

APPENDIX

Tony Cliff Reduces Lenin's Theory To "Uncanny Intuition"¹

If Marx did not leave behind him a "Logic" (with a capital letter), he did leave the logic of Capital . . . Intelligent idealism is closer to intelligent materialism than stupid materialism. Dialectical idealism instead of intelligent; metaphysical, undeveloped, dead, crude, rigid instead of stupid."

Lenin, *Philosophic Notebooks*²

To grasp the meaning of Lenin's book [Imperialism], unlike that of let us say, Rosa Luxemburg's (The Accumulation of Capital) or Hilferding's, one does not have to be familiar with Marxist economic writings.

Tony Cliff, *Lenin, Vol. Two* (pp. 59-60)

MARX'S *CAPITAL* has gone on many adventures after the author's death, 1883. These became tortuous after the death of his lifelong collaborator, Engels, 1895. The first revolutionary to question Marx's theory of expanded reproduction was the very one — Rosa Luxemburg — who, with her brilliant pamphlet, *Reform or Revolution?*, had bested the revisionists who challenged Marx's "economic theories" and accused them of being weighted down by a "dialectical scaffolding." It wasn't that Luxemburg ever denied that battle of ideas,

¹ Tony Cliff, *Lenin, Vol. Two, All Power to the Soviets* (Pluto Press, London, 1976), p. 378. Pagination references to this book will appear directly in the following text.

² Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 (Foreign Languages, Moscow, 1961), p. 319. The references to Lenin's works in my text which follows, as in my preceding Introduction, cite this volume. In the preceding chapters on *Capital*, however, the references were to my own translation of Lenin, which was published as "Appendix B" to the 1958 edition of *Marxism and Freedom*, as no "official" translation was then available. I was the first to translate into English Lenin's "Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*." When Moscow finally published Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks* in English, they not only left out Adoratsky's Introduction to the first Russian edition of 1930, but also the Lenin Institute's listing of what books Lenin called for, not just in Bern, 1914-16, but in Russia after taking power. It bears repeating Adoratsky: "Despite the fact . . . of the extreme situation and the necessity to give all attention and all energy to practical questions, Lenin continued to interest himself in questions of philosophy. This is evident from his readings . . . On June 24, 1921, he asked for a Russian translation of Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology of Mind* . . . Lenin not only read but wrote on the question and philosophy. Nine-tenths of the remarks on Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period* concern the question of method."

but the horrid emergence of imperialism from the latest capitalist development led Luxemburg to question "what" Engels "made out of" the manuscripts Marx had left for Vols. II and III of *Capital*, especially Vol. II. In any case, the debates over her greatest theoretical work, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) — whether it was, as she claimed, a "supplement," or a revision — were still on when the greatest of all shockers befell Marxist revolutionaries: the betrayal of the German Social Democracy at the outbreak of World War I.

Under the circumstances, Lenin (who had made an outline of his critique of Luxemburg's work which he considered a new version of underconsumptionism not unlike the Narodniki³) changed his mind. Instead, he embarked on something totally new, and totally apart from what all other Marxist revolutionaries who had not betrayed were doing. Lenin, at one and the same time, along with taking the most extreme anti-war position, calling for the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war, plunged into the study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Oh, yes, *Capital* was still the theoretic determinant, but Lenin was not arguing on the basis of what he or any other Marxist had written about it. Instead, Lenin proceeded to probe Marx's own roots in the Hegelian dialectic.

No doubt, his colleagues, had they known what he was doing in the Bern library when the world was, literally, going to pieces, would have thought it a strange sight to see him poring over Hegel's *Science of Logic* and concluding all Marxists (himself included, obviously) had not "completely" understood Marx's *Capital*, "especially its first chapter," since "it is impossible" to do so "without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's *Logic*" (p. 180). Later Lenin hit out especially hard against "the father of Marxism" in Russia, so recognized by all, especially Lenin, as *the* greatest Marxist philosopher:

"Plekhanov wrote on philosophy (dialectics) probably about 1,000 pages . . . Among them, *about* the larger *Logic*, in connection with it, its thought (i.e., *dialectics proper*, as philosophical science) nil!!" (p. 277)

Long before Lenin had reached the end of the *Science of Logic*, he experienced a shock, *not* of betrayal, as with the German Social Democrats and with Plekhanov, *but of recognition*. Here is how Lenin first expressed his elation:

³ *Leninski Sbornik*, Vol. 22 (Russian only) contains his outline of the article he intended to write. See following text, p. 105, for further detail. "The Theoretic Mistakes of the Narodniki" was, originally, Chapter I of Lenin's first major work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. (Since that chapter had been left out of the English edition, I translated it during my debates on state-capitalism. See *New International*, October, November and December, 1943.)

