their motion and their connection, always to be tested against how the world actually behaves — is worth keeping precisely because it is the opposite of what was built on it. The value of *Dialectics of Nature* today lies in reading it as the unfinished, self-correcting, experimental thing it is, and refusing the monument the Institute made of it. Engels left a workshop with the door open. It was locked, from the outside, for half a century. This edition is worth having because the lock can now be picked, and because the man inside turns out to have written, in his own hand, the warrant for opening it.

MARXISM

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State

Written in two months out of Marx's notebooks on Lewis Henry Morgan: the only sustained Marxist account of where the family, private property and the state came from, and the source of the line about the world-historic defeat of the female sex. In Alick West's translation.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

Engels wrote this book in the spring of 1884, in about two months, out of a dead man's notebooks. Marx had spent the last years of his life reading Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), an American lawyer's study of the Iroquois and of ancient Greece and Rome, and had filled a long abstract with critical remarks; he meant to write the book himself and did not live to do it. Engels, as he says in his 1884 preface, offered "but a meagre substitute for that Which my departed friend was not destined to accomplish." The result is the most widely read thing either man wrote about women, and the only sustained Marxist account of where the family, private property and the state came from — and therefore of the conditions under which they might go.

Progress issued this book in English more than once, and in two different translations, both out of Moscow. The one nearly every reader knows is Alick West's, made in 1942 and later rechecked against the German of the Marx–Engels Werke: it is the version carried in the three-volume *Selected Works*, and the source of the sentence everyone quotes — "the world historical defeat of the female sex." An older and looser rendering, of the Untermann–Kerr lineage (1902), also circulated in the Moscow printings; it gives that same sentence flatly, as "the defeat of the female sex, an event affecting the history of the world." The translation used here is West's, from *Selected Works*, Volume Three (1973), set against Engels's fourth German edition of 1891 — the right base. (One small thing to watch: in this *Selected Works* setting West's famous phrase is printed "the world-historic defeat of the female sex"; the fuller "world historical defeat" form, from the same 1942 translation, is the one that passed into common quotation.) The *Selected Works* text is spare — Engels's own prefaces, his text, the editors' endnotes. The book's Soviet career, though, is inseparable from the apparatus the free-standing Moscow editions wrapped it in — above all the Foreign Languages

Publishing House printing of 1948, which fronted Engels with an eight-page preface by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee. That preface is the specimen this introduction examines, because it is considerably more revealing than its authors intended.

Start with what the book gets right, because a great deal of it is right and it changed how the world thinks. Engels's governing move is to take three institutions that every respectable authority of his day held to be natural, eternal or divinely ordered — the monogamous family, private property, the state — and show them as products of a datable history, with beginnings and therefore with ends. The Institute's own preface summarises this fairly: Engels "demonstrates that historically all forms of family, property and state are transitory." The chapter on the state is still the crispest short statement of the materialist case. Classes with irreconcilable interests, Engels argues, would consume each other and society in sterile struggle; so there arises "a power, apparently standing above society... and this power, arising out of society, but placing itself over it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state." Not an arbiter above the fray, and not a conspiracy imposed from outside: a growth of the conflict itself, which then floats free of the society that produced it. Anyone who has watched a modern state acquire interests of its own will recognise the description.

The chapters on the family are the reason the book still sells. Engels's claim is that the subordination of women is not a fact of nature but a fact of property. Once herds, land and slaves gave a man wealth to bequeath, descent had to be traced through him, and the household ceased to be a public, collective concern and became his private one: "the wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production." From this he draws the analogy that has done more work than any other sentence in socialist writing on the subject: "In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat." The modern family, he insists, "is

based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman," and monogamy in its historical form is not the reconciliation of the sexes but "the subjection of one sex by the other." It follows — and this is the part that matters most — that a remedy exists and can be specified. "The first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry: and that this again demands that the specific feature of the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished." Housework must stop being a private burden and become a public service: "Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter." Two conditions, not one. Hold on to that; the century turned on it.

Now the weaknesses, which are real and which the tradition that produced this introduction has no interest in hiding. The scaffolding is Morgan's, and Morgan's scaffolding fell down. The ladder of savagery, barbarism and civilisation, each rung defined by a technology; the claim that group marriage was a universal stage; above all the story of an original "mother-right" overthrown in a single reversal — none of this survived the anthropology of the following fifty years. In West's translation the famous sentence reads: "The overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex." As a datable event it did not happen, and no serious ethnographer now thinks it did. Engels can hardly be blamed for using the best evidence available in 1884, and to his credit he wrote the escape clause himself, on his first page of argument: Morgan's classification would hold, he said, "unless important additional material necessitates alterations." Important additional material arrived. What survives the collapse of the narrative is the analysis underneath it: that women's position varies with the organisation of production and inheritance, that the separation of the household from social production is what impoverishes women's standing, and that this can be changed. That thesis has proved far more durable than the ladder it was carried up.

There is a second limitation, and it is the one the twentieth century tested to destruction. Engels called entry into social production the "first premise" of emancipation. It is a premise, not a guarantee. Where women entered paid work in their millions and the household remained a private workshop staffed by them after hours, the result was not liberation but a double load. Engels knew this in outline — he observed that a woman who takes up public industry "is not in a position to fulfil her family duties" — but he treated the second condition, the socialising of care, as following naturally from the first. It does not follow. It has to be paid for, and someone has to want

to pay.

Which brings us to the question those Moscow editions could not ask about themselves: was the state that printed the book consistent with it? The answer was written into the front of the 1948 edition, in the open.

The Institute's preface does something startling. It stops, halfway through, to correct Engels. "But there is one inaccurate statement in Engels' Preface to the first edition of the book which must be noted," it announces, and quotes the passage in which Engels calls the decisive factor in history "the production and reproduction of immediate life," which "is of a twofold character" — the production of the means of subsistence on one hand, "the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species" on the other. The Institute rules this out: "The family, however, cannot be placed on a par with labour, with material production, as a determining cause of social development." The correct formulation, the reader is told, "was elaborated by Comrade Stalin in his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*."

Consider what has been struck out, and when. Engels's twofold-production passage is precisely the one that makes the family and the bearing and rearing of children a site of material determination in their own right — the one place in Marxism that licenses a hard-headed materialist audit of what a state is doing to its households. Demote it to a mere "condition" of social life, and the family becomes a passive reflex of the mode of production: whatever the mode of production is socialist, the family is by definition fine, and no further questions arise. The sentence was removed in the years when the questions were most pressing. The young Soviet republic had gone furthest of any state in Engels's direction — full civil equality, secular and easily dissolved marriage, and in 1920 the first legal abortion service in the world — and it had then reversed course: abortion recriminalised in 1936, the Party's women's department (the *Zhenotdel*, wound up in 1930) long gone, and in 1944 a family decree that made divorce slow and expensive, stripped unregistered fathers of obligation to their children, and handed out medals to mothers of large families. Every one of those measures restored the individual family as the economic unit of society — the exact thing Engels said had to be abolished — and reprivatized the care of children that he said had to become "a public matter." The apparatus edited the standard, then failed it.

Trotsky had already given the reason in 1936, in *The Revolution Betrayed*. He is careful, and his care is the point: "The October revolution honestly fulfilled its obligations in

relation to woman," he writes, and the revolution "made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called 'family hearth' — that archaic, stuffy and stagnant institution in which the woman of the toiling classes performs galley labor from childhood to death." The crèches, the social dining rooms and the laundries were built, badly, on the ruins of a wrecked economy, and they failed. A poor and encircled country could not buy its way out of the household in a decade. But the retreat, Trotsky insists, went "infinitely farther than the iron economic necessity demands," because the bureaucracy discovered a use for the family it was too poor to replace: "the need... for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40,000,000 points of support for authority and power." Poverty explains the failure. The cult built on top of it — the medals, the moralising, the pretence that a forced retreat was a socialist triumph — explains the falsification. And Trotsky's warning against the easy conclusion still holds: "It would be incorrect to regard this retreat as a condemnation of the socialist system, which in general was never tried out."

The same reversal was performed on the book's other great theme, and again the preface says so. Engels ends by promising that with classes "the state will inevitably fall," and that a society of "the free and equal association of the producers will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe." The Soviet state did not go to the museum; it grew, and by 1939 it was official doctrine that it must go on growing under socialism and might persist under communism itself. The Institute prepares the reader for this on the last page of its preface, in one flat sentence: "Lenin and Stalin developed further the basic ideas expressed by Engels in this book, particularly the question of the abolition of classes and of the state during the period of Socialism and of Communism." Developed further is the apparatus's term of art for reversed. Nor can it leave even a footnote alone. Where Engels's appendix reports on the Giliaki of Sakhalin — the small Amur people whom, a note tells us, "Soviet ethnographers" now call the Nivkhi — the editors append a testimonial: October "rid them of the baneful influence of capitalism, saved them from extinction and enabled them to develop freely under the Soviet system." That note went to press in 1948, while whole deported nationalities were living under guard in Central Asia.

None of this is an argument against Engels, and it is not an argument that the seed of 1944 lay in 1884. The causes of the reversal were objective before they were political: a backward country, a revolution left isolated when the German rising failed, a working class destroyed by civil war and famine, and

no material surplus with which to socialise a single kitchen. On that ground an apparatus raised itself above the society it administered — becoming, in Engels's own words, a power "arising out of society, but placing itself over it" — and then rewrote the founder to fit. The tell is that it had to rewrite him at all. You do not correct a text you have superseded; you correct a text that is still convicting you.

So what is this Marxism worth now? More, not less, than when the corrections were being printed. The historical method has won so completely that we forget whose it was: nobody serious now argues that our particular family form is written into nature, and the argument that it is not began in these pages. The state chapter reads as freshly as ever in a world of governments visibly detached from the societies that pay for them. And the central unfinished demand is the live political question of our own decade. Women's entry into paid work — Engels's first premise — has largely happened across the rich world, and it has not delivered equality, exactly as the second half of his argument predicts it could not. Care of the young, the old and the sick is still overwhelmingly private, unpaid or badly paid, and still overwhelmingly done by women; every fight over childcare, parental leave and social care is a fight over whether the rearing of human beings is "a public matter" or a household's private misfortune. Engels put that question on the agenda and it has never been taken off. Read this book, then, not as scripture and not as a museum piece, but as an unpaid bill — one that the state which reprinted it for forty years defaulted on, and that is still outstanding.

PHILOSOPHY

Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy

A review that turned into a short history of how German philosophy ended and Marxism began - and, in its last twenty pages, one of the clearest statements of the materialist conception of history Engels ever wrote. Forty years late, and worth the wait.

Frederick Engels

Introduction to This Edition

Engels wrote this book to settle a debt, and he was forty years late paying it. In 1845 he and Marx had shut themselves up in Brussels to write out, at length, what separated them from the German philosophy they had grown up in. The manuscript never found a printer; they left it, as Marx put it later and Engels quotes here, "to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose—self-clarification." Four decades passed. Marx died. Neither of them had ever gone back to Ludwig Feuerbach, the man who, Engels says, "more than any other post-Hegelian philosopher, had upon us during our period of storm and stress" an influence that it was "an undischarged debt of honour" to acknowledge. Then the editors of *Die Neue Zeit*, the German party's theoretical journal, asked him for a review of a new book on Feuerbach by the Danish philosopher C. N. Starcke. Engels took the commission and wrote something much larger than a review: a short history of how one world outlook came out of another. It appeared in the fourth and fifth numbers of the journal for 1886 and, revised, as a separate publication in Stuttgart in 1888, with the foreword dated London, February 21 of that year.

The book is short, it is written at speed, and it does the work of a much longer one. In four chapters Engels sets out what Hegel's system contained that was worth keeping and what had to be thrown away; states what he calls the great basic question of philosophy and why the answers to it divide philosophers into camps; takes Feuerbach's materialism apart, with particular attention to his ethics; and then sketches, in twenty pages, the materialist conception of history. That last chapter is the reason the book outlived its occasion. Starcke is forgotten. Feuerbach is read mostly by specialists. The account of how ideas about law, politics and religion arise on an economic basis, and then acquire a life of their own, is still being argued about.

The text printed here is the one prepared in Moscow for the *Selected Works* in three volumes of Marx and Engels, Volume 3 (Progress Publishers, first printing 1970, second printing 1973), pages 335 to 376. It is a Progress translation; the edition names no translator, giving only "Translated from the German" at the foot of the work, as it does throughout the volume. With it come the notes of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union — eleven of its own, numbered 190 to 200, and five more first attached to earlier works in the volume and cited again here. The Institute's reference marks appear in this edition as bracketed numerals; Engels's own footnotes, and the editors' page-bottom glosses signed "—Ed.", are kept where the edition puts them.

One thing the edition does not print deserves recording at the outset, because a reader would otherwise never know it was missing. In the foreword Engels explains that he went back to the 1845 manuscript, found the section on Feuerbach unfinished and unusable, and then found something better: "in an old notebook of Marx's I have found the eleven theses on Feuerbach printed here as an appendix. These are notes hurriedly scribbled down for later elaboration, absolutely not intended for publication, but invaluable as the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook." They are not printed here as an appendix. In place of them the edition sets an editors' footnote directing the reader to another volume — "Ibid., pp. 13-15." A companion footnote sends him to Volume 1, pages 16 to 80, for the unfinished manuscript. The pamphlet Engels published had a beginning, a body and an end; the *Selected Works* keeps the first two and files the third somewhere else. We will come back to this, because it turns out to be more than a housekeeping decision.

