On the 100th Anniversary of V. I. Lenin's Death

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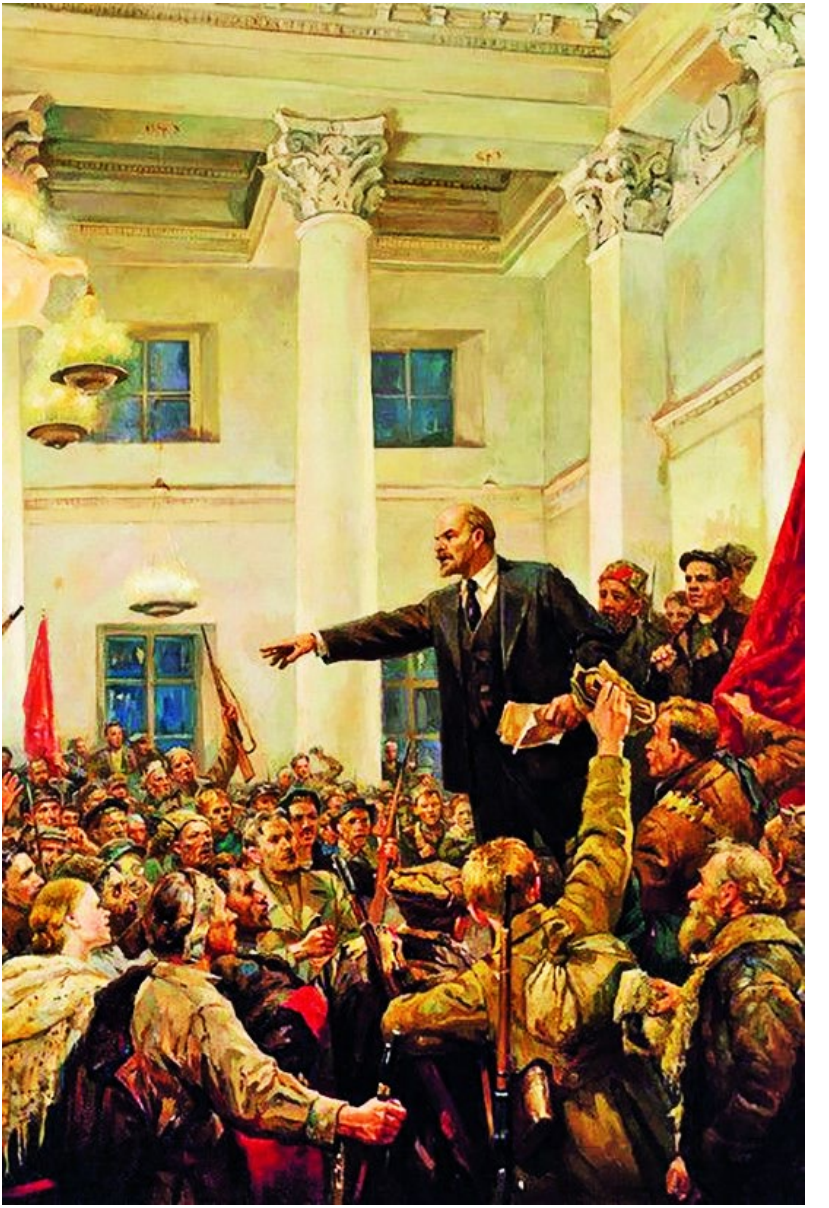

This month [January], specifically on the 21st, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, Lenin. Events of enormous world historical significance are attached to his name, particularly the victory of the first proletarian revolution in the world (1917) and the formation of the first state led by the working class. These two events, in turn, opened up a new historical moment in humanity: the general crisis of capitalism. This is characterized by the division of the world into two systems, the capitalist and the socialist, and the struggle between them; the sharpening of the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of the capitalist countries; and the crisis of the colonial system of imperialism.

