

Lenin Versus Anti-Lenin

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This hundredth anniversary year of Lenin's death has generated a remarkable outpouring of explorations and evaluations that are in dramatic contrast to the flat, two-dimensional dogmas that became dominant during the Cold War years of 1947 to 1990. Those seeking an understanding of Lenin are now presented with much to consider that is complex, multifaceted, vibrantly alive, and perhaps urgently relevant. Along with a proliferation of books, articles, forums and conferences, there has been a four-month online series of keynote addresses and panel discussions under the rubric of *Leninist Days/Jornadas Leninistas*, and all of this provides only a partial sense of the richness of this phenomenon. As the *Leninist Days* organizers emphasize, "100 years without Lenin" at the same time adds up to "100 years with him." Much has changed, much has evolved, and much is different. Much is also the same – but in new ways.

We will focus here on two of the many issues to emerge in all of this. One relates to a challenge regarding a point raised in my new Lenin book and in my *Leninist Days* presentations – that some aspects of Lenin's thought and practice are essential for serious revolutionaries, and other aspects that are *non-essential*. Another involves the notion that some of what I consider "non-essential" has, in fact, been identified as *truly essential* by shrewd elements to the right of Lenin (connected, for example, with U.S. intelligence agencies, as well as conservative ideologists), and in some cases even consciously absorbed and utilized by theorists and activists of the far-right.

Historical Framework of the Essential and Non-Essential in Lenin

In the book *Lenin: Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*, I note that "one can certainly find, in what Lenin said and did under one or another circumstance, things that were rigid or dogmatic or authoritarian or wrong or overstated. ... But the essential thrust of Lenin's thought and practice went in the opposite direction from such limitations." I add an opinion – "*that humanistic and democratic 'opposite direction' has the greatest relevance for those who would change the world for the better.*"¹

Later in the book, I quote from Rosa Luxemburg: "What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks."² For Lenin, *genuine* freedom and democracy are *inherently* anti-capitalist and revolutionary. A deep commitment to such freedom and democracy is essential to Lenin's revolutionary goal, and also to his strategic orientation for achieving that goal.³

More than one person has challenged this approach to Lenin. To the extent that I have understood this challenge, I think it boils down to this: Does defining "what is essential" to Lenin involve a desire to pick and choose only what appear to be the "nicer" aspects of Lenin's orientation?

Is this truly a materialist approach, or is it a recipe for a very subjective utopianism? These are valid questions, assuming we take them seriously – which means actually doing the research to determine what happened. These actualities matter. As Lenin stressed, “facts are stubborn things.”

Sufficient evidence has been amassed – by an impressive cluster of outstanding historians – to demonstrate that Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades were sincerely and effectively committed to a dynamic blend of democracy and socialism, and that they became a hegemonic force in Russia’s labor and revolutionary movements, helping to inspire a mass insurgency – a militant alliance of workers and peasants – that swept away the Tsarist order in 1917 and advanced in the direction of rule by democratic councils (soviets) and socialism. Out of all this, Lenin and his comrades created a global network of revolutionaries – the Communist International – to help generate revolutions in countries throughout the world. They saw this as essential for the future of socialism – and also for the future development of the revolutionary process in Soviet Russia.⁴

As we know, the outcome was qualitatively different from the realization of a democratic and socialist order – either in Soviet Russia or on our planet. The incredibly harsh years of 1918 to 1924 (the year of Lenin’s death) culminated in the consolidation of a Communist Party dictatorship that modernized the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, consisting of most of the old Russian Empire. This modernization also involved an ongoing murderousness and repressiveness generally labelled Stalinism, named after Lenin’s successor. The three most influential explanations for this development go something like this:

- 1) it was all necessary and good – consistent with the democratic and humanistic aspirations of the 1917, and (whatever the difficulties and contradictions) are destined to triumph;
- 2) what happened demonstrates that Lenin’s aspirations, methods and goals were evil, and consistently so, from inception to realization – with loudly proclaimed democratic commitments simply a cover for totalitarian power-lust;
- 3) the genuine revolutionary-democratic commitments of Lenin and his comrades were overwhelmed by catastrophic developments.

The first two explanations predominated during the Cold War rivalry of the USSR and the capitalist West. The first cannot be taken seriously at least since the collapse of the USSR. Although the second consequently became the prevalent explanation, it was contradicted by much of the amassed evidence previously referred to. Only the third explanation is consistent both with that amassed evidence and with what we know of what happened from 1924 to 1991. We will consider two items which support the explanation that revolutionary-democratic commitments of Lenin and his comrades were overwhelmed by catastrophic

developments. One is a primary document from 1920, a widely disseminated discussion of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” by a prominent Bolshevik leader, Lev Kamenev. The other is a careful study of the early functioning of the Soviet government by scholar Lara Douds.

While Marx and such co-thinkers as Luxemburg and Lenin had defined the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” democratically as *political rule by the working-class*, by 1919 it had come to mean a dictatorship exercised by the Russian Communist Party, the name adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1918. This has often been seen as the essential, defining attribute of “Leninism.” Yet Lenin’s knowledgeable and sophisticated comrade Lev Kamenev scoffed at the notion that “the Russian Communists came into power with a prepared plan for a standing army, Extraordinary Commissions [the Cheka, secret police], and limitations of political liberty, to which the Russian proletariat was obliged to recur for self-defense after bitter experience.”⁵

Immediately after power was transferred to the soviets, he recalled, opponents of working-class rule were unable to maintain an effective resistance, and the revolution had “its period of ‘rosy illusions.’” Kamenev elaborated: “All the political parties—up to Miliukov’s [pro-capitalist Kadet] party—continued to exist openly. All the bourgeois newspapers continued to circulate. Capital punishment was abolished. The army was demobilized.” Even fierce opponents of the revolution arrested during the insurrection were generously set free (including pro-tsarist generals and reactionary officers who would soon put their expertise to use in the violent service of their own beliefs). Kamenev went on to describe increasingly severe civil war conditions that finally changed this situation, ending a period of “over six months (November 1917 to April–May 1918) [that] passed from the moment of the formation of the soviet power to the practical application by the proletariat of any harsh dictatorial measures.”⁶