Take the strengths first, and they are considerable. The best thing in the book is its treatment of Hegel, which is neither a demolition nor a rescue but a separation of the method from the system. Engels shows how a philosophy that had been

received as the official creed of the Prussian state — "the terminating system of the whole development—the Hegelian system—was even raised, as it were, to the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of state!" — contained a principle that dissolved every such creed, including its own. Hegel's notorious sentence that everything real is rational was read by Frederick William III's subjects as "a philosophical benediction bestowed upon despotism, police government, Star Chamber proceedings and censorship." Engels shows that on Hegel's own definitions it converts into its opposite: what has ceased to be necessary has ceased to be real, and so "All that exists deserves to perish." From this he draws the passage that is the finest thing he ever wrote about method:

Just as the bourgeoisie by large-scale industry, competition and the world market dissolves in practice all stable time-honoured institutions, so this dialectical philosophy dissolves all conceptions of final, absolute truth and of absolute states of humanity corresponding to it. For it [dialectical philosophy] nothing is final, absolute, sacred.

The second strength is the account of where philosophical problems come from. Engels does not treat the question of spirit and nature as a puzzle that fell out of the sky; he traces it to men who did not know how their own bodies worked, who dreamed of the dead and concluded that something in them was separable from the body. The "great basic question of all philosophy," he says, is "that concerning the relation of thinking and being," and it grew out of that. This is a genuinely historical way of handling a metaphysical dispute, and it is done without sneering.

Third, there is the demolition of Feuerbach's ethics, which is funny and merciless and has lost none of its edge. Feuerbach founded morality on the urge towards happiness, tempered by respect for the same urge in others. Engels observes that on this basis "the Stock Exchange is the highest temple of moral conduct, provided only that one always speculates right," and follows the logic through: the man who loses has merely calculated badly, his ruin is the punishment for his own unethical arithmetic, and the winner may "slap my chest proudly, like a modern Rhadamanthus." The conclusion is the sting: "Feuerbach's morality is cut exactly to the pattern of modern capitalist society, little as Feuerbach himself might desire or imagine it." Anyone who has sat through a lecture on enlightened self-interest knows that this reply is still needed.

Fourth, and most durable, the chapter on history. Engels's problem is that men act for reasons they can state, and history produces results nobody intended. His answer is to look for

"the driving powers which—consciously or unconsciously, and indeed very often unconsciously—lie behind the motives of men who act in history," and to look for them not in individuals but in what "set in motion great masses, whole peoples, and again whole classes of the people in each people." The state gets a page that is worth the whole essay: it "presents itself to us as the first ideological power over man," an organ society creates for its common interests which, "hardly come into being," makes itself independent of society, and the more completely as it becomes the organ of one class.

The weaknesses are real, and two of them matter for what came afterwards. The first is the treatment of Feuerbach himself, which is thinner than the occasion required. Engels admits in the foreword that the finished part of the 1845 manuscript "contains no criticism of Feuerbach's doctrine itself." What we get instead is a verdict — Feuerbach "stopped halfway, was a materialist below and an idealist above" — that is true as far as it goes and does not much engage with what Feuerbach actually argued. The book Engels was reviewing gets a similarly brisk hearing.

The second is more serious. Engels divides philosophers into "two great camps" according to whether they take spirit or nature as primary, and he is careful about it. He says twice that the words idealism and materialism "originally signify nothing else but this; and here too they are not used in any other sense," and warns explicitly of "what confusion arises when some other meaning is put into them." He was right to worry. A distinction offered as a way of sorting historical positions is easily converted into a test of allegiance, and a test of allegiance is easily converted into an instrument. Engels supplied the distinction and the warning in the same paragraph. His successors kept the distinction.

Which brings us to the question this edition does not put to itself. Was the state that reprinted this book consistent with it?

The book ends philosophy. That is its argument, stated flatly: the materialist conception of history "puts an end to philosophy in the realm of history, just as the dialectical conception of nature makes all natural philosophy both unnecessary and impossible," and what remains to philosophy is only "the theory of the laws of the thought process itself, logic and dialectics." It is not a call for a better philosophy. It is a notice that the discipline has been overtaken by the sciences and by history, and that inventing connections in the head is no longer a respectable way to spend a career.

In the Soviet Union this text became the foundation document

of a compulsory academic subject. The "basic question" and the "two camps" were taught as the framework of dialectical materialism to every student in the country; the answer was known before the question was put; and the examinations had right answers. That would be irony enough. But it went further than teaching. In January 1931 the Party's Central Committee settled a dispute between rival schools of Soviet philosophers by resolution, condemning the group around Abram Deborin as "Menshevizing idealism" — a philosophical verdict handed down by a political body, with consequences for the careers and eventually the lives of the losers. In 1947 Andrei Zhdanov intervened in the same way in a discussion of a history of philosophy, laying down what the history of philosophy was to be. Engels had written that the philosophers' answers "split them into two great camps." He did not envisage a state that would decide which camp you were in, and act on the decision.

The Institute's own note on this work, note 190, shows how the conversion was made. It is not really a note; it is a four-hundred-word essay attached to the title, telling the reader what the book proves before he has read a line of it. Two of its sentences are worth setting out. "The way a philosopher approaches the fundamental issue of philosophy determines his allegiance to one or the other philosophical camp." And: "Much credit is due to Engels for his substantiation of the partisan principle of philosophy" — partiinost, party-mindedness, the doctrine that philosophy has a party line — closing with the judgement that "This work of Engels's is a model of proletarian commitment and principled philosophical thinking." Engels's careful, twice-repeated warning against putting other meanings into the words has been turned inside out. The camps are no longer a description of a historical division; they are an allegiance, and the allegiance is assessed.

And now the missing appendix reads differently. The eleven theses Marx scribbled in 1845 are the most concentrated statement in the whole tradition of the priority of practice over contemplation: that the truth of thinking is settled in activity, not in argument; that the educator himself has to be educated; and, in the last of them, that interpreting the world is not the point. Engels put them at the end of the pamphlet deliberately, as its conclusion and its warrant. An edition that removes them and leaves a cross-reference is not censoring anything — the theses are in Volume 1, and the note says so. It is doing something quieter. It is taking a work whose argument is that philosophy has ended in practice, and returning it to the shelf as philosophy: chapters one to four, notes, no appendix, no instruction to go and change anything. Nothing has been cut. The architecture has simply been rearranged so that the

building no longer points anywhere.

Why it turned out this way is a question about circumstances before it is a question about doctrine. A revolution isolated in a poor country, its working class destroyed in a civil war fought under foreign invasion, threw up an administrative caste that had every reason to want a doctrine incapable of being turned back on itself — and every reason to keep the founders in print, since their authority was the only warrant it had. So the sentences went on being set in type, in millions of copies, in every language the state could reach. That is the standing refutation of the use they were put to. A regime that had genuinely superseded Engels would not have needed to keep quoting him.

So what is this Marxism worth now? Its central move is a habit of mind rather than a doctrine, and the habit is in short supply: when an idea presents itself as obvious, ask what interest finds it obvious, and when it became so. That is not cynicism about ideas — Engels is emphatic that a philosophy can drive a movement, that "everything which sets men in motion must go through their minds," and that the form it takes there matters. It is a refusal to take the self-description of an age at face value. His demolition of an ethics built on mutual self-interest is still the best short reply to the moral economy of the market, and it lands harder now than it did in 1886. His account of the state as an organ that separates itself from the society that made it is more useful to a socialist than most of what has been written on the subject since, and it is not a comfortable thought for anybody, in any system. And the sentence to carry away is the one about dialectical philosophy: for it "nothing is final, absolute, sacred." It was printed for seventy years by a state that had made a great many things sacred and final, and the printing was its own quiet indictment. Engels closed by saying that the German working-class movement is the inheritor of German classical philosophy. The inheritance was diverted for a long time into a Ministry and a syllabus. It has not been extinguished, and this small book is still the shortest route back to it.

MARXISM

Marxism and Revisionism

Lenin in the trough of defeat after 1905, asking why reformism keeps coming back - and answering that it is not a mistake to be argued away but a pressure with a permanent social base. Short, unusually clear, written for a legal commemoration of Marx.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

Lenin wrote "Marxism and Revisionism" in the spring of 1908, for a memorial symposium, Karl Marx (1818–1883), published legally in St. Petersburg to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of Marx's death. The date matters twice over. It was a commemoration; and it was written in the trough of defeat. The revolution of 1905 had been crushed, Stolypin's gallows were busy, the workers' organisations were being driven back underground, and the mood among the radical intelligentsia was one of retreat — out of politics into mysticism, "god-building," and a fashionable revision of Marxism's philosophical foundations. Lenin was at that moment beginning the polemic that would become Materialism and Empirio-Criticism (1908–09), and the sharp aside near the middle of this article — against those who would smuggle in "old and reactionary philosophical rubbish disguised as a criticism of Plekhanov's tactical opportunism" — belongs to that same fight. The present edition prints the text from the Collected Works, Volume 15 (Progress Publishers, Moscow; first printing 1963; edited by Andrew Rothstein and Bernard Isaacs), which reproduces the Institute of Marxism-Leninism's Russian edition.

The article's purpose is announced by its title. Marxism, Lenin argues, has by now defeated its open rivals — the Young Hegelians, Proudhon, Bakunin, Dühring — and the moment it wins, the doctrines it beat return in disguise: no longer as enemies but as "amendments" from within. "Revisionism" is his name, taken from Eduard Bernstein, for that inside pressure. "Pre-Marxist socialism has been defeated," he writes; "it is continuing the struggle, no longer on its own independent ground, but on the general ground of Marxism, as revisionism." The essay tracks it across three fronts — philosophy, political economy, politics — and then puts the question that gives it its lasting value: why does revisionism keep coming back?

The answer is the strongest thing in the piece, and it is genuinely strong. Revisionism, Lenin argues, is not a personal failing or a run of bad arguments but a permanent product of capitalist society: "The inevitability of revisionism is determined by its class roots in modern society. Revisionism is an international phenomenon." Alongside the working class, capitalism ceaselessly regenerates a mass of small proprietors — "there are always broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie, small proprietors," and "Capitalism arose and is constantly arising out of small production" — and their outlook seeps back into the workers' parties. That is a sociological insight, not an insult, and it is why "the petty-bourgeois world-outlook should again and again crop up in the ranks of the broad workers' parties." The political corollary is equally sharp: democracy does not dissolve the class struggle but exposes it. Against the revisionist claim that universal suffrage had made the state neutral, Lenin answers that parliamentarism "does not eliminate, but lays bare the innate character even of the most democratic bourgeois republics as organs of class oppression." Bernstein's motto — "The movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing" — is taken apart as the theory of a politics with no horizon beyond the next concession. On all this the article is bracing, and in the century since it has been repeatedly borne out.

Its weaknesses are the shadow of its strengths. The polemic hardens into a binary — orthodoxy against revision, every "amendment to Marx" filed under class capitulation — that leaves little room for the honest correction a living science needs and that Lenin himself constantly practised. The philosophical stretch is the least candid: it folds the neo-Kantian revisionists together with the very different Machism of Bogdanov and Bazarov, and the "criticism of Plekhanov's tactical opportunism" it warns against was as much a faction fight as a philosophical one. The brisk dismissal of "revisionism from the left" — the revolutionary syndicalism of Labriola and Lagardelle — is a verdict pronounced too fast to convince. And the confidence that reformism had been theoretically routed proved premature: six years on, in August 1914, the revisionism Lenin thought

discredited carried the mass parties of the Second International into the war. The essay named the disease exactly and underrated its virulence.

Then there is what the Soviet state made of it — for no text in the canon is more double-edged in official hands. "Marxism and Revisionism" supplied "Marxism-Leninism" with its very grammar: the division of the world into orthodoxy and heresy, and the word revisionism as the standing charge against every heresy. From an analytic category — a tool for understanding why reformism recurs — "revisionism" was forged into an instrument of rule. It was hurled at the Left and Right Oppositions, at Bukharin, at Tito in 1948, back and forth across the Sino-Soviet split (each capital branding the other "revisionist"), at whomever the line of the day condemned. The article that warned against a doctrine going dead became the warrant for policing doctrine to death.

The irony runs deeper than the abuse of a word. Lenin attacked those who would "amend" Marx; the apparatus that canonised him amended, edited, suppressed and re-amended Marx and Lenin without pause — airbrushing the editions, burying the inconvenient texts, rewriting the history yearly to fit the leader. It denounced revision while making revision a state monopoly. Above all it was refuted by Lenin's own central thesis. If the petty-bourgeois outlook regenerates inside the workers' movement and pulls it toward accommodation, then the severest test of the theory was the Soviet state itself: a privileged bureaucratic stratum, materially interested in order and in its own perquisites, which carried through a genuine revision of Marxism — the abandonment of the Commune-state, of workers' democracy, of internationalism for socialism in one country — and called the revision loyalty. The category Lenin built to explain reformism fits the caste that wielded it against others better than it ever fit Bernstein.

This is precisely where the Fourth International located it. Trotsky's charge was that Stalinism was the real revisionism — the bureaucratic betrayal of both Marxism and Leninism — even as the apparatus screamed "revisionism" and "Trotskyism" at him. The point of restoring the word is not to swell the heresy-hunt but to end it: to use "revisionism" as Lenin used it, against the class pressures that turn a revolutionary movement respectable — the bureaucracy's own pressures included — and never as a brand pinned on a rival for excommunication.

Nothing vindicated the essay's central thesis — that reformism regenerates wherever capitalism does — more plainly than the

fate of Western Communism in Lenin's own name. By the 1970s the mass parties of Italy, France and Spain had completed the passage Bernstein only opened: Eurocommunism embraced the parliamentary state as the road to socialism, dropped the dictatorship of the proletariat, and made "the movement" — the electoral advance, the historic compromise — very nearly "everything." Here was revisionism grown to its maturity, and Moscow duly denounced it; but the denunciation was hollow, for the Soviet state's own "socialism in one country" had cleared the path. Ernest Mandel, in *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, drew the conclusion the apparatus could not afford: that Eurocommunism was Stalinism's offspring and not its opposite, reformism reborn from the very petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic pressures Lenin had diagnosed.