In a short text written by the German Communist leader Clara Zetkin (Reminiscences of Lenin), she describes Lenin as "the undisputed leader of a Party which, clear as to its objective and the way to it, had led the Russian workers and peasants in the struggle for power; and which now, supported by their trust, was ruling by the dictatorship of the proletariat. So far as an individual can fill such a position, Lenin was the creator and leader of the great empire that had become the first Workers' and Peasants' State of the world "

Lenin's death occurred five years after the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, and after the workers' power was able to put an end to and defeat the counterrevolutionary war imposed by various foreign armies and the internal reaction immediately after the overthrow of the power of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. This victory allowed for the process of peaceful construction of the country's economy to be put on track; and — in December 1922 — the First All-Union Congress of Soviets, at the proposal of Lenin and Stalin, resolved to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Lenin died after.

Lenin was the architect of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (later the Communist Party (Bolshevik); the strategist to bring the working class and poor peasants to power and to define the tasks that the nascent proletarian power had to fulfill in order to build socialism; he was the creator of the Third International (Communist International); he was the theoretician who developed Marxism in the new conditions that humanity was then experiencing: the epoch of imperialism. Regarding this last element, Stalin pointed out that " Leninism grew up and took shape under the conditions of imperialism, when the contradictions of capitalism had reached an extreme point, when the proletarian revolution had become an immediate practical question, when the old period of preparation of the working class for revolution had arrived at and passed into a new period, that of direct assault on capitalism."

Lenin's theoretical work is many-sided, encompassing all the aspects that make up Marxism: philosophy, political economy, and scientific socialism-communism. He discerned the characteristics that capitalism had attained by that time and specified—with complete certainty—the elements present in capitalism at the end of the 19th century. This allowed us to conclude that it had reached its highest stage of development and, at the same time, its final phase: imperialism. He developed the theory of the revolutionary party of the working class, its role in the process of preparing and leading the revolution, and then as a vanguard detachment in the period of building socialism under the dictatorship of the proletariat; he developed the theory on the building of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat and the possibility of its victory in one country. He clarified how the working class can and must draw the other laboring classes and strata into the revolutionary struggle, particularly the poor peasantry; he made a great contribution to the understanding and resolution of the national question. He enriched the social sciences with his scientific works on agrarian subjects, the development of capitalism in Russia, in the field of economics, the defense and development of dialectical materialist thought, and in philosophy. Obviously, what has been said here falls short in relation to the gigantic theoretical work of the main leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Lenin tirelessly defended the principles of Marxism, fought against revisionist falsifications of revolutionary theory. Historical experience shows that any deviation from Marxist-Leninist principles, any attempt to supplant the scientific theory of proletarian revolution by bourgeois distortions or variants, undermines, harms and endangers the strategic objectives of the international working class, and the triumph of socialism-communism over capitalism. The defense and development of Marxism played, and will always play, a fundamental role for the victory of the revolution and for the victorious construction of socialism, since the bourgeoisie, imperialism and opportunism act on the terrain of ideas to derail the revolutionary struggle and channel it along paths functional to the stability of capitalism.

His First Steps in the Revolutionary Movement and the Building of the Party

Vladimir Ilyich's first contact with Marxist literature was through his brother Alexander, who at the age of 21 was imprisoned and then hanged along with four other young men, for participating in an attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander III, who escaped unharmed. At that time, Vladimir Ilyich was 17 years old and already considered the execution of the representatives of the tsarist autocracy to be wrong as a mechanism for achieving the emancipation of the people.

In the same year (1887), Vladimir Ilyich – who would later assume the name Lenin – entered the University of Kazan to study law, but a few months later he was expelled for participating in a student movement that questioned the internal regulations of the university. The sanction also included a ban on continuing to live in that city, so he was sent to KoKushino, a village where his sister Anna was staying. The Tsarist police instructed that a *"severe surveillance be established over the deportee."* Thus began the process of close police surveillance, as well as exile and forced migration, that would accompany him until the victory of the revolution. Of this first experience, he recalled the following years later: *"It seems to me that never in my life after that, neither in prison in Petersburg nor in Siberia, did I read so much as in the years of my*

deportation to the village of Kazan. It was a continuous reading, from the early hours of the morning until late at night."[1]

He was only able to complete his law studies in 1891, at the University of St. Petersburg, which agreed to accept him as an "external student", that is, unable to attend its lectures and forced to study alone. Lenin obtained the highest marks in all subjects in his grade.