This is corroborated by an anti-Leninist scholar from the Cold War period, Alfred G. Meyer, who commented that “the unceremonious dissolution of the Constituent Assembly” in January 1918 hardly constituted the inauguration of Bolshevik dictatorship: “for some months afterwards there was no violent terror. The nonsocialist press was not closed until the summer of the same year. The Cheka began its reign of terror only after the beginning of the Civil War and the attempted assassination of Lenin, and this terror is in marked contrast with the lenient treatment that White [counter-revolutionary] generals received immediately after the revolution.”⁷

Also significant is Lara Douds’ more recent scholarly study, *Inside Lenin’s Government: Ideology, Power and Practice in the early Soviet State*. The government referred to is commonly known as Sovnarkon, an acronym for *Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov* (Council of People’s Commissars). As Douds notes, Lenin and his comrades believed that by carrying out a revolution to give all power to the soviets, “they were constructing a novel and superior democratic system.”⁸

“There were competing visions among radical socialists who led the new regime of how this Soviet democracy was to be expressed in practice,” Douds explains, “but government by Sovnarkom combining supreme executive and legislative power, responsible to the hierarchy of Soviets from local to national level, expressed at the center in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets (Vserossiiskii Tsentral’nyi Ispolnite’nyi Kmitet or VTsIK), was initially the institutional form it took.” She documents that “the history of the first years of Lenin’s government illustrates that the monolithic, authoritarian party-state was not the immediate nor conscious outcome of Bolshevik ideology and intentional policy, but instead the result of ad hoc improvisation and incremental decisions shaped by both the complex, fluid ideological inheritance and the practical exigencies on the ground.”⁹

Douds engages with what she sees as “the overlooked but fascinating ways in which Soviet leaders attempted to apply elements of Marxist and socialist thought to the institutions at their disposal to create a superior form of democracy, although the experimental and innovative measures they trialed ultimately failed to deliver a freer and fairer system and instead crystallized into a dysfunctional state apparatus and a Communist Party dictatorship by the death of Lenin in 1924.” But the party dictatorship is not how it all started out. Initially it was the government of soviets, not the party, that was predominant. “In the first year or two after the October Revolution, Sovnarkom’s apparatus was certainly more developed than the equivalent party apparatus, which only began to expand from spring 1919.”¹⁰

Douds gives attention to the dynamics of the two-party coalition that first governed the newborn Soviet Republic – the Bolsheviks (soon renaming themselves Communists) and the Left-Socialist Revolutionaries, which broke down due to the precipitous actions of the Left SRs in reaction against the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. She also gives attention to the multi-party character of the soviets, in which Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Left-Socialist Revolutionaries, and other oppositional leftists had voice and vote, until the relentless brutalization of the Russian civil war caused this to give way to repressions imposed by Lenin’s Communists.¹¹

Douds also gives attention to the collegial, democratic-collectivist ethos which was initially predominant within the various components of the soviet government, although the crises and catastrophes of civil war, foreign intervention, and economic collapse resulted in this giving way to more authoritarian modes of functioning. She traces Lenin’s efforts to push back against the ballooning of bureaucratic functioning and the erosion of soviet authority through the increasing incursions of the Communist Party – efforts which proved to be doomed to failure.¹²

Causes for the failure are, Douds’ research suggests, only partly attributable to the aggressive assaults on the revolutionary regime by powerful and vicious enemies both within Russia and globally. The replacement of multi-party democracy by single-party dictatorship quite

naturally made the party predominant, and the relative autonomy of soviet institutions quickly melted away. While touching on this, however, Douds gives weight to deficiencies she sees in Lenin's 1917 classic *The State and Revolution*. Whatever its strengths as a work of historical-intellectual excavation in the views of Marx and Engels, she finds it naïve and deficient as a blueprint for constructing a new form of government.¹³

Identifying the Essential and Non-Essential in Lenin

This conceptual framework suggests an approach for determining the essential and non-essential in Lenin's thinking. Karl Radek has recounted a comment made to him regarding some of his old writing: "It's interesting to read now how stupid we were then!"¹⁴ Surely one would be justified in consigning whatever those "stupidities" were to what was non-essential in the corpus of Lenin's thought. In my explorations of Lenin's thought and general approach, the following eight components seem *essential*:

1. A belief in what Georg Lukács called "the actuality of revolution" – or as Max Eastman put it, a rejection of "people who talk revolution, and like to think about it, but do not 'mean business' ... the people who talked revolution but did not intend to produce it."¹⁵
2. A commitment to utilizing Marxist theory not as dogma, but as a guide to action, understanding that general theoretical perspectives must be modified through application to "the *concrete* economic and political conditions of each particular *period* of the historical process."¹⁶
3. Building up an organization of class-conscious workers combined with radical intellectuals – operating as a revolutionary collective, both democratic and disciplined – capable of utilizing Marxist theory to mobilize insurgencies to replace the tyrannies of Tsarism and capitalism with democracy and socialism.¹⁷
4. An approach to the interplay of reform struggles with the longer-range revolutionary struggle, permeated by several qualities – (a) a refusal to bow to the oppressive and exploitative powers-that-be, (b) a refusal to submit to the transitory "realism" of mainstream politics, (c) a measuring of all activity by how it would help build the working-class consciousness, the mass workers' movement, and the revolutionary organization that will be necessary to overturn capitalism and lead to a socialist future.
5. An insistence that the revolutionary party must function as "a tribune of the people,"¹⁸ combining working-class struggles with systematic struggles against all forms of oppression, regardless of which class was affected – deepening and extending into the centrality of a workers' and peasants' alliance in the anti-Tsarist struggle.