Read against its ossification, the article is more useful now than the catechism ever allowed it to be. Its core holds. Reformism is not a mistake to be argued away but a recurring pressure with a permanent social base, because capitalism keeps manufacturing the strata that feel it; parliamentary democracy conceals class rule rather than abolishing it; and "the movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing" remains the epitaph of every socialism that mistakes adaptation for strategy. But the essay warns against two deaths, not one. There is the death by dissolution that Lenin named — Marxism watered down into liberal reform — and there is the death he did not live to see named, the death by petrification: the living method embalmed as a state creed, its keepers appointing themselves the sole licensed authors of "revision." "Marxism and Revisionism" was turned into a weapon of that second death. Taken back from its abusers and read for what it actually argues, it stands against both — which is the only way a doctrine that means to stay alive can be read at all.

PHILOSOPHY

The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism

Two thousand words written for the thirtieth anniversary of Marx's death and published under the tsarist censor: German philosophy, English political economy, French socialism, and what Marx made of each. For a century, the first thing many readers were given on the subject.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

Lenin wrote this short article in the spring of 1913, for the March number of *Prosvetsheniye* — "Enlightenment," the Bolsheviks' legal theoretical monthly, published openly in St. Petersburg under the eyes of the tsarist censor. The date is the whole occasion: March 1913 was the thirtieth anniversary of Marx's death, and the piece is a commemorative primer, a little under two thousand words meant to tell a worker-reader, plainly and quickly, what Marxism is and where it came from. It is not a treatise. It is a popular outline, and it should be read as one. The present edition prints the text from the *Collected Works*, Volume 19 (Progress Publishers, Moscow, translated from the Russian by George Hanna and edited by Robert Daglish), which follows the fourth Russian edition prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

The article's argument is announced in its title. Marxism, Lenin says, has three sources and three component parts: German classical philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism, which Marx transformed, respectively, into dialectical and historical materialism, the theory of surplus value, and the doctrine of the class struggle. The whole essay is the elaboration of that single tripartite scheme.

Its strength is real and worth naming. The article is written against the idea of Marxism as a sect. It opens by facing the charge head-on: that bourgeois science treats Marxism "as a kind of 'pernicious sect,'" and that it must, because "there can be no 'impartial' social science in a society based on class struggle." Lenin's answer is generous and, on its own terms, true. 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 civilisation." On the contrary — and

this is the sentence to hold on to — Marxism "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." This is Marxism presented as an open inheritance, the continuation of the best that had been thought, not a revelation walled off from it. For a popular introduction that is exactly the right note, and it is honestly struck.

The weakness is harder to see, because it is bound up with the strength. The very neatness that makes the article teachable — three sources, three parts, each mapped onto the next — is a schematism, and a schematism is a thing that can be memorised without being understood. A living method reduced to a numbered list is halfway to being a catechism. And near the top of the piece stands the single most quoted, and most abused, sentence Lenin ever wrote: "The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true." Read in context it is a rhetorical flourish, the confidence of a commemorative article; but the words omnipotent and true, set side by side as a slogan, say something the rest of the essay does not — that the doctrine is finished, closed, beyond correction. That is not the spirit of the man who insisted Marxism was the heir of world civilisation and not a sect. It is the germ of the opposite reading, and history reached for it.

For the decisive question about this text is not what it says but what was later done with it — and here the reflexivity is almost too exact to be believed. The state that canonised Lenin took his three "component parts" and built them, quite literally, into the architecture of compulsory instruction. Soviet ideological training was organised as three disciplines — dialectical and historical materialism, Marxist-Leninist political economy, and scientific communism — the very triad of this 1913 sketch, now examination subjects that every student in the USSR had to pass. The commemorative primer

became the syllabus. And the sentence about omnipotence became the motto over the door: printed on banners, set on the walls of lecture halls, recited until it meant nothing. "Marxism-Leninism" was assembled out of exactly this material — a body of doctrine to be learned, tested, and professed, its answers known in advance.

What that machinery produced was, precisely, the thing Lenin's opening paragraph had denied Marxism was: a "hidebound, petrified doctrine," a "pernicious sect" — only now it was the sect of the state. The essay that argued Marxism could never become a closed system was made the foundation stone of one. Its warmest claim — that the doctrine lives because it keeps company with "the best that man produced" — was inverted into a fortress doctrine that treated the best that man was then producing, in genetics or economics or philosophy, as heresy to be denounced. There is no need to reach outside the text for the indictment. The Soviet use of *The Three Sources* is refuted by the first page of *The Three Sources*.

Which is also why the article survives its own misuse. Set the canonisation aside and read the opening again: Marxism as the "legitimate successor" to philosophy, political economy and socialism — an argument for keeping the doors open, not for bolting them. That is the sentence the bureaucracy could not honour and could not quite erase, and it is the reason the essay still has something to teach. The tradition that took Marxism seriously as a method rather than a creed — Trotsky, writing in exile that the Soviet orthodoxy had turned a tool of analysis into a state religion; the Marxists who went on revising and arguing where the catechism forbade it — was continuing Lenin's own stated project against the icon made in his name. The lesson of this small text is not the tidy diagram of three parts, useful as it is for a first lesson. It is the claim underneath the diagram: that a doctrine stays alive only so long as it remains the heir of the best thought of its time, and open to being corrected by it. The USSR proved the point in the negative, by embalming the doctrine and calling the embalming loyalty. Read honestly, thirty years after Marx's death and a century after its own, the article asks to be taken at its word — as an argument against the very sect that was later built on top of it.

MARXISM

Karl Marx: A Brief Biographical Sketch with an Exposition of Marxism

Lenin compressing the whole of Marxism into an encyclopaedia article, written as the First World War broke out - with the 1918 preface explaining which section the tsarist censor cut, and why it was the one on revolutionary tactics.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

Of all the short texts in the Marxist library, this is the one most likely to have taught you your Marxism — and most likely to have taught it to you as a catechism. Lenin wrote it in the second half of 1914, at Poronin on the Galician border and then in Berne, in the weeks when the First World War broke out and the Second International collapsed into support for its own governments. It was not a manifesto but a commission: an entry on "Karl Marx" for the Granat Encyclopaedic Dictionary, the most widely used reference work in Russia, which appeared in 1915 in the seventh edition, Volume 28, over the signature "V. Ilyin". The task Lenin set himself was to compress the whole of Marxism — the philosophy, the economics, the socialism, the tactics, and the life that held them together — into the space of an encyclopaedia article. He did it so well that the piece has been reprinted, translated and set for study ever since. The edition in your hands is Volume 21 of the Collected Works, issued by Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1964, translated from the Russian and edited by Julius Katzer.

The article carries a short 1918 Preface that tells you at once what kind of text this is and what was done to it. The tsarist censor, Lenin explains, "for censorship reasons, deleted the end of the article on Marx, namely, the section dealing with his revolutionary tactics." The most political part — the part on what Marxists should actually do — was the part the autocracy would not print, and Lenin, writing the preface from the middle of a revolution he now led, could only partly reconstruct it from memory. He used the occasion to strike at the Mensheviks, who had, he wrote, "sunk to utter betrayal of socialism and to desertion to the bourgeoisie." Keep that preface in mind: it is the sound of a living argument going on around a text that would later be frozen solid.

What the article does supremely well is map. In a few

thousand words Lenin lays out the whole of Marx's thought as a single connected structure: philosophical materialism, then dialectics, then the materialist conception of history, then the class struggle; then value and surplus value; then socialism; then tactics. The famous opening of the doctrinal section is the seed of everything: "Marxism is the system of Marx's views and teachings," continuing and consummating "the three main ideological currents of the nineteenth century, as represented by the three most advanced countries of mankind: classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, and French socialism combined with French revolutionary doctrines in general." As a piece of exposition this is unmatched — lucid, proportionate, and honest about difficulty. And, crucially, Lenin's bibliography, which fills the last pages of this edition, is the work of a real scholar, not a propagandist: he sends the reader to Marx's critics by name — Böhm-Bawerk, Bernstein, Sombart, the "marginal utility" economists, the anarchists and the Narodniks — because he expects the doctrine to survive the encounter. That open, arguing quality is the truest thing in the book.

It has a weakness, and the weakness is bound up with the strength. This is an encyclopaedia article, and its virtue is that it makes Marxism teachable by dividing it into parts. But a living, self-correcting body of thought presented as a numbered "system" is one short step from a body of thought presented as a closed one. The very sentence "Marxism is the system of Marx's views and teachings" — right and useful for a reference work — could be lifted out and made to mean that Marxism is finished, a fixed doctrine to be learned rather than a method to be used. The neatness that makes the article a superb door into Marx also makes it easy to nail shut. And the piece we have is missing precisely the part that would have guarded against this — the concluding section on revolutionary tactics that the censor cut and that Lenin could only sketch again from memory. What survives of it, restored in this edition, is the antidote to the schematism: Marx, Lenin

writes, "enthusiastically hailed the revolutionary initiative of the masses, who were 'storming heaven'" in the Paris Commune of 1871, even though he had warned against the rising and even in its defeat; and Marx "sharply condemned" the empty "revolutionary phrases" of the ultra-lefts while, "no less sharply," attacking the opportunism that shrank from illegal struggle. Marxism, in the part the censor removed, is not a system at all but a discipline of judgement.

Was the state that canonised this article faithful to it? Here is the sharpest irony in the whole programme of these introductions, because no single text did more to make the catechism, and no single text argues harder against it. The tripartite structure Lenin sketched here — three sources, three component parts, which he had laid out under exactly that title in a companion article of 1913 — was lifted wholesale into "Marxism-Leninism" as taught in every Soviet school and Party study circle: dialectical and historical materialism reduced to a set of numbered theses, recited and examined. The article a working revolutionary wrote to open a living method to encyclopaedia readers became the master template for a dead orthodoxy. What the apparatus kept was the skeleton — the three parts, the clean divisions. What it amputated was everything that made Lenin's version alive: the open bibliography that argued with its enemies became a closed canon that anathematised them; the flexible, self-critical tactics — condemning phrase-mongering and opportunism in the same breath — vanished into a doctrine that could bless whichever line the leadership currently held. From 1956 the same custodians who reprinted Lenin's scorn for the Mensheviks' "desertion to the bourgeoisie" made "the peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism" and "peaceful coexistence" their own general line — the very tailing after respectability that the restored tactics section was written against.

And the reification reached the author as much as the text. The man who signed a modest encyclopaedia entry and wrote "as far as I can remember" in its preface was embalmed against his widow's wishes, welded to Stalin as half of a doctrinal couple, and turned into the co-proprietor of an "-ism." "Karl Marx" is the document in which you can watch this happen, because the distance between the article and its use is so wide and so measurable. Lenin systematised Marx in order to hand readers a method; the bureaucracy systematised Lenin in order to withdraw the method from readers and keep it for itself. The frozen article became the measure of exactly how far the state had travelled from the revolutionary who wrote it.

So read this small classic for what it is, and refuse the reading

pressed on it for seventy years. It is not a set of theses to be memorised; it is one of the clearest short accounts ever written of how Marx's philosophy, economics and politics fit together — offered, as its bibliography and its tactics prove, as an invitation to think and to argue, not to obey. The revolutionary tradition that survived Stalinism, from Trotsky to Ernest Mandel, kept this Lenin alive: the one who engaged Böhm-Bawerk and Bernstein by name rather than banning them, who prized the Commune's audacity over the safety of an occupied position, who treated Marxism as a guide to action that has to be re-earned in every new situation. Read against the catechism that flew its structure while betraying its spirit, "Karl Marx" remains the best door into Marx there is — provided you walk through it, as Lenin did, arguing.

INTERNATIONALISM

The Right of Nations to Self-Determination

Lenin against Rosa Luxemburg on the national question, months before 1914: self-determination means the right to secede, unconditionally, because only the freedom to go makes the decision to stay worth anything. Still the sharpest tool against great-power hypocrisy.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

Lenin wrote this long essay in the first months of 1914, in the last calm before the storm. It appeared that spring in the Bolshevik legal journal *Prosveshcheniye* ("Enlightenment"), in three instalments across issues 4, 5 and 6, over the signature "V. Ilyin"; within weeks the July guns of the First World War would blow apart the International that had promised the workers of every country would never march against one another. The essay's immediate target was near at hand and specific. Clause 9 of the Russian Marxists' programme recognised "the right of nations to self-determination," and a whole array of opponents — the liquidator Semkovsky, the Bundist Liebman, the Ukrainian nationalist-socialist Yurkevich — had opened what Lenin called a crusade against it. Behind them all stood the more formidable figure of Rosa Luxemburg, whose long Polish essay of 1908–09, *The National Question and Autonomy*, had argued that the slogan was empty, metaphysical, a gift to bourgeois nationalism. Most of what follows is Lenin's reply to her. It is a polemic, and it reads like one; but out of the quarrel he built the most systematic statement Marxism had yet produced on what a workers' movement owes to oppressed nations.

His starting point is a refusal to argue about definitions in the abstract. To ask what self-determination "means" is not to consult a dictionary of law but to study history, and the history of modern Europe is the history of the nation-state — the political form in which a rising capitalism captures its home market and welds a population speaking one language into a single polity. Read against that background, Lenin says, the self-determination of nations "means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state" — nothing vaguer and nothing narrower. It means, concretely, the right to secede. Not the obligation: Marxists are not in the business of encouraging small states or multiplying frontiers, and in most cases they will argue for large units and for staying together. But the right must be unconditional, because without it the union of nations

can only be a prison, and because only the freedom to go makes the decision to stay a free one. Here Lenin plants his sharpest and most durable distinction, the one the rest of the twentieth century would test to destruction: the difference between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed one. "The Great Russians in Russia are an oppressor nation," he writes, and a socialist of the oppressor nation who will not fight, first of all, against his own state's chauvinism is no internationalist at all, whatever his professions. The worker of the oppressed nation must be won away from his bourgeoisie's separatism; but he can be won only if the worker of the oppressor nation has first, unambiguously, granted his right to separate.

