

Lenin's Marxism*

by Wolfgang Küttler

translated by Loren Balhorn

A: mārksīya līnīn. – G: Marxismus Lenins. – F: marxisme de Lénine. – R: marksizm Lenina. – S: marxismo de Lenin. C: Lièníng de Mǎkèsī zhǔyì 列宁的马克思主义.

The life and work of **Lenin** were central to the development of Marxism in the 20th century. According to Eric **Hobsbawm**, the fact that “one third of humanity found itself living under regimes directly derived “from this revolution” and Lenin’s organizational model, the Communist Party three or four decades after Lenin’s April 1917 arrival in Petrograd evidences that the transformation initiated in 1917 was “by far the most formidable organized revolutionary movement in modern history” (1995, 55). However, the Russian revolutionary’s world-historical role, as well as the 20th century state-socialist alternative to capitalism founded upon his legacy, appear deeply contradictory when measured against the core of **Marx’s** emancipatory vision. His record stands for Marxism’s ambivalent dual function in this epoch, one in which it reached the peak of its influence and later underwent its deepest crisis – both as a revolutionary orientation in the struggle against oppression and exploitation, and well as the ruling ideology of states in which Marxism as Leninism, or rather Marxism-Leninism (ML), took power. This dichotomy brought to Marxism the potential for extensive global influence as well as severe negative developments, usually inseparably intertwined with one another. In order to win renewed strength and political authority, the Marxism that developed after the 1989 collapse of the Soviet-style states in Europe first had to be liberated >from public identification with Leninism in theory and with the Leninist regimes in practice<

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(Hobsbawm 2011, 5).

Beginning in the early 1980s, Georges **Labica** worked towards a “*renewal* of Leninism” *against* the dogma of Leninism that ruled in state socialism (1986, 123). He emphasized a strand of thought in the **Leninian** tradition that avoids claims to a model character seeking to raise “the empirical evidence of an exceptional historical situation to that of a generality”, but instead seeks to serve as the foundation “of a political praxis”, which works towards the realisation of a “communist revolution [...] in conjunctures of a necessarily extraordinary nature” (ibid.). He calls this type of renewing critique, which works towards a constructive turn in the engagement with Lenin’s legacy, the “work of the particular” (116). It requires historical concretization as well as critical evaluation of Lenin’s “interventions” and their consequences for the further development of Marxism (117).

The “warm stream, hopeful for change” (**Mayer** 1995, 300) that managed to survive, against all odds, from **Lenin** to **Gorbachev** can nevertheless hardly conceal the fact that Marxism “was in rapid retreat” (**Hobsbawm** 2011, 385) long before the emergence of the “post-communist”, or rather “post-Soviet” situation (**Haug** 1993). This retreat could also be observed in how “Soviet orthodoxy precluded any real Marxist analysis of what had happened and was happening in Soviet society” (**Hobsbawm** 2011, 386). While **Marx’s** analysis and critique of capitalism has retained its validity, reception of Lenin has become even more overshadowed by Stalinism and its victims since 1989/91. Wolfgang **Ruge** understands the tragedy of **Lenin** in that “he achieved a great amount, but what he achieved did not correspond to that which he intended whatsoever”, and that his goal, ultimately “overrun” by history, cost “millions of human lives” (2010, 398). Nevertheless, the more Lenin is evaluated in light of the failure of Soviet state socialism since 1989/91, including by Marxists and leftists, the more urgent a historical-critical reconstruction of his views becomes.

This contribution first addresses the meaning of **Lenin** in terms of difference and continuity with **Marx** on one hand, and in terms of the official Marxism-Leninism (ML) canonised by **Stalin** on the other. Proceeding from the end of this epoch, the further question of the general tendencies of development constituting the context in which **Lenin’s** work and historical impact stand at the beginning of the 21st century, an epoch

characterised by conditions of global capitalism resting on the foundation of high-tech forces of production, will also be addressed.

1. *Revolutionary Marxism in the Periphery: The Russian Context of its Emergence.* – 1.1 Discrepancies between developments in Marxist theory and the possibilities of practical movement were already visible in the political and social conditions of backwards Russia. The intellectual atmosphere was as heterogeneous as the country was backwards; political opinions among the Russian “Intelligenzija” ranged from Slavophilic conceptions of national self-reliance and the agrarian-socialist utopias of the populist movement to anarchist terrorism, liberal receptions of Marx and the beginnings of a Marxist movement.

In spite of these difficult conditions, connections between **Marx** and Russia and the Russian reception of Marx had already enjoyed a quarter century-long history in the late 1880s, when **Lenin’s** revolutionary activities began. Russia had long appeared as a bulwark of the feudal-absolutist counterrevolution from the standpoint of advanced capitalism, far removed from conditions that could support a revolutionary movement. Only after Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War and the “movement for the emancipation of the serfs” emerging thereafter did **Marx** see the possibility “of an internal development” in the country “that might run counter” to Tsarism’s traditionally reactionary foreign policy (to Engels, 29 April 1858, MECW 40/310 [29/324]).

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the Narodnik movement brought the question of Russia’s potentially revolutionary future onto the horizon, and renewed importance to the question **Marx** had already raised in 1853 with regard to British colonial rule in India of the connection between revolutions on the edges of modern capitalism and the “great social revolution” (MECW 12/222 [9/226]) of the working class. Russia exemplified this predicament, torn between hopeful expectations placed in the emerging working class on one hand, and concerns that the country’s backward condition meant “fearful social revolution is at the door” (to Engels, 12 February 1870, MECW 12/430 [32/443f]) on the other. **Marx** and **Engels** studied conditions in Russia intensively and maintained close contact with Russian oppositionists. **Marx’s** works in turn had a significant impact in Russia itself: *Capital*, Volume I appeared in Russian as early as 1872, along with *Poverty*

of Philosophy and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. The Marxist theory of history was the subject of controversial discussions with respect to the potential paths of Russia's future development (cf. Küttler 1978a, 26ff and 42ff).

The emerging Russian Marxist movement in exile was primarily concerned with the question of how the struggle for democracy and socialism could and should be led, and which lessons could be drawn from the **Marxian** critique of capitalism and conception of revolution for this struggle. When asked about prospects for revolution in Russia by Russian Marxist Vera **Zasulich** in 1881, **Marx** entertains the possibility, predicated upon the victory of the proletarian revolution in the West, of a peasant revolution based on the village commune that could facilitate a Russian path to socialism bypassing protracted capitalist development (MECW 24/346-71 [19/242f and 384ff]).

Both preconditions for this unique constellation would remain unfulfilled. As **Engels** concluded in 1895, the labour movement in the West was in need of an extended, renewed approach to revolution following the disappointed expectations of 1848 and the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871 (MECW 27/510f [22/514f]). The revolution had failed to materialize in Russia as well, while advancing capitalist development meant that “the axe had also been taken to the root of the Russian peasant commune” (1894, MECW 27/431 [22/433]). Russia was now irrevocably part of “the general movement” determined in all European countries by the rapid growth of the labour movement, and the situation of the country thus initially corresponded to “the form [...] of an assault aimed to bring about the fall of tsarist despotism” (ibid.).

