

On Socialist Ideology and Culture
By VI Lenin
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The Marxists doctrine is omnipotent because it is true. It is comprehensive and harmonious and provides men with an integral world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defence of bourgeois oppression. p8

... various forms of philosophical idealism, which always, in one way or another, amounts to the defence or support of religion. p8

We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. p16

No economic struggle can bring the workers any lasting improvement, or can even be conducted on a large scale, unless the workers have the right freely to organise meetings and unions, to have their own newspapers, and to send their representatives to the national assemblies. p17

... all belittling of the role of 'the conscious element', means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers. p20

... the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology. p22

The sentence ... that the efforts of the most inspired ideologists fail to divert the working-class movement from the path that is determined by the interaction of the material elements and the material environment is therefore tantamount to renouncing socialism. p23

... he diverted that movement from the path of progressionist trade-unionism. p23

Social democratic ideology was able to achieve this superiority, and will be able to maintain it, only in an unswerving struggle against all other ideologies. But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination. And the younger the socialist movement in any given country, the more vigorous it must struggle against all attempts to entrench non-socialist ideology, and the more resolutely the workers must be warned against the bad counsellors who shout against 'overrating the conscious element', etc. The authors of the economist letter ... inveigh against the intolerance that is characteristic of the infancy of the movement. To this we reply: yes, our movement is indeed in its infancy, and in order that it may grow up faster, it must become imbued with intolerance against those who retard its growth by their subservience to spontaneity. Nothing is so ridiculous and harmful as pretending that we are 'old hands' who have long ago experienced all the decisive stages of the struggle. p24/5

While Tsarism is no longer strong enough to defeat the revolution, the revolution is not yet strong enough to defeat Tsarism. p27

Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great social democrat mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard

of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated social democratic party work. p27/8

We want to establish, and we shall establish, a free press, free not simply from the police, but also from capital, from careerism, and what is more, free from bourgeois-anarchist individualism. p29

The Party is a voluntary association, which would inevitably break up, first ideologically and then physically, if it did not cleanse itself of people advocating anti-party views. p29/30

It will be free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored 'upper ten thousand' suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people - the flower of the country, its strength and its future. It will be a free literature, enriching the last word in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and living work of the socialist proletariat, bringing about permanent interaction between the experience of the past (scientific socialism, the completion of the development of socialism from its primitive, utopian forms) and the experience of the present (the present struggle of the worker comrades). p31

Reports on the activities of social democrats in non-party unions and councils, lectures on the conditions and aims of such activities, resolutions of party organisations of all types about these activities, should become a regular practice in a workers' party. Only by such real participation of the party as a whole, by participation in the direction of such activities, can we contrast in practice truly socialist work with general democratic work. p40/1

In the sphere of politics, revisionism did really try to revise the foundation of Marxism, namely, the doctrine of the class struggle. p53

By helping to enlighten and to organise immeasurably wider masses of the population than those which previously took an active part in political events, parliamentarism does not make for the elimination of crises and political revolutions, but for the maximum intensification of civil war during such revolutions. The events in Paris in the spring of 1871 and the events in Russia in the winter of 1905 showed as clearly as could be how inevitably this intensification comes about. The French bourgeoisie without a moment's hesitation made a deal with the enemy of the whole nation, with the foreign army which had ruined its country, in order to crush the proletarian movement. Whoever does not understand the inevitable inner dialectics of parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy - which leads to an even sharper decision of the argument by mass violence than formerly - will never be able on the basis of this parliamentarism to conduct propaganda and agitation consistent in principle, really preparing the working class masses for victorious participation in such 'arguments'. p54/5

The inevitability of revisionism is determined by its class roots in modern society. Revisionism is an international phenomenon. p55

The fight against the official church was combined with the preaching of a new, purified religion, that is to say, of a new refined, subtle poison for the oppressed masses. p70

It will be reminded of this exploit when the hour comes for the people to settle accounts with the officials in cassocks, the gendarmes in Christ, the sinister inquisitors who supported anti-Jewish pogroms and other exploits of the Black Hundred Tsarist gang. p71

Our doctrine - said Engels, referring to himself and his famous friend - is not a dogma, but a guide

to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless; we deprive it of its blood; we undermine its theoretical foundations - dialectics, the doctrine of historical development, all-embracing and full of contradictions; we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of history. p74

Tolstoy's doctrine is certainly utopian and in content is reactionary in the most precise and most profound sense of the word. But that certainty does not mean that the doctrine was not socialistic or that it did not contain critical elements capable of providing valuable material for the enlightenment of the advanced classes. p83