This is the living core of the essay, and time has been kind to it. The oppressor/oppressed distinction cut through the false symmetry — the lazy view that all nationalism is equally bad — that let socialists in the great powers pose as internationalists while doing nothing about the empires they lived in. It armed the movement for the coming age of anti-colonial revolt. And Lenin's dialectic of the two tasks — support the right to secede, and fight for the closest unity of the workers across nations — is genuinely subtle, not the contradiction Luxemburg took it for. His finest illustration is Norway, which seceded peacefully from Sweden in 1905. Far from weakening the workers' movement, he argues, the Swedish workers' recognition of the Norwegians' right to go produced "their complete fraternal class solidarity, gained from the Swedish workers' recognition of the right of the Norwegians to secede." The right to divorce, he liked to say, does not oblige anyone to divorce; it makes a marriage of equals possible. That is the whole of his case in one image.

It is honest to mark where the essay is dated, and the tradition from which this introduction is written has never been shy of doing so. The subordination of the national question to the class struggle — the insistence that national demands "are subordinated to the interests of the class struggle" — is a genuine principle, but it can slide, in less careful hands than Lenin's, into a habit of treating national feeling as a mere

epiphenomenon, a thing that will melt away once the class question is settled. Lenin half-expected exactly that: like most Marxists of his generation he assumed that the victory of the proletariat would rapidly drain the national question of its charge, that peoples freed from exploitation would draw together almost of their own accord. The twentieth century did not oblige. National identity proved far more tenacious, far less reducible to economics, than the essay allows; the "merging" of nations Lenin looked toward receded rather than approached. And the essay offers a right without a mechanism — it tells us that nations may secede but says almost nothing about how the decision is to be taken, by what body, on whose count of heads. That silence would matter enormously when the party that adopted the slogan became a state. But these are the limits of a great argument, not the faults of a bad one. On the decisive question — that a socialist movement in an empire must stake everything on opposing its own government's chauvinism — Lenin was right, and the war that broke out three months later, with the socialist parties of Europe voting the war credits of their own ruling classes, proved him tragically, comprehensively right.

Was the state that canonised this essay faithful to it? The question answers itself, and the answer is the reason the text is worth republishing. The early record was, for a moment, extraordinary. The Bolshevik government recognised Finland's independence within weeks of taking power; the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of the country's nations and their right to secede and form separate states. For a few years the young Soviet republic pursued *korenizatsiya* — "putting down roots," the deliberate promotion of native languages, native cadres, native schools in the non-Russian republics — a policy without precedent among the empires of the day. Then the counter-movement set in, and its first great collision involved Lenin himself. In 1922, dying, he learned how Stalin and Ordzhonikidze were bullying the Georgian communists into a centralised union on Moscow's terms, and he was appalled. In the notes now known as part of his Testament — the memorandum *The Question of Nationalities, or Autonomisation*, dictated at the very end of 1922 — he turned his fury on the Great-Russian chauvinist riding roughshod over the smaller nations, and warned that the Soviet state was reproducing, under a red flag, the oppressor-nation arrogance he had denounced in 1914. Those notes were suppressed for more than thirty years; Soviet readers did not see them until 1956. The author of *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* had, at the last, to fight his own apparatus over the principle of the essay — and lost.

What followed under Stalin was the systematic inversion of the text. *Korenizatsiya* was reversed; Russian was pushed back to the centre; the purges fell with special weight on the "national" communists accused of the invented crime of "bourgeois nationalism." Then, in 1943 and 1944, came the deportations — the Chechens, the Ingush, the Crimean Tatars, the Kalmyks, the Volga Germans, the Balkars and others torn whole from their homelands and scattered across Central Asia and Siberia, tens of thousands dying on the way. And over all of it hung the great constitutional lie: the Soviet Constitutions of 1936 and 1977 solemnly guaranteed every union republic the right freely to secede from the Union, a clause lifted straight from Lenin's principle — while in living fact any movement that tried to exercise it was crushed as treason and the very demand was proof of counter-revolution. The right to secede had become what Lenin least wanted a right to be: a phrase in a document, a decoration on a prison wall. The essay had been embalmed exactly as its author had been, honoured in the letter and gutted in the practice.

That is where the calibration matters. It would be cheap, and false, to read this history as the working-out of some flaw in Lenin's own doctrine — to make the 1914 essay the seed of the 1944 cattle-trucks. The degeneration had causes, and they were not textual. The revolution was isolated when the German rising failed; it inherited a backward, shattered country; the civil war destroyed the very working class in whose name the state ruled; and into that vacuum climbed a bureaucratic caste that, as Trotsky argued in *The Revolution Betrayed*, usurped the revolution and ruled in its own interest while keeping its vocabulary. The Great-Russian chauvinism Lenin fought on his deathbed was the chauvinism of that caste, not of his programme. The proof is in the documents themselves: the man who wrote the "autonomisation" notes and the man who ordered the deportations were reaching for opposite things, and the state chose the second and hid the first. Ernest Mandel and the Fourth International located the tragedy precisely here — in the objective isolation of the revolution and in the Stalinist usurpation that batted on it — and not in the founding ideas. Marx, as Lenin reminds his readers in this very essay, "had no doubt as to the subordinate position of the national question as compared with the 'labour question'," and yet threw himself into the cause of Irish and Polish freedom; the tradition that runs from Marx through Lenin to Trotsky is the tradition that took oppressed nations seriously, and it is not answerable for the regime that betrayed it.

So why read it now? Because the twentieth century's last act vindicated the essay against the state that misused it. In 1989–91 the paper right to secede suddenly became real, and

the Soviet Union came apart along precisely the national seams Lenin had mapped in 1914 — the suppressed national questions had not dissolved, they had festered under the surface for seventy years and returned with interest, exactly as his logic predicted a denied right would. And the essay's central weapon is still live. Its distinction between the chauvinism of the strong and the resistance of the weak remains the sharpest tool we have for cutting through great-power hypocrisy — including the hypocrisy of the post-Soviet Russian state, which has waged its own wars against smaller neighbours while draping itself in anti-imperial language. Read against its Stalinist ossification, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* is not a museum piece but an indictment of the very oppressor-nation arrogance the USSR came to embody. Its conclusion still names the programme worth fighting for, and names it better than a century of official commentary managed to: "Complete equality of rights for all nations; the right of nations to self-determination; the unity of the workers of all nations." The three clauses belong together, and a movement that drops any one of them — that offers unity without the right to leave, or the right to leave without the fight for unity — will get neither. That is Lenin's lesson, and it is not the one carved on the monuments.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism

Written in Zurich in 1916 to show that the world war was the product of a stage of capitalism rather than an accident of diplomacy. Monopoly, finance capital, the export of capital, the division of the world - and, least comfortably, the labour aristocracy's stake in empire.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction

A pamphlet written for the censor

Lenin wrote **Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism** in the first half of 1916, in exile in Zurich, cut off from Russian libraries and short of French and English ones. He called it "a popular outline," and the modesty is exact: it is a compact synthesis, not a treatise, built out of the two best studies then available — the English liberal J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism* and the Austrian Marxist Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* — welded to a mass of "irrefutable bourgeois statistics." Its aim was to show, in a hundred pages, that the world war then in its second year was not an accident of diplomacy or a crime of wicked statesmen but the necessary product of a definite stage of capitalism.

One fact about the writing shapes everything that followed. The pamphlet, Lenin tells the reader in his own preface, "was written with an eye to the tsarist censorship." He was therefore "not only forced to confine myself strictly to an exclusively theoretical, specifically economic analysis," but had to make his political points, as he later put it, in a "slavish" tongue — in Aesopian language (veiled hints a censor would pass). The book that the Soviet state would enthrone as the finished economic doctrine of imperialism was, by its author's own account, a book with its politics deliberately muffled. That gap between the loud economics and the muted politics is where this introduction does its work.

What the book sees, and sees clearly

The analysis has a spine of five points. Imperialism, Lenin argues, is not a policy that capitalism might choose or refuse, but the shape capitalism takes once free competition has matured into its opposite. "If it were necessary to give the briefest possible definition of imperialism," he writes, "we should have to say that imperialism is the monopoly stage of

capitalism." Spelled out, it has, in his enumeration, "the following five of its basic features: (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance capital,' of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed."

Whatever one makes of the label, the description caught something real and lasting. That competitive capitalism tends toward concentration; that banks fuse with industry into a financial oligarchy; that a world already carved up must be re-carved by force, so that great-power war becomes structural rather than incidental — these are permanent contributions, and economists across the political spectrum have argued with them ever since. Sharper still, and more honest, is Lenin's account of what monopoly does inside the workers' movement of the imperialist countries. Super-profits, he writes, make it "economically possible" for the capitalists "to bribe certain sections of the workers, and for a time a fairly considerable minority of them, and win them to the side of the bourgeoisie"; and "so there is created that bond between imperialism and opportunism." This is the book's bravest idea — that a layer of the working class in the rich countries has a material stake in empire — and it cost Lenin nothing to leave it out. He put it in.

The muffled conclusion, and what the edition made of it

Here the specific edition in your hands matters. This is the Progress Publishers translation as it stood in the three-volume *Selected Works* of 1963 (Volume 1). Fixing the pamphlet in that canon — numbered, annotated, taught as the Marxist economics of the modern world — did something to it that the

editor of 1916 had begun: it presented the muffled book as the whole book.

Read the prefaces and the muffling lifts. Imperialism, Lenin says there, is "the eve of the socialist revolution"; the betrayal he is really tracking is "social-chauvinism (socialism in words, chauvinism in deeds)," the collapse of the official socialist parties into support for their own governments' war in 1914. The economics was always in the service of that political charge. The Soviet apparatus kept the economics and quietly detached the charge. What survived into the textbooks was "the theory of imperialism" as a closed body of doctrine about monopoly and finance capital; what faded was the revolutionary-defeatist politics — the call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war against one's own ruling class — that the whole pamphlet exists to arm.

And the apparatus never applied the book's own test to itself. This is not a subtlety the reader has to strain for; Lenin hands it over on the third page. Mocking Kautsky for using Japan and Korea as a safely distant example of annexation, he tells the Russian reader how to decode him: "The careful reader will easily substitute Russia for Japan, and Finland, Poland, Courland, the Ukraine, Khiva, Bokhara, Estonia or other regions peopled by non-Great Russians, for Korea." The pamphlet that defines imperialism as the great powers' plunder and annexation of subject nations names, in its own author's hand, the subject nations of the Russian empire. The state that canonised the pamphlet had re-annexed most of that list — Ukraine, the Baltic lands, the Central Asian khanates. The Institute of Marxism-Leninism's notes could gloss every foreign predator in the book; the one thing the category was never allowed to do was turn homeward. That is the reflexivity failure this series looks for in every volume, and few commit it as plainly as an edition of *Imperialism* printed in Moscow.

The strength and the hostage to fortune

A fair assessment has to weigh the analysis against the century that followed, and the weighing is genuinely two-sided. The mechanisms Lenin isolated — concentration, financialisation, the export of capital, the structural link between great-power rivalry and war — have aged well; a reader in an age of transnational finance and renewed inter-imperial confrontation will find the outline uncomfortably current. But the frame around them has aged badly, and the trouble is announced in the title. The Highest Stage promised finality. Lenin calls the imperialism he describes "moribund capitalism," marked by "parasitism and decay," and treats the whole phase as the antechamber to socialism. Capitalism was not, in fact, at its

last stage; it proved able to reorganise, to raise living standards in the imperialist heartlands, to survive the loss of the formal colonies, and to outlast the state that published this book. The under-consumptionist strand Lenin took from Hobson, and the confidence that decay must mean imminent collapse, gave the argument a built-in clock that did not keep time. Later Marxists — and, as the political-economy manuals elsewhere in this library show, the Soviet textbook-writers above all — took a sharp 1916 analysis of a conjuncture and froze it into an eternal law of "state-monopoly capitalism," forever on the edge of a breakdown that kept not arriving. The lasting parts of *Imperialism* are the descriptive parts; the part that has repeatedly misled is the teleology (the assumption that history was bound to reach a fixed endpoint) baked into the word "highest."

The uses of a theory

The misuse followed two channels, and both ran through the state that printed the book. The first was economic. From *Imperialism* the Soviet academy manufactured the doctrine of state-monopoly capitalism, the confident forecast of a West in terminal crisis that filled the Progress economics primers even as the Soviet economy slid toward its own stagnation — the category, characteristically, was pointed only outward.

The second channel was the graver one, and it is the through-line of this whole library. Lenin's theory of imperialism became the theoretical engine of Soviet foreign policy. If the world is divided into imperialist plunderers and their victims, then the state that leads the "anti-imperialist camp" inherits the victims' cause, and any regime it backs is redeemed by its distance from Washington. This is the reasoning that would license a long roll of clients and interventions in the name of anti-imperialism, and that survives today, long after the USSR, on the parts of the left that grade every government by a single axis and call the enemy of their enemy a friend. Lenin's own pamphlet cuts against that use at the root: its politics are internationalist and defeatist — turn on your own ruling class — not campist (lining up behind one bloc of states against another). A book written to teach workers to trust no imperialist state, including the one they lived under, was made the charter of an imperial state's diplomacy.

There is a last irony, and it is Lenin's demolition of Karl Kautsky that supplies it. Against Kautsky's dream of a peaceful "ultra-imperialism" — a future union of the powers that would exploit the world jointly and end their wars —

Lenin insisted the fantasy "breaks with Marxism," because the rivalry is built into the system and cannot be negotiated away. He was right about that. But the state that published his refutation spent its last decades pursuing "peaceful coexistence" with the very powers his book said could never be reconciled, while presenting itself as the pole of a bipolar world order that looked more like Kautsky's shared carve-up than Lenin's war of all against all. The theory outlived the politics that gave it meaning, and was bent to serve their opposite.