Lenin belonged to the section of the Russian intelligentsia determined to hazard this attempt. The son of German mother Maria **Blank** and father Ilya **Uljyanov**, **Lenin** (born Vladimir Ulyanov) was familiar with European education from birth, and the fundamentals of his thought shared an orientation towards capitalist progress in the West, although he cultivated a decisively revolutionary standpoint from the very outset. The seventeen-year-old was confronted with the mistakes and tribulations of the Russian opposition against the Tsarist regime when his brother Alexander **Ulyanov** was executed for participating in the attempted assassination of Tsar **Alexander III** in 1887, and he joined the illegal struggle of the Marxist circles during his studies. Fundamentally, he oriented himself towards Georgi **Plekhanov** and his “Emancipation of Labour” group,

who had come to the conclusion that perspectives for the revolutionary movement in Russia were determined by the ongoing development of capitalism and thus primarily by the struggle of the working class during his exile in Geneva in the 1880s.

1.2 **Lenin's** critique of petty bourgeois anti-capitalism and the agrarian-socialist concepts of the Narodniks were by no means on the side of the “legal Marxists”, who accepted capitalism as a model for Russia, but were rather part of his strategy to catch up to and overtake the bourgeois revolution with the goal of realising a socialist-communist transformation. “Marxism” proceeds from neither the negation nor the acceptance of capitalism, but rather “sees its criterion in the formulation and theoretical explanation of the struggle between social classes and economic interests that is going on before our eyes” (*Economic Content of Narodism*, 1895, LCW 1, 394). The Russian Marxists had to “present an integral picture of our realities as a definite system of production relations” and thereby “show that the exploitation and expropriation of the working people are essential under this system, and show the way out of this system that is indicated by economic development” (*Friends of the People*, LCW 1, 296, emphasis removed). To the extent that Marxist theory “satisfies the requirements of science” and is capable of providing answers to the proletariat’s questions, then “every awakening of the protesting thought of the proletariat will inevitably guide this thought” into the channels of revolutionary Social Democracy (297). Should this unity of theory and practical movement be achieved, then Russian workers would “overthrow absolutism” and lead the open struggle for communist revolution on behalf of the proletariat worldwide (300). These key points represent the essentials of Lenin’s views on the application of Marxist theory and praxis under particular Russian conditions.

Lenin first sought to substantiate his practical strategy with recourse to comprehensive empirical findings, and began by concentrating on agriculture as the sphere that caused the Narodniks to doubt the potential of country-wide capitalist development. His initial research therefore did not focus on the “heights” of modern capitalism in the few urban centres of industry (*Economic Content of Narodism*, LCW 1, 495) but rather on the emergence of the “home market” (*Capitalism in Russia*, 1899, LCW 3, 25) caused by the transformation of agriculture, largely dominated by semi-feudal manorial economies and “archaic” village institutions at the time, which he investigated by studying statistics

collected by local government bodies (*zemstvo*). He based himself theoretically on the **Marxian** analysis of the mode of production of developed capitalism (cf. *Capitalism in Russia*, Chapter 1 as well as the concluding section, *The “Mission” of Capitalism*). **Lenin** would later utilize Karl **Kautsky’s** research on the *Agrarian Question* (1899) in ensuing debates around capitalism in agriculture (1902, LCW 5, 103-222).

Next, **Lenin** pointed to the existence of “antagonistic *classes*” among the traditional peasant communities, that is, among the majority of the population, “characteristic only of capitalist organisation of the social economy” (to P.P.Maslow, 30 May 1894, LCW 43, 40), and thereby ascertained the natural ally of the working class, still in the minority at the time: the rural proletariat.

The third qualification, namely the ideational and organisational mobilisation of the potentially revolutionary classes, would become the main sphere of activity for the Russian socialists during the founding phase of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, around 1898-1903. **Lenin** develops his renowned concept of a party structure adapted to the conditions of illegal struggle in this context. Cohesion and centralised organisation are for him necessary preconditions for building a party not “of social reforms” but rather “of social revolution”, in which the “fundamental ideas of Marxism” and the “theory of the class struggle” in particular are adhered to (LCW 5, 353). Debates on this project increasingly revealed the antagonism between the party’s radical wing, led by Lenin and commanding a majority at that time (Bolsheviki, from *bolshinstvo*, majority), and the reformists and centrists (Mensheviki, from *menshinstvo*, minority).

1.3 These differences grew into a deeper division during the first Russian Revolution, lasting from 1905-7. **Lenin** was primarily concerned with forcing the process of revolution beyond its bourgeois limits, against the supporters of a moderate opposition within the bourgeois-democratic movement. After being forced into temporary emigration, he deepened his understanding of Marx to the extent possible at the time. In order to refine his understanding of revolution, he studied **Marx’s** concept of the “permanent revolution” (MECW 10/287 [7/254]) and his later critique thereof. **Lenin** differentiated between the 1789 type of revolution and its central image of the Jacobin dictatorship and that of 1848 and the victory of the feudal counter-revolution (LCW 8, 257-9). In doing so, he understood democratic revolutions in the periphery, such as the

one in 1905, as already belonging to a new epoch of socialist transition – in declared opposition to **Plekhanov**, who, in light of Russia’s backwardness, viewed the bourgeois camp as the only realistic hope for the radical opposition. **Lenin**, by contrast, insisted upon the possibility of a direct transition to proletarian-socialist revolution: “The proletariat must carry the democratic revolution to completion, allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush the autocracy’s resistance by force and paralyse the bourgeoisie’s instability”. The goal as well as lines of conflict of the actually intended objective of the upheaval is established directly after: “The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population, so as to crush the bourgeoisie’s resistance by force and paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie” (*Tactics*, 1905, LCW 9, 100, emphasis removed). He does not understand the hegemonic block necessary for different phases of the revolution as securing a majoritarian social basis as such, but rather bases himself on the social forces ready and willing to undertake a violent break with the past, which in turn is to be realised by the dictatorship of a revolutionary state, based on a movement from below.

1.4 Following the defeat of the revolution in **Stolypin’s** 1907 coup, agrarian relations as well as the relationship between revolution and reform remain central topics of **Lenin’s** analyses; as in the 1890s, problems concerning capitalism as a social formation also surface (cf. Küttler 1978b, 450ff and 462ff). Lenin deals primarily with the alternatives of bourgeois upheaval in Russia during this phase, that is, the democratic revolution from below in the French style and the feudal-bourgeois revolution from above of the Prussian-German type. He expands this differentiation between developmental paths with an analysis of different forms of capital and types of capitalists on the one hand (to I.I.Skvortsov-Stepanov, 16 December 1909, LCW 16, 117-22), and by contrasting two basic types of capitalist development in agriculture, analogous to the two political paths, on the other: the US-American type of unrestricted establishment of fully capitalist relations, and the Prussian model of reform through compromise with the existing feudal nobility (cf. LCW 13, esp. 240ff).

