

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov – Lenin/ Ran Abramitzky

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov - Lenin (1870-1924) was one of the most influential figures of the Twentieth Century. He was a Russian revolutionary leader, a communist, and a political theorist. A militant and dogmatic interpreter of the Philosopher Karl Marx and the creator of the new Marxist-Leninist ideology, Lenin led the October Revolution that brought into existence the world's first Socialist state. His communist archetype of a one-party state based on common beliefs, discipline and centralism survived for more than seven decades and spread within a generation to Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.

Vladimir Ilyich was born in 1870 in Simbirsk to a close family. His father was a school inspector and then became a director of a public school, and his mother was a self-educated woman who was devoted to her children. Lenin, as Vladimir later became known, was a lively, energetic, self-confident and impatient young man, and an exemplary student. After his expulsion from Kazan University for revolutionary activities, Lenin began to read European revolutionary literature and was especially influenced by Chernyshevsky. In 1893, two years after becoming a lawyer, Lenin moved to St. Petersburg, where he joined an illegal group propagating Marxism among workers, and he soon became its leader. One of the founders of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in St. Petersburg, Lenin was arrested for over a year and then sentenced to exile in Siberia until 1900. While there, he continued to study the works of Marx and Engels, wrote books and pamphlets, and married N.K Krupskaya, whom he had met a few years earlier in St. Petersburg. In 1900, he left to Zurich and then to Munich, where he set the revolutionary newspaper Iskra, 'The Spark'. Lenin lived in Western Europe until 1917 except for a period of two years in the 1905 revolution, during which he returned to Russia.

Lenin held that the rise of capitalism is a necessary condition both for economic growth and for a subsequent revolution. On the one hand, he favored capitalist farming to communal ownership of land and believed that capitalistic large-scale machine industry brought about technical progress and development. He thought that the move towards capitalistic farming created markets for manufacture goods, food and clothing, and sparked economic growth. At the same time, he predicted that technical progress and capitalist relationships would result in decrease in wages in cities and frustration in rural areas, which would, in turn, spark a revolution aiming to destroy capitalism. In 1902, Lenin published his controversial book "*what is to be done?*" in which he preached for a disciplined party based on common ideology and secretive political activities, and pushed for a revolution led by the intellectual elite, who would lead the working masses to a victory over czarism.

His hard line of a militant and centralized party with active membership caused a split in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903 into Lenin's Bolsheviks (Majority) and Mensheviks (Minority), and the two struggled until the First World War. In 1905, after czarist troops killed a group of workers in a peaceful procession in St. Petersburg in what came to be known as Bloody Sunday, the working class masses went on violent strikes, indicating the beginning of the 1905 revolution. The revolution lasted more than two years, but eventually failed.

When the First World War erupted, Lenin opposed it and claimed it was imperialist and bourgeois. In 1916, he wrote his "*Imperialism the Highest State of Capitalism*", in which he pointed out imperialism's tendency to create monopolies that overpowered resources in order to overcome its self-destruction, and this led to the exploitation of underdeveloped countries by a few imperialist ones. According to him, the less developed countries would start a revolution to overcome the exploitation. In March

1917, in a response for bad economic conditions, two hundred thousands workers went on strike, causing the resignation of the czar. In April of that year, Lenin wrote his "*April Theses*", in which he forged a strategy that would allow the Bolsheviks to seize power.

In October 1917, Lenin led the October Revolution and became the head of the new Soviet government. He nationalized banks, large factories, and later land, and talked about forming a dictatorship of the proletariat. At first, he promised to bring land and peace to Russian peasants, workers and soldiers. He abolished all private land ownership, gave peasants the right to take over land, issued a decree that allowed workers in enterprises to supervise their managers and called all governments to end hostility. In 1918, he signed the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany and withdrew Russia from the war. But Lenin also held the belief that the dictator was above the law, was not reluctant to impose his will powerfully, and crushed voices that were not in accordance with his. Following the treaty, the Russian economy entered a period of crisis and Lenin called for a central and disciplined party that would be the only one to set policies and to implement them. The Civil War of 1918-1920 destroyed the country's resources, and a threat of starvation in cities emerged. Lenin and his party began the 'War Communism' and used a policy of food confiscation, forcing farmers to pass grain from the countryside to towns. In 1919, the 'Comintern', Socialist International, was established. It was based on disciplined and inflexible beliefs and soon served as a tool for the Soviet government's foreign policy. By 1921, Lenin had realized that the regime might be in danger unless a change occurred. The oppressive policies created disincentives for agricultural production and much of the grain-growing land was out of production. Moreover, 1921 saw a severe drought in south Russia. Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy, the NEP, which

was a semi-privatization of agricultural production. The NEP was designed to encourage peasants to sell their products by allowing them, after paying a tax-in-kind, to trade in local markets. Although NEP seemed inconsistent with Marxist ideas, it is believed to have revived the Russian economy, and to have saved the new regime from a collapse and the country from famine.

History remembers Lenin as the founder of the Soviet Union, a ruthless leader of Russia, and as an important Marxian Theorist.

Bibliography:

Desai, Meghnad (Editor). Lenin's Economic Writings. New Jersey, 1989.

Lenin, V.I. The Development of Capitalism in Russia, 1899.

Lenin, V. I. What is to be done?, 1902. (Translated by S.V. and Patricia Utechin, Oxford University Press, 1963).

Lenin, V. I. Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1916. (Sixteenth printing, Moscow 1975).

Service, Robert. Lenin: A Political Life (3 Volumes). Bloomington and Indianapolis, vol.1 1985, vol.2 1991. Vol.3 1995.

Service, Robert. Lenin: A Biography. Cambridge Massachusetts, 2000.

Then, Rolf H. W. Lenin: Genesis and Development of a Revolutionary. New Jersey, 1973.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/>

Lenin, V.I. April Theses, 1917.

Robert C. Allen. Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution. Unpublished Ms. Oxford.