6. A strategic orientation combining the struggle against capitalism with the struggle for revolutionary democracy (including a republic, a militia, election of government officials by the people, equal rights for women, self-determination of nations, etc.). Lenin stressed “basing ourselves on the democracy already achieved, and exposing its incompleteness under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as a necessary basis both for the abolition of the poverty of the masses and for the *complete* and *all-round* institution of *all* democratic reforms.”¹⁹

7. Characterizing global capitalism as having entered an imperialist stage, involving economic expansion beyond national boundaries for the purpose of securing markets, raw materials and investment opportunities, embracing all countries in our epoch – oppressed by competing and contending elites of the so-called “Great Powers.”²⁰

8. A consistent, unrelenting revolutionary internationalism: understanding that capitalism is a global system, seeing struggles against exploitation, oppression and tyranny that global solidarity and global organization are essential to socialist revolution.

One can argue that much of this is not unique to Lenin, but all of it is essential to the “Leninism” of Lenin.

Of the non-essential in Lenin’s political thought and practice, several examples suggest themselves. It can be argued that Lenin was, in his polemics with others on the Left, prone to indulge in unfair exaggeration and uncomradely ridicule. That was certainly the judgment of some of his comrades who shared Lenin’s basic orientation and edited the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* and who, much to his chagrin, turned down 47 of his contributions in 1912 to 1914, at one point admonishing that “his strong language and sharpness go too far.”²¹ Despite his complaints, Lenin did not split from his comrades over this – a clear indication that we are dealing with something that was not essential.

Or consider this hostile critique by an anti-Leninist named Moissaye Olgin from the Jewish Labor Bund, describing Lenin’s orientation as the revolutionary upsurge of 1905 was beginning to collapse:

In 1906, after the dissolution of the first Duma [tsarist parliament], when it became evident that absolutism had retained its power – when the mass of the peoples were becoming disappointed and revolutionary organizations were crumbling and the collapse of the revolution was evident – Lenin was preaching nothing less than an immediate armed insurrection. He urged the creation of an army of conspirators, to consist of groups of from five to ten “professional revolutionists,” those groups to go among the people and stage an insurrection.²²

The Bundist critic saw this as a consistent feature of Lenin's orientation, writing (in months of 1917 between the overthrow of the Tsar and the Bolshevik seizure of power) that "now, as before, he advocated an armed insurrection." Yet the critic fails to note that by 1907 Lenin was breaking away from the "armed insurrection" orientation (which continued to be advanced by his erstwhile co-thinker Alexander Bogdanov). At times he was even voting with the Mensheviks for non-insurrectionary electoral work, and trade union efforts, and reform activity by the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party to which both factions still belonged. This culminated in a sharp internal struggle among the Bolsheviks, in which Lenin led a majority in breaking from those around Bogdanov. All of which suggests – contrary to what is implied by the critic – that Lenin's 1906 perspectives were not an essential element in his general revolutionary orientation.²³

There is also a significant cluster of significant developments, taking place during the final years of Lenin's life. In the catastrophic period of civil war and foreign intervention which followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, when optimistic expectations were overwhelmed by a desperate struggle simply to survive, there were a number of emergency measures and authoritarian improvisations – which had never been part of the Bolshevik orientation from 1903 through 1917 – but which were advocated by Lenin and/or implemented by the new Communist regime. This resulted in protests and critiques from many Bolshevik comrades who had been close to Lenin up until this period – gathered in such groupings as the Workers' Opposition and Democratic Centralists. Some of Lenin's comrades also expressed concern over the repressive operations of the secret police, the Cheka. In addition to supporting the creation and many activities of the Cheka, Lenin condoned and even advocated the use of brutal and sometimes murderous human rights abuses, and also (perhaps "only" rhetorically) threatened, in 1921, to have socialist critics of his policies shot. The establishment of the Communist Party dictatorship was described by prominent Bolshevik Mikhail Tomsky in this way: "Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, two, three or four parties may exist, but only on the single condition that one of them is in power and the others in prison." Such policies have been presented as representing the very essence of Leninism, rather than as the emergency measures and authoritarian improvisations that they actually were.²⁴

In fact, many of these "*non-essential*" qualities in the Leninism of Lenin did become essentials of the "Leninism" associated with the ideology and regime associated with Stalin. For many in the larger world, such repressive and cynical qualities came to characterize much of the Communism prevalent in the Stalin era. The powerful propaganda apparatus of the Stalin regime affirmed that such "Communism" was firmly grounded in ideas and actions of Lenin.²⁵

The Formidable Anti-Lenin

The same message was conveyed by the powerful propaganda apparatus of the anti-Communists. Turning extreme authoritarianism into a devastating depiction of “Leninism” has been complemented by a cornucopia of Lenin quotes widely disseminated by right wing ideologues – often made up by those self-same ideologues.

Many of the alleged quotations relate to issues of particular concern to conservative campaigners. “One man with a gun can control 100 without one,” is a favorite of gun control opponents. Those who oppose proposals for national health care have promoted this one: “Socialized medicine is a keystone to the establishment of a socialist state.” Fiscal conservatives have told us Lenin said: “The way to crush the bourgeoisie is to grind them between the millstones of taxation and inflation.”

Those suspicious of what is taught in public schools sometimes attribute this to Lenin: “Give us the child for 8 years and it will be a Bolshevik forever.” Sometimes it seems like Lenin thought to do his evil in half the time: “Give me four years to teach the children and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted.” Phony Lenin quotes indicate that he was nothing if not ambitious: “Give me just one generation of youth, and I’ll transform the whole world.”

John Birch Society founder Robert Welch retailed this false quote in the 1960s, and it has been widely shared since then, by Ronald Reagan, among others: “First, we will take Eastern Europe, then the masses of Asia, then we will encircle the United States which will be the last bastion of capitalism. We will not have to attack. It will fall like an overripe fruit into our hands.”²⁶ Another favorite for those who like military analogies is this one: “You probe with bayonets: if you find mush, you push. If you find steel, you withdraw.”