In contrast to the USA and Germany, he regards an at least relatively progressive conclusion of capitalist formation in Russia to be impossible along either developmental

path. The reforms conceded by Tsarism were inadequate to facilitate even a minimal degree of bourgeois social progress, particularly in the countryside. This means that, firstly, the “autocracy has entered a *new* historical period. It is taking a step towards its transformation into a bourgeois monarchy” (LCW 16, 199), while revolutionary democracy is at the same time weakened, though not defeated. In this regard, post-1905 Russia is similar to Germany between 1848-71, “the epoch of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary struggle” between these two paths of the bourgeois revolution, from both above and below (121).

Accordingly, **Lenin** also stands by his revolutionary strategy during this phase. The Labour Party must prepare itself for an additional, deeper transformation. He thus opposes tendencies towards integrating Russian Social Democracy into reformism, as well as those seeking to limit the party to the illegal struggle by boycotting parliament (cf. LCW 13, 94-113). Lenin’s political fight against revisionism corresponds to a sharp polemic on philosophical, primarily epistemological, terrain (*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, 1909), for which he was “poorly equipped” in light of “his philosophical knowledge at the time” (Wittich 1999, 82).

1.5 The outbreak of the First World War and the Social Democratic leaderships’ alliances with the ruling classes of their respective countries represented a caesura for **Lenin**. In *The Collapse of the Second International* – the title of his 1915 polemic – he describes the alliance as “the disgraceful treachery to their convictions [...] by most of the official Social-Democratic parties”, having “taken sides with their General Staffs, their governments, and their bourgeoisie, against the proletariat” (LCW 21, 205f). It was an existential crisis of Marxism in the sense of a principled choice between revolutionary and reformist orientations, which he considered to have been overdue for quite some time.

On the eve of the war, **Lenin** had already sought to direct the strategic deliberations of the socialist parties in the metropolises towards the social movements outside of the core. He refers primarily to the Chinese revolution of 1911-12, in which “one quarter of the world’s population has passed” over to “movement and struggle” (LCW 18, 400). Lenin situates “the place of imperialism in history” (*Imperialism*, 1917, LCW 22, 298) as the stage of capitalism’s final crisis, out of which the socialist transformation as world-

historical epoch emerges.

This epochal understanding of history serves as the frame for a novel world-revolutionary strategy and explains the abrupt change in **Lenin's** own perspective towards a direct transition to proletarian-peasant revolution after the fall of Tsarism in 1917. An initial formulation of this turn can be found in his *Letters From Afar* (LCW 23, 295-342) drafted during his Swiss exile, and is further elaborated as Bolshevik strategy following his return to Petrograd in the so-called *April Theses* (LCW 24, 21-6), against the protests of many of his own comrades. **Plekhanov** describes **Lenin's** conception as “ravings [...] abstracted [...] from the conditions of time and place” (1917/2013, 92f) and points to the underdeveloped state of Russian capitalism.

Lenin argues that deteriorating social conditions brought on by the war, affecting not only the proletariat and peasantry but also wide swathes of the intelligentsia, the petty bourgeoisie and the oppressed non-Russian populations, offer the chance to form a broad hegemonic alliance to transition the hitherto bourgeois revolution “to its *second* stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants” (LCW 24, 22). Although he acknowledges the possibility of a peaceful transition under the condition that the Soviets, under Bolshevik leadership, are granted “all power”, the notion that a violent break is inevitable predominates, and would be confirmed by the actions of the counter-revolution. In this context, the exclusive condition of “all power to the Soviets” represents a narrowing of the hegemonic block. In early October 1917, Lenin, in light of the majority in the Soviets for the “democracy of Russia” (LCW 26, 67), still argues that convening the Constituent Assembly could “ensure the peaceful development of the revolution, [...] and power could pass peacefully from one party to another”; otherwise, “there is bound to be the bitterest civil war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” (ibid.). Shortly thereafter, as the situation continues to escalate, Lenin begins to argue for the forceful taking of power against reservations from his own ranks (cf. *The Crisis Has Matured*, LCW 26, 74-86; *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, ibid., 87-136). Following the victory of the insurrection and the formation of the Soviet government, the Constituent Assembly, “summoned on the basis of the election lists of the parties existing prior to the proletarian-peasant revolution under the rule of the bourgeoisie, must inevitably clash with the will and

interests of the working and exploited classes” (LCW 26, 382). According to his view, its dissolution in January 1918 ultimately became necessary, as the Assembly “refused to recognise the power of the people” (441).

The contradictions inherent in **Lenin’s** understanding of the state in relation to the labour movement and participation of the masses as such can be observed throughout all phases of the revolutionary struggle and counter-revolutionary violence, from the failed December uprising of 1905 to the successful revolution of 1917. In *State and Revolution*, a programmatic text written shortly before the October Revolution in 1917, his arguments are both anti-state and strictly council-socialist, referring to **Marx’s** assertion that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes” (*Civil War in France*, MECW 22/328 [17/336]; *State and Revolution*, LCW 25, 419). This constituted “the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to the state” (420). Confronted with the pressures of civil war and material necessity after the victory of the revolution, he pursued a political centralization that ultimately smothered the councils. “The title of ‘Soviet’ remained, while the thing itself vanished” (**Haug** 2005, 269).

1.6 The concrete form of the new era is characterised by this internal contradiction found in **Lenin’s** Marxism in power. At the same time, the frequency of his abrupt strategic turns, often difficult to understand even for his own comrades, demonstrates an uncanny ability to recognise and make use of opportunities. He undertakes drastic strategic shifts and systemic changes such as the implementation of dictatorial measures during the civil war, followed later by the transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP), which he justifies by arguing that if “the transition to peace takes place in a period of economic crisis” and the Soviet government fails to introduce the necessary “system of complex, transitional measures”, it will “surely lead to the collapse of the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat” (LCW 32, 189f).

At the same time, **Lenin** vigorously rejects any possible compromise with the insurgents of the Kronstadt uprising, although they originally came from the revolutionary ranks themselves. On the one hand, he acknowledges the source of the current phenomena of crisis in his own mistakes: “one crucial event, one critical lesson of the past few weeks—the Kronstadt events—was like a flash of lightning which threw more of a glare upon

reality than anything else” (LCW 32, 279). Nevertheless, in order to justify the violent suppression of the uprising, he blames the motivations of participants on their backwardness, the petty bourgeois interests and behaviours of the peasantry, and the interventions of White Guards, foreign enemies and “petty-bourgeois anarchist elements” (184). During the 10th Party Congress, while the uprising still raged, he cites the necessity of “a thorough appraisal of the political and economic lessons of this event” (184) as one of the most important reasons for the transition to the NEP. He corrects War Communism with a policy that again allows for nuanced relations with the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, and even invites foreign capital into the country to this end (329-65). Contradictions develop relating to the antagonism between an openness towards flexible economic and social changes and rigorous observance of the principles of dictatorship in the political structure, which will become characteristic of the state socialist developmental model emerging from the Russian Revolution as such.

