

LENIN

By Victor Chernov

LENIN is dead—this time dead physically, for spiritually and politically he has been dead a year at least. We have got in the habit of speaking of him as a thing of the past; and for that very reason it will not be difficult now to write of him dispassionately.

Lenin was a great man. He was not merely the greatest man in his party; he was its uncrowned king, and deservedly. He was its head, its will, I should even say he was its heart were it not that both the man and the party implied in themselves heartlessness as a duty. Lenin's intellect was energetic but cold. It was above all an ironic, sarcastic, and cynical intellect. Nothing to him was worse than sentimentality, a name he was ready to apply to all moral and ethical considerations in politics. Such things were to him trifles, hypocrisy, "parson's talk." Politics to him meant strategy, pure and simple. Victory was the only commandment to observe; the will to rule and to carry through a political program without compromise, that was the only virtue; hesitation, that was the only crime.

It has been said that war is a continuation of politics, though employing different means. Lenin would undoubtedly have reversed this dictum and said that politics is the continuation of war under another guise. The essential effect of war on a citizen's conscience is nothing but a legalization and glorification of things that in times of peace constitute crime. In war the turning of a flourishing country into a desert is a mere tactical move; robbery is a "requisition," deceit a strategem, readiness to shed the blood of one's brother military zeal; heartlessness towards one's victims is laudable self-command; pitilessness and inhumanity are one's duty. In war all means are good, and the best ones are precisely the things most condemned in normal human intercourse. And as politics is disguised war, the rules of war constitute its principles.

Lenin was often accused of not being and of not wanting to be an "honest adversary." But then the very idea of an "honest adversary" was to him an absurdity, a smug citizen's prejudice, something that might be made use of now and then jesuitically in one's own interest; but to take it seriously was silly. A de-

fender of the proletariat is under an obligation to put aside all scruples in dealings with the foe. To deceive him intentionally, to calumniate him, to blacken his name, all this Lenin considered as normal. In fact, it would be hard to exceed the cynical brutality with which he proclaimed all this. Lenin's conscience consisted in putting himself outside the boundaries of human conscience in all dealings with his foes; and in thus rejecting all principles of honesty he remained honest with himself.

Being a Marxist, he was a believer in "class struggle." As an individual contribution to this theory he used to confess his belief that civil war was the unavoidable climax of class struggle. We may even say that to him class struggle was but the embryo of civil war. Dissent in the party, whether serious or merely trifling, he often tried to explain as an echo of class antagonisms. He would then proceed to eliminate the undesirable by cutting them off from the party, and in doing this he "honestly" resorted to the lowest means. After all, is not a non-homogeneous party an illegitimate conglomeration of antagonistic class-elements? And all antagonistic class-elements should be treated according to the precept "war is war."

His whole life was passed in schisms and factional fights within the party. From this resulted his incomparable perfection as a gladiator, as a professional fighter, in training every day of his life and constantly devising new tricks to trip up or knock out his adversary. It was this lifelong training that gave him his amazing cool-headedness, his presence of mind in any conceivable situation, his unflinching hope "to get out of it" somehow or other. By nature a man of single purpose and possessed of a powerful instinct of self-preservation, he had no difficulty in proclaiming *credo quia absurdum* and was much like that favorite Russian toy, the Van'ka-Vstan'ka boy, who has a piece of lead in his rounded bottom and bobs up again as fast as you knock him down. After every failure, no matter how shameful or humiliating, Lenin would instantly bob up and begin again from the beginning. His will was like a good steel spring which recoils the more powerfully the harder it is pressed. He was a hardy party leader of just the kind necessary to inspire and keep up the courage of his fellow fighters and to forestall panic by his personal example of unlimited self-confidence, as well as to bring them to their senses in periods of high exaltation when it would be extremely easy for them to become "a conceited party," as he

used to say, resting on their laurels and overlooking the perils of the future.

This singleness of purpose was the thing that most imposed respect among his followers. Many a time when Lenin managed to survive, thanks only to some blunder of his foes, the credit for his survival was attributed to his unflinching optimism. Often it used to be mere blind luck—but then blind luck mostly comes to those who know how to hold out through a period of desperate ill-luck. Most persons soon give up. They do not care to sacrifice their strength in evidently futile attempts; they are sensible—and it is this good sense that precludes good luck. There is some supreme common sense, on the other hand, in a man who will spend his last ounce of energy in spite of all odds,—in spite of logic, destiny and circumstance. And with such “unreasonable common sense” nature endowed Lenin to excess. Thanks to this tenacity he more than once salvaged his party from apparently inextricable straits, but to the masses at large such occurrences were miracles and were ascribed to his genius of foresight. Foresight on a large scale, however, was the very thing he lacked. He was a fencing master first of all, and a fencer needs only a little foresight and no complicated ideas. In fact, he must not think too much; he must concentrate on every movement of his adversary and master his own reflexes with the quickness of inborn instinct, so as to counter every hostile move without a trace of delay.