Read Imperialism, then, for what it still explains — the anatomy of monopoly, the roots of great-power war, the honest naming of the labour aristocracy's stake in empire. And read it, as this series must, against the empire that canonised it: a book whose own definition, in its own author's list of annexed nations, convicts the state that made it scripture.

MARXISM

Letters from Afar and The April Theses

Six weeks in 1917 that turned the Russian Revolution off its course: five letters written in Zurich from newspaper scraps, four of them suppressed until 1924, and the ten propositions Lenin read out the day after the Finland Station.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

The texts gathered here were written across a single hinge of history — the six weeks in the spring of 1917 in which Lenin turned the Russian Revolution off the road its first leaders had chosen. He wrote the five Letters from Afar in Zurich in March, in the first days after the tsar fell, when the only news reaching him was the "scanty information available in Switzerland" of the newspapers. Only the first of the letters reached Russia in time to be printed, and that with cuts made by the editors of Pravda, who found it too sharp; the rest were held back, and did not see print until 1924. Then, at the start of April, Lenin crossed Germany in the sealed train, arrived at the Finland Station on the night of the 3rd, and the next day read out to a meeting of Social-Democrats the ten propositions the world would know as the April Theses. They were published on 7 April as The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution. This edition prints the Progress Publishers translations from the Collected Works — the Letters from Volume 23 (Moscow, first printing 1964, translated by M. S. Levin, the late Joe Fineberg and others) and The Tasks of the Proletariat from Volume 24 (1964). They are set here in the order they were written, letters first, so that the reader can watch the argument gather from a distance and then land.

What the two texts share is a refusal to let the revolution stop where it had arrived. February had put power in the hands of the liberal Provisional Government while the workers and soldiers built their own councils — the soviets — alongside it; most socialists, Bolsheviks included, treated this as the settled "democratic" stage and gave the new government conditional support. Lenin would have none of it. "The first revolution," he writes in the opening line of the first letter, is "but certainly not the last." The theses put the same thought as a formula that would echo for a century: Russia was "passing from the first stage of the revolution — which ... placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie — to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants." From that follow the famous injunctions: "not

the slightest concession to 'revolutionary defensism'" in the imperialist war; "No support for the Provisional Government"; and, against a return to parliamentarism, "not a parliamentary republic ... but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom."

The strongest thing in these pages is not the tactical audacity but the picture of the state Lenin wanted to build in place of the old one. It is already the vision he would elaborate that summer in The State and Revolution. "We need a state," he writes in the third letter. "But not the kind of state the bourgeoisie has created everywhere, from constitutional monarchies to the most democratic republics." In its place he sketches the model of the 1871 Paris Commune: a people's militia in arms rather than a standing army and police — "a people's militia, to which women must belong equally with men"; and, in the fifth thesis, the three demands that are the moral core of the whole document — "Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy," all officials "elective and displaceable at any time," and the salary of every official held to "the average wage of a competent worker." This is not a plan for a party to rule over the workers. It is a plan for the workers to govern themselves and to make the apparatus of government cheap, disarmed of coercive monopoly, and recallable at will.

It would be false to the tradition that reprints these texts to pass over their strains. Lenin himself is candid that the theses are provisional — "I publish these personal theses of mine with only the briefest explanatory notes, which were developed in far greater detail in the report." They were written at speed and bet everything on a wager that the whole document makes plain: that the Russian rising was the opening of a European and world revolution, and that a workers' Russia would not have to stand alone for long. That wager was reasonable in 1917 and it lost. The Commune model of the fifth thesis presupposes a confident, organised, and armed working class with the leisure to administer its own affairs; the country that actually tried to realise it was, within a year,

blockaded, invaded on a dozen fronts, and stripped by civil war of the very proletariat in whose name the soviets spoke. The distance between the vision of the militia and the reality of the besieged garrison is not a flaw in the argument — it is the tragedy that overtook it.

That distance is exactly where this tradition insists on keeping its balance. The Bolsheviks of 1917 were not designing the state that came after them; they were reaching, in a collapsing country and a world war, for a way to keep the revolution from being handed back to the bourgeoisie under a democratic name. Lenin's "first stage ... to its second stage" was, in all but the name, the permanent revolution Trotsky had argued for since 1905 — the recognition that in backward Russia the bourgeoisie could not carry through even its own revolution, so the proletariat would have to. On that point history vindicated them. The retreats and hard measures came later and under duress; nothing in these texts commands them, and much in them forbids them.

Was the state that made these pages holy faithful to them? It was their photographic negative, and that is the sharpest reason to read them now. The fifth thesis demanded the abolition of the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy; the Soviet state that canonised it built the largest standing army, the most powerful political police, and the most swollen bureaucracy of the age. It demanded officials elected, revocable, and paid a worker's wage; it produced a caste of unrecalable functionaries whose privileges were the organising fact of the society. The theses' call for "transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies" — the demand soon shortened to the slogan All power to the Soviets — became, in the event, all power to the Party apparatus, and the soviets themselves were hollowed into a ceremony. Even the history of the texts was tidied to fit. The first Letter from Afar had been cut by Pravda's own editors before it could reach the workers; the theses, when Lenin brought them home, startled the Bolshevik leaders who had been backing the Provisional Government and drew an open rebuttal from Kamenev in the Party's own paper. The later canon smoothed all of this away, presenting a seamless, infallible Lenin whom the Party had followed as one — the better to license a Party that now demanded to be followed as one. The letters that had been suppressed for seven years were reprinted as scripture by the same institution whose forerunners had suppressed them.

So why read them today, against the grain of the cult that embalmed their author? Because the charter of workers' power from below that they lay out — the republic of soviets, the armed people, the official who earns a worker's wage and can

be sacked by a show of hands — is the standard against which the bureaucratic state stands self-condemned. These are not the ancestors of the nomenklatura; they are its accusers. The April Theses, read as Lenin wrote them rather than as the catechism recited them, are not a blueprint for a party-state but the measure of how far that state departed from its own founding word. And their central intuition is still the live one: that a revolution which stops at the "democratic" stage managed by its propertied class has not been completed but arrested, and that the only guarantee against a new master is the self-government of the producers themselves. Lenin thought that guarantee lay in the soviets. History took the soviets away from the workers, and the state that resulted proved his point in the worst way. Returning these texts to their plain meaning is a way of returning the promise to the people it was made to.

MARXISM

The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government

Spring 1918: famine closing on the cities, industry stopped, and Lenin answering with a lecture on bookkeeping and output. Notable for its candour - he calls paying the old specialists more than workers "a step backward on the part of our socialist Soviet state power".

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

Lenin wrote this pamphlet in the least romantic weeks of his life. It was the early spring of 1918. The insurrection was five months old, the old order broken, the landlords and capitalists expropriated in the main — and the young Soviet republic was staring at ruin. In March it had signed the peace of Brest-Litovsk, surrendering Poland, the Baltic provinces and the Ukraine to buy a breathing space from the German army; the price was enormous and the respite might be brief. Industry had all but stopped, the transport system was collapsing, famine was closing on the cities, and the working class in whose name the state ruled was scattering back to the villages or dying at the front. Into that emergency Lenin threw not a call to arms but a lecture on bookkeeping, discipline and output. Written in March and April and delivered as a report to the Central Executive Committee, the text appeared in Pravda and Izvestia on 28 April 1918 and at once as a pamphlet. Its subject, he announced, was the shift from destruction to construction — from smashing the exploiters to the far harder work of running things: "the most important and most difficult aspect of the socialist revolution, namely, the organizational task." The present edition is the Foreign Languages Publishing House translation issued in Moscow in 1951, prepared from the twenty-seventh volume of the fourth Russian edition of the Collected Works.

It is an honest and, in places, a bracing document, and its strengths are the strengths of a man who refuses to flatter his own side. Lenin will not pretend that the seizure of power was the difficult part; he insists the difficult part is only now beginning. He faces the backwardness of Russia without euphemism, and he faces his own retreats the same way. The notorious decision to pay the old bourgeois specialists — engineers, managers, agronomists — far more than a worker earned he refuses to disguise as anything but what it was: not only "a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune," he writes, but "a step backward on the part of our socialist Soviet state power." That candour is the book at its best. So is its

democratic hope, still audible under the grim arithmetic: the vision of "producers' and consumers' communes, which conscientiously keep account" of their own economy; the argument that socialism, by abolishing the enslavement of the masses, "for the first time opens the way for competition on a really mass scale"; the refusal to separate the dry organizational task from "all the revolutionary enthusiasm, without which there can be no victorious revolutions."

But this is also the text in which Lenin argues for the things that would trouble his own movement for a century. Here is the case for adapting the Taylor system of scientific management — "applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system" — and for piece-rates tied to output. Here is the general slogan of the moment, pitched in the register of a besieged quartermaster: "Keep regular and honest accounts of money, manage economically, do not be lazy, do not steal, observe the strictest labour discipline." And here, above all, is the passage that would be quoted for and against him ever after — the demand that the toiling masses learn to combine the turbulent, surging "public meeting" democracy of the revolution "with iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work." One-man management, labour discipline, the Taylor stop-watch, obedience to a single will: it is all here, in Lenin's own hand, and no honest introduction can wish it away.

The calibration matters, and the tradition from which this introduction is written has always insisted on it. Much of what Lenin proposed was the unavoidable realism of trying to restart a shattered economy under blockade and civil war, and he hedged it at every turn. The specialists' privileges were a retreat to be overcome, not a new principle. The obedience was to be obedience "while at work," inside a workers' state, to leaders the soviets could recall — accounting and control by the producers, not of them. The enthusiasm for Taylorism sat beside a warning that the system was also "the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation." These were emergency measures argued transparently as emergencies. And yet it would be

dishonest not to mark the danger in them: a productivist strand that can treat the discipline of labour as the very substance of socialist construction, and that, cut loose from the workers' own power, becomes simply the disciplining of labour by whoever holds the state. Lenin thought that power was safely in the hands of the class. History was about to remove that guarantee.

Was the state that canonised this pamphlet faithful to it? The question answers itself, and the answer is the reason the text is worth republishing. Consider only the date on this edition: Moscow, 1951. To reprint Lenin's 1918 emergency arguments at the height of late Stalinism was to hold them up as the permanent charter of a labour regime he never imagined and would have abhorred. By 1951 the Soviet worker lived under labour books that tied him to his workplace, under the criminal decrees of 1938–1940 that made lateness and absence prosecutable offences, under the Stakhanovite cult of output and, at the edge of it all, the camps. What Lenin had offered as a provisional retreat under the guns of the civil war, Stalinism had frozen into the constitution of Soviet labour — and had quietly stripped away the one thing that in 1918 was supposed to make it socialist. "Unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person" was meant to be obedience within a workers' state answerable to the workers, and the careful phrase "while at work" marked its limit. Under Stalin the obedience became total and the answerability vanished; the single will belonged not to a recallable Soviet leader but to a bureaucratic caste accountable to no one. The pamphlet that argued for accounting and control by the toilers had become the alibi for accounting and control of the toilers.

That inversion had causes, and — this is the decisive point — they were not textual. It would be cheap, and false, to read the 1918 pamphlet as the seed of the labour-camp economy, to make Lenin's stop-watch the ancestor of the Gulag. The degeneration came from history, not from the sentences. The revolution was isolated when the German rising failed; it inherited a ruined and backward country; and the civil war consumed the very working class in whose name the dictatorship of the proletariat was exercised, so that by 1921 the class had been decimated and the state ruled in the name of a ghost. Into that vacuum climbed the bureaucracy that Trotsky anatomised in *The Revolution Betrayed* and Ernest Mandel after him — a caste that usurped the revolution and governed in its own interest while keeping its vocabulary. Honesty requires adding that the emergency ran, at the time, further than this pamphlet: Trotsky himself, in *Terrorism and Communism*, defended the outright militarisation of labour, and the tradition that produced this introduction owns that

record as emergency and not as norm. Honesty also requires noting that the author himself came to dread what his apparatus was becoming; the Lenin of the last struggle, dictating against the bureaucracy from his deathbed, is already at war with the machine that would embalm him. The measure of the betrayal is not that Lenin proposed hard measures in 1918 but that a besieged expedient was canonised as timeless doctrine and turned against the workers it had been meant to serve.

So why read it now? Because, read against its Stalinist ossification, the pamphlet keeps alive a question the movement cannot dodge and the official cult buried: how does a workers' state raise production, run an economy and discipline labour without the discipline hardening into a new exploitation? Lenin at least posed the problem without illusion and looked for the answer in the right place — in the self-activity and control of the producers themselves, the communes that "keep account" of their own labour, not in coercion handed down from above. His pamphlet is honest enough to call the privileges of the specialists "a step backward" and to mean it as something to be overcome. The Stakhanovite banners that later flew his portrait meant no such thing; for them the discipline of labour was not a retreat but the destination. And the warning reaches past the USSR. Productivism — the worship of output and obedience as ends in themselves, the demand that the producers submit to a single will "while at work" — is not a relic of the Stalinist past; it is the common logic of every regime, private or bureaucratic, that treats living labour as an instrument to be tuned for yield. The living Lenin of these pages is the one who blushed at the specialists' salaries and swore to abolish them; the dead Lenin is the icon on the production chart. This edition, printed to enforce the second, cannot help preserving the first — and lets the reader tell them apart.