“Movement and ‘self-movement’ (this NB!) . . . who would believe this is the core of ‘Hegelianism,’ of abstract and abstruse (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism?? . . . The idea of universal movement and change (1813 *Logic*) was conjectured before its application to life and society. In regard to society it was proclaimed earlier (1847) [*Communist Manifesto*] than it was demonstrated in application to man (1859) [*Origin of Species*].” (p. 141)

From then on, Lenin began to work out the integrality of philosophy and Marx’s economic categories. Thus: “Hegel’s analysis of syllogisms—U(niversal), P(articular), I(ndividual) — recalls Marx’s imitation of Hegel in Chapter I [of *Capital*]” (p. 178). As we see, it was not just a question any longer of contrasting Essence vs. Appearance, which all Marxists had been ready to accept, along with “the materialist conception of history” as signifying economic structure as basic vs. ideological superstructure, or production as more fundamental than the market. No, by then Lenin was in the “idealist” Doctrine of the Notion.

Indeed, Lenin was to stop longest in the final chapter, “The Absolute Idea,” precisely because he had worked out so new a relationship of ideal to real that he could write: “Alias: Man’s consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it” (p. 212). Which didn’t mean that Lenin went up into the wild blue yonder. Quite the contrary. Every writing he then embarked on became the theoretic preparation for proletarian revolution. His philosophic break became the Great Divide in Marxism.

He no sooner finished reading the *Science of Logic* than on January 5, 1915, he addressed a letter to *Encyclopaedia Granat*, for which he had written the essay, “Karl Marx.” He was trying to recall it in order to make “certain corrections in the section on dialectics . . . I have been studying this question of dialectics for the last month and a half and I could add something to it if there was time . . .” Evidently there was no time — or at least the bourgeois *Granat* found no time — to allow Lenin to make his correction. Lenin then decided that he no longer could accept any other Marxist’s analysis of imperialism, although he had just a few months earlier favorably introduced Bukharin’s study of imperialism and the world economy.

CONTRAST THIS history to Tony Cliff’s listings. His chronology does list: “23 August/5 September: Lenin arrives in Berne (Switzerland)” — and then proceeds to mention that Lenin presented his thesis on war to a Bolshevik conference. But neither there, nor in the whole 411 pages of text, Notes and Index of his second volume of the three-volume study of Lenin does Tony Cliff utter a single word that

Lenin repaired to the library to study Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and that Lenin’s “Abstract of Hegel’s *Logic*” took from September to Dec. 17, 1914, to complete ⁴ — after which followed 1915 and more “On Dialectics,” and everything from *Imperialism* to *Marxism and the State*, the first version of *State and Revolution*.

Tony Cliff’s *Lenin* is a most curious compilation. Though subtitled “All Power to the Soviets,” and although it follows the first volume which already had centered on “Building The Party” (and is so subtitled), it is that same vanguardist theme that permeates Vol. Two as well. Indeed, the Foreword explains that the reason for the book, when Trotsky’s monumental *History of the Russian Revolution* had already covered that period so magnificently, is the latter’s “serious defect”: “The one thing noticeably missing is the Bolshevik Party: its rank and file, its cadres, its local committees, its Central Committee” (p. ix).

So weighted down is Tony Cliff with the concept of the vanguard party to lead and the “calibre of leadership,” that he does not deign so much as to mention the philosophic break Lenin experienced at the shock of the simultaneity of the outbreak of World War I and the collapse of the Second International, and that all his political battles, not only with the Social Democrats who betrayed but with his Bolshevik co-leaders who didn’t betray, were grounded in his new concept of dialectics.