In 1893 he moved to Petersburg, the seat of the tsarist government and one of the centers with the greatest capitalist development in the country, therefore with a working-class presence. There were several revolutionary circles at work, mainly made up of intellectuals from the petty bourgeoisie and under the influence of the *"Narodniks",* supporters of a liberal-reformist policy, who minimized the exploitation of the poor peasants, the class struggle in the countryside and, in fact, opposed the revolutionary struggle against the tsarist autocracy.

There he joined a Marxist group that carried out socialist propaganda among the workers; His mastery of Marxism made him a recognized Marxist leader in the capital. A year earlier, in Samara, at the age of 22, Vladimir Ilyich was already seen as the organizer of the first Marxist circles in that city.

Lenin understood with absolute clarity that the fight against and unmasking of the ideas of the "Narodniks" was a revolutionary necessity and wrote the book *"What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats", in which he unmasked the "theoreticians of Narodniks as representatives of the subjective, anti-scientific, idealist method who denied the objective character of the laws of social development and the decisive role of the masses in history"*[2] He also put forward for the first time to the Russian Social-Democrats the need to create the Marxist workers' party and the idea of a revolutionary alliance between the workers and peasants as a fundamental instrument for putting an end to the tsarist regime of the landlords and the bourgeoisie and building a communist society.

He established contacts with various Marxist groups at home and abroad; he first worked to unify the Marxist circles in Petersburg into an organization that took the name of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class (1895) which, in Lenin's own words, would be the "embryo" of the party of the working class. In December of the same year, the police arrested a large number of the members of the

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[1] Quoted by Elio Bolsanello in A Brief Illustrated History of Lenin. p. 25.

[2] See *Collected Works* of V. I. Lenin. Preface to Volume One. p. XXII, Spanish edition.

"League of Struggle", including Lenin, who remained in prison for the next fourteen months. In January 1897 he was deported to a small village in Siberia for three years, during which time he wrote more than thirty works, among them: "The Development of Capitalism in Russia," "The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats," "Capitalism in Agriculture," "The Draft Programme of Our Party."

After his exile in January 1900, Lenin devoted himself entirely to two tasks which he had thought about and planned in detail during that time: the building of the revolutionary party of the working class and the creation of an all-Russian Marxist newspaper, the Iskra, which saw its first issue in December of the same year. The newspaper, which was published abroad, "prepared the ideological and organizational cohesion of the Party throughout Russia."

The eyes of the Okhrana (tsarist political police) followed Lenin very closely, forcing him to leave the country in July 1900; he was only able to return five years later, when the revolution of 1905 broke out.

While he was in exile in Siberia, the First Party Congress was held in 1898, which resolved on the formation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). Despite the fact that the Party had been formally constituted, in fact it did not yet exist: it lacked a Programme and Statutes, the Central Committee elected there was arrested by the police and was not reconstituted, the ideological and organizational dispersion among the groups persisted.

The political situation, characterized by the sharpening of the class struggle and the imminence of a revolutionary outbreak, called for the creation of the Party. For Lenin the matter was not a matter of simply calling a new congress, before achieving this, he said, it was necessary to clarify and unify it in relation to the aims and purposes of the Party, its organizational forms and methods of struggle, to purge the organizations of viewpoints contrary to Marxist conceptions. In order to achieve these purposes, he proposed the creation of Iskra (The Spark). In the article Where to Begin?, he outlined a plan for the organization of the party, which he developed in the book What Is To Be Done?