MARXISM

The State and Revolution

Written in hiding weeks before October, from a notebook of quotations on Marxism and the state, and never finished - the insurrection interrupted it. The most sustained attack on bureaucratic state power in the Marxist canon.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction

The book the state could not live up to

Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* in August and September 1917, in hiding across the Finnish border, a fugitive from the Provisional Government he would overthrow within weeks. He worked from a small blue notebook headed "Marxism on the State" — quotations from Marx and Engels he had gathered the previous year while arguing with Bukharin about whether a socialist revolution should seize the existing state or destroy it. The book was published in 1918 and never finished. Its planned seventh chapter, on the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, was cut short by the October insurrection itself. In a one-page postscript Lenin explained the gap with a sentence that has outlived most of the book's arguments: "It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of revolution' than to write about it."

That unwritten chapter is where this introduction begins, because the experience Lenin went off to have would answer his book in a way he did not intend. No political pamphlet of the twentieth century was printed more often or read more dutifully. Progress Publishers and its predecessor issued it in scores of languages; it sat on every Soviet syllabus. And no book in this library stands in a stranger relation to the state that published it, because *The State and Revolution* is the most sustained attack on bureaucratic state power in the entire Marxist canon — and it was canonised by the most bureaucratic state the workers' movement ever produced.

What the book does, and does well

Its power is that of recovery. Lenin set out to rescue the theory of the state that Marx and Engels had built and that the leaders of pre-war Social Democracy — above all Karl Kautsky — had, in his word, "forgotten." Against them he insists on a hard definition: "The state is a product and a manifestation of the

irreconcilability of class antagonisms." It is not a neutral referee standing above society but an instrument of class rule — at bottom, he says, following Engels, "special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc." From this everything follows. If the state is an organ of one class's domination, the working class cannot simply lay hands on the ready-made machine and use it for its own purposes. It must, in Marx's word from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, "smash" it — break up the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy — and replace it with something of a wholly different type.

That something is the Paris Commune of 1871, which supplies the book's positive model. Lenin reads the Commune as the discovered form of workers' power: officials elected and subject to recall at any moment, paid no more than a worker's wage; the standing army replaced by the armed people; the separation of powers abolished so that the same body makes and executes the laws — "a working, not a parliamentary, body." Representative institutions are not abandoned but transformed; what is thrown out is parliamentarism, the arrangement by which citizens get "to decide once every few years which members of the ruling class [are] to repress and crush the people." Beyond this lies the "withering away" — a term Lenin takes from Engels and defends against its opportunist softening. The state does not wither under socialism because the state is nice; it withers because, once class antagonisms are gone, the "special bodies of armed men" have nothing left to do. Until then the workers need a state of their own — but already a "semi-state," a state so shorn of officialdom and standing force that it has begun to dissolve on the day it is born.

Read as theory, this is bracing and, on its own terms, coherent. It remains the sharpest short statement of why socialists cannot be content to administer the existing machinery of government.

What the book leaves out

A fair reading has to mark the silences, because they are where the trouble entered. *The State and Revolution* is a book about the state that says almost nothing about the party. The instrument that would actually hold power in Russia after October — a centralised vanguard organisation — is barely present; the Commune model quietly assumes that the armed workers themselves, not a party apparatus acting in their name, will run things. Nor does the book reckon with backwardness. Its Commune is imagined in an advanced country with a working-class majority and a short road to abundance; it has little to say about what becomes of a "semi-state" that must survive civil war, famine and isolation in a peasant country where the proletariat is a thin and shrinking minority. The withering away is offered as a tendency with almost no counter-tendency named. The possibility that the "semi-state" might not dissolve but harden — that a new officialdom might congeal precisely out of the emergency measures of a besieged revolution — is the one danger the book does not think through. This is not hindsight smuggled in: it is the gap the next four years would fill.

The uses of a sacred text

Here the Progress edition earns its introduction. A book becomes doctrine not only through what it says but through how it is placed, and the Soviet apparatus placed this one with care. Fixed as Volume 25 of the *Collected Works*, wrapped in the Institute of Marxism-Leninism's annotations, taught as catechism, *The State and Revolution* was honoured in exactly the measure that it was disregarded. The Soviet edition's own editorial apparatus — the introductions and notes through which the state framed the book to itself — is itself part of how the canonisation worked, and repays reading for the framing it performs.

The misuse is not subtle, which is why it was never discussed. The state that published *The State and Revolution* built, point for point, the machine the book condemns. Lenin demanded the abolition of the standing army; the USSR raised one of the largest in history. He demanded officials elected, recallable and paid a worker's wage; the Soviet state produced a bureaucracy neither elected nor recallable, and a caste whose privileges Lenin's Commune-standard was designed to make impossible. He called the periodic ballot that changes nothing "the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism"; the state that printed the sentence let its people decide nothing at all. The "semi-state" that was supposed to begin withering on day one instead swelled for seventy years. It is the exact reversal Trotsky drew out in *The Revolution Betrayed*, a book that is in

large part *The State and Revolution* held up as a ruler against the thing the revolution became — and the gap measured in the space between them.

And the machine was betrayed from the other flank as well. Where the Soviet state swelled the apparatus Lenin said must be broken, the great Western Communist parties, by the 1970s, decided it need not be broken at all. Eurocommunism — the "democratic road to socialism" of the Italian, French and Spanish parties — made its peace with the standing army, the bureaucracy and the parliamentary state, and proposed to pass through them to socialism rather than smash them. Santiago Carrillo even gave the position its book, *Eurocommunism and the State*, whose title reads as a deliberate inversion of Lenin's; Ernest Mandel answered it for the Fourth International in *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, tracing the capitulation to the same root as the Eastern one — the retreat into "socialism in one country" and the abandonment of world revolution. So the pamphlet was refuted from both sides at once: in the East by a state that would not wither, in the West by parties that would no longer smash.

This is why, of all the volumes in this series, *The State and Revolution* fails the test we apply to each of them most completely and most instructively. Every book here is asked whether its own central category can be turned on the state that issued it. Most cannot make the turn. This one makes it unavoidably: its category is the critique of bureaucratic state power, and there is no reading of it that does not indict the publisher. That is precisely why it could be printed in millions and remain politically inert — revered in ritual, dead in practice, a charter recited by the regime it convicts.

Honesty requires one more turn of the screw. Lenin is not a bystander to the outcome. The hardening of the Soviet state into the apparatus his book condemned began under his own leadership, in the demobilising of the working class and the swelling of officialdom that followed the civil war. *The State and Revolution* is not innocent of what came after; it is silent about the machinery that would betray it. But it is by this book, more than any other, that the betrayal can be named — which is the difference between a text that excuses a regime and one that arraigns it. Lenin set the pamphlet aside to make the revolution. The revolution wrote his missing seventh chapter, and it was not the one he had planned. Read here not as the Soviet state's founding charter but as its indictment, drafted in advance by the state's own founder.

MARXISM

A Great Beginning & The Tasks of the Youth Leagues

Lenin in 1919 and 1920, looking past the civil war to the harder task: railwaymen giving up their Saturdays as "the actual beginning of communism", and a speech telling the young to master everything humanity has made rather than recite a signboard.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Introduction to This Edition

The two pieces gathered here were written in the hardest years of the Russian Revolution, and both look past the fighting to the thing Lenin thought would be harder still: the making of communists. The first, *A Great Beginning*, was written in June 1919, at the blackest point of the civil war, with Kolchak driving from the east and Denikin from the south and the cities starving behind the front. Its occasion was small and unlikely — a handful of railwaymen on the Moscow-Kazan line who had begun staying behind on their Saturdays to work, unpaid, for the republic. Lenin seized on these "communist subbotniks" as a sign of something enormous: the first shoots of a new kind of labour, given freely rather than squeezed out by hunger or the whip. The second, *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues*, is the speech he gave on 2 October 1920 to the Third Congress of the Young Communist League, on what the young would have to learn in order to build a society none of them had seen. The texts here are the Progress Publishers translations from the *Collected Works* — *A Great Beginning* from Volume 29 (Moscow, first printing 1965) and *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues*, in Julius Katzer's revised translation, from Volume 31 (1966).

Both are Lenin at his most generous and least dogmatic. *A Great Beginning* rests on a genuine insight, and a modest one: that overthrowing the old rulers was the easy part. The subbotniks matter, he writes, because they are "the actual beginning of communism" — not its proclamation but its germ, visible for once in the behaviour of ordinary workers. This is, he says, "a revolution that is more difficult, more tangible, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism." The discipline he wants is not imposed but grown — "the free and conscious discipline of the working people themselves." The same pamphlet contains the definition of class that every Soviet schoolchild would later recite: classes

are "large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production." *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues* is warmer still, and its central demand is not obedience but culture. The whole duty of the young, Lenin says, "might be summed up in a single word: learn" — and learn everything: "You can become a Communist only when you enrich your mind with a knowledge of all the treasures created by mankind." He is explicit that this is the opposite of rote: "We have no need of cramming." He is sober about the scale of the task, promising the delegates not utopia but that "no less than ten years will be required for the electrification of the country."

It would be a poor tribute to leave the weaknesses out. Both texts carry the seeds of what could go wrong once the enthusiasm of a few thousand volunteers was asked to become the organising principle of a whole economy. The hope that free, unpaid labour might scale up from a heroic minority to a system was never tested under conditions Lenin could control; his heirs would supply the missing enthusiasm with compulsion. And the youth speech contains the tradition's most quoted and most dangerous formula on morality. Against the churchmen and the idealists Lenin insists that "we do not believe in an eternal morality," that "our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle." In his mouth this was a weapon against hypocrisy; detached from his own scruple and handed to a state, it becomes a licence — for whatever the men who claim to speak for the class declare the class to need. Lenin did not draw that conclusion. Others would.

The tradition from which this introduction is written insists on the calibration. In June 1919 Lenin was not designing a labour code; he was reaching for hope in a wrecked country under siege, and the subbotniks were a real movement of real workers, not a decree. The whole point of *A Great Beginning* is that the new discipline "does not drop from the skies" and cannot be commanded into being — it has to be freely given or

it is nothing. That is the exact opposite of what the enthusiasm would later be made to mean. These were the intuitions of a revolutionary who still believed the working class held its own state in its own hands. History was preparing to take that guarantee away.

Was the state that turned these texts into scripture faithful to them? It was not, and the distance is the reason to reprint them. The voluntary Saturday that Lenin prized precisely because it was voluntary became, within two decades, the compulsory subbotnik — a ritual obligation dressed in the language of free labour. The "enthusiasm" he had watched with wonder was industrialised into the Stakhanovite cult of output, into shock-work and socialist emulation as techniques for extracting more from the worker, into the tonnage worship of the Five-Year Plans; and where enthusiasm failed, the labour decrees of 1938–1940 made lateness and absence crimes. The free and conscious discipline of the producers had become the discipline of the producers by a bureaucracy standing over them. Lenin's definition of class, meanwhile, turned in the hand of anyone honest enough to apply it: a stratum defined by "the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production" and by its command over the means of production need not hold legal title to be a class — which is precisely how Trotsky, in *The Revolution Betrayed*, anatomised the Soviet bureaucracy as a privileged caste. The catechism could not afford to let that definition point homeward, so it froze it into a formula about capitalism alone. And the youth? The Tasks of the Youth Leagues had demanded that the young "enrich" their minds with all of human culture and had warned that "Communism will become an empty word, a mere signboard, and a Communist a mere boaster, if all the knowledge he has acquired is not digested." What the Komsomol became was the cramming Lenin forbade — a machine of rote "Marxism-Leninism", a ladder for careerists, an instrument of mobilisation and control. The morality Lenin had subordinated wholly to the class struggle supplied the alibi for the purges, in which the interests of the class were whatever the General Secretary said they were.

None of this was written into the sentences, and it would be cheap to pretend it was. The germ of communism Lenin saw in a railway depot is not the ancestor of the compulsory subbotnik any more than his stopwatch fathered the Gulag. The degeneration had causes, and they were historical, not textual: the revolution was left isolated when the risings in the West failed; it inherited a ruined and backward land; and the civil war it barely survived consumed the very working class in whose name the state ruled, so that by 1921 the class had been scattered and the dictatorship governed in the name of a

ghost. Into that emptiness climbed the bureaucracy Trotsky and, after him, Ernest Mandel described — a caste that usurped the revolution and kept its slogans. Honesty adds that the author lived long enough to fear the apparatus he had helped build: the Lenin of the last struggle, dictating against the bureaucracy from a sickbed, is already fighting the machine that would one day embalm him and hang his portrait over the production charts. The measure of the betrayal is not that Lenin hoped too much for voluntary labour in 1919 but that his hope was canonised as a duty and turned against the workers who were supposed to give it.

So why read them now? Because, set against the ossified cult, they keep alive the question the cult was built to bury: what is the difference between labour that builds communism and labour that is merely commanded in its name? Lenin's answer is unambiguous and still bracing — the difference is freedom, the free and conscious self-activity of the producers, or it is nothing. The subbotnik as free association and the subbotnik as compulsory ritual look alike on the calendar and are opposites in substance, and the whole distance between the revolution and its betrayal lies in that gap. The youth speech reaches even further past its origins. Its vision of a generation that inherits and masters "all the treasures created by mankind," rather than reciting a signboard, is a rebuke to every regime — Stalinist or otherwise — that would rather have its young obedient than educated. Lenin told the fifteen-year-olds in that hall that they, and not he, "will see a communist society, and will itself build this society." The state that came after made them build something else. Reading him now, against the grain of the cult that claimed him, is a way of returning the promise to the people it was made to.

HISTORY

History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union / Bolsheviks /

The single most important document of Stalinism as a system of belief: the 1938 party history that two generations learned from, drafted under Stalin's personal editorial control and printed in something like forty million copies. Withdrawn after 1956, and long out of reach in English.

Commission of the C.C. of the C.P.S.U.(B.)