A Marxist economist like Tony Cliff is so little concerned with Hegelian dialectics 62 years after Lenin’s break that he fails to see the relevance of Lenin’s study of Hegelian dialectics either to Marx’s “economic” works or to Lenin’s *Imperialism*. The miniscule Chapter 4, of five pages, Tony Cliff devotes to the question, with the excuse that he will deal with it in his third volume “which will deal with the Communist International.” He will then develop *his* theory (his, not *Lenin’s*, analysis of imperialism). He, of course, has a perfect right to his own views of imperialism. But that cannot be used as ground for not facing Lenin’s theory at the time *when*, and the manner in which Lenin developed it. He only thereby proves that eclecticism, bereft of methodology, cannot appreciate methodology in others, in Lenin especially, *because* his own so totally deviates from that revolutionary vision which is in-

⁴ In Vol. One, (*Lenin: Building The Party*, 1975), Cliff does have one single reference (p. 291) to “dialectically terse and lively *Philosophic Notebooks*” at the point where he criticizes *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. One would have thought that, even if Cliff had no time for concretizing his terse single statement on the *Notebooks*, his preoccupation with the Party should have led him to see that, Stalinist detractors notwithstanding, Lenin himself had not a word on “party-ness of philosophy.” Instead, Cliff’s point is that it was supposedly only “in the period of reaction after the revolution” that “Marxist philosophy inevitably came to the fore” (Vol. One, p. 289). No wonder he could not see the *Notebooks* as Lenin’s philosophic preparation for revolution.

separable from the concept of revolutionary Subject (the proletariat) as both force and Reason.

The ground for this reductionist attitude to Lenin as theoretician was, in fact, laid in Tony Cliff's first volume, where Cliff writes: "It was hardly an exaggeration for the Bolshevik historian M. N. Pokrovsky to write, 'You will not find in Lenin a single purely theoretical work; each has a propaganda aspect.'"⁵ Whatever it was the "Bolshevik"⁶ meant by "purely theoretical," it is clear that what Tony Cliff thinks of as "pure theory" is "pure economics."

Thus, when he does deign to praise Lenin, he condescendingly stresses that Lenin's writing a "popular pamphlet does not mean that he did not work hard on it." and then points to the fact that, as against the "booklet" *Imperialism*, the *Notebooks on Imperialism* are "a massive 739 pages," stressing especially that Lenin "read and annotated 148 books and 232 articles" (p. 59). For Tony Cliff, the unfortunate part here is that, very obviously, he has *not*⁷ read those 739 pages. Had he read them⁸, he would have seen that, from the start, Lenin was by no means only out for data, though that is massive, but had read philosophic works, from Lange's *History of Materialism* to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.

Whether Lenin had made as copious notes of the *Phenomenology* as of the *Science of Logic* we cannot know, as the Moscow Institute did not bother to inform us whether Lenin made them and they were lost, or he never annotated it. But there is no doubt that he had read it, and there is no doubt that the "phenomenon" of imperialism, and the "attitude" to it, owes much to the work. (Incidentally, Lenin had also made careful note, in his "Abstract of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," of the references Hegel himself made to his *Phenomenology*, which Hegel originally conceived as the "Introduction" to *Logic*.)

Tony Cliff remains unmoved, deaf to the integrality of philosophy in Marx's or Lenin's economic works. He is so preoccupied with "the breadth of analysis of Luxemburg or Hilferding," not to mention Buk-

5 Cliff, *Lenin*, Vol. One, p. 256.

6 Outside of the fact that, having belonged before World War I to Trotsky's Mezhrayontsy (Interdistrict) organization and afterward, becoming a complete Stalinist, Pokrovsky wasn't exactly an "Old Bolshevik" in the traditional sense, he does fit Lenin's reason for not attributing "significance to the desire to hold on to the word 'Bolshevism,' for I know some 'old Bolsheviks' from whom may God preserve me." ("The Nascent Tendency of 'Imperialist Economism'" was Lenin's reply to Bukharin. This thesis, along with Bukharin's, Trotsky's and all tendencies within the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, etc. is included in *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, by Olga Hess Gankin and H. H. Fisher (Stanford University, California, 1940), which remains the best compilation of documents for that period.

7 Cliff's reference is not to the *Notebooks on Imperialism*, but to a May, 1959 article by L. G. Churchwood in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*.

8 *Notebooks on Imperialism* (Russian edition), Moscow, 1939, p. 3.

harin, that he brings out this further "proof" of Lenin's failure of a theoretical grasp — "the realization of surplus value, which for Rosa Luxemburg became so central, [is] not even mentioned in Lenin's booklet," and that, my dear readers, Tony Cliff assures us, "is not accidental" (p. 60).

