

# LENIN'S IDEAS AND THE FUTURE OF SOCIALISM

The views of Soviet  
and Western  
historians and  
philosophers

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This brochure contains an account of a round-table conference of Soviet and Western historians and philosophers held at the Novosti Press Agency on the eve of Vladimir Lenin's 120th anniversary.

The materials of the round-table discussion are presented here in an abridged form; the translation into English was done from the Russian-language shorthand record.

***“Lenin’s Ideas and the Future of Socialism” was the topic of a round-table conference of social scientists from the Soviet Union, the United States, West Germany, France and Britain. The conference took place at the Novosti Press Agency within the framework of the Moscow International Conference of Historians, who came together to discuss the problems of Russia and the USSR in the 20th century.***

ИДЕИ ЛЕНИНА И БУДУЩЕЕ СОЦИАЛИЗМА

Серия "Пресс-конференции и брифинги"

на английском языке

Цена 15 к.

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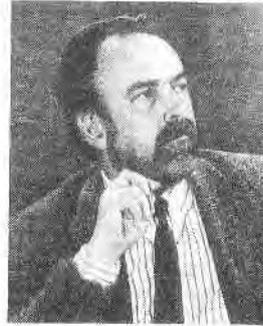
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Eduard ROSENAL



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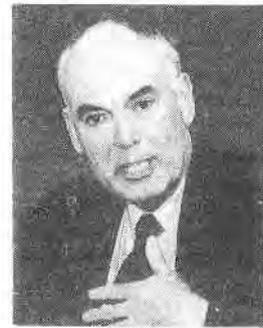
Yuri POLYAKOV



Vladimir NAUMOV



Alexander RABINOWITCH



Paul DUKES



Andrei SAKHAROV



Anatoly BUTENKO



The round-table discussion was opened by **Boris KOROLYOV**, Chief Editor of the Novosti International Department and member of the Novosti Management Board. He said:

"This round-table conference, organized by the Novosti Press Agency and the Institute of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences, is taking place within the framework of the Moscow International Conference of Historians who have devoted themselves to the problems of the history of Russia and the USSR in the 20th century. It is held on the eve of the 120th anniversary of the birth of Vladimir Lenin, whose name is unseparable not only from the history of this country, but from world history as well. Apparently, we are here not to indulge in celebration, but to work, for the future path of socialism is the key problem of perestroika, of its strategy and tactics.

"Today I have come across the April issue of the *Der Spiegel* magazine with its cover featuring a photograph of a statue of Lenin, the head in a noose. That was Bucharest—they were pulling down the monument to Lenin, and the caption ran: "Communist Lenin accountable for the fall of the Soviet system". I do think that this round-table discussion will throw some light on whether *Der Spiegel* made its categorical statement in a rash moment, and will provide answers to many questions that not only stir people's minds on a global, national or pro-

fessional scale, but also touch upon the personal feelings of a great number of people both in the USSR and in many other countries.

"And now, please, allow me to give the floor to political analyst Eduard Rosental, the ad hoc Chairman of our meeting."

## **Eduard ROSENTAL**

"First I would like to introduce the participants in the meeting. The Western participants are:

"**Robert Tucker**, professor at Princeton University (USA), the author of a number of books about Stalin and Stalinism, including the one recently published in the Russian language in Moscow by Progress Publishers;

"**Dietrich Geyer**, Professor from the Federal Republic of Germany, who specializes in Russian history of the 18th-20th centuries. He is the author of the book *The History of the Russian Revolution and Russian Imperialism*;

"**Marc Ferro**, Professor and Director of the Institute of Soviet Problems and the Problems of Eastern and Central Europe (France);

"**Alexander Rabinowitch**, Professor of History at Indiana University (USA) and the author of the book *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: 1917 Revolution in Petrograd*, which has recently been published in the Russian language;

"**Paul Dukes**, Professor of History, University of Aberdeen (Scotland), and the author of the book *October and the World: Perspectives on the Russian Revolution* (London, 1979);

"**Geoffrey Hosking**, Professor from Britain, the author of *A History of the Soviet Union Since 1917* (London, 1985), the book that was put out in mass editions to become Britain's principal manual on the history of Soviet society.

"The Soviet participants are: Corresponding Members of the USSR Academy of Sciences **Pavel Volobuyev** and **Yuri Polyakov**, Doctors of Science **Vladimir Naumov**, **Andrei Sakharov** and **Anatoly Butenko**.

"So, there is a team of social scientists at this table today. Whatever personal feelings they may have towards Lenin or to Soviet history, all of them are noted for their historical vision of Lenin's legacy and of his time. Regret-

tably, this is something that is lacking in many of our media writers, who often use hand-picked quotations, or 'minutiae'—as Lenin would call it, to make very sweeping and far-reaching generalizations.

"Allow me a small digression. About ten years ago, I went with a friend of mine to see his son at a military school somewhere in the middle of Russia. As we approached the entrance gate, we saw the inscription on it which read: 'Death by firing squad for misconduct. Lenin'. Lenin said that in 1919, with only one-tenth of Russia's territory remaining under Soviet rule, and on a specific occasion. Unfortunately, some of our media writers in the same manner are still using this sort of quoting technique."

### **Pavel VOLOBUYEV**

"My colleague has just given us an example of how Lenin's words about the use of firing squads, say in 1919, are misquoted many years later. One, however, must bring himself to visualize the atmosphere of those times, the historians who are present here know how much this helps. Lenin could also be quoted as saying: We should be shot by a firing squad unless we do this or that. Such expressions can only be understood in the context of historical events taking place in 1919-1921. This means that every sharp, or even lashing statement of Lenin's should not be taken at its face value or as an order that was to be carried out immediately. I am telling you this as my commentary on the opening word.

"Now a few words to the point. We are certainly in a difficult position here. Although we have been commended on possessing an historical vision, we nonetheless still sin against the historical approach to Lenin and his legacy. Therefore, to have a clear understanding of Lenin and his views on socialism, as well as to provide an answer to the question under discussion, it would be necessary to remove two or maybe three layers of varnish from Lenin's image and put an end to the idolization of his person and to the attempts to make all his views a dogma.