Introduction to the 1939 Edition

The title page of this book names no author. It says: "EDITED BY A COMMISSION OF THE C.C. OF THE C.P.S.U.(B.)" and, below that, "AUTHORIZED BY THE C.C. OF THE C.P.S.U.(B.) 1938". That is the whole attribution, and it is the most honest sentence in the volume. This is not a history written by historians and then approved. It is a decision of a governing body, issued in the form of a history.

The Short Course was serialised in Pravda in September 1938 and published as a book immediately afterwards; the English edition followed in 1939 and is the text reprinted here. Its drafting was done principally by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky and Pyotr Pospelov, both apparatus men with scholarly pretensions, working under an editorial control that Stalin exercised personally and heavily; the philosophical section of Chapter Four, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", is his own composition and was later reprinted under his name. In November 1938 a Central Committee decree made the book the single authorised textbook of party history and the backbone of all party education, displacing every other account, including several written by the same Yaroslavsky. What followed was probably the largest print run of any political text of the twentieth century: something in the region of forty million copies in the Soviet Union alone before Stalin's death, and translations into dozens of languages for the world communist movement. Every Communist Party from Barcelona to Shanghai studied it. Whatever else it was, it was effective.

It is essential to fix the date. The book appeared as the mass operations of the Terror were being wound down — Nikolai Yezhov was removed from the NKVD in late 1938, and shot in 1940 — and it is best understood not as a history that preceded the killings but as the explanation issued after them. Roughly a million and a half people were arrested in 1937 and

1938; NKVD records released from the archives in the 1990s account for some 680,000 executions in those two years. A regime that had shot its own founding generation needed a narrative in which that was the correct and even the merciful thing to have done. The Short Course is that narrative. It was published so that the question would not be asked again.

The vanishing of October

Begin where the falsification is most complete, because it is also most checkable. Chapter Seven covers the October insurrection. The reader is told:

On the instructions of the Central Committee of the Party, a Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was set up. This body became the legally functioning headquarters of the uprising.

And then:

This Party Centre was the leading core of the Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet and had practical direction of the whole uprising.

The "Party Centre" is said to have been elected on 16 October and headed by Stalin. Now note what the chapter never does. It never says who chaired the Petrograd Soviet. It never says who chaired the Military Revolutionary Committee. Across some twenty pages narrating the seizure of power, the two most important offices in the insurrection are described repeatedly and their holders are never named — because both were held by Trotsky, elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet on 25 September (Old Style) 1917. The body elected on 16 October was in the record a five-man "Military Revolutionary Centre" — Bubnov, Dzerzhinsky, Sverdlov, Stalin and Uritsky — designated as a component of the Soviet's committee, and no minute survives of it ever meeting as a directing body. The Central Committee protocols for 1917 were published in the

Soviet Union in 1929 and can be consulted. The Short Course did not invent a document; it promoted a line in a minute into the general staff of a revolution. Trotsky had made the point in 1938, in an essay the American magazine *Fourth International* reprinted in 1950: the "Center" appointed on the night of 16 October "was forgotten by everybody, even by its own members", and the old minutes recording it, "discovered by chance in 1924 and falsely interpreted, have served as a base for the bureaucratic legend" ("Art and Politics in Our Epoch", vol. XI no. 2, March–April 1950).

Trotsky appears in the October narrative exactly twice, both times as a saboteur. First, at the meeting of 10 October, where "he moved an amendment which would have reduced the chances of the uprising to nought". Second:

At a meeting of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky in a fit of boasting blabbed to the enemy the date on which the Bolsheviks had planned to begin the armed uprising.

Set beside this the roll of Bolsheviks the book does credit with organising the rising in the provinces: Voroshilov, Molotov, Dzerzhinsky, Ordjonikidze, Kirov, Kaganovich, Kuibyshev, Frunze, Yaroslavsky, Zhdanov — and "Comrade Yezhov", who "made preparations for an uprising of the soldiers on the Western Front, in Byelorussia". Yezhov in 1917 was a twenty-two-year-old soldier who had joined the party months earlier and was unknown outside his garrison. He is in the list because in 1938, when the list was drawn up, he ran the political police. The list is not a record of 1917. It is a photograph of the Politburo and its clients at the moment of printing, projected backwards twenty-one years.

Sometimes the erasure is done with a flourish of apparent fairness. Of the Mezhrayontsi, the Petrograd group Trotsky led into the Bolshevik Party at the Sixth Congress, the book concedes that "Volodarsky and Uritsky, for example, actually did become Bolsheviks" — both, conveniently, killed in 1918 and therefore safe to praise — before delivering the verdict that Trotsky and his friends "had joined not to work in the interests of the Party, but to disrupt and destroy it from within". The concession exists to make the condemnation look weighed.

Criminalising the past

The characteristic method of the Short Course is not the forged document. It is the change of category. Read the summary of the 1937–38 trials in Chapter Twelve:

The insidious attempts to thwart the peace of Brest-Litovsk at the beginning of 1918 ... the villainous shot that wounded Lenin in the summer of 1918 ... the deliberate aggravation of differences in the Party in 1921 with the object of undermining and overthrowing Lenin's leadership from within, the attempts to overthrow the Party leadership during Lenin's illness and after his death ... all these and similar villainies over a period of twenty years, were committed, it transpired, with the participation or under the direction of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Rykov and their henchmen, at the behest of espionage services of bourgeois states.

Nearly every event in that sentence happened. There was a bitter fight over Brest-Litovsk, in which Bukharin led the Left Communists and Trotsky held a third position. There was a trade union controversy in 1921. There was a succession struggle during and after Lenin's illness. These are the ordinary furniture of a revolutionary party's history, and the reader who knows nothing else will find them here more or less where they belong. What has been altered is their status. Political disagreement, recorded in published minutes, is retrospectively reclassified as espionage. The technique works precisely because it does not require lying about the events; the events are the alibi. Nothing is fabricated except the motive, and the motive is the whole charge.

The one document the chapter cannot reclassify it simply omits. Lenin's dictated notes of December 1922 to January 1923 — what became known as the Testament, in which he proposed removing Stalin from the post of General Secretary — are absent. The word does not appear in this book. Chapter Nine narrates Lenin's illness, his death, the Lenin Enrolment and Stalin's funeral oration ("We Communists are people of a special mould. We are made of a special stuff") at some length, and in that entire passage there is no hint that Lenin's last political act concerned the man delivering the vow. The suppression was total and it was noticed: writing in December 1940, the editors of *Fourth International* observed that the Testament had "to this day" never been published in the Soviet Union at all ("Our Lenin", vol. I no. 7). It was not printed there until 1956.

On Kirov, murdered in Leningrad on 1 December 1934, the book advances by stages, each of which contradicts the last and none of which is flagged as a revision. First a Leningrad group of former Zinovievites; then a "Moscow Centre"; then, a year later, "the actual, real and direct organizers of the murder of Kirov were Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and their accomplices". Trotsky was in Norway. The evidence against

all of them was confession, obtained by methods the reader is not told about. Trotsky's public summary of the last of the trials, quoted a decade later in Fourth International, put the arithmetic where the book will not: "Of the nine people who were members of the Political Bureau during Lenin's lifetime, i.e., actual rulers of the fate of the USSR, there remains only one unaccused, Stalin." The Commission of Inquiry chaired by John Dewey, which took testimony in Coyoacán in April 1937 and published its findings as Not Guilty in 1938, examined the charges of the first two Moscow trials in detail and found them unproven and the defendants Trotsky and Leon Sedov not guilty. In 1988 the Supreme Court of the USSR quashed the verdicts against Bukharin, Rykov, Zinoviev, Kamenev and their co-defendants and the Communist Party posthumously restored their membership. The 1936–38 trials are today rejected as fabrications by essentially every serious historian, Russian and Western, in any political tradition.

The chapter's final movement should be read exactly as printed. The section is headed "LIQUIDATION OF THE REMNANTS OF THE BUKHARIN-TROTSKY GANG OF SPIES, WRECKERS AND TRAITORS TO THE COUNTRY. PREPARATIONS FOR THE ELECTION OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF THE U.S.S.R. BROAD INNER-PARTY DEMOCRACY AS THE PARTY'S COURSE." Three sentences dispose of the executions:

The Soviet court sentenced the Bukharin-Trotsky fiends to be shot. The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs carried out the sentence. The Soviet people approved the annihilation of the Bukharin-Trotsky gang and passed on to next business.

The next business is inner-party democracy: secret ballots, an end to co-option, "the unlimited right to challenge candidates and to criticize them", and the December 1937 election in which 98.6 per cent voted for the single bloc. The two subjects are not held apart. They are consecutive paragraphs, and the book sees no difficulty.

The scale is where the silence is loudest. The named dead in these pages are a few dozen former leaders. Of the Seventeenth Congress of 1934 the book records "1,225 delegates with vote and 736 delegates with voice but no vote", and adds that it "is known in history as the 'Congress of Victors'". At the Twentieth Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev told the assembled delegates that 1,108 of that congress's delegates had been arrested on counter-revolutionary charges and that 98 of the 139 members and candidates of the Central Committee it elected had been

shot. The Short Course was written in the middle of that, for the survivors, by some of the people doing it.

The famine that is not there

Chapter Eleven covers collectivisation. The word "famine" occurs eight times in this book — for the crop failures of tsarist agriculture, for the hunger of the Civil War, and once as a hypothetical warning that stagnant grain farming would leave the towns "faced with chronic famine". It is never once used of 1932–33.

What the book does supply is an admission carefully bounded in time and blame. The "distortions" of early 1930 are conceded:

It was found that the voluntary principle of forming collective farms was being violated, and that in a number of districts the peasants were being forced into the collective farm[s] under threat of being dispossessed, disfranchised, and so on.

But the fault belongs to over-enthusiastic local officials, to the leadership of the Moscow Region and Transcaucasia, and above all to the class enemy, who "instigated the peasants to slaughter their animals". The remedy is Stalin's article of 2 March 1930, "Dizzy With Success", of which the book says: "The article set the minds of the peasants at rest." After that, the narrative reports only success, and the elimination of the kulaks (well-to-do peasants) as a class is presented as an accomplished structural fact — the policy "eliminated the most numerous class of exploiters in our country, the kulak class" — with no statement anywhere of what happened to the human beings so classified. Well over a million and a half people were deported to "special settlements" in 1930–31 alone, in operations documented from Soviet archives since the 1990s, and mortality in transit and on arrival was severe.

Of the famine of 1932–33 there is nothing. The scholarship remains genuinely divided on the numbers and sharply divided on intent: excess deaths across the USSR are usually placed somewhere between five and seven million, with the largest concentrations in Ukraine, the Kuban and Kazakhstan, and historians continue to argue whether the Ukrainian catastrophe is properly described as a genocide directed at a nation or as the lethal outcome of a grain-extraction policy pursued without regard to who died. What is not in dispute is that millions starved in a peacetime economy under the direct administration of the party whose history this is, in the years the book covers, in the chapter that covers them. The silence is

not an oversight of emphasis. It is the largest single fact removed from the volume.

A party without an international

The last surprise is what the Short Course does to the movement it was written for. The word "Comintern" does not appear. "Third International" appears five times, all of them before 1919, in the account of its founding. After Chapter Eight the Communist International effectively ceases to exist in these pages. A textbook produced for every Communist Party on earth contains no history of the organisation to which those parties belonged.

Spain follows from this. The Spanish war of 1936–39 was raging as the book went to press, and it is present only as a manoeuvre between great powers: Germany and Italy, the book explains, were "surreptitiously landing troops on Spanish territory, in the rear of France", and in reality "they were striking at Great Britain and France". The Spanish working class does not appear. The Republic's internal politics do not appear. The collectivisations in Aragon and Catalonia, the Popular Front, the Barcelona May Days of 1937, the suppression of the POUM and the abduction and murder of Andreu Nin in June 1937, the role of Soviet advisers in all of it — none of it is here. Neither Franco nor Hitler is named anywhere in the book. The reader is given an anti-fascism with no fascists in it and an internationalism with no international.

What survives

None of this makes the volume worthless, and a reader told that everything in it is false will be defenceless against it.

The Short Course falsifies chiefly by omission, by re-attribution and by re-categorisation. It rarely fabricates documents. Where it quotes, it usually quotes accurately, and some of what it quotes is not easily found elsewhere in English: the Central Committee resolution of 10 October 1917 on the armed uprising, drafted by Lenin, is given in full; the Tenth Congress resolution on Party Unity of March 1921, with its ban on factions, is quoted at length and fairly, including the passage on Kronstadt; the successive congress delegate counts and membership figures are drawn from official records and are broadly reliable as a record of what the party said about its own size. Lenin's pre-war agrarian journalism is summarised with its statistics intact. On everything in which no faction had a stake — the Second Congress split, the fight with the Economists and the Otzovists, the Duma work, Pravda — the

book is a serviceable, if triumphalist, précis of positions that can be checked against the originals.

Chapter Four, section 2, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism", deserves separate mention. As philosophy it is a schematic reduction of a rich tradition to a set of numbered features fit for memorisation. As a historical object it is among the most consequential philosophical texts of the century: for a generation of communist intellectuals from Prague to Beijing, this short essay simply was Marxism, and its categories shaped what could be thought in a dozen national traditions for thirty years. You cannot understand mid-century communist intellectual life without reading it.

And there is the Conclusion, which contains, apparently without embarrassment, the sentence: "The Marxist-Leninist theory is not a dogma but a guide to action." It appears in a book that a Central Committee decree had made the compulsory catechism of eight million people. The Short Course is at its most instructive when it is quoting itself.

The reply

The answer was already in print before the book was. Trotsky's *The Stalin School of Falsification*, published in English in 1937, assembled the 1917 Central Committee minutes and the suppressed documents of the 1920s precisely against the account of October that this volume would canonise; *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) supplied the analysis of the bureaucracy that made sense of why such an account was needed. The Dewey Commission's *Not Guilty* (1938) is the contemporary forensic demolition of the trial evidence. Trotsky himself was killed in Coyoacán on 21 August 1940 by an agent of the NKVD, two years after this book told its readers what he was.