2. *Lenin’s “Interventions”*. – Antonio **Gramsci** identifies **Lenin’s** contributions as the “theorization and realization of hegemony” of revolutionary forces (PN, Notebook 7, §35, 187) and compares him, in terms of the popularization of Marxism, to early Christianity’s **Paulus** (§33; 183f). **Labica** makes positive reference to this observation, while also emphasizing the other side of **Gramsci’s** position, namely his warning against an uncritical generalization of the Russian example and Lenin’s interpretation thereof (1986, 118). What is at stake is not only **Lenin’s** method of changing strategies and solutions based on the situation at hand, but in fact the entire concept of this Marxist-oriented movement, constituted as a “work in progress”, as it were, and later established as the epochal model of the Communist workers movement as such.

2.1 Initial focus is devoted to the character, method and intention of **Lenin’s** reception of **Marx**. Illegality and internal banishment restricted his access to Marx’s work for some time, and it was only later, in exile, that **Lenin** was able to read the entirety of known literature by and about **Marx**, as is noted in the commentated bibliography of the essay *Karl Marx*, originally written for a lexicon marking the 30th anniversary of his death in 1913 (LCW 21, 80-91). Citations of various receptions of Marx and individual references made to Marx, **Engels** and Marxism fill 12 double-columned pages in the index of the

Collected Works (LCW, Reference Index 2, 335-47). **Lenin's** explicit comments on the Marxism of the Second International, which in turn outline his understanding of “orthodox Marxism” as such, always occur within the context of debates with other political currents. The objects of analysis and the consequences to be drawn from them in terms of practical strategy vary according to the situation in the country and internationally.

Lenin repeatedly emphasizes the coherence and systematics of **Marx's** doctrine: “*Marxism* is the system of Marx's views and teachings. Marx was the genius who continued and consummated 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” (LCW 21, 40). “Acknowledged even by his opponents, the remarkable consistency and integrity of Marx's views” drove **Lenin** to begin his essay with a “brief outline of his world-conception in general” (ibid.), before summarising dialectics, the materialist conception of history, class struggle, economic doctrine and Marx's conception of socialism in textbook-like fashion.

Lenin regularly draws attention to the conflict between **Marx** and **Engels** and their opponents of all stripes, such as in a review of their correspondence edited by August **Bebel** and Eduard **Bernstein**. Here, he criticizes Bernstein's forewords to the individual volumes as well as his participation as an editor as such, arguing that Bernstein, given “his notorious ‘evolution’ to extreme opportunist views”, could not do justice to the letters, “impregnated through and through with the revolutionary spirit” (LCW 19, 552) as they were. Beyond the *Manifesto*, the 1859 preface to *Contribution*, and the first volume of *Capital*, **Lenin** pays particular attention to **Marx's** contemporary historical writings (*Class Struggles*, *18th Brumaire*, *Civil War*), and from **Engels** primarily *Peasant War*, *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and *The Housing Question*. The notion of a seamless continuation, later cultivated by ML, in which **Lenin** understands the “new” as merely the “application” of the original theoretical corpus to contemporary developments, can be found here for the most part. Yet differences arise in the approach, practical implementation and justification of each step, which transform his “interventions” into weighty developments with major

implications for the future of Marxism.

2.2 This pertains, firstly, to the conception of the relationship between scientific analysis and practical strategy. On the one hand, **Lenin** emphasises that a realistic candour or openness is necessarily both the prerequisite as well as result of scientific thoroughness. In this regard, he bases himself primarily on **Engels**, who in 1888, when discussing the “exposition of the materialist conception of history” developed in 1845-6 – i.e., *The German Ideology*, first published in 1932 – states that it only proves “how incomplete our knowledge of economic history still was at that time” (*Ludwig Feuerbach*, MECW 26/520 [21/264]; *Friends of the People*, LCW 1, 147). On the other hand, this open analysis of new developments ought to yield “an integral picture of our realities” (LCW 1, 296); contrary to the careful estimates attributed largely to **Plekhanov**, **Lenin’s** method of anticipatory tendency analysis assumes the theory of a developed mode of production from the first volume of *Capital*, about which **Marx** says in the preface (1867) that the “country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (*Capital 1*, MECW 35/9 [23/12]) (although he would later restrict this prognosis to “the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe” in 1887; MECW 24/200 [19/ 111]). As early as 1895, in the context of an argument over socialist perspectives in Russia, **Lenin** calls for “the Marxist” to view the capital relation in its “most developed form”, that which is the “quintessence of all the other forms, and shows the producer that the aim and object to follow is the abolition of this relation and its replacement by another” (*Economic Content of Narodism*, LCW 1, 381, fn.). In a fragment on *Statistics and Sociology* written in 1917, he emphasises – this time in a debate on the national question – the need to “build a reliable foundation of precise and indisputable facts” in order to avoid one-sided conclusions; for a theoretical foundation to become “a real foundation”, it “must take not individual facts, but the *sum total* of facts, without a *single* exception” (LCW 23, 272).

The basis of the certain result is thus the analysis of facts out of which the practical political programme directly emerges, although **Lenin** nevertheless regards **Marxian** theory to be an adequate template under Russian conditions as well. It becomes clear in his first summaries of Marxian theory, such as **Lenin’s** interpretation of the *Preface 59*, that he one-sidedly assumes the inevitable conquest of all existing forms by the capitalist

social formation. He grasps concrete processes of transformation from the perspective of a theoretically fixed conclusion. Where **Marx** writes of “the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science”, differentiating them from “ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (MECW 29/263 [13/9]), **Lenin** separates “ideological social relations” from “material social relations [...] that take shape without passing through man’s consciousness” (*Friends of the People*, LCW 1, 140). He misses the fact that the “material [...] economic conditions of production” (MECW 29/263 [13/9]) cannot emerge without being mediated by the consciousness of actors.

This interpretation of the base and superstructure conception also has implications for **Lenin’s** understanding of the relationship between party and masses and between leadership and class. He views the **Marxian** theory of social formation and theory of class struggle as mutually interdependent foundations of a materialist theory of history and society, as a synonym for social science. Accordingly, his concepts of the individual and of the group are derived from socio-economic relations. As early as 1895, long before the oft-cited passage in *A Great Beginning* (LCW 29, 421), **Lenin** defines “classes” as groups “within the bounds of each such social-economic formation, [...] differing from each other in the part they played in the system of production relations, in the conditions of production, and [...] in the interests determined by these conditions” (*Economic Content*, LCW 1, 412). Marxist-influenced sociology and historiography oriented itself around a conception of the relationship between the theory of formation, class and class struggle (cf. Steiner 2008, esp. 238ff) as developed here for far too long, neglecting differentiations with view to both cultural relations as well as **Marx’s** concrete class analysis (cf. Vester 2008).

Although **Lenin** denies its presence in his own Marxism, the trend towards objectivism inherent in this understanding, intended to provide “a firm basis for the conception that the development of formations of society is a process of natural history” (*Friends of the People*, LCW 1, 140f), also abets the “degenerate tendency”, as **Gramsci** states with reference to Nikolai **Bukharin’s** *Theory of Historical Materialism*, “which consists in reducing a conception of the world to a mechanical formula which gives the impression of holding the whole of history in the palm of its hand” (*SPN*, Notebook 11, §25, 427f).

