

Leninism: A logical development of Marxism

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Abstract : Marxian philosophy shook the world political thought. It is true that every stone of the Marxian edifice was prefigured in the works of his predecessors, but that does not make Marx a second hand philosopher and minimize the significance of what he did. The important thing about the work of Marx was not its originality, but its synthetic power. He seized upon the philosophic materials which had been lying about loose and largely unused for many years and fused them into a systematic whole and supplied the proletarian movement with a dynamic theory and a tremendous impulse to action. The man who made Marxism a practical political creed in Russia was Lenin. Lenin was a great leader of practical wisdom. As a great organizer, agitator and revolutionary, he occupies a very important place in the theory and practice of socialism. He was a rare combination of theorist and a man of action. He made Marxism up to date in the light of certain needs and developments which Marx had not anticipated. The purpose of this paper is to put focus on the changes and developments that Lenin introduced in the theory of Marxism.

IndexTerms – capitalism, centralism, exploitation, imperialism, proletariat, revolution.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the words of J.H. Hallowell, “Lenin was specially concerned with the period of transition from capitalism to socialism and contributed much in the way of theory on this subject that Marx and Engels had neglected, or discussed ambiguously.” One of the charges leveled against Marxism was that its prophecies have not proved true. Marx had prophesied that with the growth of capitalism, the misery of the working class will increase and that capitalism is leading to its own destruction. Its numbers are gradually diminishing, while ranks of the proletariat are increasing in the epoch of imperialism, and of the proletarian revolution”. In his “Imperialism: The Highest state of capitalism”, Lenin sought to explain as to why the expanding capitalism did not bring in the increasing misery of the worker. This he did with the help of increasing. But future events had shown that what Marx foretold had not come to take place. According to Stalin, “Leninism is Marx of his theory of imperialism. According to Lenin, the lower middle classes and the skilled workmen of advanced industrial countries were saved from the increasing misery which was predicted for them by Marx on account of the creation of empires by these countries. Had these countries not embarked upon a policy of imperialism, then the condition of their workers would have deteriorated. The exploitation of the colonial people saved them from the increasing misery. The people of the dominant country became capitalists. The workers who received material benefits out of the loss of imperialism did not feel that their interests were the same as those of the proletariat. These labor aristocrats frustrated the working class movement by adopting the theories of gradualism and the mechanical inevitability of socialism. Such ideas prevented the workers from developing class struggle.

However, though the workers of the capitalist country were saved from the law of increasing misery; now it was the people of the colonial territories who became miserable and sank of the conditions of the proletariat. Lenin maintained that the state of imperialism was not a contradiction of the teachings of Marx but merely a fulfillment of it. As capitalism developed, units of industrial production grew bigger and combined in trusts and cartels to produce monopoly capitalism. The same was the case in the financial world where finance capitalism developed. Monopoly-finance capitalism, according to Marx was aggressively expansionist. It resulted in the exploitation of the colonial peoples and produced wars between nations. These wars will bring the end of capitalism and usher in a new era of socialism. Thus, according to Lenin, Marx was not wrong. He only paid insufficient attention to the penultimate stage. The stage of imperialism through which capitalism will pass before giving place to socialism. Imperialism suffers and thus the argument of Marx was mainly correct. This is what Lenin means when he says that imperialism is the last stage of capitalism. However, Weyper is of the opinion that Lenin’s theory of imperialism in fact is so far as it is a defense of Marxism is both dishonest and untrue ; in so far as it is true it is not a defense of Marxism at all. It is an effective renunciation of the teaching of Marx.

The second change that Lenin brought in Marxism was through his concept of party, which he called “the party of a new type”. Lenin assigns a vital role to the party which he calls the ‘vanguard of the proletarian movement’. Lenin feels that spontaneously the workers become only trade unionists and that revolutionary ideology has to be brought home to them from outside. The agency to bring about such an ideology is the party. The party as Lenin conceived was to consist of a carefully picked body of the intellectual and moral elite. The party will provide guidance and leadership to the proletarian movement. The party will judge as to what is good for the working class and how they are to carry on their movement. According to Lenin, “ the proletariat has no weapon in the struggle for power , except organization. Constantly pushed out of depths of complete poverty , the proletariat can

and will inevitably become an unconquerable force only as a result of this : that its ideological union by means of the principles of Marxism is strengthened by the material union of an organization holding together millions of toilers in the army of the working class.” The party thus becomes the staff organization in the struggle of the proletariat to gain power and to retain it after it has been gained. It is the vanguard the most class conscious and at the same time the most devoted and self sacrificing part of the working class that holds it together and organization is the principle that makes it powerful. The party is the organized political lever by means of which the more advanced part of the working class leads all the proletarian and semi-proletarian mass in the right direction.

Lenin’s idea of the party was the counterpart or supplement of his idea of philosophical Marxism. Marxism is a symbol that elicits the deepest loyalty and at the same time a scientific guide to action. Similarly, a party is the semi priestly custodian of a truth whose purity must at all times be preserved against the durations with which the instructed or evil minded persons try to corrupt and at the same time a body of expert tacticians equipped with a scientific theory of history and society. The situation prevailing in Russia before the revolution was responsible to determine to some extent Lenin’s idea of the revolutionary party. During the regime of czar there was no political freedom. The czar ruled by oppression without the consent or co-operation of the people. All political parties were suspect. The party which Lenin led had to work underground. In any case, it had to be conspiratorial. Lenin’s party had thus to work secretly and be revolutionary. The basic principle of the party organization was democratic centralism.