Lenin's intellect was penetrating but not broad, resourceful but not creative. A past master in estimating any political situation, he would become instantly at home with it, quickly perceive all that was new in it and exhibit great political and practical sagacity in forestalling its immediate political consequences. This perfect and immediate tactical sense formed a complete contrast to the absolutely unfounded and fantastic character of any more extensive historical prognosis he ever attempted—of any program that comprised more than today and tomorrow. The agrarian plan worked out by him in the nineties for the Social-Democratic Party, something he had been toiling over and digesting for ten years, met with complete failure, an accident which never prevented him subsequently from hastily borrowing from the Social-Revolutionaries agrarian slogans which he previously had spent much effort in combating. His concrete plans of attack were superbly practical; but his gran-

diose program of action after victory, which was to cover a whole historical period, went to pieces at the first touch of reality. His "nearer political outlook" was unexcelled; his "further political outlook" went permanently bankrupt.

As a man who already had the truth in his pocket he attached no value to the creative efforts of other seekers after truth. He had no respect for the convictions of anyone else, he had none of the enthusiastic love of liberty which marks the independent creative spirit. On the contrary, he was dominated by the purely Asiatic conception of a monopoly of press, speech, justice, and thought by a single ruling caste, agreeing therein with the alleged Moslem saying that if the library of Alexandria contained the same things as the Koran it was useless, and if it contained things contrary it was harmful.

Granting that Lenin was absolutely lacking in creative genius, that he was merely a skilful, forcible and indefatigable expounder of other thinkers' theories, that he was a man of such narrowness of mind that it could almost be called limited intelligence, nevertheless he was capable of greatness and originality within those limitations. His power lay in the extraordinary, absolute lucidity—one might almost say the transparency—of his propositions. He followed his logic unflinchingly even to an absurd conclusion, and left nothing diffuse and unexplained unless it were necessary to do so for tactical considerations. Ideas were made as concrete and simple as possible. This was most evident in Lenin's rhetoric. He never was a brilliant orator, an artist of beautiful speech. He would often be coarse and clumsy, especially in polemics, and he repeated himself continually. But these repetitions were his very system and his strength. Through the endless re-digesting, uncouth pounding and clumsy jokes there throbbed a live, indomitable will that would not be deviated by an inch from the appointed path; it was a steady, elemental pressure whose monotony hypnotized the audience. One and the same thought was expressed many times in many different shapes till finally in one way or another it penetrated each individual brain; then, as a drop of water perforates the rock, constant repetition was applied to implant the idea into the very essence of the hearer's intelligence. Few orators have known how to achieve such admirable results by dint of repetition. Besides, Lenin always *felt* his audience. He never rose too high above its level, nor did he ever omit to descend to it at

just the necessary moment, in order not to break the continuity of the hypnosis which dominated the will of his flock; and more than any one he realized that a mob is like a horse that wants to be firmly bestrode and spurred, that wants to feel the hand of a master. When needed he spoke as a ruler, he denounced and whipped his audience. "He's not an orator—he's more than an orator," someone remarked about him, and the remark was a shrewd one.

The will of Lenin was stronger than his intellect, and the latter was everlastingly the servant of the former. Thus when victory was finally won after years of clandestine toil he did not embark upon the task of embodying his ideas as would a constructive socialist who had pondered over his creative work in advance; he merely applied to the new, creative phase of his life's program the same methods which had been used in his destructive struggle for power, "*On s'engage et puis on voit*"—he was very fond of these words of Napoleon's.

Lenin has often been painted as a blind dogmatist, but he never was such by nature. He was not the kind to become attached for better or worse to a symmetrically finished system, he merely set his mind on succeeding in his political and revolutionary gamble, where to catch the proper moment meant everything. This is how he often became a quack, an experimenter, a gambler; this is why he was an opportunist, which is something diametrically opposed to a dogmatist.

Many critics have thought Lenin greedy for power and honors. The fact is he was organically made to rule and simply could not help imposing his will on others, not because he longed for this but because it was as natural for him to do so as it is for a large astral body to influence the planets. As for honors, he disliked them. His heart never rejoiced in pomp. Plebeian in his tastes and by his inmost nature, he remained just as simple in his habits after the October revolution as he had been before. He has often been represented, too, as a heartless, dry fanatic. This heartlessness of his was purely intellectual and therefore directed against his enemies, that is, against the enemies of his party. To his friends he was amiable, good-natured, cheerful, and polite, as a good comrade should be; so it was that the affectionate, familiar "Ilich" became his universally accepted name among his followers.