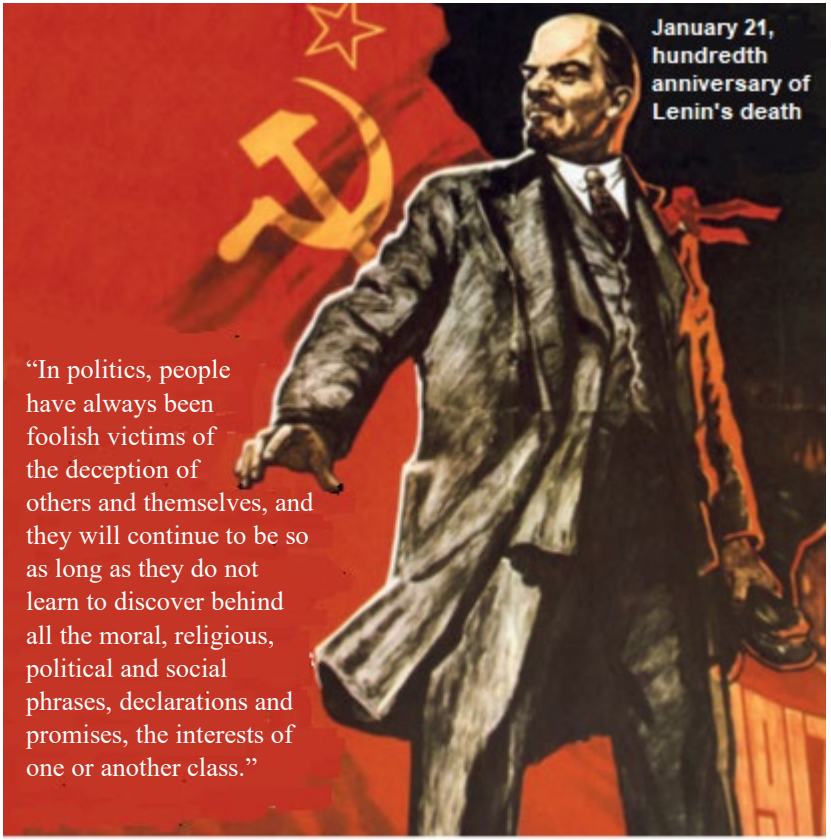
The Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P. was held on the afternoon of July 17, 1903, in a suburb of Brussels, Belgium, but due to political persecution they had to finish their work in London. It was attended by 43 delegates representing 26 underground party organizations.

The Congress had to overcome several problems, due to the fact that not all its participants identified with the policy promoted by the Iskra. It adopted a Party Programme characterized by its revolutionary content, which remained in force until the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party,

which was held after the victory of the proletarian revolution of 1917. The program laid the foundation for the ideological unification of the Party; However, when it came to approving the Statutes, the discussion turned acrimonious; the disagreements were profound. Lenin proposed that in order to be a member of the Party one must accept the Program, help the Party materially, and be affiliated with one of its organizations. Lenin's opponents, led by Martov, did not consider it essential to be part of a Party organization. Lenin's formula encapsulated the criterion of the Party as "an organized detachment, the members of which do not join the Party by themselves, but are admitted by one of its organizations, thereby submitting to the discipline of the Party." The vacillating Iskra-ists supported Martov's proposal, which won by 28 votes to 22 with one abstention.

The Congress elected a Central Committee composed of Leninists and also approved the composition of the editorial staff of the Iskra proposed by Lenin. The resolutions of the Congress on the composition of the central organs of the Party gave a victory to Lenin's supporters, who began to be called Bolsheviks (majority) and their opponents Mensheviks (minority). In the course of time, the Bolshevik denomination took on the meaning of the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, organized according to the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

The Revolution of 1905



In January 1904, without a declaration of war, Japan attacked the Russian fortress of Port-Arthur, inflicting heavy losses on the Russian fleet guarding the harbor. Thus began the Russo-Japanese War, which ended in September 1905 with Japan's victory. Port-Arthur was located on the Liao-tung Peninsula, years before the Tsarist government forced China to hand it over to Russia. Tsarism carried out a policy of annexations in the Far East, which clashed with Japanese imperialism which also sought to gain positions on the Asian continent.