The reply did not stop with his death, nor was it confined to books. Through the whole period in which the Short Course was the operative text, the case against it was made month by month in *Fourth International*, the magazine published in New York from 1940. It never reviewed the book under its title — the Short Course is not named anywhere in the surviving run — and that is instructive: what it attacked was not a volume but a method, wherever the method surfaced. In December 1940 an unsigned editorial, "Our Lenin", set out the sequence — "the history of the Russian Revolution, the story of Lenin's life, has been rewritten and rewritten at Stalin's behest", in 1923–26 to demote Trotsky, in 1926 Zinoviev and Kamenev, in 1929 Bukharin, each revision unannounced — and then did to a companion pamphlet, I. Mintz's *The October Days 1917*,

what a reader can do to Chapter Seven of this book. Mintz had explained that neither Lenin nor Stalin spoke at the Congress of Soviets on the night of 25–26 October because both were organising detachments to search Petrograd for grain. Why, the editorial asked, were the two men credited with directing the insurrection spending that night on the work of a minor functionary? Because Stalin had to be placed somewhere, and Lenin had to be placed beside him.

On the trials the magazine was specific rather than indignant. Natalia Sedova Trotsky, answering Joseph Davies, the former United States ambassador who had gone into print defending the verdicts, made the evidentiary point no official history has met: in the Moscow proceedings "not a single fact was established, not a single document was produced, and, in general, not a scrap of material evidence was adduced" ("Mr. Davies and the Moscow Trials", vol. III no. 1, January 1942). The sharpest account of the method itself came from Joseph Hansen in 1950. Checking Michael Sayers and Albert Kahn's *The Great Conspiracy*, the popular Anglophone restatement of the charges, against a memoir it cited, Hansen found Trotsky's name struck out of the quoted passages and Lenin's put in its place. His conclusion is the one to carry into this volume: it shows "how difficult it is for representatives of Stalinism to touch any page in history, no matter how minor, without responding to the compulsion to deface it. The lie has been elevated into a system that now shapes the thinking of the lowest hack on the payroll." ("Stalin's Frame-Up System", vol. XI no. 4, July–August 1950).

When the book was withdrawn, the same magazine said within weeks why withdrawal would settle nothing. In the spring of 1956 M. Stein observed that the Twentieth Congress had begun rehabilitating the bureaucracy's own dead while leaving the case against Trotsky standing: "Thus in continuing the struggle against Trotskyism it must by that very fact continue to falsify history" ("The End of the Stalin Cult", vol. XVII no. 2, Spring 1956). He was right, and the falsifications outlived the book. When the post-Stalin History of the CPSU appeared to replace it, Ernest Mandel — writing as Ernest Germain — answered it point by point in "Thirty Questions and Thirty Answers about the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union", published in two installments in a different journal of the same name — *Fourth International*, the English-language quarterly of the International Secretariat — nos. 10 and 11. Mandel's method is worth imitating: to show that the new official history still denied Lenin's change of strategic line in April 1917, he quoted Molotov's own article of 1924 — "the party did not have that clarity of vision and that spirit of decision which were required by the revolutionary

moment" — and a note in the 1928 Soviet edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*. The best refutations of the official history were assembled from the official archive.

The Short Course was quietly withdrawn after 1956. There is a last irony in that, which the reader may keep. Pyotr Pospelov, one of the two men who drafted this book, chaired the commission that in 1955–56 investigated the destruction of the Central Committee and prepared the material Khrushchev used in the secret speech. The same hand wrote the charge and, twenty years later, the accounting.

MARXISM

What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats

Lenin's first book, written at twenty-four against the Narodniks of Russkoye Bogatstvo and circulated illegally on a hectograph. It survives as a torso - Part II has never been found. Progress Publishers, with a new critical introduction by Dmitry Chasovennikov.

V. I. Lenin

Publisher's Introduction

This is Lenin's first book, and it survives as a torso. Part I is here; Part III is here; Part II has never been found. The Progress edition prints the two that exist, records the gap, and moves on. It is worth stopping where the edition does not, because almost everything this book came to mean afterwards turns on how it reached us and who assembled it.

What it is

In the spring and summer of 1894 a twenty-four-year-old lawyer named Vladimir Ulyanov wrote a long polemic against three writers on the Petersburg monthly *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth): N. K. Mikhailovsky, the most respected radical thinker of the previous generation; S. N. Krivenko; and S. N. Yuzhakov. They were Narodniks — populists, who held that Russia might reach socialism through the peasant commune without passing through capitalism, and who had begun to attack the new Marxist current as foreign, fatalistic and indifferent to the peasantry's suffering. The title is sarcastic. The "friends of the people" are the men who called themselves that, and Lenin's subtitle sets out the charge: *A Reply to Articles in Russkoye Bogatstvo Opposing the Marxists*.

It could not be printed. It was hectographed — copied by a gelatine duplicating process, a few hundred at a time — and passed hand to hand through the study circles of Petersburg, Moscow and the provinces. The 1894 Publisher's Note, reproduced here, is the note of the illegal duplicators, and this edition adds the Institute of Marxism-Leninism's Note to the Present Edition, which we also reproduce. Both are worth reading: they are the book's own account of how it travelled.

The text you have follows the Progress translation in *Collected Works*, Volume 1, rendered from the fourth, enlarged Russian

edition prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. The apparatus is theirs: the numbered notes at the back are the Institute's, and we have kept their original numbering from the volume, so that a reader working against the printed *Collected Works* can follow both. Lenin's own page-bottom notes, and the translators' notes closing "—Ed.", stay where they belong.

What it does well

Strip away the names of forgotten magazine controversialists and the book is a sustained attack on a way of thinking, and the attack still lands.

Mikhailovsky's school held that the study of society required a "subjective method in sociology" — that because social facts involve human purposes, the investigator must begin from an ideal of what would satisfy human nature and measure reality against it. Lenin quotes Mikhailovsky's own formulation, and it is the hinge of the whole polemic:

"Sociology must start with some utopia"

Everything follows from that sentence. If you begin from a utopia, Lenin argues, you are not studying a society at all; you are ranking institutions against a standard you brought with you, and the standard turns out to be your own class's self-image dressed as human nature. The alternative he proposes is not a rival ideal but a change of question: instead of asking what arrangement would suit people, ask what production relations actually constitute this society, and by what laws they function and change. It is the young Lenin's clearest statement of the materialist method, made before he had any authority to invoke, and it is made by argument rather than by citation.

The second strength is empirical. The friends of the people insisted that Russian capitalism was a small foreign graft — a

million and a half factory workers — while the real Russia remained a countryside of small producers. Lenin goes through the handicraft trades, the village workshops, the buying-up merchants, and shows an economy already thoroughly capitalist in its relations however pre-modern in its technology, with the small producer's tiny holding not a refuge from exploitation but the thing that makes his exploitation cheap. He is scathing about the metaphysical habit of thinking in “naked and direct contrasts”, and the scorn is earned: it was, in 1894, the better description of Russia.

The third is political, and it is the passage the book is still argued over. Against both the terrorists and the liberal petitioners, Lenin concludes that the factory worker “is none other than the foremost representative of the entire exploited population”, and that the task is to turn scattered strikes and riots into the organised struggle of a class. What that entails he states with a precision most of his later readers have not matched:

And that is why it is the direct duty of the working class to fight side by side with the radical democracy against absolutism and the reactionary social estates and institutions — a duty which the Social-Democrats must impress upon the workers, while not for a moment ceasing also to impress upon them that the struggle against all these institutions is necessary only as a means of facilitating the struggle against the bourgeoisie

Both halves of that sentence are load-bearing, and we shall come back to what happened when they were pulled apart.

Where it falls short

Say plainly what is weak in it. The tone is the tone of a very young man who has just found a method and cannot stop demonstrating it: exhaustive, sarcastic, line-by-line, often hectoring, and considerably longer than its argument needs. Lenin quotes his opponents at such length in order to convict them that the reader loses the thread of the indictment.

More seriously, the polemic is so intent on destroying the Narodnik answer that it concedes nothing to the Narodnik question. The question was whether a country entering the world market late, with a surviving communal agriculture, must repeat the whole Western sequence. Lenin treats any hesitation about that as a flight from facts into abstract schemes. Yet Marx himself had hesitated. In 1881 Marx drafted, several times over, a reply to Vera Zasulich in which he allowed that the Russian commune might serve as a starting

point for social regeneration if a revolution came in time to save it, and he said explicitly that the account of primitive accumulation in *Capital* was expressly limited to Western Europe. Lenin cannot be blamed for not knowing this: the drafts were not published until 1924, and the Soviet canon afterwards kept them at the edge of the record, where they embarrassed the schema of five stages that the state had made compulsory. But the reader should know that on the central question of the book, the founder was less certain than his twenty-four-year-old advocate, and that the certainty in these pages is the polemicist's, not the method's.

And the last sentence, famous as it is, carries the germ of something the tradition paid for:

the Russian WORKER, rising at the head of all the democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism and lead the RUSSIAN PROLETARIAT (side by side with the proletariat of ALL COUNTRIES) along the straight road of open political struggle to THE VICTORIOUS COMMUNIST REVOLUTION.

The prediction was, astonishingly, right. The word “straight” was not. Nothing in the thirty years that followed was straight, and the habit of reading history as a road with a known destination — a habit this passage models beautifully — is the one the official Marxism of the following century turned into a doctrine of inevitability, and then into an alibi.

Was the state that canonised it consistent with it?

Two things about this edition deserve more attention than the edition gives them.

The first is in the Preface to the volume, stated quite openly. The text printed here follows a copy of the 1894 hectographed edition which reached the Institute of Marxism-Leninism only in 1936, carrying corrections apparently made by Lenin himself; on that basis the Preface says the edition contains the exact text. The claim is almost certainly true. It is also worth knowing what else the Institute was doing in 1936 and 1937 — the years of the Moscow Trials, when the men who had made the revolution were being shot and removed from the photographs, and when the same apparatus was rewriting the history of 1917 wholesale. Scrupulous scholarship on a pamphlet from 1894 and systematic falsification of the recent past were carried on in the same building by the same institution. That is not a paradox. Accuracy about the distant past is the coin in which such an apparatus buys the authority to be believed about the near.

The second is Part II, and here the silence is genuine rather than culpable. The state that built institutes to publish Lenin entire, that recovered a manuscript thought lost beyond recall and a hectograph nobody had catalogued, could never produce a third of his first book. It is missing, and this edition says so. A canon is measured as much by what it cannot supply as by what it selects.

Then there is the reflexive test, which this book invites more sharply than most. Its argument for the Social-Democrats' way of working turns on a proposition about the educated:

there can be no sectarianism when the task is that of promoting the organisation of the proletariat, and when, therefore, the role of the "intelligentsia" is to make special leaders from among the intelligentsia unnecessary.

That sentence was printed, in millions of copies, by a state governed for sixty years by a permanent apparatus of professional leaders drawn from the intelligentsia, whose reason for existing was that they were necessary. The text was safe to circulate because nobody was expected to hold the regime to it. That is what canonisation does: it converts a demand into a relic.

Later use, and one misuse

The measure of a living book is that people fight over it, and the fight over this one came late and from an unexpected quarter.

In the first months of 1983 the Executive Committee of the Fourth International published, in its French theoretical review, two articles facing each other across a single issue. Doug Jenness of the American Socialist Workers Party argued, under the title the review gave him — "Notre continuité politique avec le bolchevisme", our political continuity with Bolshevism — that the early Lenin — What the "Friends of the People" Are above all — showed a Marxist who took the democratic and agrarian struggle with a seriousness that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution had obscured. He named this book as the first of Lenin's important works, and quoted the passage given above, on fighting side by side with the radical democracy, at length. Ernest Mandel's reply, "Défense de la révolution permanente", in defence of permanent revolution, ran in the same issue. The whole quarrel lay in whether you stopped that sentence at the dash. Jenness's tendency, which would shortly leave the International altogether, needed a Lenin for whom the democratic struggle was the strategic centre; his opponents needed the second half

of the sentence, where the democratic demands are the means of clearing the road to the struggle against capital, and where the party doing the impressing is an independent workers' party and not a wing of the radical democracy. Ninety years after it was hectographed, an illegal pamphlet aimed at three magazine writers was the document on which a split turned.

Elsewhere it did what famous titles do. British Marxists footnoted page 153 of Volume 1 for the young Lenin on social production relations. In 1974 an Irish socialist paper, arguing about cattle prices and the ruin of the small farmer, praised "the system adopted by Lenin in his book 'The economic content of narodism'" of rationing food to children, mothers and the wounded — a programme, it said, that saved millions of lives. No such system is in that book, or in this one. The writer was thinking of War Communism, a quarter of a century later, and had attached it to a title he had heard of. The mistake is not contemptible; it is what happens when a forty-five-volume edition stands on a movement's shelf as an emblem of continuity rather than a set of books that get read. It is one of the reasons for issuing this one on its own.

What is living here

Read for its conclusions, this is a period piece: the Narodniks are gone, Russkoye Bogatstvo is gone, and the question whether Russia would develop capitalism was settled by events within a decade.

Read for its method, it is not. The demand that you describe a society before you judge it; the refusal to let an ideal of human nature stand in for an analysis of who owns what and who works for whom; the insistence that the most modern and concentrated form of exploitation is where the capacity to end exploitation is formed; and the double duty in that one long sentence, to fight alongside the democrats without dissolving into them — every one of these is a live instrument, and every one of them was blunted by the state that put the author's body on display. The young man who wrote this had no apparatus, no authority and no country. He had an argument, a duplicating machine and a conviction that the workers did not need to be enthused with perspectives, only helped to understand their position. That is the inheritance, and it is not in the mausoleum.