"One has to keep in mind that Lenin changed and modified his own views on socialism many times. The fact that he initially adopted the socialist idea based on Marxist theory does not mean that he did this dogmatically. At

every turning point of history Lenin's image reveals, so to say, a new facet and his views on socialism become richer.

"I will dwell on that in broad general terms. Incidentally, before he wrote his *April Theses* in 1917, Lenin held the popular Marxist belief that Russia was not ripe for socialism either in the level of its productive forces, or in the competence of its proletariat. By that view, the only thing that could be expected of Russia was that a bourgeois-democratic revolution would trigger a pan-European socialist revolution, in which Russia would follow suit.

"Apparently, Lenin's views were heavily influenced by World War I, and when he returned to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917 the main ideas of the *April Theses* had already taken shape in his head.

"The *April Theses* was a breakthrough in the theory of socialism and a landmark in the evolution of Marxist thought. In the first place, Lenin abandoned the notion that was common among most socialists at that time, namely, that *socialism* and *Russia* were incompatible. The next thing he did in the *April Theses* was to set the task of Russia's gradual transition to socialism. Not an overnight introduction of socialism, as Russia was not ripe for that, particularly due to the absence of necessary prerequisites in the agrarian sector, but a gradual change-over to socialism through a number of transitional steps. What steps? The nationalization of all lands, the confiscation of land holdings and farming implements of landlords, the nationalization of large monopolized industrial sectors, the introduction of worker's inspections, and so forth.

"What reasons did Lenin give for these resolute, albeit gradual and well-thoughtout steps towards socialism? The drastically new situation brought about by the world war and the associated misfortunes that were particularly destructive for Russia: the economic crisis, devastation, hunger and as a result—the radicalization and revolutionization of the masses. In those circumstances, Lenin gives Russia a perspective of a socialist future. Later, we shall see that Lenin's choice was well-based and correct. In a series of works, written in the period between 1917 and January 1923, Lenin, I think, further revealed the profound purport of his *April Theses*.

"And this was that Russian capitalism had not coped

with the task of civilizing and modernizing the country. It had only made a few initial steps in that direction. There still remained the task of linking Russia to the modern industrialized world. Viewed from that angle, the October Revolution of 1917 appears as a specifically Russian way of attaining the heights of contemporary civilization. In his speeches and written works, Lenin would emphasize Russia's lack of civilization and urge it to become civilized. But how? By reshuffling the stages of normal historical development and, with the minimum of material prerequisites that existed in basic industries, transport and credit, to stage a political revolution in the drive for political power. Next, upon winning power, to use political instruments in propelling the country along the road to modern civilization, as I said earlier.

"At that time, Lenin had in mind only a general idea of socialism. It was not without reason, that he objected to a detailed definition of socialism being included in the new programme that was being prepared by the Russian Communist Party's 7th Congress. It was in August of 1917 that he wrote the words which were later obliterated: 'We do not claim that Marx knew or Marxists know the road to socialism down to the last detail. It would be nonsense to claim anything of the kind. What we know is the direction of this road, and the class forces that follow it; the specific, practical details will come to light only through the *experience of the millions* when they take things into their own hands.' I would like to emphasize in this connection that Lenin gave the experience and the creative work of the millions a decisive role in the construction of socialism. By all appearances, a theorist of Marxism should have had a detailed blueprint of socialism. The blueprint he had, as I have told you, could only be described as a skeleton plan envisaging a succession of transitional moves towards socialism. The central idea was that the popular masses, driven by the desire for social justice, would fill the Marxist formulas of socialism with their own content.

"Next, I would like to dispute views expressed by some of our media writers and philosophers, particularly by Anatoly Butenko who is present here. In a series of articles published by the magazine *Nauka i Zhizn* (Science and Life), he asserts that Lenin's pre-October views of social-

ism directly led to 'war communism'\*, or else, that it corresponded with the ideas or the concept of 'war communism'. This idea is much favoured recently by our media writers, and the argument behind it is that Lenin's blueprint of socialism came to be translated into practice because he tried to copy the pattern of the future socialist society from the latest successes achieved by the militarized state-monopoly capitalism.

"To this I can say the following: with the October Revolution at hand, Lenin had already mapped out two paths of transition to socialism. One path did not envisage the breaking up of the old social relations, on the contrary, it presupposed their step-by-step transformation. Moreover, the new socialist system of social relations left room for capitalists. Cultured capitalists were to be geared to the system of new social relations, or using Lenin's words, taken into the employ of the Soviet power. Finally, being a great theoretician and political strategist, Lenin foresaw a different turn of events. He had therefore equipped himself with another plan, that of abandoning the idea of slow transformation and taking swift and decisive action.

"Why was it that the Soviet country embarked on the second path? The choice had not depended solely on the leaders. During November-December of 1917 and even in January 1918, the Soviet Government held negotiations with major industrialists and manufacturers representing the metal-production, machine-building, leather and textile industries concerning the creation of joint-stock trusts, i.e. it attempted to implement the idea of state-run capitalism from which a gradual transition to socialism could be made. The masses of industrial workers had, however, become so radicalized that they spontaneously embarked on the path of confiscation and nationalization of industrial enterprises. The attempt to steer the transition process from above was largely a failure.

"Another instance in which Lenin can be said to have

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\*"War communism", the economic policy of the Soviet state in the time of the civil war and foreign military intervention of 1918-1920. It was characterized by the naturalization of the economy, curtailment of commodity turnover, and a diminishing role of money, credit and finance. An important element of "war communism" was the food tax—the confiscation by the state of farmers' produce surpluses.

changed his views on socialism has to do with 'war communism'. It is still a riddle to me why so great a mind had fallen prey to a military-communist euphoria and had to witness the tragic events in Kronstadt and the Tambov province\* and the country being plunged into a socio-political crisis, before he understood that 'war communism' was a zigzag with only a superficial adherence to Marxist postulates and formulas. Considering the situation that had arisen in Russia by that time, it was a perilous road. The only plausible explanation that I have for that is the revolutionary zeal that is so inherent in all generations of Russian revolutionaries. Some media writers and philosophers look for explanation in the doctrinal rudiments of our policy. I don't think they're right, because the doctrine of 'war communism' emerged later, after the revolutionary practices had already begun. Apparently in this case practice ran ahead of theory.