The war, in addition to the enormous cost in lives (120,000 casualties among dead, wounded and prisoners in the tsarist army), meant an enormous expense and affect on the country's economy, which in turn provoked the discontent of the masses, who opposed the war. The life of the workers became unbearable and their hatred of the tsarist regime grew.

The conditions of exploitation and oppression in which the workers, peasants and nationalities lived led to the conditions for a revolutionary outbreak, which were accentuated by the outcome of the war.

Lenin followed events very closely from Switzerland. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks took different positions on the war. *"The Mensheviks, including Trotsky, were sinking to a position of defending the 'fatherland' of the tsar, the landlords and the capitalists. The Bolsheviks, headed by Lenin, on the other hand, held that the defeat of the tsarist government in this predatory war would be useful, as it would weaken tsardom and strengthen the revolution."*[1]

In December 1904, a major Bolshevik-led workers' strike broke out in Baku, which ended with a historic victory: the signing of the first contract between workers and employers in Russia. This struggle marked the beginning of the revolutionary upsurge in Transcaucasia and a number of regions of Russia. In December 1904 the newspaper *Vperyod (Forward*) also began to circulate, which maintained the political orientation of the old *Iskra*, which by then had abandoned its revolutionary character to become a spokesperson for conciliatory positions, after the Bolsheviks left the editorial board.

In the midst of the wave of protests that took place in several cities, in Petersburg, where the movement grew rapidly, the priest Georgy Gapon, who worked with the tsarist police, organized a mobilization to the Winter Palace on November 9, 1905, in order to deliver to Tsar Nicholas II a petition with the needs of the people. It was a provocation coordinated with the *Okhrana*. The thousands of men, women, children and elderly people who marched peacefully were ambushed and shot at; more than 2,000 people were killed and nearly 5,000 wounded. *"*It was a dastardly, cold-blooded massacre of defenceless and peaceful people*,"* Lenin wrote in the article *The Plan of the St. Petersburg Battle* [in "Revolutionary Days", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8].

The massacre, which was described as *Bloody Sunday*, did not provoke the fear or resignation that the regime expected; on the same day that the fighting began, the workers erected barricades in the streets of the capital, and in the following days a wave of strikes spread across Russia.

In Geneva, Switzerland, Lenin wrote the article *Revolution in Russia*, in which he described the heroic struggle of the Russian proletariat in sentences such as: "*Rivers of blood are flowing, the civil war for freedom is blazing up.... The slogan of the workers has become: Death or freedom!... Long live the revolution! Long live the insurgent*

[1] History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (*Bolsheviks*), pp. 55-56..

proletariat!" Elio Bolsanello, in the book *A Brief Illustrated History of Lenin*, relates that Lenin wrote more than sixty articles in *Vperyod*, in which he analyzed and substantiated the tactics of the Bolsheviks and the necessity of the leadership of the party in the conduct of the armed insurrection.

The differences of opinion in the R.S.D.L.P. regarding the tactics to deal with the events, made it an urgent task to convene the Third Party Congress, to define a single political tactic, obligatory for all its members. The Mensheviks opposed this convocation and did not attend the Congress, which met in April 1905 in London. The Congress condemned the Mensheviks, regarding them as *"a section that had split away from the Party."* At the same time a conference convened by the Mensheviks met in Geneva. Lenin summed up *what was happening as "Two Congresses, Two Parties."*

The Third Congress held that, "despite the bourgeois-democratic character of the revolution in progress, despite the fact that it could not at the given moment go beyond the limits of what was possible within the framework of capitalism, it was primarily the proletariat that was interested in its complete victory, for the victory of this revolution would enable the proletariat to organize itself, to grow politically, to acquire experience and competence in political leadership of the toiling masses, and to proceed from the bourgeois revolution to the Socialist revolution."[2]

Two months after this congress the book *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* appeared, in which Lenin criticized the political tactics of the Mensheviks and laid the foundations for the revolutionary tactics of the Bolsheviks. The fundamental tactical thesis developed by Lenin states that the proletariat can and must be the *leader* of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the *leader* of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia. *"Marxism*," Lenin wrote, *"teaches the proletarian not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to be indifferent to it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie, but, on the contrary, to take a most energetic part in it, to fight most resolutely for consistent proletarian democracy, for carrying the revolution to its conclusion."*[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 64.
[3] Ibid., p. 66.