This false Lenin quote is also worth considering: “Destroying all opposition by invective, slander, smear, and blackmail is one of the techniques of Communism.” Featured in a publication of Reverend Billy James Hargis’s Christian Anti-Communist Crusade in the 1960s, the quote – according to Julian Williams, Research Director for Hargis – resulted from “one of those occasions where someone made up a Lenin remark to fit one of Communism’s tactics. Lenin just didn’t spell things out that clearly.”²⁷

“A lie told often enough becomes the truth” – the widespread attribution of this to Lenin pairs nicely with another: “Promises are like pie crust, made to be broken.” Of course, many know of Lenin’s cynical categorization of “useful idiots” – applied to those who fall for and repeat Communist propaganda. As with all the bogus quotes cited here, however, Lenin never said it. Those who claim that he did say these things are never able to cite a credible source. It’s all made up.

Even more serious anti-Communist accounts have contributed to the expanding mythologies related to Lenin. Examples of this can be drawn from the widely circulated biography by Victor Sebestyen – *Lenin*:

The Man, the Dictator, and the Master of Terror, which appeared in 2017. Sebestyen's book, with a fine narrative flow and a certain degree of sophistication, is hardly the worst of anti-Lenin studies. But even here there are problems that may be instructive. Let us focus only on two.

Sebestyen accurately notes that, as a radicalizing youth, Lenin was profoundly influenced by – it could be said he truly loved – a revolutionary novel of the 1860s, *What Is To Be Done?*, by Nikolai Chernyshevsky. But Sebestyen fumbles in what he makes of the novel, telling us the volume's hero is "Rakhmetev, who dreams of a world where poverty has ceased to exist and everyone lives in total freedom." Rakhmetev "forsakes all pleasure in the cause of Revolution," building "his stamina by eating raw steak, performing strenuous gymnastic exercises and physically arduous work." Having no time for anything except making revolution," he is unswerving in his dedication, brutally honest, clinically efficient, cold rational." Lenin modeled himself, we are told, on the novel's main character.²⁸

The problem, however, is that Rakhmetev is a relatively minor character in *What Is To Be Done?*, the main character being a very different kind of person – a young woman named Vera Pavlovna. The heroine organizes, among conscientious and hardworking seamstresses, two successful cooperative enterprises that function along democratic and socialist lines, "described in loving detail," as E. H. Carr has put it, for the novel's readers.²⁹ At the same time, Vera engages in a life of the mind, discussing science, philosophy, and the meaning of freedom with two intimate friends – young intellectuals and conscientious medical students. The two help introduce the strong-minded heroine to the world of ideas and literature, and each falls in love with her. In fact, a major focus of the book is the relation between men and women, as well as how to live a moral life in an immoral society.

As Carr notes, the novel's form is that of "a highly discursive Victorian English novel." While *What Is To Be Done?* is artistically flawed in more than one way, in their introduction to the book's most recent English translation, Michael Katz and William Wagner comment that "Chernyshevsky's chief intellectual accomplishment lay in synthesizing the ideas of contemporary Western European social critics, political economists, and philosophers into an ideology of radicalism that appealed to angry young *intelligenty* caught in the backward conditions of mid-nineteenth century Russia." The key to the novel's structure, according to the prominent Bolshevik culture critic A. V. Lunacharsky, was in its examination of "vulgar people, new people, superior people, and dreams." And as historian W. Bruce Lincoln notes, it was meant to "portray how liberated men and women might build a new society." Young rebels turned to it "for guidance in their daily lives." Lenin was one of these young rebels, as was his sister Olga, two years his junior, with whom he was very close. Shortly before her premature death, she wrote (clearly revealing Chernyshevsky's influence): "The aspiration towards truth and to the ideal

is in people's souls ... One must always believe in people, in the possibility of something better on earth, despite personal disappointment ... If one doesn't believe in people, doesn't love them, then what is one living for?"³⁰

Sebestyen's deformed account of the novel and of its meaning for Lenin is matched by other distortions in his biography. One involves a terrible famine that began sweeping through the Russian Empire in 1891, from which more than 400,000 died of starvation, typhus, and cholera. Most radical and liberal intellectuals blamed the policies of the Tsar, the ineptness of bureaucratic state, and the self-centeredness of Russia's privileged elites. More than this, many rallied to distribute food, medicines, and other assistance. Sebestyen tells us that Lenin "would have nothing to do with relief or charitable work to help the dying peasants," because "for him, the important thing was that the famine would weaken the autocracy and might further the cause of the Revolution." Lenin (all of 21 years old) made use of "an inflexible logic and a cold interpretation of Marxism," insisting that "it's sentimentality to think that a sea of need could be emptied with the teaspoon of philanthropy," concluding that "the famine ... played the role of a progressive factor." Sebestyen offers a shocking observation from Lenin's famous future comrade, Leon Trotsky: "He conducted systematic and outspoken propaganda against the relief committees."³¹

There is more than one problem with Sebestyen's account. If one checks his footnotes, the source for the Trotsky quote is *On Lenin: Notes Towards a Biography*, but the quote is nowhere to be found in that book. Of course, mistakes can occur – and it turns out that a different Trotsky title is the relevant one: *The Young Lenin*. But consulting the actual source deepens the problem. Trotsky is saying the opposite of what is attributed to him! The actual quotation comes not from Trotsky himself, but from an anti-Lenin writer whom Trotsky is debunking – a populist acquaintance of the young Lenin who was hostile to his Marxism, Vasily Vodovozov. Trotsky emphasizes that Lenin was not alone in raising critical questions about the effectiveness of the philanthropy, commenting: "The Marxists, of course, opposed not aid to the starving, but the illusion that a sea of need could be emptied with a spoonful of philanthropy."³²

Lenin biographer Lars Lih also challenges the Vodovozov account which Sebestyen uses. "The young Lenin becomes a walking, talking embodiment of the most hostile stereotypes of Russian Marxism circulating at the time [in the 1890s]," Lih comments. "Many historians still today believe in the accuracy of this polemical caricature of Russian Marxism in general and Lenin in particular." Lih goes on to cite Lenin's polemics of the 1890s (as well as articles from such Russian Marxist mentors of the time as Georgi Plekhanov and Pavel Axelrod) which corroborate the points stressed by Trotsky. He also cites a source suggesting that the young Lenin may, in fact, have joined with his sisters in rendering aid to the hungry in 1891-92.³³

In a sense, we have been dealing here with the equivalent of “non-essential” qualities in anti-Communism’s “Anti-Lenin” boogeyman. It is possible to dismiss the cornucopia of phony “Lenin quotes,” and also to reject all distortions such as those we have identified in the Sebestyen biography (there are certainly more of those in Sebestyen and other sources) while keeping intact what could be termed “The Anti-Lenin” – a formidable weapon to employ against the threat to today’s world order that is posed by Lenin’s ideas and example.