"Further, there was a U-turn towards a new economic policy, the NEP\*. And again, Vladimir Lenin proved himself a skilled and far-sighted politician. At first, the changeover to the NEP was a forced and fragmentary measure. In the years that followed, Lenin conceptualized a new system of views on socialism. I don't share the opinion of those economists and political writers who believe that by the end of his life (1922-1923) Lenin devised, if anything, a complete model of socialism based on a commoditiless and marketless economic pattern. Nor do I agree with those who claim that there were tears in Lenin's eyes as he was saying good-bye to the Marxist idea of a commoditiless and marketless socialism. Nothing of the sort! Lenin was a sober politician. On many occasions in his life did he discard utopical dogmas and postulates. Whenever the latter failed to be confirmed as practically valid, he would drop them immediately without remorse, regardless of whether they had been any of his own ideas. I do believe, that Lenin was on his way to the unequivocal conclusion that the commoditiless and mar-

\*Armed revolt of the Kronstadt naval base garrison and some warships of the Baltic fleet (March 1921) and peasant unrest in the Tambov province (August 1920 to August 1921) triggered by discontent with the "war communism" policies.

\*New Economic Policy (NEP), the policy pursued by the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet Government during the 1920s; it allowed certain development of capitalist structures but under the full control of the proletarian dictatorship.

ketless economy had nothing to do with socialism. He made no final judgement to that end however.

"And the last thing. Lenin died with the belief that, though belated, a world revolution was imminent. He thought of the October Revolution in Russia as an ice-breaker making a pathway ahead into the future. Today we know that it was a hasty conclusion to make. We all agree now that the road to socialism that we have built is far from being the best one. But it is not Lenin who is to blame for that.

"Concerning the future of socialism, we must seek ways of socialist renovation and look for a new model of socialism, keeping pace with the realities of modern times and relying on the attainments of human thought, including the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and on Marxist methodology as seen from the perspective of today. For I am convinced that capitalism is by no means the terminal destination in humankind's historical evolution."

## **Robert TUCKER**

"Lenin died when he was not even 54 years old. I think he was probably the most influential person of the 20th century. And he was a very controversial person, too. Thus, for instance, as a Marxist he believed in the 'withering away' of the state. But at the same time, he was the founder of a very strong new state in Soviet Russia.

"I can visualize two Lenins: a revolutionary Lenin and a reformist Lenin. This, of course, is a simplification, because Lenin the revolutionary was inseparable from Lenin the reformer.

"As a revolutionary, Lenin was, on the one hand, a Marxist, an orthodox Marxist. On the other hand, he was a typically Russian revolutionary, who revealed through his writings and accomplishments the influence of the narodniks\* traditions in the Russian revolutionary movement. Lenin was a Marxist-narodnik, but not from the point of his acceptance of the populists' land reform. No. He knew much, he read much and he learned much about

\*Narodniks (populists)—the ideology and movement of Russian intellectuals in the second half of the 19th century, which upheld the interests of democratic peasantry and blended together a radical bourgeois-democratic anti-feudal programme and the ideas of utopian socialism.

the traditions of the past century's Russian revolutionaries, such as Chernyshevsky, Tkachyov, Lavrov\* and many others. Being a Marxist-narodnik, Lenin was moving towards Lavrov. As you know, the narodniks' movement split up during the 1870s into terrorists on the one side and propagandists on the other. Lavrov was the leading thinker among the propagandists. I think that Lavrov's idea of it being a duty of revolutionary activists to disseminate revolutionary ideas, i.e. to take them to the people, which later materialized in the famed 'going to the people', lodged deep in the soul of Vladimir Ulyanov. I think it surfaced as he wrote his work *What Is to Be Done?* in 1902, in which he highlighted the influence of the narodniks' ideas and assigned the revolutionary party with a mission to disseminate ideas. Those, however, were already Marxist ideas, i.e., what he called social-democratic consciousness implanted not only in the midst of industrial workers. He said: we must go to all strata of the population. Being a narodnik, he always thought about all classes and not about the proletariat alone. That's very important.

"Also, I think, he was influenced by Tkachyov's idea of a revolutionary party: a backward country, Russia, made it possible for the political power to be seized first, and socialist reforms to be pushed through next. I think that this idea became deeply lodged in his mind and his soul. When World War I made tangible the opportunity for seizing power, Lenin wrote the work *The State and Revolution* in 1917, in which this idea was heavily accentuated. In his later work, about the renegade Kautsky, he also emphasized the idea of proletarian dictatorship as the pivotal point in Marxism. This idea is to be found in orthodox Marxism, in the writings of Marx and Engels, but not as the pivotal point of their doctrine. On his part, Lenin as a Russian revolutionary thought it to be the centrepiece of Marxist doctrine. He wanted to rationalize the idea of having to seize power by force and using that newly-gained power to push through the reforms. As he said in

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\*Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), a Russian thinker, a writer, economist and philosopher; Pyotr Tkachyov (1844-1885), a Russian revolutionary thinker, a literary critic and writer, the proponent of Jacobinism in populism; Pyotr Lavrov (1823-1890), a theorist of the Russian revolutionary populism, a philosopher, a writer and a social thinker.

one of his 1919 works, the state was a truncheon. And he was eventually destined to use that truncheon of state power against all enemies of the revolution, to use his expression.

"In this instance, we see Lenin as a revolutionary. Later on, under the NEP, we shall see another Lenin, a reformer. Upon the adoption of the New Economic Policy, he had already reappraised the situation in the country and in the world. He saw the main problem in finding ways of rescuing the country from backwardness and building a society that might be called socialist. On that score, Marx was of no help to him, because Marx provided no distinct model of a socialist economy; he only offered some general ideas in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and in some other works. Incidentally, Lenin never read many of the young Marx's writings; those were published in Moscow in the late 1920s, after Lenin's death. It was very important to know those writings of young Marx to be able to understand his vision of socialism. But Lenin never read them. And when the time came for him to rethink that problem, the Bolsheviks were in power, the civil war had ended, 'war communism' had been discontinued and discarded as the general political line. What was to be done? In his last articles, which Bukharin\* called 'Lenin's political testament', we come across Lenin the reformer, because there he thinks of building a socialist society in Russia through a generation-long process. Not only was it to be a long process, but also a non-violent, peaceful process, based on conviction, rather than on coercion. That was his principal idea. And then we see that Lenin finds a definition of socialism, but where? Not in Marx's writings, but in Robert Owen's article on cooperation.