As a politician, **Lenin** knows that no one can hold history in his pocket, but nonetheless requires this understanding of formation for political-ideological reasons, namely, to justify the possible hegemony of the proletariat in a coming revolution that is initially of a bourgeois nature – and after 1917, to situate the post-revolutionary transitional society as a precursor to fully-developed socialism.

2.3 This approach defines **Lenin's** conception of an 'epoch' as well as his view of the relationship between capitalism and socialism in times of war and revolution. It also serves to refute social democratic claims to **Marx** that understand the relationship between revolution and war according to the model of the bourgeois revolutionary wars of the 19th century (cf. LCW 21, esp. 145ff). For **Lenin**, by contrast, the crisis of the capitalist system in the imperialist war means that a decision between catastrophe and barbarism on the one hand, and progress towards socialism on the other becomes inevitable. The war had “speeded up developments fantastically, aggravated the crisis of capitalism to the utmost, and confronted the peoples with making an immediate choice between destruction and immediate determined strides towards socialism” (September 1917, LCW 25, 282). He repeats in October: “humanity must now choose between perishing or entrusting its fate to the most revolutionary class” (367f), and argues that his followers “cannot be revolutionary democrats in the twentieth century and in a capitalist country *if we fear* to advance towards socialism” (360).

Lenin views the synthesis between industrial and finance capital as a “special stage of capitalism” (*Imperialism*, LCW 22, 265) – not in the sense of a finished condition, but rather according to the “tendency of capitalist accumulation” (MECW 35/748 [23/789]) originally identified by **Marx** – and, with reference to Rudolf **Hilferding's** *Finance Capital* (1910), as *monopoly* capitalism. On the one hand, this “newest stage” is “progressive” (LCW 23, 63) in that it intensifies the contradiction between capital and labour, but on the other hand is plagued by “parasitism and decay” (LCW 22, 276). As a “moribund capitalism” (302), it objectively paves the way for the passage “to a higher socio-economic order” (298).

In the revolutionary year of 1917, **Lenin** establishes a direct relation between the monopoly stage of capitalism and Soviet power and the beginnings of socialist economic organisation, arguing that “socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist

monopoly” (LCW 25, 362). For the NEP, Lenin suggests connecting elements of this most modern capitalism with revolutionary control of the “commanding heights” of the economy as a necessary transitional form. Because history “*has given birth* in 1918 to two unconnected halves of socialism existing side by side like two future chickens in the single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia have become the most striking embodiment of the material realisation of the economic [...] conditions for socialism, on the one hand, and the political conditions, on the other” (LCW 27, 340). Absent a victorious revolution in Germany, however, the task of revolutionaries “is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare *no effort* in copying it and not shrink from adopting *dictatorial* methods to hasten the copying of it. Our task is to hasten this copying even more than Peter hastened the copying of Western culture [...], and we must not hesitate to use barbarous methods in fighting barbarism” (ibid.).

2.4 The *political* organisation of the transitional society was to correspond to this dualism of still-capitalist structures and the party’s monopoly on political power. Its repressive structure was significantly bolstered by War Communism, before external victory and internal crisis forced a return to the conceptions of 1918, although it remains unclear whether **Lenin** understood this radical turn in merely tactical terms or was in fact pursuing more principled aims (**Behrendt** 2010, 2046ff).

The immense difficulties encountered while developing the new society appear largely as obstacles which can be overcome as long as the revolutionary government “has the backing of the majority of the population” (1917, LCW 24, 418). In situations in which “we are faced with either destruction or self-discipline, organisation and the possibility to defend ourselves”, the “politically conscious worker will understand what the main task of the socialist is, and then we shall win” (May 1918, LCW 27, 403). The title of his last *Pravda* article published in March 1923, *Better Fewer, But Better*, evidences his concerns about the quality of the transition. Here, **Lenin** cites the fact that “development proceeded at such breakneck speed<, taking Russia >from tsarism to the Soviet system” in the course of a few years, as the primary cause for difficulties in constructing the new state (LCW 33, 488).

Lenin nevertheless maintains the possibility of catching up to bourgeois development as a way of opening up the path to socialism: “What if the complete hopelessness of the

situation, by stimulating the efforts of the workers and peasants tenfold, offered us the opportunity to create the fundamental requisites of civilisation in a different way from that of the West-European countries?" (1923, LCW 33, 478).

Despite this orientation towards the participation of the mass of workers and other layers of the working population, the dictatorial system remains. For **Lenin**, post-revolutionary democracy is always the new form of socialist democracy which emerges along the path of revolutionary dictatorship, in explicit reference to **Engels** (cf. *State and Revolution*, LCW 25, 459ff). The state is either an instrument of the ruling class dictatorship (390ff) or of the revolutionary-democratic, that is, proletarian dictatorship. Here, **Lenin** bases himself on the writings of **Marx** and **Engels** concerning the 1848 revolution and the ensuing class struggles (406ff), **Marx's** evaluation of the Paris Commune (418ff), and the notion of the withering-away of the state developed by Marx in *Gotha* and **Engels** in *Anti-Dühring* (461ff). Marxists are only those who have grasped "the essence of Marx's theory of class struggle and adhere to the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat without question: >The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*" (418).

According to this view, the transition requires the dictatorship of the proletariat to suppress the counter-revolution and, as developments even after victory in the civil war demonstrate, opposition within the revolutionary ranks as well (cf. LCW 32, 196-203). True emancipation is linked to the communist future: "So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state" (*State and Revolution*, LCW 25, 473). The proletarian revolution is tasked with undertaking concrete steps towards liberation from oppressive state structures, as expressed immediately after the revolution in the *Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People* (LCW 26, 423-5). However, measures to ensure individual freedoms were lacking. Instead, the declaration was followed by repressive decisions such as the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the removal of remaining coalition partners from the revolutionary government.

The country's desperate situation, in which the extreme Right once again dominated on the side of the counter-revolution, was supposed to legitimise the use of extreme measures modelled upon the Jacobin dictatorship: "Our Red terror is a defence of the

working class against the exploiters” (LCW 31, 142). The suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion served as a particularly drastic demonstration of the consequences of this radically single-handed approach: as Rosa **Luxemburg** had warned, the dictatorship of the proletariat became a dictatorship of the party and, even more restrictive, the party leadership.

Similarly, the state of exception had fateful consequences on the terrain of legality. The new legality was to be strictly observed and guaranteed, as **Lenin** repeatedly emphasises, while exclusively serving the aims of the revolution at the same time. Lenin calls for the ruthless application of terror in this regard on multiple occasions. As he explains in 1922 while justifying a law concerning the death penalty, the legal system “must not ban terror [...] but must formulate the motives underlying it, legalise it as a principle, plainly, without any make-believe or embellishment”. Thus, laws “must be formulated in the broadest possible manner, for only revolutionary law and revolutionary conscience can more or less widely determine the limits within which it should be applied” (to D.I.Kursky, LCW 33, 358).