It may be worth lingering for a moment over this formulation – “The Anti-Lenin.” Ironically, in one of the *Leninist Days* discussions in April 2024, a knowledgeable scholar suggested that Leninism came into being not in 1902 or 1903, but only in the early 1920s. What this scholar meant by “Leninism” was not the actual theory and practice which absorbed Lenin’s attention and activities in the years culminating in the Bolshevik Revolution, but rather the authoritarian elitist model which has increasingly passed for Leninism in the years since the 1917 Revolution. For purposes of clarity, I use the term *Leninism* in reference to the actual thinking and actions of Lenin and his close comrades after 1903. The later authoritarian-elitist model associated as “Leninist,” particularly as articulated within the right half of the political spectrum, can be termed *The Anti-Lenin*.

It is noteworthy that key figures in the creation of this “Anti-Lenin” vision include people who once considered themselves stalwart Leninists.

There is Bertram D. Wolfe, a founder of and leading educator within the U.S. Communist Party, who was expelled in 1929 as part of an oppositional group resisting policies of Stalin, proudly claiming to uphold the genuine perspectives of Lenin for another decade before dissolving. As the Cold War began to unfold in the late 1940s, Wolfe became a central figure in the crusade against Communism, working closely with such entities as the U.S. State Department, the U.S. War College, and the Central Intelligence Agency. For three decades he produced many influential books and articles, opposing Communism, challenging Marxism, and denouncing Lenin as the architect of totalitarianism.³⁴

Another radical intellectual of the 1930s, prominent figure in the Trotskyist movement, was James Burnham. By the early 1940s he was an outspoken critic of Marxism, arguing that, in fact, Stalin truly was Lenin’s rightful heir, and producing what became a treasure-trove of conservative anti-Communist thought. Among his influential books were: *The Managerial Revolution*, *The Machiavellians*, *The Struggle for the World*, *The Web of Subversion*, and *Suicide of the West*. In good Leninist fashion, he sought to go beyond words as an early and influential presence within the Central Intelligence Agency. He would also exercise influence among crystalizing right-wing cadres as one of the most influential editors of William F. Buckley’s conservative weekly *National Review*.³⁵

The knowledge and experience imparted by such figures contributed substantially to the knowledge base utilized by the U.S. government in the early years of the Cold War, as reflected in an internal CIA manual on Communist organization produced in the late 1940s:

The international Communist movement has not merely survived, but has actually flourished, in the face of difficulties which have ruined political forces with less constancy of purpose and with less practical a technique. It has maintained itself as the “vanguard of the proletariat” through Tsarist and totalitarian suppression, armed intervention, two world wars, and a decade of general “bourgeois” prosperity. In large measure, Communist successes can be explained by the organizational adaptability of the Communist Party and its mastery over a mass of practical techniques. The Party knows what it must do and how to go about doing it, in any given circumstance. This competence was responsible in the first place for the success of the Bolshevik Revolution, and since then, for the endurance of the Party as a continuing threat to all “bourgeois” states. Whatever the political climate, the Party goes on, working openly and legally where it can, secretly and illegally where it must.³⁶

Such an analysis not only described the world Communist movement of the early Cold War years but was also a key building-block in the crafting of the conceptual “Anti-Lenin” that would permeate the political culture and governmental policies of the United States and beyond for many years to come.

Abdurakman Avtorkhanov was less well-known than Wolfe and Burnham, but his trajectory and contributions are quite significant. Growing up in the Soviet Union in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, he joined the Communist Party in 1927 and did well as one of the protégés of prominent Soviet leader Nikolai Bukharin, graduating from the elite Moscow Institute of Red Professors. A falling out between Bukharin and Stalin, however, earned Avtorkhanov a 1937 arrest and five-year prison sentence. Conditions of World War II enabled him to escape to Nazi Germany. He later stayed on in West Germany, heading up the Institute for the Study of the USSR, helping establish Radio Free Europe, and later serving in the U.S. Army Institute of Advanced Russian Studies.³⁷

Avtorkhanov produced influential studies on Communism. The opening sentence of one of these – *The Communist Party Apparatus* – captures the fundamental narrative of the “Anti-Lenin” conceptualization:

Bolshevism is not an ideology, it is an organization. Its ideology is Marxism, revised and brought up-to-date as required by the interests of the organization. Bolshevism is not a political party in the usual meaning of the term. The Bolsheviks themselves call it a

party, but with the significant reservation that it is a party of a new type. Bolshevism is not a “movement,” based on a mosaic of class representation, amorphous organizational principles, an emotional shifting of its masses and an improvised leadership. Bolshevism is a hierarchical organization built from the top down and organized on the basis of a specific body of doctrine precisely developed in theory and applied in practice. The organizational forms of bolshevism are subject to constant change in response to changing conditions of time and place, but its internal structure remains unaltered. This system is the same today as it was before the Bolsheviks came to power.³⁸

Avtorkhanov goes on to emphasize: “The party was not an aim in itself; Lenin needed the party as a weapon for organizing the revolution in Russia, and the revolution as the means for seizing power.” He notes that Lenin “regarded power exercised on behalf of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a means of achieving the ultimate aim – the building of communism.” He adds that Lenin “passed Marxism, a product of the European mind, through the filter of the specific Russian circumstances, removing from it all that was Utopian and lofty in order to make use of all that was practical and dynamic.”³⁹