"Marx and Engels contemptuously called Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier 'utopian socialists'. But Owen was a highly pragmatic man. A factory-owner, he campaigned for the establishment of co-operative settlements and he even set up some. It had been that Owen who inspired Lenin to think about what socialism really was. And he arrived at the conclusion that socialism was the system

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\*Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938), Russian Communist Party leader and statesman, member of the Communist Party Politbureau (1924-1929) and Alternate Politbureau member (in 1919-1924). Shot in 1938 on Stalin's order. Rehabilitated in 1988.

of civilized cooperators. That was surely not in keeping with the Marxist line of thought, but it was a very interesting idea. Lenin never got further than that. This, however, was the reformist road to socialism which in his last articles he tried to discern.

"To this I should add that as a reformer, Lenin focused his attention on the economic side of the matter. He was creating socialism as an economic system. But as far as the political system was concerned, he was no reformer. At the time when he, or rather the Party under his influence, gave the go-ahead to the NEP, Lenin wanted not to reform the one-party state, but to make it even more rigid. For instance, at the 10th Party Congress, which signalled the transition to the NEP, he piloted a resolution on the unity of the Party and denounced factionalism. Today, we are witnessing the emergence of new political government, a new system which I think will be based on multi-party lines, unforeseen by Lenin.

"To draw a conclusive pattern, I would like to point out that even at the time when Lenin became reform-minded, he still remained a Russian enlightener, because he saw the main task of the Party in disseminating the idea of cooperation among people at large, and mainly among the peasantry. For this reason, the function of propaganda and instruction, about which he wrote in his work *What Is to Be Done?*, remained for him the prime function of the Party.

"I think that if he had lived in our times, the closing decades of the 20th century, with all its wars and other cataclysms, he would have been a representative of the new thinking. I think he would see the need for convergence and understand the inevitability of transition to a market economy. This, I think, would have been his train of thought about socialism, though of course it is impossible to say for sure what he would be thinking about if he were alive."

## **Yuri POLYAKOV**

"Pavel Volobuyev has told us that Lenin's views changed over time, and that we took no notice of that. Let me add that after Lenin's death the world changed considerably, but we took no notice of that either.

"It has been 67 years since Lenin dictated the last

lines of his last articles. The world has changed drastically, but Lenin's every written word, every assessment, every conclusion which was pronounced by him 67, 70, 80 or 90 years ago, we accepted as something he said just yesterday and turned it into an undecaying stereotype.

"I do believe that the main defect in our attitude to Lenin, I mean here the Soviet scientists, is the absence of an historical approach. Much has been done by our media writers: they tolled the bell, they sensed the public distaste for a goodie-goodie Lenin. But quite a few publicists and historians ignore the importance of the historical approach. Hand-picked quotations from Lenin's writings would still be used in scientific papers and speeches of our leaders, irrespective of whether they were relevant to the context of the time.

"There isn't a single book about World War II, for example, that has not been studded with quotations from Lenin's works: when at war, act as the military do. This is a very common phrase, but you will unfailingly find Lenin's name ascribed to it. 'A nation in which the majority of the workers and peasants realize, feel and see that they are fighting for their own Soviet power. . . such a nation can never be vanquished'—this he said in 1919, but it was about a different time and a different war.

"Lenin's opponents do the same trick: they pick a quotation, some have been quoted here today, such as 'to shoot, to jail, to arrest', and irrespective of context, time and place, accuse Lenin of being prone to violence and terror. This kind of out-of-history approach leads to the mortification and dogmatization of Lenin's ideas.

"I am convinced that we ought to distinguish between the Lenin who belongs to history and must be viewed in an historical context, and the Lenin who belongs to the present and the future.

"Belonging to history is the considerable part of his legacy. This includes the definition of imperialism as the supreme phase of capitalism; the idea about proletarian dictatorship; the justification of revolutionary coercion and fierce and merciless struggle against class enemies. Lenin of today and tomorrow means rejuvenated socialism, peace between nations, social justice and equality between peoples. These global issues have lost nothing

of their original momentousness.

"Now that socialism has suffered a number of defeats, that its failures in Central and South-Eastern Europe have become self-evident, and that the Soviet Union is staggering through a crisis, many think that Lenin can be dumped onto the scrap-heap of history, like his statues in Bucharest and Katowice. But let us turn to history, let us recall the French Revolution. Upon the restoration of the Bourbon rule, everything that had taken place since 1789, including the Napoleonic period, began to be referred to as an eclipse of the mind or a crime, and all the personalities involved were labelled as rascals and bandits. Yet, as time went by, history revealed the real worth of the French Revolution. Though, as I see it, the slogans about Equality and Fraternity, let alone Liberty, have not become a reality in most countries, the French Revolution has greatly contributed to mankind's progress, and there are few people who dare deny this today.

"For its part, the October Revolution in Russia, contrary to all expectations, did not start the fire of a world revolution, but it spurred the world evolution and gave impetus to humankind's development.

"It is my conviction that the world's socialist movement is going to be revived along new lines, with an account taken of the blunders, overdoings, failures and frustrations that have taken place over these 70 years. It is going to be revived on the basis of Lenin's ideas that are to be made free from everything momentary and superficial, as well as from all the deformations of the post-revolutionary period."

## **Marc FERRO**

"I would like to dwell on several aspects of Leninism—and not only in the light of yesterday, but of today as well. Talking about the Communist Party issue, I want to focus on the discussion that took place between Zinoviev\* and the Bolsheviks in 1917. As is known, Zinoviev said then

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\*Grigori Zinoviev /Apfelbaum/ (1883-1936), Soviet statesman and Communist Party leader, member of the Communist Party Central Committee Politbureau (1921-1926); alternate member of the Politbureau in 1919-1921; Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet in December 1917; Chairman of the Comintern Executive Committee in 1919-1926. Victim of Stalin's repressions. Rehabilitated in 1988.

that there were several political parties in Russia: one per every social group, i.e., Social Democrats for workers, one party for the bourgeoisie, and so forth.