Now it is hard to believe that the erudite Tony Cliff, who is penning a three-volume study of Lenin, has not bothered to acquaint himself with what Lenin thought of Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*. He has left himself the loophole of revealing all in the as-yet-unpublished Vol. Three of *Lenin*. But he would first then again violate the historic chronology. In any case, let me help him find it. In *Leninski Sbornik*, Vol. 22, pp. 343-348, Lenin commented on Luxemburg's work soon after it was published in 1913⁹. He outlines what he intends to write in his critique:

"ROSA LUXEMBURG'S UNSUCCESSFUL SUPPLEMENT TO MARXIST THEORY

For example:

- I. 14 years ago. The Narodniks against the Marxists. Legal Marxists and Social Democrats.
- II. R. Luxemburg's Perversion.
- III. Posing of the theoretical problem.
- IV. Rosa Luxemburg's ("supplement"). Criticism. Anti-criticism.
- V. Rosa Luxemburg's "supplement." A failure.
- VI. Dialectics and eclectics.
- VII. Imperialism and realization of surplus value. (Rothstein, etc.)"

Lenin's *Essay on Karl Marx* is, of course, also a "popular pamphlet," so it may not have interested Tony Cliff, but there, too, Lenin lists Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* in his bibliography of Marxist works as "an incorrect interpretation of Marxist theory." And if Tony Cliff insists on "purely theoretical" works, then do please let him read Lenin's "Theoretic Mistakes of the Narodniki," not to mention *Imperialism*. Yes, *Imperialism*.

Instead, Cliff leads up to Chapter 4 by telling us (in the chapter on the National Question) that "many of the leading comrades in Russia did not understand why Lenin was so vehement in his opposition to Bukharin" (p. 56 footnote), and in the very chapter on *Imperialism*, skips to Lenin's *Will* (12/23-24/1922) to quote Lenin on Bukharin as

9 I have reproduced more of Lenin's Commentary from *Sbornik*, Vol. 22, in my debates on Luxemburg in *New International*, March, 1943. My 1944 critique of Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* was reproduced on the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Capital*, as Appendix to my *State-Capitalism and Marx's Humanism* (News & Letters, 1967).

the "biggest theoretician," without so much as mentioning that a "but" follows:

"but his [Bukharin's] theoretical views can only with the very greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxian, for there is something scholastic in him. (He has never learned, and I think never fully understood, the dialectic.)"

WHAT IS THIS dialectic that made Lenin say — and not just in a polemical way, but in his *Will* — that his Bolshevik co-leader, Bukharin, who had never betrayed, who was always a revolutionary, who was, in fact, "the favorite of the whole party" and a "major theoretician," was "not fully a Marxist" because he had "never fully understood the dialectic"? The very work that Tony Cliff considers so theoretically superior to Lenin's popularization was the one that Lenin had first introduced favorably, but after grappling with Hegel's dialectic, found so non-dialectical that he undertook his own study. Lenin reiterated his departure from Bukharin's "economism" also after conquest of power, when Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period*¹⁰ once again demonstrated a lack of "dialectics," that is to say, disregard of the proletariat as Reason, as Subject.

Secondly, and foremost, Lenin found Bukharin's opposition to self-determination not just bereft of the "dialectic of history," but so total an impediment to working with new national revolutionary forces, such as the Irish revolutionaries, that he designated Bukharin's position as nothing short of "imperialist economism"! Again Lenin had to repeat his opposition to Bukharin's stand against self-determination after conquest of power, both in his debates on the new Program of the Party, and on the International.

Tony Cliff's singular empiricism — like all empiricism, bereft of all methodology — is beyond comprehending Lenin's theory — theory, not just a "popular outline." By leaving out Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks*, Cliff not only skips over "philosophy," but the dialectics of liberation as self-developing Subject, that is to say, the actual masses in revolt. Thus, by no accident whatever, in the chapter on the "National Question," on which Cliff is supposed to agree with Lenin, not Bukharin, he has not a word to say about the Irish Revolution. Whether or not that, too, has been left by Tony Cliff for "Volume Three," it nevertheless was the concrete "topic" under discussion. What was decisive then were live revolutionaries. Their appearance on the historic stage had sharpened to a fever pitch all the tendencies fighting Lenin's *theoretic* position.

¹⁰ The English translation of Bukharin's *Economics of the Transition Period* (Bergman Publishers, N.Y., 1971) includes Lenin's Critical Remarks of the work.

Tony Cliff chooses to begin the discussion on the National Question with the position of the Austrian Socialists in the 19th century, but it was not that debate, nor even Poland, 1912, when the National Question was still debated just as "principle," nor the Bund, that was at issue during World War I. Though Cliff still keeps away from referring to the Easter Rebellion, he is finally forced to quote Lenin:

"The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene."