Along with Wolfe and Burnham, Avtorkhanov viewed Stalin’s extreme authoritarian version of “Communism” as consistent with Lenin’s intentions and practices. The “Anti-Lenin” conceptualization of such ideologues remove all “utopian and lofty” aspirations and impulses from the equation. Their conception of Leninism revolved around a “party of a new type” characterized by an authoritarian hierarchy, unremittingly centralist, highly disciplined, pitiless, manipulative. This “Leninism” claimed to care about democracy, freedom, and a decent life for all – but it cynically made use of such notions only for the purpose of concentrating all power into its own hands. This understanding of Leninism was propagated in the popularization *Masters of Deceit*, produced by the longtime director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, J. Edgar Hoover, who had been fighting Communism since 1917, explaining that it was “a global threat to humanity, and to each of us,” functioning around the world as “a dedicated, conspiratorial group operating under modern conditions as an arm of revolution.”⁴⁰

Seductive Attractions of The Anti-Lenin

An early contribution to the most recent wave of Lenin evaluations is a collection edited by Alla Ivanchikova and Robert R. Maclean, *The Future of Lenin: Power, Politics, and Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*. In her introductory essay to this volume, Ivanchikova lists “right-wing Leninism” as one of the significant contemporary developments deserving examination,

referring to “a corpus of works, literary and theoretical, that, throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, adapt Lenin for right-wing use.” In his contribution to the volume, David Ost comments on “a mini-revival of interest in Lenin, starting unexpectedly on the Right, but lately emerging in parts of the Left as well.” Ost views Leninism through the lens of what we have described as “The Anti-Lenin” and naturally opposes its revival on the Left. But he is intrigued that “the new Right seems to find Lenin almost irresistible.” He adds that “Donald Trump’s post-defeat determination to hold onto power regardless of the rules was an impressive performance of right-wing Leninism ...” A more detailed exploration by Alexander Mihailovic shares “Leninist” pronouncements of far-right ideologues Paul Gottfried, Grover Nordquist, and especially Steve Bannon – although he comments that “we can safely assume that [Bannon’s] contact with Marxism-Leninism is as much through other conservative sources, most likely from the works of American apostates from leftism as Whittaker Chambers, Sidney Hook, and James Burnham.”⁴¹

The “Anti-Lenin” paradigm is thoroughly elitist, hierarchical, authoritarian, heartless, and extremely efficient – while functioning in hostile terrain – in undermining the power of its opponents while expanding its own power and influence. “Among the aspects of Lenin’s thought that right-wing ideologues have to dispense with to make him useful for their goals,” notes Alla Ivanchikova, “is his Marxist core: his commitment to universal equality, anti-imperialism, and working-class power.” Researcher Cihan Tuğal concurs: “Even though a defining feature of the American Right is a rabid anti-Marxism, conservatives have a history of infatuation with [authoritarian understandings of] communism.” He emphasizes an essential characteristic of “right-libertarian/conservative Leninism” – that despite its stance as representing grassroots populism, “it still serves the interests of the very few.”⁴²

Tuğal notes an early variant of right-wing Leninism in the John Birch Society, launched in 1959 by an ideologically-oriented businessman animated by right-wing conspiracy theories, named Robert Welch, and which “modeled its strategies on communist cell organizing.” Looking back on Birch Society history from the vantage-point of 2023, *Financial Times* US national editor Edward Luce concurs that – animated by “ferocious organizing zeal” – Welch “aped Lenin’s Bolshevik methods.”⁴³ A 1966 scholarly description brings to mind hostile Cold War accounts of Communist organizational structures:

It soon becomes very clear to that the organization was to operate under authoritarian control all levels; it was to be a monolithic body which could not be infiltrated, distorted or disrupted. There is to be no room for democracy because to Robert Welch democracy is “a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perennial fraud. ... it must submit to direction from the top, otherwise it

would become a debating society (after the order of a democracy) and no debating society could ever hope to stop the Communist conspiracy.⁴⁴

Welch himself, in *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, projected the goal of a million members “truly dedicated to the things in which we believe.” He added that a “million members is all we would want,” explaining that “we need disciplined pullers at the oars, not passengers.” He acknowledged that this was akin to “the Communist principle of the ‘dedicated few,’ as enunciated by Lenin. And we are, in fact, willing to draw on all successful human experience in organizational matters, so long as it does not involve any sacrifice of morality in the means used to achieve an end.”⁴⁵

According to Welch, the group’s actual membership never rose above 100,000 (others put the figure at less than 30,000). One problem was that it had earned a reputation, even among many prominent conservatives, as being somewhat crazy and conspiracy-obsessed. Yet continuing to function largely “under the radar” throughout the 1970s, its field staff and membership worked diligently in a variety of ad hoc committees which, according to Welch biographer Edward Miller, “helped bridge the chasm between capitalist libertarians who wanted smaller government, lower taxes, and less regulation, and the social conservatives concerned with social transformations in gender rights, the liberalization of sexuality and pornography, and civil rights reforms.” Issues preoccupying these ad hoc groups “included abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, the United Nations, sex education, and tax reform.”⁴⁶

“Middle-of-the-road” perspectives of the political mainstream, predominant through the 1950s and early 1960s, were proving inadequate for growing numbers of people, as the population was impacted by a proliferation of unsettling social-cultural changes and economic instabilities, generating a slow-motion radicalization, with growing numbers of people looking for alternatives to “politics-as-usual.” The political Left would benefit from this, but there were limitations: many on the Left were “pragmatically” connected to the centrist-liberalism of the Democratic Party, while others on the Left were fragmented, inexperienced, and resource-poor.⁴⁷ The centrist-conservatives predominant in the Republican Party of that time were increasingly seen – along with the centrist-liberal Democrats – as part of the problem, not part of the solution by radicalizing sectors of the population. Elements on the far-right of the political spectrum – due to their various ad hoc campaigns, their more sharply-defined political orientation, and their substantial resources – were well-poised to benefit from the radicalization that was underway. All of this helped create the atmosphere in which the so-called “Reagan Revolution” of the 1980s was able to crystallize.⁴⁸