"What is important to note in this connection is that the working masses had no alternative in choosing a political party. That is, persons like Lenin and Zinoviev were, so to say, blocking the political choice of the masses.

"Now, what can we see today? Millions of Soviet citizens want to choose their social and political orientation. That, however, does not seem to be in line with Leninist theory. Now, if we consider this point, we shall see that public opinion today is breaking loose from the hold of Leninism.

"Over the past 70 years we have witnessed the Bolshevikization of history: the Bolshevik Party was ascribed a far more important historic role than it really deserved.

"Let me quote one of Stalin's works which he wrote in July 1917. Here's what he wrote: there were only 24,000 of us, and we are being accused of having staged a revolution in urban and rural areas, in the midst of revolutionary masses, and so forth. It's too tall a story, concludes Stalin. The same can be said of the whole of Soviet history, because its annalists keep forgetting the role of society in the evolution of the historical process—society, and not solely the Communist Party.

"For instance, it is a well-known fact that there was an active revolutionary movement and peasant upheavals in rural areas, in which the Bolshevik Party had no part. It is also well known how much violence there had been in society before October 1917, which had nothing to do with the Bolsheviks.

"It is possible, therefore, to recognize the very same phenomenon throughout the subsequent history of Russia; we saw, or we see, two forms of coercion which seem to complement each other—one was being wielded by the Party which cudgelled against all other political organizations, while the other emerged from the midst of those classes whose representatives were taking the seats in the Soviets.

"Today, we face the same problem, except that the balance of forces is different. The new Soviet society is well educated—there are 30 million people with higher education diplomas, 40 million engineers and technicians, and 15 million doctors. A society like this can no longer

tolerate ideological pressures. One may say, that Gorbachev is an embodiment of such intolerance, a political token of this social movement. On the other hand, the current restructuring drive is encountering inevitable resistance. The same happened in 1917, but then the resistance was put up by those classes which were at the helm."

### **Geoffrey HOSKING**

"Much has been said here about Lenin as a theoretician. I would like to talk about him as a practical political leader. We know him as a man who was capable of changing his views at various stages of his political career. What catches the eye, however, is that in every such instance Lenin was perfectly sure that his viewpoint was infallible, and that everyone who disputed it was wrong and should be silenced by any available political means. This, I think, is the most important and maybe the most harmful aspect of Lenin's legacy.

"In trying to overcome the difficulties that faced the peoples of the Russian empire in the course of the 1917 Revolution, and especially in the post-civil-war period, it would seem only natural for the Bolsheviks to form a coalition with other parties, at least with socialist ones. But Lenin still insisted on the infallibility of his stand. He did that even in 1921, when the fallacy, not to say bankruptcy, of his position became self-evident. Even at that time, he did not invite, let's say, the Mensheviks to take part in the government, notwithstanding the fact that they had been proved right on a number of issues, such as the economic doctrine, for example. Moreover, he ordered the arrest of all the Menshevik leaders across Soviet Russia. Besides this, he stifled the opportunity for political debate within his own party.

"As we think about the needs of today, it seems to me that the main thing is to achieve political consensus, bringing together as many political parties and movements as possible. Scores of them have already sprouted across the Soviet Union, anyway. Insistence on the unerring exclusivism of any political opposition is bound to produce noxious results.

"On many points I respect Lenin as a political leader, and I feel obliged today to talk about things that should

be done his way and things that should not—that was my idea."

### **Anatoly BUTENKO**

"As I happen to be the only philosopher among my historian colleagues at this table, permit me first of all to outline my standpoint in the light of today's realities in terms of which all of us work and think.

"When a social system collapses in a country which used to call itself socialist and swore that it would always be loyal to the doctrines of Marx and Lenin, the idea of socialism will be inevitably undermined and the ideas of Marx and Lenin inevitably devalued, irrespective of whether any such system has been a barrack-type bureaucracy or adhered to Stalinism or any other 'isms'.

"What I am saying is that no matter how right Marx and Lenin were in principle, no matter how much superior they were to such epigons as, for example, Brezhnev, or Honecker, or Husák, or anyone like them, the setback that the socialist system is currently going through is inescapably causing Marxist ideology and the idea of socialism to go into a protracted retreat to be able to regroup their intellectual forces and find a new basis for their arguments.

"If anyone thinks that this signals the end of the historical path of Marxism and Leninism, we can cite the popular byword: "It's not bedtime yet", in the sense that it would be ridiculous to believe that the idea of social justice can disintegrate as long as there are the poor and the rich, and that the idea of socialism can be defeated as long as there is still exploitation of man by man.

"Given the sweeping changes now occurring in the world of socialism, the ideological changes are apparent. In this country, for instance, we are witnessing very interesting things. Today, we have no more infallible ideological gods. It's not because oracles have stopped talking, but because the people has stopped listening to them.

"One trait of Stalinism was that Stalin shaped up his own version of Marxism-Leninism which he tailored according to his own needs to be able, above all, to prove the correctness of his doctrine. For that end to be achieved, some things would be omitted, some whitewashed, some hushed up and some completely erased.

"We, in the Soviet Union, still have a cultural and political atmosphere that has shaped over decades. There emerged thousands of books, monographs, hundreds of articles, etc., and all that ideology, trimmed, mended and held together by some logical bonds—and in fact soaked with Stalinism—was being hammered into our heads. A whole generation of social scientists has been raised on that stuff.

"Today, however, as we are living through a period of renewal, including that in the sphere of ideology, we witness not a surge of scientific studies, but a media boom. Media writers are struggling to get rid of the weight of past dogmas—I think that's only natural; as Heinrich Heine once said, new enterprises require new clothes. In so doing, however, they free themselves from their old understanding of Marx and Lenin, but not from what these two thinkers were in deed. And we see the critics engage in a cavalry raid on Marx's and Lenin's ideas. It can't be argued that some of Marx's and Lenin's ideas have become obsolete and some have not been corroborated by real-life practices—it would be ridiculous not to see that. We are, however, witnessing some sort of belletristic diarrhea, excuse me for sounding rude, which, of course, will eventually cure itself.