Back in Exile

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution, the onslaught of tsarism against the workers' movement and the revolutionary organizations increased, and an atmosphere of terror was established. Above all, the Bolsheviks were persecuted, many were sentenced to death or imprisoned; Like bloodhounds, the police were looking for Lenin who, faced with the danger to his life, had to take the path of exile. Crossing the frozen Gulf of Finland on foot, he left Russia, went to Stockholm, where he waited for Krupskaya, who stayed in Petersburg, and then went to Geneva, Switzerland. The year was 1908 and Lenin could only return to Russia in 1917.

Political conditions had changed in Russia. Lenin understood that the new circumstances made it necessary to use all forms of struggle in order to maintain the relationship with the masses and regain strength. One of

these forms of struggle was participation in the *State Duma* (Legislative Assembly), from which the Bolsheviks carried out intense work to unmask the regime. In analyzing the significance of that epoch, Stalin pointed out that *"this was a period when our Party turned from the open revolutionary struggle against tsardom to roundabout methods of struggle, to the utilization of each and every legal opportunity—from mutual aid societies to the Duma platform. This was a period of retreat after we had been defeated in the Revolution of 1905."*[1]

Lenin's work in exile was intense and fruitful. Needless to say, he wrote countless articles, reports and analyses, among other things. The most outstanding works written in those years are: *Marxism and Revisionism, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, The State and Revolution, On the National Question, Socialism and War* and *The April Theses,* among others. He worked tirelessly to unify the Bolshevik forces; through liaison he directed the activity of the Party in Russia, gave lectures, took part in meetings of the R.S.D.L.P. abroad, participated in the editorial board and edited several newspapers, organized a Party School in Paris for workers engaged in clandestine work, organized more than 50 courses on the theory and practice of socialism; he participated in several meetings of the International Socialist Bureau.

Years passed and political conditions in Russia changed. Once again the revolutionary effervescence was gaining ground. Lenin felt the need to have a newspaper that spoke to all sectors of the population. With Stalin's coordination, on April 22, 1912 (May 5 according to the new calendar) the first issue of *Pravda* (The Truth) circulated. Lenin wrote almost daily, using various pseudonyms. By then he was living in Paris, but in order to be closer to his country and lead the newspaper, together with his mother and Krupskaya, he moved to Krakow, which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

A new wave of workers' strikes shook Russia in the first months of 1914. Discontent was growing in the countryside and threatened to take the form of widespread uprisings. In the second half of that year the First World War broke out, fomented by German imperialism. Initially, Germany and Austro-Hungary on the one hand were pitted against Russia, England and France on the other. The conflict then spread to all of Europe and Asia. The outbreak of war found Lenin in Poronin, Austro-Hungarian territory, and he was arrested by the Austrian police, accused of espionage

[1] History of the CPSU(B), p. 133.

on behalf of the tsarist government. In reality, the arrest was due to the fact that, from the beginning, Lenin spoke out against the war. After eleven days of detention, he was released and went to Bern, the capital of Switzerland, which had declared neutrality in the war.

The Bolshevik deputies of the Fourth Duma spoke out against the war and were deported to Siberia; the Tsar ordered the mass imprisonment of members and sympathizers of the Bolshevik Party.

Lenin not only spoke out against the war, but also proposed to turn the imperialist war into a civil war; arms should not be wielded by brother workers of one country against those of another, but against bourgeois governments. Lenin called for declaring "war on war." In contrast to the revolutionary attitude of the Bolshevik Party, the European social democratic parties of the Second International openly supported their governments in the war. They voted in parliament in favor of war budgets and betrayed the principles of proletarian internationalism; this behavior was the climax of a process of degeneration that led to their liquidation. For Lenin, the Social Democratic International was an instrument at the service of the bourgeoisie; the proletariat needed a new organization and he proposed the creation of the Third International.