Right-wing Leninism has manifested itself in even more explicit forms than what we have seen in the early John Birch Society. A key figure has been billionaire Charles Koch, a former Bircher who, with his brother David, branched out to bankroll a variety of right-wing entities. This included the 1977 creation of the influential right-wing think-tank, the Cato Institute, which played a significant role in the propagation of right-wing Leninism. Centrally involved in the early days of the Institute was well-known laissez-faire economist Murray Rothbard. “We can learn a great deal from Lenin and the Leninists,” according to Rothbard, who “admired Lenin’s daring leadership,” as historian Nancy MacLean puts it, “but most of all ... saw that some of his techniques could serve a wholly opposite purpose: namely, to establish a kind of capitalism purer and less restrained than the world had ever known.” MacLean describes Rothbard’s action plan: “As the Bolshevik leader taught, the ‘cadre’ was to play the vital role: its full-time devotion to the cause, as a militant minority of foot-soldier ideologues, would assure purity and consistency while building the ranks and expanding the cadre’s influence on others.”⁴⁹

Researcher Cihan Tuğal has argued that a sophisticated variant of right-wing Leninism, integrates theorizations of Antonio Gramsci, and that it is “through integrating the ‘war of position’ tactics ... with a cadre-led drive to infiltrate Washington DC (and cadre-controlled coalition building) that the Right has triumphed.” Tuğal cites a 1983 proposal crafted through the Cato Institute, entitled “Achieving a Leninist Strategy,” guiding this more advanced approach. Commenting that “the authors were well aware that Leninism in an advanced country did not entail an overnight seizure of power and merciless imposition of utopia,” he suggests that the more sophisticated right-wing Leninism “would simultaneously target policy, economy, Washington DC, civil society, and culture.”⁵⁰

As already noted, a key difference between actual Leninism and right-wing Leninism is that the one aspires to bring equality, social justice, and democratic power to all, while the other serves the interests of the very few. As a consequence, Tuğal suggests that, despite its anti-statist rhetoric, “the right-wing appropriation of Lenin is bound to be authoritarian,” and “Bolshevism-in-reverse is much faster than classical Leninism in bloating the state it promises to smash.”⁵¹

The “Anti-Lenin” conceptualization has been the meat and drink of anti-Communist propaganda at least since the middle of the twentieth century. But it has persisted beyond the Cold War and the collapse of the Stalinized Communist powers. Like a monstrous golem, fashioned out of a muddy understanding of Lenin and Leninism, it has taken on life as a practical political force. Ingesting the Masters of Deceit ethos of the Cold War era, it cynically claims to care about democracy, freedom, and a decent life for all – but is authoritarian, hierarchical, highly disciplined, and dedicated to enhancing the power of privileged elites.

When wedded to governmental power, “The Anti-Lenin” has proved to be incredibly lethal, as documented in such studies as William Blum’s *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, as well as two volumes by Vincent Bevins – (1) *The Jakarta Method: Washington’s Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped our World* and (2) *If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution*.⁵²

Within the United States and other countries, “The Anti-Lenin” has been perceived as fostering something akin to fascism. There has certainly been a proliferation of variations of right-wing populist movements and governments – not only in the United States, but also in Brazil, Russia, India, Hungary, Turkey, and elsewhere.

Lenin for Revolutionaries

Many want something better than the crises and calamities of the status quo, and definitely something other than the right-wing golem of “The Anti-Lenin.” Yet if we are passive, it seems likely that one or the other, or both, of these futures will finally triumph over us.

A society in which the free development of each person will be the condition for the free development of all people, in which we all share in the labor that would make this so, sharing in the fruits of our labor, with liberty and justice for all, a society of the free and the equal – it would be good to make that dream real. This would be an alternative worth striving for.

Efforts to bring this into being have more than once ended in failure and disappointment. Yet only through such efforts can advances toward genuine democracy and freedom and a better life for all be made real. Nor is it something that can simply be achieved once and for all. It is a never-ending story of continuing struggles that give meaning to life and hope for the future.

Increasing numbers of those who are aware of the situation we are in, and who engage in struggle to open a different and better pathway for humanity, are becoming revolutionaries. To be more effective, such people may commit themselves to making use of the positive insights and examples associated with what we have identified as essentials of Lenin’s orientation.

1 Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin: Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2023), p. xv.

2 Ibid., p. 122.

3 Paul Le Blanc, "Lenin's Socialism: Labels and Realities," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, 14 March 2024, <https://links.org.au/lenins-socialism-labels-and-realities>

4 A sampling includes: Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017); Ronald G. Suny, *Red Flag Unfurled: History, Historians, and the Russian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017); David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers in the Russian Revolution: February 1917-June 1918* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018); Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered. "What Is To Be Done?" in Context* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008); Tamas Krausz, *Reconstructing Lenin, An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

5 Lev Kamenev, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (Detroit: Marxian Educational Society, 1920); reproduced in Al Richardson, ed., *In Defence of the Russian Revolution: A Selection of Bolshevik Writings, 1917-1923* (London: Porcupine Press, 1995, pp. 102-110); also on Marxist Internet Archive: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kamenev/1920/x01/x01.htm>.

6 Ibid.

7 Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 193.

8 Lara Douds, *Inside Lenin's Government: Ideology, Power and Practice in the early Soviet State* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 4.

10 Ibid., p. 10.

11 Ibid., pp. 97-124.

12 Ibid., pp. 149-68.

13 Ibid., pp. 11-20.

14 Radek/Lenin quoted in Le Blanc, *Lenin: Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*, p. xv.

15 Eastman and Lukács quoted in Le Blanc, *Lenin: Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*, pp. xii, 10.

16 V.I. Lenin, "Letters on Tactics," *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 43.

17 Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015).

18 V.I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961), p. 423.

19 V.I. Lenin, in "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations in Self-Determination," *Collected Works*, Vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), p. 408.

20 See Paul Le Blanc, "Lenin, Imperialism, and Revolutionary Struggles," *Irish Marxist Review*, Vol. 13, No. 37 (2024).

21 R. Carter Elwood, *The Non-Geometric Lenin: Essays on the Development of the Bolshevik Party 1910-1914*. (London: Anthem Press, 2011), p. 44.