"New notions are not to be feared. What's really worrying is that those who grasp the essence of what is happening keep their mouths shut—usually because they feel ill at ease at the thought of having to swim upstream. Yet history will inevitably put the right things in the right places."

## **Andrei SAKHAROV**

"When this discussion began, I got the impression that we were talking in some kind of an airless space. We are talking about Lenin, Lenin's ideas, Lenin's evolution, but we don't say anything about his environment. Lenin without the people, without specific personalities, without the tiniest capillaries of the demotic organism, is not Lenin, but someone else, an abstraction that evolves and generates ideas as a thing in itself.

"In my view, it won't be possible to understand the evolution of Lenin's ideas, unless we come to understand his environment and the impacts it had on him and the

Party, as well as the interrelations of these forces. It must be noted that the people of Russia at that time was a peculiar organism, in which proletarians and semi-proletarians accounted for 80 percent, and illiterate people for 50 percent of the urban and even more of the rural population, not to mention the country's ethnic outskirts where the population was totally illiterate. That was the people which Lenin and his Party were putting under their banners and whose practices sustained the revolution and the revolutionary theory. For it is impossible to think of a theory without practice, theory without the practice of the millions of people.

"By the year 1929, some 90 percent of the Bolshevik Party members were those who had joined it after 1917. Those were young people who had taken part in the civil war, and who still carried firearms, and with guns at the ready they exerted pressure on the situation in the country. Similarly, 80 percent of the Party leaders were persons who had joined it during the revolution. Such was the 'human material' that Lenin had to deal with. When today I hear the question: How could a genius like him sanctioned 'war communism'?, I ask back, whether he could act differently under the circumstances. By all appearances, he had no alternative. Also, the genius had the logic of a victor—a special brand of logic.

"I do think that we have been underestimating this logic in a number of ways.

"What does it mean, 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'? Lenin was a Marxist, he was evolving a theory and he adapted it to his time. But we should remember that the dictatorship of the proletariat in reality is millions of people, in every town, in every region, every urban area, every institution—people who have seized the power.

"The grandeur of Lenin was probably in letting those people exercise their new-gained power. It would be absurd to assume that those masses should have acted in perfect agreement with the lofty theory of Marxism or Leninism, or with the theory of proletarian dictatorship that had been conceived by Lenin as a theoretician.

"Taken together, those people were cogs in the revolution's wheel. But every one of them was what Nikolai Bukharin called an emancipated personality and they were acting as individuals.

"It is indisputable, that being a reformer and a revolu-

tionary, Lenin expressed those tendencies in the life of society and the people. With the revolution on, the laws of 'war communism' in force and the people determined to take social revenge, it was a logical dictatorship and a logical terror.

"The point is, however, that revolution and 'war communism' cannot be perpetuated eternally. And the theoreticians were not the first to understand that. It first occurred to common people. They were tired of the revolution and they were fed up with 'war communism' and sabre-rattling. The theory, however, was developing too slowly. And when the Kronstadt and Tambov riots erupted, its tardiness became self-evident.

"Lenin was the only theoretician, and probably the only person in Russia who tried to reconcile the class-related and universal human interests. When I think of the NEP, I consider it to have been the first attempt at taking a universal human approach to history and revolution. As I see it, the switchover to the NEP at that time went against the grain, it seemed illogical and unexpected. But Lenin sensed the population's fatigue and steered the country towards the NEP. I think the thesis that a most radical revolution cannot but adapt itself to the environment in which it occurs, fully applies to our history and our theoreticians. With this in mind, I consider that Lenin's genius was in that he responded to the popular sentiments perceiving them and incorporating into his theory, for which the people paid him in his own coin.

"One of us here mentioned newspaper snapshots of Lenin's statues being pulled down. Yes, they are being and will be pulled down. They will be pulled down by those who abhor Lenin's chief qualities—his revolutionary ardour and closeness to the people. But there are others who are right, I think, in saying that as long as there are the destitute, the oppressed, the exploited, the insulted and the humiliated, i.e., those who seek social indemnity, monuments to Lenin are going to be erected. I don't think we can escape this kind of dialectics."

## **Dietrich GEYER**

"I'd like to sway this discussion towards a different end. I believe it is important for us to know why they pull down the monuments and what makes *Der Spiegel* hope

for an all-out sale of millions of copies featuring that cover photograph. It is perfectly clear that Lenin is being blamed for things that were done not by him but by his successors. It should be pointed out also that Soviet historians, Soviet historical science as such and most of the Soviet intelligentsia are largely responsible for the hatred that people in Central and South-Eastern Europe direct at Lenin today. My criticism is pointed, above all, at the astonishing idolization in which historical science was engaged. And I must tell you I was surprised at the topic of today's round-table discussion, from this point of view. I am asking myself what kind of a connection there is between the ideas of Lenin, this great historical figure, who died in 1924, and the oncoming 21st century. It may sound a bit thick, but I see this as an attempt to use Lenin in resolving problems and answering questions to which he has no answer. I share the view that Lenin is to be historicized, and that we should not ask him questions which he is unable to answer.

"Back in Germany, I did my best to follow the discussion over historical issues in the Soviet press. And I got the impression, which involves not only Lenin, that your intellectuals are inclined to seek answers about the future in history, in the past. Being an historian, I can only rejoice at that. They turn to Chaadayev\* and Dostoyevsky<sup>#</sup> and to the traditions of 19th-century political thought; they revive the ideas of Solovyov, Berdayev and Florensky<sup>^</sup> in an attempt to use the legacy of these great scientists and thinkers in tackling the problems that will face us in the future. The same thing, I repeat, is being done to Lenin. I would like to be told what my Soviet colleagues think about this argumentation which I have given in a somewhat deliberately harsh manner."