Lenin’s willingness to accept realistic corrections to his political course did not extend to even contemplating modifications to the dictatorial form of party rule. Laws and legislation were radically emptied of their indispensable formal validity and subjected to the requirements of revolutionary power. Nearing death and isolated from political life, Lenin warns in his last letters, constituting a kind of testament, against arbitrariness, recklessness and exorbitance among the leading revolutionaries, from whom he demands “not so much the qualities of an administrator as [...] the ability to enlist the services of other men” (LCW 36, 599). In doing so, he does not touch upon the structures he built in the revolutionary struggle. **Stalin’s** later escalation of this arbitrariness beyond all measure despite the stabilisation of the new order and the devastating consequences thereof “cannot be retrospectively justified” (**Klenner** 2012, 833) by the rampaging of the counter-revolution and the fascists.

3. An attempt at an historical-critical summary must primarily address the novel quality of the problems emerging from the imperialist war, the revolution and the conditions of development in Soviet Russia. **Lenin’s** Marxism broke new ground in this regard. The

construction of a new social order in an underdeveloped country, at least initially as a transitional society, while nevertheless pursuing socialism as a formational perspective was without precedent in both theory as well as actual history.

3.1 Following the immense losses of both human life as well as means of production, the fundamental preconditions from which **Marxian** socialism proceeds, i.e., the existence of capitalists and workers, first had to be re-created in the peasant-petty bourgeois-shaped transitional society – in the contradictory form of a state capitalism that does not serve the interests of capital, necessary “to lay the economic foundation for socialist economy”, as the revolutionaries “hold all the key positions. We hold the land; it belongs to the state” (1922, LCW 33, 427).

Here, sober evaluation stands side-by-side with exaggerated faith in one’s own strength, hopes for the participation of the masses alongside dictatorial acceleration of the transformation from above. “Our opponents told us repeatedly that we were rash in undertaking to implant socialism in an insufficiently cultured country. But they were misled [...] because in our country the political and social revolution preceded the cultural revolution [...]. This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country” – a task which “presents immense difficulties”, “for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base” (6 January 1923, LCW 33, 474f). Ten days later, he asks “why cannot we begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of culture” necessary for the “building of socialism” by revolutionary means, “and then, with the aid of the workers” and peasants “government and the Soviet system, proceed to overtake the other nations” (478f)?

3.2 This raised the precarious problem of the relationship between Russian reality and the **Marxian** project as such. On one hand, **Lenin** did not deviate from **Marx’s** fundamental assertion that only highly-developed capitalism provided the necessary preconditions for the socialist-communist society. On the other, and in line with his concept of the ‘epoch’, **Lenin** related the revolutionary movements in the periphery of the capitalist world to the world-revolutionary context as a whole, and thus, like **Marx** and **Engels** in the 1880s and 1890s before him, considered it plausible that these could play an instigating role. This explains the asynchronicity in forms of the transformational process: “The social

revolution cannot be the united action of the proletarians of *all* countries”, he writes in the summer of 1916, because “most of the countries [...] have not even reached, or have only just reached, the capitalist stage of development” (LCW 23, 58f).

As demonstrated in his January 1917 speech marking the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the beginning of the first Russian revolution in 1905, **Lenin** did not assume from the outset that Russia would be the first country in which the imperialist war would become a revolutionary civil war. Although he predicts the coming revolutionary upheaval, which “cannot end otherwise than with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, with the victory of socialism”, he suggests that he and the “older generation” of the revolutionary movement “may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution” (LCW 23, 253). Lenin neither assumes the victory of the socialist revolution in an *underdeveloped* capitalist country as an historical law, nor does he insist that this must occur in the weakest link in the geo-political chain. As Isaac **Deutscher** has correctly pointed out, it was only with the doctrine of “Socialism in one country” that **Stalin** “established himself as an ideologue in his own right” (1949/1962, 290).

Also after the victory of the Russian revolution, **Lenin** was aware that its historical importance was only relative. In this regard, he stressed the need to differentiate between the current influence that events in Russia have on the labour movements of other countries, and the more general significance of the “historical inevitability of a repetition, on an international scale” of “certain fundamental features of our revolution”, meaning that “at the present moment in history [...] it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something [...] of their near and inevitable future” (*Left-Wing Communism*, LCW 31, 5f). Lenin nevertheless warns against exaggerating the degree of this vanguard role, for “soon after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, a sharp change will probably come about: Russia will cease to be the model and will once again become a backward country (in the ‘Soviet’ and the socialist sense)” (ibid.).

The contradiction, both in terms of the **Marxian** program as well as within his own political and theoretical conceptions, lies not in this question, but rather in the ambivalent treatment of the problem of the transition, primarily in terms of the relationships between state, party, and society, that is, the relationship between leadership and “masses”. This

relationship oscillates from the very outset, from the struggle over the party programme during its foundation to **Lenin's** writing and decrees while in power, torn between forced educationism from above and calls for active participation and continuous democratic control from below.

In *What is to Be Done?* (1902), **Lenin** not only underscores the importance of revolutionary theory, without which there can be “no revolutionary movement” (LCW 5, 369), but also connects this, basing himself on **Kautsky's** assertion that socialist consciousness is always “something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without” (384), to a more fundamental assertion on the relationship between theory and ideology: “Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the *only* choice is – either bourgeois or socialist ideology” (ibid.). This statement is relativized in a footnote: “This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians” (ibid.). Here, the emphasis of the external relationship between Marxism understood as a revolutionary “ideology” and the working class is not the only matter of note. Even more important – because of its later binding character within ML – is the turn away from the exclusively critical conception of ideology as derived from **Marx** towards ideology as a neutral definition of all forms of social consciousness, and from this, an exclusively positive relationship to proletarian, or rather socialist theory and worldview.

3.3 This blending of theory and ideology also strains **Lenin's** relationship to philosophy and science, and not only because his later statements would become an integral component of ML. These statements can be found primarily in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and in the conspectuses and margin notes of the *Philosophical Notebooks*. Lenin seeks, as he emphasises in a letter to Maxim **Gorky**, to be “just *an ordinary Marxist* in philosophy” (25 February 1908, LCW 13, 449). But this hesitation, with which he, for example, allows artists full freedom of political orientation outside of party work (ibid.), is coupled with an uncompromising rejection of deviations from “dialectical and historical materialism” as he understands it, which threaten to damage the theoretical-political unity of the party. Freedom of criticism, as he explains in *What Is To Be Done?*, is not that of creative scientific debate, but rather the *ideological* “freedom to convert

Social-Democracy into a democratic party of reform” (LCW 5, 355), and *scientifically* the “freedom from all integral and pondered theory”, that is, a turn towards “eclecticism and lack of principle” (369). On one hand, **Lenin** pursued a legitimate clarification vis-à-vis the Neo-Kantian critique of Marx with view to establishing a productive connection between materialism, which – through “further experimental investigation” – “stimulates” attempts to solve other unsolved questions (LCW 14, 46) and contemporary scientific developments. On the other hand, Lenin also demands strict “orthodoxy” in philosophical questions, as is evidenced in a list of questions formulated in 1908 obliging lecturers at the party school on the island of Capri to adhere to the principles elaborated by **Engels** in *Anti-Dühring*. They were to “acknowledge that the philosophy of Marxism is *dialectical materialism*” and “that Machism has nothing in common with Bolshevism” (LCW 14, 15f).