Nobody is to be blamed for being born a slave; but a slave who not only eschews a striving for freedom but justifies and eulogises his slavery (e.g., calls the throttling of Poland and the Ukraine, etc., a 'defence of the fatherland' of the great Russians) - such a slave is a lickspittle and a boor, who arouses a legitimate feeling of indignation, contempt and loathing. p87

No one can seriously think it possible to organise the majority of the proletariat under capitalism. p105

One of the chief conditions for the socialist revolution's victory is that the working class must realise it has to rule and that its rule should be carried through during the transition period from capitalism to socialism. The rule of the proletariat, the vanguard of all the working and exploited people, is essential in this transition period if classes are to be completely abolished, if the resistance of the exploiters is to be suppressed, and if the entire mass of the working and exploited people - crushed, downtrodden and disunited by capitalism - are to be united around the urban workers and brought in close alliance with them.

All our successes have been due to the workers grasping this and governing the state through their soviets.

But the workers have not yet grasped this sufficiently and are often too timid in promoting workers to governing the state.

Fight for this, comrades! Let the proletarian cultural and educational organisations help in this. That will be a pledge of further success and the final victory of the socialist revolution. p107

The congress demands that everyone engaged in a given trade, in a given sphere of activity, should join a single trade union. At the same time it declares that the trade union movement cannot hold aloof from the fundamental tasks of the struggle for the emancipation of capital. And, consequently, only those unions which recognise the revolutionary class struggle for socialism by the dictatorship of the proletariat can be full and equal members of the trade unions. Your union is a union of this kind. If you stand by that position, you will be sure of success in winning over the greater bulk of the teachers and in working to make knowledge and science no longer something for the privileged, no longer a medium for reinforcing the position of the rich and exploiters, but a weapon for the emancipation of the working and exploited people. Allow me to wish you every success in this endeavour. p111

In this connection, the communist subbotniks organised by the workers on their own initiative are really of enormous significance. Evidently, this is only a beginning, but it is a beginning of exceptionally great importance. It is the beginning of a revolution that is more difficult, more tangible, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism. Only when this victory is consolidated will the new social discipline, socialist discipline, be created; then and only then will a reversion to

capitalism become impossible, will communism become really invincible. p112

... the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only the use of force against the exploiters, and not even mainly the use of force. The economic foundation of this use of revolutionary force, the guarantee of its effectiveness and success is the fact that the proletariat represents and creates a higher type of social organisation of labour compared with capitalism. This is what is important, this is the source of the strength and the guarantee that the final triumph of communism is inevitable. p121

The communist organisation of social labour, the first step towards which is socialism, rests, and will do so more and more as time goes on, on the free and conscious discipline of the working people themselves who have thrown off the yoke both of the landowners and capitalists. p121/2

Only a definite class, namely, the urban workers and the factory, industrial workers in general, is able to lead the whole mass of the working and exploited people in the struggle to throw off the yoke of capital, in actually carrying it out, in the struggle to maintain and consolidate the victory, in the work of creating the new, socialist social system and in the entire struggle for the complete abolition of classes. p122

... we also know that for some time after the revolution traces of the old ethics will inevitably predominate over the young shoots of the new. When the new has just been born the old always remains stronger than it for some time; this is always the case in nature and in social life. p128

In the last analysis, productivity of labour is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new social system. p129

Communism begins when the rank and file workers display an enthusiastic concern that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labour. p130

All educational work ... should be imbued with the spirit of the class struggle being waged by the proletariat for the successful achievement of the aims of the dictatorship. ... the communist party ... should display the utmost activity and play the leading part in all the work of public education. ... the Marxist world outlook is the only true expression of the interests, the viewpoint, and the on socialist ideology and culture of the revolutionary proletariat. Marxism has ... assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and on socialist ideology and culture. Only further work on this basis ... can be recognised as the development of a genuine proletarian on socialist ideology and culture. Under the People's Commissariat of education. p157/8

... we cannot conduct educational work in isolation from politics. p161

The transition from bourgeois society to the policy of the proletariat is a very difficult one, all the more so for the bourgeoisie incessantly slandering us through its entire apparatus of propaganda and agitation. It bends every effort to play down an even more important mission of the dictatorship of the proletariat, its educational mission, which is particularly important in Russia, where the proletariat constitutes a minority of the population. Yet in Russia this mission must be given priority, for we must prepare the masses to build up socialism. The dictatorship of the proletariat would have been out of the question if, in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat had not developed a keen class-consciousness, strict discipline and profound devotion, in other words, all the qualities required to assure the proletariat's complete victory over its old enemy.