Yes, Lenin was good-natured. But good-natured does not

mean good-hearted. It has been observed that physically strong people are usually good-natured, and the good nature of Lenin was of exactly the same description as the amiability of a huge Saint Bernard dog toward surrounding pups and mongrels. So far as we can guess, real good-heartedness most probably was considered by him one of the pettiest of human weaknesses. At least it is a fact that whenever he wanted to annihilate some Socialist adversary he never omitted to bestow upon him the epithet of "a good fellow." He devoted his whole life to the interests of the working class. Did he love those working people? Apparently he did, although his love of the real, living workman was undoubtedly less intense than his hatred of the workman's oppressor. His love of the proletariat was the same despotic, exacting, and merciless love with which, centuries ago, Torquemada burned people for their salvation.

To note another trait: Lenin, after his own manner, loved those whom he valued as useful assistants. He readily forgave them mistakes, even disloyalty, though once in a while calling them sternly to task. Rancor or vengefulness were alien to him. Even his foes were not live, personal enemies but certain abstract factors to be eliminated. They could not possibly excite his human interest, being simply mathematically determined points where destructive force was to be applied. Mere passive opposition to his party at a critical moment was a sufficient reason for him to have scores and hundreds of persons shot without a moment's consideration; and with all this he was fond of playing and laughing heartily with children, kittens and dogs.

It has been said that what the style is the man is. It would be even truer to say that what the thought is the man is. If it has been given to Lenin to leave any imprint of himself upon the doctrine of class struggle it is to be found in his interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, an interpretation permeated with the conception of that will which was the essence of his own personality. Socialism means the enfranchisement of labor; and the proletariat is the warp and woof of the working mass. In the proletariat itself, however, there are purer and less pure strains of proletarians. Now if a dictatorship of the proletariat over the working masses is required there must be, on the same principles, within the proletariat itself a vanguard-dictatorship over the proletarian rank and file. This must be a kind of quintessence, a true Proletarian Party. Within this Proletarian

Party there must likewise be an inner dictatorship of the sterner elements over the more yielding ones. We have thus an ascending system of dictatorships, which culminates and could not help culminating in a personal dictator. Such Lenin came to be.

His theory of concentric dictatorships,—which reminds one of the concentric circles of Dante's *Inferno*,—thus developed into a universally applicable theory of Socialist dictatorial guardianship over the people, that is, into the very antithesis of true Socialism as a system of economic democracy. This favorite and most intimate conception of Lenin—and the only one really his own—was a *contradictio in adjecto*. Such an inner contradiction could not help but become, ultimately, a source of disintegration inside the party he had created.

He is dead. His party is now headed by men whom for a long period of years he moulded after his own image, who found it easy to imitate him but who are finding it extremely difficult to continue his policy. That party as a whole is now beginning to experience the fate of its supreme leader: gradually it is becoming a living corpse. Lenin is no longer there to galvanize it with his surplus energy; he spent himself to the dregs—spent himself on a party which is now, in its turn, exhausted. Over his freshly made grave it may for a moment draw closer together and pronounce vows of fidelity to the revered teacher who has told it so much in the past, but who today is telling it no more, and who will tell it no more in the future. Then it will fall back into everyday life and again be subject to the law of disintegration and dissolution.

THE FUTURE OF THE MONROE DOCTRINE

By C.

THE hundredth anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine has now been duly celebrated. In the literature elicited by this occasion the dominant note has been one of satisfaction and of praise. Plainly the American people with few exceptions are proud of the Monroe Doctrine. They look on it as a monument to the wisdom of the fathers. They believe that it has proved beneficial, not only to themselves, but to the whole Western Hemisphere, without giving cause of legitimate umbrage to the rest of the world for it is a doctrine of defense, not aggression. It has been and still is the shield of many a weak state. So far from being "an obsolete shibboleth,"¹ it is as living today as when it was first enunciated and is admitted to be the fundamental principle of our foreign policy from which no statesman at Washington may swerve even by a hair's breadth.

To be sure, these views come a little more glibly from the Republicans than from the Democrats. The Monroe Doctrine did get into the Peace of Versailles, but it was rather as an afterthought with the not very inspiring appellation of a "regional understanding." It may not be incompatible with the League of Nations, but the relations between the two require a certain amount of explanation. This explanation the Democrats have offered, indeed they have had to keep on offering it, yet at the best theirs is only a defensive attitude, however vigorous, while the Republicans can expatiate on the triumphant continuity of the truly American policy from the days of Monroe and John Quincy Adams to those of Harding and Hughes. Certainly its success has been remarkable and great is its present renown.

A century ago when the Monroe Doctrine was promulgated, though it warmed the heart of people at home, its effect abroad was less than many have imagined. In actual fact it did not attract widespread attention in Europe or enthusiasm in South America, nor can one demonstrate that it had any direct influence in the settlement of the two questions which led to its formulation—namely, the attempt of the Russians to extend their American coast to the southward, and the half-formed,

¹See *The Monroe Doctrine, an Obsolete Shibboleth*, by Hiram Bingham, Yale Press, 1913. The fact that the author revised his opinions later does not make the book less worth reading.