Later preoccupation with questions of the dialectic in Greek philosophy and primarily **Hegel** in 1916 pertain to the ongoing conflict with reformism, yet **Lenin** adopts the **Marxian** dialectic not only as methodological foundation of scientific analysis, but elevates it to the level of a comprehensive object theory as well. Here we can again observe the oscillation between an open and fixed worldview as an essential feature of the **Leninian** understanding of Marxism.

Lenin could certainly draw on **Marx**, and even more so **Engels**, as far as the materialist foundation of scientific thought was concerned. Nor did he view the oft-emphasised claim to the validity of the “doctrine” as a monopoly on scientificness or as a free pass for ignorance vis-à-vis non-Marxist philosophy and science. That said, they should, similar to the “problems raised by the recent revolution in natural science”, be integrated into “militant materialism”, particularly since this revolution, especially like the theory of Albert **Einstein**, who “is himself not making any active attack on the foundations of materialism”, would be thoroughly gutted by the bourgeois intelligentsia. In order to “hold its own in the struggle against the onslaught of bourgeois ideas [...] and carry it to a victorious finish, the natural scientist must be a modern materialist, a conscious adherent of the materialism represented by Marx, i.e., he must be a dialectical materialist” (LCW 33, 233).

Lenin’s fight for the superiority of “militant materialism” over the allegedly contrary

bourgeois science tended towards ideologisation and dogmatisation, which later helped to facilitate its transformation into a catechism securing the power of a new ruling elite. Here we ultimately find the contradiction between Lenin's "implicit" philosophy, which, as **Gramsci** writes, lies in "the practical work of creating history", and his "explicit" philosophy, which seeks to elaborate this "coherently" (*FSPN*, Notebook 10.II, §31, 387).

4. *The ambivalent result: Lenin's Marxism in his epoch.* – 4.1 The question of how **Lenin** would have ultimately resolved the nascent dualism emerging with the onset of the NEP between a dictatorship conceived as socialist and a renewed capitalism ventures into the realm of speculation. His warnings concerning the role of **Stalin** during the >long agony< lasting from late 1922 to his death on 21 January 1924 (**Hedeler** 2013, 45ff) were ignored largely because the leadership group, meticulously dissected and evaluated in his last writings, agreed that a public debate on the distribution and control of power risked splitting the party and endangering the entire system – a judgement in line with the uncompromising path to and in power that **Lenin** himself had pursued.

Among the contenders for his succession, **Bukharin** (1926/1976, 598 and 1929/2013) supported the cautious line of the alliance with the peasantry, while **Trotsky** as well as his supporter, the economist Yevgeni **Preobrazhensky**, tended towards a dictatorship of the working class – including support for industrialisation via primitive accumulation at the expense of the peasantry. **Trotsky** did not, as **Stalin** later claimed following the party's break with "Trotskyism", see himself as principally opposed to **Lenin**. There had of course been "moments when we disagreed", but these had never amounted to a "struggle between two 'principles' " as depicted by **Stalin** (**Trotsky** 1929/1970, 461). The "fight against Trotskyism" initiated in 1923 had actually been "a fight against the ideological legacy of Lenin" (488).

The latter was effectively claimed by **Stalin**, who would ultimately emerge from the power struggle victorious, to legitimize his system of political rule. In this regard, he defined Leninism as early as 1924 as the "Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution", the "theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general" and "the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular" (*Foundations of Leninism*, W 6, 73); although "proletarian" actually signifies the inverse of the established relations of power

in both cases.

This version of Leninism, officially designated the “Marxism of the 20th Century” (**Fedoseyev** 1973, 181ff) by the CPSU, has since been widely considered a legitimate further development of Marxism in the Soviet Union and later the “socialist camp”, as well as by many outside of this sphere in the context of the Cold War. The close connection between **Marx** and **Lenin** in ML was by no means exclusively **Stalin’s** invention, nor was it merely a result of the problematic form taken on by the relationship between theory and praxis. **Lenin’s** ideas continued to be perceived as representative of a revolutionary Marxism despite, or perhaps because of, their integration into ML. That said, even upon critical examination, his political importance exceeds that of other theoreticians and party leaders of both the Second International and the Comintern.

This was made historically possible by the extreme answers demanded by extreme conditions in a catastrophic period, characterised by **Hobsbawm** as an “age of total war” (1994/1995, 21) and “world revolution”. The latter emerged and unfolded as “the child of twentieth-century war”: while the first World War had triggered the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union resulting from it became a “superpower” after the second. The revolution initiated in 1917 thus became “a global constant in the century’s history” (54), one pole in the barbarically waged conflicts of the “age of extremes”.

4.2 Writing while still under the impression of the “Great War”, Ernst **Bloch** expresses the hopes attached to the revolution successfully realised in Russia with the Biblical reference “ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem” (*Principle of Hope*, Vol. 2, 1959/1995, 610). Bertolt **Brecht** writes in memory of **Lenin** in a similar vein, in a time marked by extreme disappointments due to **Stalinist** terror and the defeats at the hands of fascism: “When **Lenin** died and was absent / The victory had been won, but the country lay in ruins. / The masses had decamped, but / The path was obscured. / [...] Fifteen years have passed since then. / One-sixth of the Earth / Is liberated from exploitation. / [...] And where it persists] / The masses continue to rise again / Prepared to struggle. / Lenin [...] was our teacher. / He struggled with us. / He is enshrined / In the great heart of the working class” (*Kantate zu Lenins Todestag*, 1939). For **Brecht**, however, this pathos does not pertain to the ruling symbolism found in statues and monuments, nor does “enshrined” mean the ideological consolidation of a singularly valid canon or cult-like deification of an

authority above any and all critique. Rather, honouring **Lenin** should be realised through the practical resolution of concrete life questions. **Brecht** incorporates this into his image of the carpet weavers of Kutan-Bulak, who spent the money collected for busts of **Lenin** to combat an outbreak of fever threatening their village: “So they were useful to each other by honouring Lenin, and / Honoured him by being useful to each other, and thus / Had understood him well” (1929/1977, GW 9, 666f). This image of Lenin as enlightening and clarifying figure stands in direct contrast to the mummification of his body (even lying at **Stalin’s** side for several years) in the mausoleum in front of the Moscow Kremlin, reminiscent of the ancient Pharaohs – a revealing and incriminating example of tendencies towards an oriental-despotic form of rule. Accordingly, **Brecht** defines the relation to **Stalin** in terms of difference: “Mi-en-leh’s orders were tersely formulated convictions. Mi-en-leh could not say the superior power of his opponents forced him to give orders. It forced him to convince. Ni-en had fewer opponents and gave orders” (*Me-ti*, 2016, 144).

