

V.I. Lenin died 100 years ago

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The Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin, died on 21 January 1924 — 100 years ago. Even if hardly anyone defends Stalin (Lenin’s successor) today, there are still plenty of leading politicians from left-wing parties who revere Lenin and Trotsky. They may speak of ‘Stalinism’ with disdain, but will then go on to profess their support for Lenin and Trotsky. One such example is John McDonnell, until a few years ago one of the leading figures in the British Labour Party. He cited his most significant intellectual influences as “Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.” Janine Wissler, leader of Germany’s left-wing Die Linke party, was also a member of the Trotskyist Marx21 group until her election as the party’s leader in February 2021.

One of the most respected contemporary leftist philosophers, the Slovenian Slavoj Žižek, unabashedly argues for a “new communism” in his 2021 book *A Left that Dares Speak Its Name*. Žižek extols “Lenin’s greatness,” which lay in the fact that, after the Bolsheviks seized power, he held steadfast to his socialist principles, even though the conditions did not exist for an actual “construction of socialism.”

According to Trotskyists, the socialist Soviet Union was at its best when Lenin and Trotsky shaped policy, but bad times followed under Stalin after Lenin’s death.

In fact, however, the crimes of communism began as soon as the Bolsheviks seized power and started their war against a majority of the Russian people.

It began with the struggle against the bourgeoisie, against the rich. In December 1917, Lenin demanded that extreme force be used against “this offal of humanity, these hopelessly decayed and atrophied limbs, this contagion, this plague, this ulcer,” specifically “the rich and their hangers-on,” and the bourgeois intellectuals. His aim was “to *purge* the land of Russia of all vermin,” the rich and other rogues. How this should be done, he explained in drastic words: “In one place half a score of rich, a dozen rogues, half a dozen workers who shirk their work ... will be put in prison. In another place they will be put to cleaning latrines ... In a fourth place, one out of every ten idlers will be shot on the spot.”

In December 1917, the Bolsheviks nationalized land and real estate. In all cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, property owners were expropriated. In February 1918, the Bolsheviks began to evict affluent families from their apartments to house unemployed proletarians and soldiers. “Housing Committees,” appointed by councils, registered property owners and threw them out of their lodgings.

In some places, workers took bloody ‘revenge’ on factory managers and engineers, but sometimes simply on anyone they considered bourgeois – which, when in doubt, was anyone who wore a suit or did not perform manual labor. Peasants drove out their landlords and took the land.

As a result of war, civil war, revolution and socialism, agricultural production fell by 57 percent between 1914 and 1921. Livestock decreased by 33 percent between 1916 and 1922, and the amount of land in agricultural use decreased by 35 percent. In terms of food, the situation was therefore very difficult. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks used hunger as a weapon in the class struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Lenin blamed ‘the rich’ for the hunger – they were the scapegoat to whom hatred was to be directed: “The famine is not due to the fact that there is no bread in Russia,” Lenin explained, “but to the fact that the bourgeoisie and the rich generally are putting up a last decisive fight against the rule of the toilers, against the state of the workers, against the Soviet government, on this most important and acute of questions, the question of bread. The bourgeoisie and the rich generally, including the rural rich, the kulaks, are doing their best to thwart the grain monopoly; they are dislocating the distribution of grain undertaken by the state for the purpose of supplying bread to the population ...”

In Petrograd, now St. Petersburg, the per capita calorie allocation was proclaimed on posters in the fall of 1918: workers were entitled to a daily ration of 100 grams of bread, 2 eggs, 10 grams of fat, and 10 grams of dried vegetables, while “bourgeois, real estate owners, merchants, shopkeepers, etc.” were to receive only 25 grams of bread and were not entitled

to eggs, fat or vegetables. In contrast, party members could eat in canteens, were given 'food parcels' (*pajoks*), and enjoyed exclusive access to special stores set up for the families of senior party officials.

Martin Ivanovich Latsis, one of the first leaders of the Soviet political police, instructed his subordinates on November 1, 1918: "We don't make war against any people in particular. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class. In your investigations don't look for documents and pieces of evidence about what the defendant has done, whether in deed or in speaking or acting against Soviet authority. The first question you should ask him is what class he comes from, what are his roots, his education, his training, and his occupation."

Many of the bourgeoisie fled the big cities, including to the Crimea. But wherever they were tracked down, they were met with terror. In one massacre, 10,000 to 20,000 people were shot or lynched: "From Nakhimovsky [in Sevastopol in the Crimea] all one could see was the hanging bodies of officers, soldiers, and civilians arrested in the streets. The town was dead, and the only people left alive were hiding in lofts or basements. All the walls, shop fronts, and telegraph poles were covered with posters calling for 'Death to the traitors.' They were hanging people for fun."

A popular theme that recurred in many articles in Bolshevik newspapers was the humiliation of the 'bourgeoisie' who were forced to clean the latrines and barracks of the Chekists – the members of the Cheka, the Extraordinary All-Russian Commission for Combating Counterrevolution, Speculation and Sabotage – and the Red Guards. A newspaper in Odessa reported: "If we execute a few dozen of these bloodsucking idiots, if we reduce them to the status of street sweepers and force their women to clean the Red Army barracks (and that would be an honor for them), they will understand that our power is here to stay ..."

Grigory Zinoviev, party leader in Petrograd and member of the Bolshevik inner leadership circle, wrote in September 1918: "To dispose of our enemies, we will have to create our own socialist terror. For this we will have to train 90 million of the 100 million Russians and have them all on our side. We have nothing to say to the other 10 million; we'll have to get rid of them."

In the Soviet Union alone, the victims of communism number 20 million, worldwide the figure is over 100 million.

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