Democratic centralism means on the one hand is that the party is democratic. Every office bearer is elected by the members of the party. the full congress of the party is the ultimate and supreme authority. And each organ of the party, whether the lowest cell or the highest central executive, conducts its deliberations and arrives at its decisions on a democratic basis. Each member of the party has the right of speech and expression. Decisions are taken by the majority. In this sense, the party is democratic. But on the other side party is also centralized. It is centralized in the sense that the members have to follow the leader once he is elected. Any disagreement of a lower with a higher body must be kept in abeyance until the next congress but until that time the lower organ must obey the higher one. Similarly once the decision is taken, it is fully binding on all the participants. They have to obey it as fully and unquestioningly as if it was their own. Thus the party is marked by rigid discipline in which the sole duty of the members and its organs is to obey the dictates of the higher bodies without any question. Lenin did not favor a broad based party because he believed the strength of the party which lies nor in its numerical strength but the quality of its membership. He wrote: “reduce the membership of the party and you strengthen the party.”

In leading the revolutionary crisis of 1917 in Russia, Lenin added another important innovation to Marxism. Max Lerner, one of Lenin’s admirers had remarked that “there is probably nothing in the history of political thought that equals in dramatic power Lenin’s achievement in linking his own life the analysis and enactment of revolution. He was one of those rare persons in whom life drives no paralyzing wedges and in whom therefore there is no gap between the idea and act.” This was the role that he attached to revolution. According to Lenin, the violent method was necessary because the capitalists were not expected to abdicate their power without a bitter struggle. The party must not only take part in the revolution but so far as possible must take the lead. Marx had said that capitalism was leading towards its own end and that revolution was to take place only after capitalism came to an end. But Lenin held that to destroy capitalism the use of violence was necessary and that the workers were to be trained in the revolution. The revolutionary tendencies of the workers are to be encouraged and a full revolutionary program is to be prepared since the very beginning. He held that a socialist who waits for the revolution to mature will miss the chance.

In his scheme of revolution, Lenin made another contribution and that was the role he assigned to the peasantry. Marx throughout spoke of industrial workers. He did not attached any importance to the role of the peasantry class. Lenin on the other hand felt that no revolution could succeed in Russia unless it was supported by peasantry. Hence he called for joint action of peasantry and working class. Actually the Russian revolution was not purely a proletarian revolution but a bourgeoisie-democratic and a proletarian revolution combined. This had been considered hardly possible by orthodox Marxism. According to orthodox Marxism, socialist revolution should have taken place not in Soviet Russia but in some industrially well-developed land.

Lenin drew a distinction between an organization of workers and an organization of revolutionaries. The former must be essentially trade union in character as wide as possible and as public as political conditions will allow. By contrast, the organization of revolutionaries must consist exclusively of professional revolutionaries ,must be small, and ‘as secret as possible’. On the other side Marx assumed that the class-consciousness would slowly develop in the working class in their daily struggle of earning wages. In his work, ‘What is to be Done?’, Lenin said, “class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers.” Lenin insisted that the professional revolutionary must be no less professionally trained than the police.

Though Lenin accepted the Marxian thesis that the new state produced by the revolution is itself an instrument of power and repression, quite as much as the capitalist state which it replaces, in which the proletariat organized as a ruling class creates its own appropriate apparatus of violence to enforce its purposes ; yet for Lenin, this dictatorship of the proletariat was for all practical purposes the dictatorship of the party. Though Lenin did not say so in explicit words. This was what he essentially meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. As Stalin said later, “the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dictatorship of the party which becomes the nucleus of all working class organizations.”

CONCLUSION

In the words of Sabine, “Lenin’s Marxism presents the anomaly of being at once the most dogmatic assertion of orthodox adherence to the principles of the master and at the same time the first rendering of it on points where circumstances required its modification. For him Marxism was at once the creed of a party, having the function of all creeds that give unity to a militant organization, and also a guide to action, to be shaped at need to new occasions. Yet the creed itself stood in the way of frankly empirical revision or the abandonment of parts in the light of new facts ; if it were revised it must develop its own changes

dialectically. The revisions which Lenin made were sometimes perilously close to abandonment. ” Stalin once wrote, “Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and of the proletarian revolution.” Lenin no doubt was a follower of Karl Marx and held the teachings of his master with great sanctity and reverence; but he was a disciple who brought about serious changes in the philosophy of his master. In the first place he laid emphasis on the revolutionary aspect of Marxism. He had no faith in evolutionary methods. Secondly, Lenin adopting Marxism to a later period of capitalism, brought in some new concepts like the theory of imperialism and the idea of party. Lenin was also faced with the task of adopting Marxian philosophy to the needs of soviet Russia . He was pledged to overthrow the czar and his regime and for this purpose he put emphasis on the need of a well organized party consisting of the intellectual elite. He made Marxism successful in a country which was less-industrially advanced, contrary to the Marxian thought. He was not prepared to wait for the growth of consciousness among the workers of Russia and the growth of capitalism before czardom could be destroyed. He made Marxism up to date in the light of certain needs and developments which Marx had not anticipated.

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