4.3 **Brecht’s** cautious voice of protest and the haughty insistence on an all-powerful Leninism as expressed by **Fedoseyev** in the early 1970s (1973, 184) represent the opposing sides found in the reception of **Lenin** in the decades following the Second World War. More so than during the struggle against fascism, the contradictions inherent in this reception grew increasingly visible in the context of global systems rivalry, which also witnessed the greatest spread and influence of Leninian Marxism. We find historical examples thereof in revolutionary movements and upheavals on all continents on one hand, and convulsions within state socialism’s sphere of influence on the other: 1953 in the GDR, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, 1970 and 1980 in Poland.

Following **Stalin’s** death and the 20th Congress of the CPSU, a brief period of openness towards internal reform set in, during which (and similar to the final crisis after 1985) proponents spoke out in favour of restoring **Leninian** conceptions of socialism – with the unintended consequence of revealing the system’s blatant unreformability. Subsequent engagements with Lenin’s work were accordingly broad and diverse, ranging from those within the ML framework “of the sort seeking to renew dialectical materialism” while abandoning the canonised “pedagogical corpse” (**Labica** 1986, 123) on one side, to endeavours towards fundamental renewal based on a deconstruction of said materialism

on the other.

The dilemma of the former method, widespread and internally differentiated across the established social sciences of state socialism, is described aptly by **Labica**: they demonstrated that attempts at renewal could “never be entirely covered up” by the authority of dogma and in fact repeatedly “haunted” official ML (124). This took place via dissidents and oppositionists, who in the role of “moles of re-emerging Leninism” never “grew tired of invoking its legacy” (123). At the same time, however, the “struggle over words” in ML “expressed a lot about what it had to say: the convoluted stringing together of complex interventions, with the ultimate effect of allowing time itself to come apart” (124). This pertains to sociological, historical, legal, and political scientific references to **Lenin** in the context of the internal requirements of state socialist societies in competition with the West as well as the growing international integration of academia operating under the Marxist-Leninist label (**Küttler** 1999). In the Soviet Union itself, a reception of Lenin directly conceived as revision served to expand historical and sociological research on the conditions and novelties of the Russian Revolution, as well as analogies to the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America (**Hösler** 1995) – endeavours corresponding to similar projects in GDR scholarship, such as the projects on developing countries and revolutionary historical research initiated and conducted by Walter **Markov** (2009, 337ff and 370ff).

Meanwhile, the image of Lenin in bourgeois scholarship differentiated as well, particularly with view to the concept of 1917 as a developmental revolution (cf. Geyer 1968/1987). Doubts and criticisms grew among Marxists outside of the Soviet sphere of influence concerning the foundations of ML: the dictatorship of the proletariat, the fighting revolutionary party of a new type, the worldwide transition to socialism as initiated in 1917, as well as the dominant understandings of science and philosophy. In light of obvious manifestations of crisis within state socialism, foundations for a renewal of Marxism were drafted via a critical evaluation of **Leninian** Marxism. In this regard, the development of the reception of Lenin is inextricably linked to the wider history of Marxism “in rapid retreat” (**Hobsbawm** 2011, 385).

5. *Prospects: Lenin and Marxism in the 21st Century* – With the ruptures of 1989, the

global situation as it was discussed in the 1970s and 80s has again changed dramatically. For Marxism, liberation from the chains of dogmatic ossification means, on the one hand, that it can engage with the new constellation of social development without reservations. On the other hand, the epochal shift of 1989/91 also meant losing the support of a real-historical alternative. History, which in ML was fixed as the “historical law” of the transition from capitalism to socialism, proved to be open in this regard once again.

Accordingly, **Lenin** is no longer viewed exclusively through the lens of a progressive revolutionary epoch, but increasingly in terms of negative developments and malformations – to some extent as the inverse of the positive super-elevation once common in state socialism. Overall, a depreciating distance is predominant, at least in the industrialised countries of the West. In Russia itself, he appears more as destroyer of the great national power than as the initiator of a new upward trajectory, so much so that in the context of a new Great Power political nationalism, even **Stalin** is viewed more positively (cf. Schützler 2014, 16). In Left discourse at the outset of the 21st century, concepts of transformation realised step-by-step through broad alliances of civil society dominate (cf. Reißig 2009, 15ff), in which **Lenin** no longer plays a role. In contrast to this is the attempt to invoke a new “hour of Lenin” and identify analogies to “Leninian moments”, particularly with view to his revolutionary politics, in the construction of a corresponding organization and party form (**Porcaro** 2012, 86). Slavoj **Žižek** responds to the undeniable insight that a return to **Lenin** is impossible, “that his particular solution [...] even failed monstrously”, by asserting that repetition does not entail repeating his concepts and deeds, but rather returning to unsolved problems, to thereby better see “that there is something wrong with *our* epoch”, because “a certain historical dimension is disappearing from it” (2002, 310f).

Even if one does not agree with these lines of argument, the questions they pose are important for a situation in which the point is no longer to argue whether **Lenin’s** revolution was directed against **Marx’s Capital**, as **Gramsci** (1917/1977) saw it, to thereby identify the discrepancy between intentions and results of **Lenin’s** Marxism. Rather, we must ask ourselves to what historical generality the “work of the particular” (**Labica** 1986, 116ff) should refer, if the transition to socialism can no longer be conceived within the framework established by the October Revolution. “We cannot

foresee the solutions of the problems facing the world in the twenty-first century”, writes **Hobsbawm** (2011, 15). But in order to find plausible solutions, “they must ask **Marx’s** questions, even if they do not wish to accept his various disciples’ answers” (ibid.). That Marxian questions have again become prominent in a new way is rooted in “plenty of good reasons”, namely the real experience that “the globalised capitalist world [...] was in crucial ways uncannily like the world anticipated by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*” (5). Precisely because of this, **Hobsbawm** relates this historical relativisation of the aforementioned answers not only to those of the “disciples”, but also to the concrete answers that **Marx** provided and which in some respects are “not or no longer acceptable” (12) over one and one half centuries later. Decisive is if and how the world of globalised capitalism will make **Lenin’s** questions relevant once again, even if the answers are no longer appropriate in their specifics or require a thorough-going critique in light of their previous consequences.

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Abbau des Staates, Abbild, Absterben des Staates, abstrakt/konkret, Anarchismus, Avantgarde, Berufsrevolutionär, Bucharinismus, Denkform, Dialektik, dialektischer Materialismus, Diktatur des Proletariats, Doppelherrschaft, Elektrifizierung, Erkenntnistheorie, Feuerbach-Thesen, Finanzkapital, Gramscismus, Grundfrage der Philosophie, Grundwiderspruch (Haupt-/Nebenwiderspruch), Hegelianismus, historischer Materialismus, Idealismus/ Materialismus, Imperialismus, Kaderpartei, Kapitalismus, Kautskyanismus, K-Gruppen, Kolonialismus, Kommandohöhen, Konterrevolution, Konzentration und Zentralisation des Kapitals, Kriegskommunismus, Krisentheorien, Kritik (V), Kronstädter Aufstand, Legaler Marxismus, Lehrbuchmarxismus, Linie

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