We do not hold the utopian view that the working masses are ready for a socialist society. From the precise facts provided by the entire history of working-class socialism we know that this is not the case, and that preparedness for socialism is created only by large scale industry, by the strike

struggle and by political organisation. To win victory and accomplish the socialist revolution, the proletariat must be capable of concerted action, of overthrowing the exploiters. p161/2

Only by acquiring the sum total of knowledge that the teachers have inherited from the bourgeoisie. without this the technical achievements of communism will be impossible, and all hopes for those achievements would be pipe dreams. p166

It should be said that the hundreds of thousands of teachers constitute a body that must get the work moving, stimulate thought, and combat the prejudices that to this day still persist among the masses. the heritage of capitalist on socialist ideology and culture, the fact that the mass of the teachers are imbued with its defects, which prevent them from being communists, should not deter us from admitting these teachers into the ranks of the political education workers, for these teachers possess the knowledge without which we cannot achieve our aim. p167

It is the duty of our educational workers to accomplish the re-education of the masses. p168

... politics should be the business of the people, the business of the proletariat. p168

All propaganda for communism must be conducted in a way that will amount to practical guidance of the state's development. Communism must be made comprehensible to the masses of the workers so that they will regard it as their own cause. p170

We must re-educate the masses; they can be re-educated only by agitation and propaganda. the masses must be brought, in the first place, into the work of building the entire economic life. That must be the principal and basic object in the work of each agitator and propagandist, and when he realises this, the success of his work will be assured. p170

I think that this alliance of communists and non-communists is absolutely essential and correctly defines the purposes of the journal. One of the biggest and most dangerous mistakes made by communists (as generally by revolutionaries who have successfully accomplished the beginning of the great revolution) is the idea that a revolution can be made by revolutionaries alone. On the contrary, to be successful all serious revolutionary work requires that the idea that revolutionaries are capable of playing the part only of the vanguard of the truly virile and advanced class must be understood and translated into action. A vanguard performs its task as vanguard only when it is able to avoid being isolated from the mass of the people it leads and is able really to lead the whole mass forward. Without an alliance with non-communists in the most diverse spheres of activity there can be no question of any successful communist construction. p171

It will be seen from the above that a journal that sets out to be a militant materialist organ must be primarily a militant organ, in the sense of unflinchingly exposing and indicting all modern 'graduated flunkies of clericalism', irrespective of whether they act as representatives of official science or as free lances calling themselves 'democratic left or ideological socialist' publicists. in the second place, such a journal must be a militant atheist organ. p173

These masses should be supplied with the most varied atheist propaganda material, they should be made familiar with facts from the most diverse spheres of life, they should be approached in every possible way, so as to interest them, rouse them from their religious torpor, stir them from the most varied angles and by the most varied methods, and so forth. p174

... that so-called modern democracy ... is nothing but the freedom to preach whatever is to the advantage of the bourgeoisie, to preach, namely, the most reactionary ideas, religion, obscurantism, defence of the exploiters, etc. p176

... no natural science and no materialism can hold its own in the struggle against the onslaught of bourgeois ideas and the restoration of the bourgeois world outlook unless it stands on solid philosophical ground. p177

But only he who never does anything never makes mistakes. p178

The only difference between Russia and other countries in this respect is that our laws do not sanctify hypocrisy and the debasement of the women and her child, but openly and in the name of the government declare systematic war on all hypocrisy and all debasement. p180/1

The working class of Russia proved able to win power; but it has not yet learned to utilise it, for otherwise it would have long ago very politely dispatched such teachers and members of learned societies to countries with a bourgeois 'democracy'. That is the proper place for such feudalists. but it will learn, given the will to learn. p181

... we shall have to cut down the expenditure of government departments other than the people's commissariat of education, and the sums thus released should be assigned for the latter's needs. p183

We are not doing anything - or doing far from enough - to raise the schoolteacher to the level that is absolutely essential if we want any on socialist ideology and culture at all, proletarian or even bourgeois. p183

Here we have a fundamental political question - the relations between town and country - which is of decisive importance for the whole of our revolution. While the bourgeois state methodically concentrates all its efforts on doping the urban workers, adapting all the literature published at state expense and at the expense of the tsarist and bourgeois parties for this purpose, we can and must utilise our political power to make the urban worker an effective vehicle of communist ideas among the rural proletariat.

I said 'communist', but I hasten to make a reservation for fear of causing a misunderstanding, or of being taken too literally. Under no circumstances must this be understood to mean that we should immediately propagate purely and strictly communist ideas in the countryside. As long as our countryside lacks the material basis for communism, it will be, I should say, harmful. In fact, I should say, fatal, for communism to do so.