22 Moissaye J. Olgin, *Lenin and the Bolshevik* (New York: Revolutionary Workers League, 1936; reprinted from *Asia*, Volume 17; Number 10, December 1917), p. 12. By 1920, after immigrating to the United States, Olgin reevaluated his orientation, and became part of the Communist movement.

23 Ibid., p. 12; Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, pp. 129-152; Paul Le Blanc, "Learning from Bogdanov," in *Revolutionary Collective: Comrades, Critics, and Dynamics in the Struggle for Socialism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), pp. 49-75.

24 Barbara Allen, *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937: Life of an Old Bolshevik* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016); Charter Wynn, *The Moderate Bolshevik: Mikhail Tomsy from the Factory to the Kremlin, 1880-1936* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023), p. 263. Tomsy was employing this joke, in 1927, against long-time comrades of Lenin – Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Krupskaya, etc. – who, after Lenin's death, opposed policies of the bureaucratic regime represented at the time by Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin. But the joke was on him when, soon after, Stalin turned on Bukharin, Tomsy, and Alexei Rykov as "right deviationists."

25 See David Brandenberger and Mikhail V. Zelenov, eds. *Stalin's Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

- 26 Edward H. Miller, *A Conspiratorial Life: Robert Welch, The John Birch Society, and the Revolution of American Conservatism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 372. Many false Lenin quotes (labeled as such) can be found through Wikipedia, only some of which are presented here.
- 27 Paul F. Boller, Jr. and John George, *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 70.
- 28 Victor Sebestyen, *Lenin: The Man, the Dictator, and the Master of Terror* (New York: Vintage Books, 2018), pp. 61-63. Thanks to Jodi Dean for drawing my attention to these matters.
- 29 E.H. Carr, "Introduction" to N.G. Cherneshevsky, *What Is to Be Done? Tales About New People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. xiii, xiv, xv.
- 30 Michael R. Katz and William G. Wagner, "Introduction: Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?*, and the Russian Intelligentsia," in Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What Is to Be Done?* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 15, 27; W. Bruce Franklin, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia* (New York: Viking, 1998), p. 188; Katy Turton, *Forgotten Lives: The Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution, 1864-1937* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 26.
- 31 Sebestyen, pp. 69-71.
- 32 Leon Trotsky, *The Young Lenin* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1972), pp. 172-75.
- 33 Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 39.
- 34 Bertram D. Wolfe, *Lenin and the Twentieth Century: a Bertram D. Wolfe Retrospective* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University 1984); Bertram D. Wolfe, *Breaking with Communism: The Intellectual Odyssey of Bertram D. Wolfe*, edited and with an introduction by Robert Hessen (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University 1990).
- 35 Paul Le Blanc, "The Odyssey of James Burnham," in *Revolutionary Collective: Comrades, Critics, and Dynamics in the Struggle for Socialism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), pp. 140-167.
- 36 Central Intelligence Agency, "Clandestine Communist Organization, Part One, Interim Report, 1949," p. 1. My thanks to Alla Ivanchikova for supplying a copy of this manual.
- 37 Biographical information available through Wikipedia.
- 38 Abdurakman Avtorkhanov, *The Communist Party Apparatus* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books/World Publishing Co., 1968), p. 1.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 2-3, 19.
- 40 J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Pocket Books, 1962), pp. v, vi.
- 41 Alla Ivanchikova and Robert R. Maclean, eds., *The Future of Lenin: Power, Politics, and Revolution in the Twenty-First Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2022), pp. 6, 12, 28, 29, 102. On Bannon's self-identification as a "Leninist," see Ron Radosh, "Steve Bannon, Trump's Top Guy, Told Me He Was 'a Leninist,'" *The Daily Beast*, updated April 13, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/steve-bannon-trumps-top-guy-told-me-he-was-a-leninist>
- 42 Ivanchikova and Maclean, eds., *The Future of Lenin*, p. 12; Cihan Tuğal, "The Counter-Revolution's Long March: The American Right's Shift from Primitive to Advanced Leninism," *Critical Sociology* 2020, Vol. 46(3), pp. 346, 352.
- 43 Tuğal, pp. 344, 347; Edward Luce, "Birchers – cabals, conspiracies and the group that paved the way for Trump," *Financial Times*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/5247f68e-33a2-43ef-848e-56bca6294693>
- 44 Max P. Peterson, *The Ideology of the John Birch Society*, Masters' Thesis, Department of Graduate Studies (Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1966), p. 32.
- 45 Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (1961), <https://archive.org/details/WelchRobertBlueBook/page/n1/mode/1up>
- 46 Miller, *A Conspiratorial Life*, pp. 318, 330; Matthew Dalleck, *Birchers: How the John Birch Society Radicalized the American Right* (New York: Basic Books, 2022), p. 9.
- 47 Information on the US Left is offered in: Paul Le Blanc, *Left Americana: The Radical Heart of US History* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), pp. 1-32, 73-80, 131-178, 187-252; Paul Le Blanc, *Marx, Lenin, and the Revolutionary Experience: Studies in Communism and Radicalism in the*

Age of Globalization (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 153-98, 221-58; Paul Le Blanc and Michael Yates, *A Freedom Budget for All Americans: Recapturing the Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in the Struggle for Economic Justice Today* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013).

48 Much of this is documented in Kim Fones-Wolf, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), summarized and analyzed in Le Blanc, "The Triumphant Arc of US Conservatism," in *Left Americana*, pp. 179-86. Also see Dalleck, pp. 1-16.

49 Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), pp. 84, 138, 140.

50 Tuğal, pp. 346, 349-50. Gramsci spoke of an interplay between *war of maneuver* (confrontation with and direct assault by insurgent forces on the state) and *war of position* (a more gradual building up of insurgent influence and power in society).

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 354.

52 William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, updated edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped our World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2021); Vincent Bevins, *If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution* (London: Wildfire, 2023).