## **Anatoly BUTENKO**

"I'm afraid that we, in the Soviet Union, still believe Stalin's tale of the October Revolution. It hasn't been refuted yet. According to it, Lenin was allegedly claiming in his *April Theses* that backward Russia was able to

\*Pyotr Chaadayev (1794-1856), a Russian philosopher and writer.  
<sup>#</sup>Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), a Russian writer and thinker.  
<sup>^</sup>Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900); Nikolai Berdyayev (1874-1948); Pavel Florensky (1882-1943), Russian religious philosophers.

change over to socialism and make a socialist revolution straight off. That's Stalin's version. All of you understand, that it is an obvious fraud. Lenin never claimed anything of the kind. Scores of arguments can be cited to prove that he didn't. When, for instance, Kamenev\* censured Lenin during the April Conference for plans to promptly steer the bourgeois revolution onto a socialist track, Lenin objected unequivocally: I've no such plans, moreover, I warn against attempts of that kind; it's impermissible in Russia. Some of our historians managed to even blue-pencil Lenin's speech at the Congress of Soviets in the wake of the October overturn. He is purported to have said: the socialist revolution heralded by the Bolsheviks has been accomplished. Lenin never said any such thing. What he actually said was: the workers' and peasants' revolution that we had told you about has been accomplished. Stalin falsified history and coined his own version of that phrase which was inserted in all books and history manuals. Many more such examples could be cited.

"At the same time, for some reason here we keep silent about Lenin's errors which he committed after the Bolsheviks took power—smoothly and with a minimum of bloodshed. The discussion over the establishment of an all-Soviet government in the country signalled an end to plans for completing the bourgeois revolution and starting to create the prerequisites for socialism step by step. Had Lenin ushered in the NEP in 1917, of course, it's pure theorizing for history cannot be reversed, it would have probably enabled us to avoid civil war on such a gigantic scale.

"Had the NEP been introduced right away, as a prerequisite for a future transition to socialism, I am confident, it would have put Russia on the right track to socialism. All the more that it was in the mainstream of Lenin's thinking during the period between April and October 1917. Yet when Lenin came to power, he introduced 'war communism'. As I see it, there were two reasons for that. One is doctrinal. Lenin believed that socialism would be relying on a marketless economic system, although he did not say that in the Programme adopted by the 8th Party Congress. When later on he would own up to this

\*Lev Kamenev /Rosenfeld/ (1883-1936), Soviet statesman and Communist Party leader; Communist Party Politbureau member in 1919-1926. Shot in 1936 on Stalin's order. Rehabilitated in 1988.

error, he would not say that Marx had been wrong, but he would say: We have been wrong, the Bolsheviks have made a mistake. Lenin gave the go-ahead to 'war communism'—a decision that was conceptually wrong.

"Afterwards, when he turns to the NEP, he embarks on the path mapped out by the April Conference—calling for a gradual, circumspect transition to socialism. This movement was, however, soon destined to be arrested by Stalin who, certainly, relied on the ideas of 'war communism'. Incidentally, another of Stalin's falsification was to portray Lenin as a single-minded personality. But there were certainly at least two Lenins: Lenin of 'war communism' and Lenin of the NEP. Stalin, however, favored the one-dimensional picture."

### **Yuri POLYAKOV**

"Dozens of publications assert that immediately after the October uprising, Lenin launched a military-communist policy. I must tell you that this was not so. According to Lenin, the policy that was being pursued immediately after the revolution was similar to the NEP, but it had to be abandoned under the weight of circumstances. Take for instance the nationalization of industry. The first decrees on nationalization were concerned only with those enterprises whose owners were saboteurs or runaways, while the mass-scale nationalization began at the end of June 1918. At that time, Lenin made it perfectly clear that the government was planning to carry out socialist reforms by tailoring its efforts maximally to the existing conditions. The civil war, however, necessitated a dramatic change."

### **Vladimir NAUMOV**

"As we find ourselves going through a period of cardinal change, I think it is important that we elucidate the ideas of socialism which were brought forward at the dawn of our history and see what part of that legacy we can use and what we must leave behind. These questions are not only theoretical but practical as well, for they are bound to shape out our political course today.

"I think that the turning point in this sense can be dated back to 1922-1923, when Lenin began to analyse

the first results of the New Economic Policy after it had been proclaimed by the 10th Party Congress. It was a study of practical errors, a summary of everything that had been done, and it led Lenin to major theoretical generalizations. These generalizations, I believe, had outlined the course of development absolutely different from that which was chosen by the country's leaders after Lenin's death.

"The strategic line proclaimed by those leaders had very little in common with Lenin's views on the subject. They did not share Lenin's ideas of the new economic policy, they put to doubt Lenin's ideas of commodity-money relations, and they practically refused to draw in indigenous and foreign capital. They had their own ideas of how to handle trade, small-time business and entrepreneurship. Regrettably, the post-Lenin Party walked in the steps of its new leadership. Moreover, this betrayal of Lenin was noiseless and gentle, accompanied by calls to be faithful to Leninism, to safeguard Leninism, and so forth.

"Lenin's last articles occupy a special place in his theoretical legacy. I disagree with the opinion that Lenin did not touch upon political issues, but concerned himself solely with economic matters in those writings. On the contrary, all the letters that Lenin sent to the Congress started with questions concerning the political structure; he even suggested that it should be altered, particularly, to bring the Politbureau and the General Secretary under the Party's control. In that, I see an important step towards the democratization of society as a whole. Democratization at the party level is a major precondition for democratic change in society. With this in mind, we should restore Lenin's ideas in our memory—the ideas of true socialism. I see it as an essential and urgent scientific and political task."

### **Dietrich GEYER**

"I think that our difference of opinion is the following. You, colleague Naumov, and your Soviet fellow-thinkers, are interested in those of Lenin's writings which you consider to be of immediate importance. I have the impression that under perestroika the interest in Lenin's works has been concentrated, roughly speaking, on some 150

pages of his writings. The thing is, however, that Lenin wrote 50 volumes, and a new, 70-volume collection is soon to be published. Using Lenin's legacy for momentary purposes is quite a normal thing to do with politicians, but when it comes to historians, I feel myself in strong doubt.

"My colleagues and I expect the Institute of Marxism and Leninism to produce a scientific, not panegyric, biography of Lenin and bibliography of his works. So far, perestroika has failed to do that."