That is a fact. We must start by establishing contacts between town and country without the preconceived aim of implanting communism in the rural districts. It is an aim which cannot be achieved at the present time. It is inopportune, and to set an aim like that at the present time would be harmful, instead of useful, to the cause. p186

With most of the population organised in co-operatives, the socialism which in the past was legitimately treated with ridicule, scorn and contempt by those who were rightly convinced that it was necessary to wage the class struggle, the struggle for political power. etc., will achieve its aim automatically. p188

All we actually need under NEP is to organise the population of Russia in co-operative societies on a sufficiently large scale, for we have now found that degree of combination of private interest, of private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of subordination to the common interests which was formerly the stumbling block for many socialists. indeed, the power of the state over all large scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry. etc., - is this not all that is necessary to

build a complete socialist society out of co-operatives, out of co-operatives alone, which we formerly ridiculed as huckstering and which from a certain aspect we have the right to treat as such now, under NEP? Is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society? It is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it. p189

Co-operation must be politically so organised that it will not only generally and always enjoy certain privileges, but that these privileges should be of a purely material nature (a favourable bank-rate etc.) The co-operatives must be granted state loans that are greater, if only by a little, than the loans we grant to private enterprises, even to heavy industry, etc. p190

A social system emerges only if it has the financial backing of a definite class. ... at present we have to realise that the co-operative system is the social system we must now give more than ordinary assistance, and we must actually give that assistance. But it must be assistance in the real sense of the word. ... by assistance we mean aid to co-operative trade in which really large masses of the population actually take part. ... The whole point is to verify the nature of this participation, to verify the awareness behind it, and to verify its quality. p190

Strictly speaking, there is 'only' one thing we have left to do and that is to make our people so 'enlightened' that they understand all the advantages of everybody participating in the work of the co-operatives, and organise this participation. 'Only' that. ... The entire people must go through a period of cultural development. p191

Nevertheless, it will be a distinct historical epoch, and without this historical epoch, without universal literacy, without a proper degree of efficiency, without training the population sufficiently to acquire the habit of book reading, and without the material basis for this, without a certain sufficiency to safeguard against, say, bad harvests, famine, etc. - without this we shall not achieve our object. p191

... a number of economic, financial and banking privileges must be granted to the co-operatives - this is the way our socialist state must promote the new principle on which the populations must be organised. but this is only the general outline of the task; it does not define and depict in detail the entire content of the practical task, i.e., we must find what form of 'bonus' to give for joining the co-operatives (and the terms on which we should give it), the form of bonus by which we shall assist the co-operatives sufficiently, the form of bonus that will produce the civilised co-operator. and given social ownership of the means of production, given the class victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, the system of civilised co-operators is the system of socialism. p192

In the capitalist state, co-operatives are no doubt collective capitalist institutions. Nor is there any doubt that under our present economic conditions, when we combine private capitalist enterprises - but in no other way than on nationalised land and in no other way than under the control of the working class state - with enterprises of a consistently socialist type (the means of production, the land on which the enterprises are situated, and the enterprises as a whole belonging to the state), the question arises about a third type of enterprise, the co-operatives, which were not formerly regarded as an independent type differing fundamentally from the others. Under private capitalism, co-operative enterprises differ from capitalist enterprises as collective enterprises differ from capitalist enterprises. Under state capitalism, co-operative enterprises differ from state capitalist enterprises, firstly, because they are private enterprises, and, secondly, because they are collective enterprises. under our present system, co-operative enterprises differ from private capitalist enterprises because they are collective enterprises, but do not differ from socialist enterprises if the land on which they are situated and the means of production belong to the state, i.e., the working class. p193

... for socialism cannot be established without a class struggle for political power in the state.

p194

If the whole of the peasantry had been organised in co-operatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism. But the organisation of the entire peasantry in co-operative societies presupposes a standard of on socialist ideology and culture among the peasants (precisely among the peasants as the overwhelming mass) that cannot, in fact, be achieved without a cultural revolution. p195

This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base). p195

... what about a people that found itself in a revolutionary situation such as that created during the first imperialist war? Might it not, influenced by the hopelessness of its situation, fling itself into a struggle that would offer it at least some chance of securing conditions for the further development of civilisation that were somewhat unusual? p198

If a definite level of on socialist ideology and culture is required for the building of socialism, ... why cannot we begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of on socialist ideology and culture in a revolutionary way, and then, with the aid of the workers' and peasants' government and the soviet system, proceed to overtake the other nations? p199

Our European philistines never even dream that the subsequent revolutions in oriental countries, which possess much vaster populations and a much vaster diversity of social conditions, will undoubtedly display even greater distinctions than the Russian revolution. p199