But meanwhile they hadn't; 1917 was still to be. And when it did come, it was preceded by Lenin's *State and Revolution* that was first begun in those same critical years, 1914-16, when Lenin was grappling with Hegelian dialectics as philosophy, as politics, as economics, as self-developing Subject. "The dialectics proper" — Lenin's phrase — had to be shown as "the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge" (p. 363).

Having eliminated this from his study of Lenin, it is no wonder that Tony Cliff reached the climax of his comprehension — I mean *non-comprehension* — of Lenin by singling out Lenin's "uncanny intuition. In a period of great changes, the number of unknown factors, not only in the enemy camp, but also in our own, is so great that sober analysis alone will not suffice. An unsurpassed ability to detect the mood of the masses was Lenin's most important gift." This reductionism, we must remember, is not something said only in Chapter 4 devoted to "Imperialism," or on any other single subject, but in the very last chapter, "Lenin Calls Up the Insurrection," on the penultimate page.

Cliff doesn't get any less arrogant as he moves from Chapter 4 to attributing "uncanny intuition" to Lenin in Chapter 19, praising "strategy" on the ultimate page of his work, where he writes: "The crucible of October furnished the supreme test of his [Lenin's] strategy and of the calibre of his leadership of the party and the class" (p. 379).

IT IS OF LITTLE matter whether Tony Cliff ever frees himself from the unbridgeable gulf he has dug between theory and practice, economics and politics, philosophy and revolution, as well as between leadership and ranks, and whether he will finally (i.e., in the last volume) attribute "theory" to Lenin's new universal that the population "to a man, woman and child" either controls production and the state, or we return "back to capitalism." Lenin's admonition to the party, that socialism cannot, *can not*, "be introduced by a minority, a party," will stand:

"Every citizen to a man must act as a judge and participate in the government of the country, and what is most important to us is to enlist all the toilers to a man in the government of the state. That is a tremendously difficult task but socialism cannot be introduced by a minority, a party."¹¹

What does matter is that these points of departure in theory and practice have not become ground for working out what is urgent for our age, not only on the integrality of philosophy in economics, but in the relationship of spontaneity to organization. Elsewhere¹² I have shown that, though too many who consider themselves Marxists are forever clinging to the Party, Party, Party — as if Lenin had clung to the 1902 Social Democratic vanguard party concept unchanged — Lenin had actually changed his views many times. What is crucial here is what has happened in our age.

Lenin's break with his philosophic past began with Marx's *Capital* in hand, came to fruition the same way in the greatest proletarian revolution, and ended in the same way as he hit out against Bukharin's "economism" and lack of dialectics. Very obviously, Marx's *Capital's* adventures haven't ended yet, and no doubt will not end until we actually have achieved classless society on truly human foundations. But isn't it high time, 53 years after Lenin's death and all the aborted and incomplete revolutions since, that we at least rediscovered what Lenin had learned about the relationship of dialectics to economics, politics, revolution — in a word, dialectics of thought and dialectics of liberation? Irrespective of the correctness or "incorrectness" of what the position on any single issue was, or what later data occurred, shouldn't revolutionary Marxists instead be preoccupied with whether we are headed in the direction Marx thought was the goal — "the development of human power which is its own end, the true realm of freedom . . ." ¹³

¹¹ Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. VIII, p. 320. What is crucial also is Vol. IX, especially Lenin's debates with Bukharin and Trotsky on the Trade Unions.

¹² For the period 1903-1923, see *Marxism and Freedom*, Ch. XI, "Forms of Organization: The Relationship of the Spontaneous Self-Organization of the Proletariat to the 'Vanguard Party'" and Ch. XII, "What Happens After." For the latest on the whole question of spontaneity and *apartidarismo* (anti-partyism), the Portuguese Revolution is most important. See *Portugal: Key Documents of the Revolutionary Process* which reproduces many documents and manifestoes of the Portuguese Revolution (People's Translation Service, 1735 Allston Way, Berkeley, Cal. 94703). See also my analysis "Will the Revolution in Portugal Advance?" (*News & Letters*, Jan.-Feb., 1976) and Perspectives 1977-78, "It's Later, Always Later — except when spontaneity upsurges and you realize it is here and now, and you aren't there and ready," published by News & Letters.

¹³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 954.