### **Alexander RABINOWITCH**

"I found it very interesting to hear Professor Tucker talk of two Lenins. It can't be argued that in the times of the NEP there was a huge difference between Lenin as a revolutionary and Lenin as a reformer. I can even suggest there were three Lenins, or even more. And maybe three or more models of the Communist Party. It is certain, that the Lenin of 1917 was very different from what he was before the revolution and then during the NEP. Back in 1917, he advocated the idea of creating a popular, decentralized and tolerant party. At that time, the Party was comparatively democratic from top to bottom. Lenin and his Party were also different during the civil war. That is, he was a flexible politician, who easily adapted himself to a changing environment.

"Lenin influenced the course of the revolution in many important ways. I would like to identify two of them. On the one hand, he was the chief motive force who propelled the Party towards a socialist revolution. In April 1917, he returned to Russia from emigration and in a virtually single-handed effort halted the trend for forming an alliance with the Mensheviks. Within several weeks he was able to persuade the majority of the party leadership to adopt a revolutionary course. He helped cement the Party after it had suffered a defeat in July. And he aimed his Party at the seizure of the Winter Palace prior to the beginning of the 2nd Congress of Soviets, contrary to more prudent decisions by the majority of the Party leadership, not to mention the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Menshevik-Internationalists.

"That the Bolsheviks could have come to power in October 1917 without Lenin is beyond my imagination. I see him as an incredibly strong and resolute person and a

flexible politician. He could defend his position in an argument with brilliant skill, but when necessary he would seek a compromise. When he was away from Petrograd, his followers were able to withstand the pressure of his arguments, but in his presence they would usually accept whatever propositions he had to make.

"There was, however, the reverse side of the coin. Acting that way, Lenin almost single-handedly eliminated the opportunity for establishing a broad-based democratic, multi-party, socialist government in 1917. In my view, this opportunity was particularly tangible in the autumn of 1917.

"The Bolshevik storming of the Winter Palace prior to the 2nd Congress of Soviets, as a result of Lenin's pressure, caused the moderate socialists to be apprehensive of any potential cooperation with the Bolsheviks and with Lenin in particular. A homogeneous socialist rule, as I see it, was the only possible alternative to the Bolshevik one-party government.

"I quite agree with what Professor Geyer has told us, and I repeat that there are quite a few things about Lenin that we still do not know. In my view, Lenin was one of the first victims of Stalin's historiography. We still have a lot of work ahead of us before we come to know him better."

## Marc FERRO

"I am surprised at hearing some colleagues here talk of Lenin and Leninism with an approximation that directly contravenes Lenin's legacy. When Lenin touched upon matters relating to Russia, he would first talk about Russia and next turn to Marx or other scientists for proof. Here, we've no such procedure. We have not had a look at today's problems in the Soviet Union.

"At present, Central Europe has made a U-turn in its attitude towards the Soviet Union, and we know that public opinion in Poland, Czechoslovakia and other countries has to do with what we call perestroika. One may say that Gorbachev is sometimes more popular, for instance, in Western Europe, than he is in the Soviet Union. There are numerous opinion pools to corroborate that.

"My question is, which of Lenin's works dwell upon the relationships between the Soviet Union (or Russia) and

Central Europe? It may sound a bit thick, but I ask this deliberately to demonstrate that love for quotations sometimes looks preposterous."

## Andrei SAKHAROV

"As is known, in his polemics with Martov, Plekhanov and later with Sukhanov\*, Lenin insisted that we would advance towards socialism by making up for the lags in culture and material production. A fine and precise thought. Lenin kept reiterating, that we were to use the whole of the bourgeois culture for our own ends and enrich ourselves with new knowledge.

"On the practical plane, however, our country was caught in a huge historical trap, from which it has so far been unable to break loose. The theory was beautiful, but the dialectics of the revolution, the crunching pressure of the millions of toilers on the bourgeois elite caused that culture to disintegrate in all respects. Lenin who tried to defend his position in his work *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (1918) and later, in the time of 'war communism', as well as still later, could no longer hold back that pressure, though he and his associates, such as Lunacharsky and Tsyurupa\*, were making last-ditch efforts to safeguard that culture, one way or another. The revolutionary torrent, however, carried us forward, and revolutionary totalitarianism was so overpowering, that after the revolution and the civil war were over, the country found itself a cultural wreck. Stalin contributed to this process by political trials of the 20s and 30s.

"Professor Geyer spoke of there being millions of doctors and engineers in the Soviet Union—that's all very well, all of them are professionals carrying diplomas, but a diploma is not a synonym of 'culture and civilization'. At every step today we are aware that this Lenin's concept

\*Yuli Martov /Zederbaum/ (1873-1923); Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918)—leading figures of the Russian and international Social-Democratic movement, and leaders of the Mensheviks—the petty-bourgeois reformist wing which came into existence after the split of the Russian Social Democrats in 1903; Nikolai Sukhanov /Gimmer/ (1882-1940)—member of the Russian revolutionary movement, an economist and publicist.

\*Anatoly Lunacharsky /1875-1933/; Alexander Tsyurupa /1870-1928/—Soviet statesmen and Party leaders, People's Commissars /ministers/ of the first Soviet governments.

has not become part of our policy which we pursue largely without due regard to the mentality of the people for whose sake perestroika has been launched. The roots of this tragedy lie in the civil war, in the first years of Soviet rule, but it is also a tragedy of modern times. However, as it was the people who staged this tragedy and acted in it, it thus condemned itself to spiritual devastation. We shall need decades to attain an adequate level of culture and civilization. And, of course, it cannot be attained overnight by decrees of the Supreme Soviet."

### **Geoffrey HOSKING**

"I agree that Russia is a country. . . let's say of an extremely high level of culture, but of rather a low level of civilization. However, this country, with its highly-literate population, should not wait until commonplace civilization bring about democracy. Democracy shapes itself up in the struggle for commonplace civilization."

### **Robert TUCKER**

"Concerning the future of socialism. I believe it is important that we avoid thinking about the future in terms of a single country or a national model. We live at a time when we must be thinking in international, planetary terms. In my view, we can also think about socialism while becoming increasingly aware of being citizens of the Earth who should cooperate with each other. This doesn't mean that national states are going to wither away. But I regard international cooperation as the only road to humankind's survival. I fear that our children and grandchildren will be living in a doomed world if only we do not realize the need for such cooperation and do not make more resolute strides in that direction than those which we have made so far."

**Novoyti** 