The war spelled disaster for the workers and peoples of Russia, leaving a trail of dead, wounded and starving; the army was accumulating defeats; the country's economy was being destroyed; The big bourgeoisie and the landowners continued to enjoy their wealth. The discontent and hatred of the workers, peasants, soldiers and intellectuals against the tsarist regime grew, expressed in mass protest actions against the war and tsarism. The discontent even infected sections of the bourgeoisie, who sympathized with and had the support of the governments of England and France.

The year 1917 began with intense workers' agitation; strikes broke out in several cities. The idea of a general strike was gaining strength. In Petrograd, soldiers joined the demonstrators. Again, two different positions were evident among the revolutionary organizations: the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries made every effort to lead the movement within the institutional framework, convenient for the liberal bourgeoisie; the Bolsheviks, on the other hand, knew that the conditions for a new revolution had been created and had to be made to break out.

The Revolution of 1917 Triumphs

The workers and people knew that the only chance of avoiding the total collapse of the country depended on the victory of the revolution. The escalation of strikes and political demonstrations against war, famine and absolutism moved to the level of insurrection on February 26, heeding the call of the Bolsheviks. The soldiers joined the people, and the fate of tsarism was sealed. On February 27 the tsarist regime fell, and a few days later the Duma organized a new provisional government, in which representatives of "the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois landlords" participated.

From February to October 1917, an unprecedented revolutionary period opened in Russia; the political struggle remained bitter, new political slogans were raised for the workers' movement. The liberal bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries were doing everything in their power to curb the revolutionary impetus of the workers and peasants, who demanded more radical action, because they saw that what had been done up to that point was not enough, it was not all they expected from the revolution. Lenin, in the first of the *Letters from Afar*, wrote that *"the slogan, the 'task of the day', at this moment must be: Workers, you have performed miracles of proletarian heroism, the heroism of the people, in the civil war against tsarism. You must perform miracles of organisation, organisation of the proletariat and of*

the whole people, to prepare the way for your victory in the second stage of the revolution."[1]

Again the soviets, which appeared for the first time in the revolution of 1905 on the initiative of the workers, arose and revealed themselves as organs of armed insurrection and the germ of the new power. Now these soviets were made up of workers and soldiers, the latter being essentially peasants forced to go to war. Thus a singular situation was established: the existence of two powers, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie expressed in the Provisional Government, and the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, represented by the soviets.

This duality of power could not be maintained for long; the resolution of the conflict depended on which of the two prevailed. In another of the *Letters from Afar*, Lenin analyzed the political situation and tasks in the following terms: "*In the preceding letters, the immediate tasks of the revolutionary proletariat in Russia were formulated as follows: (1) to find the surest road to the next stage of the revolution, or to the second revolution, which (2) must transfer political power from the government of the landlords and capitalists... to a government of the workers and poorest peasants. (3) This latter government must be organised on the model of the Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, namely, (4) it must smash, completely eliminate, the old state machine, the army, the police force and bureaucracy (officialdom), that is common to all bourgeois states, and substitute for this machine (5) not only a mass organisation, but a universal organisation of the entire armed people. (6) Only such a government, of 'such' a class composition ('revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry') and such organs of government ('proletarian militia') will be capable of successfully carrying out the extremely difficult and absolutely urgent chief task of the moment, namely: to achieve peace, not an imperialist peace, not a deal between the imperialist powers concerning the division of the booty by the capitalists and their governments, but a really lasting and democratic peace, which cannot be achieved without a proletarian revolution in a number of countries. (7) In Russia the victory of the proletariat can be achieved in the very near future only if, from the very first step, the workers are supported by the vast majority of the peasants fighting for the confiscation of the landed estates (and for the nationalisation of all the land...).*"[2]

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[1] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp. 306-7.
[2] Ibid., pp. 340-1.

On April 3 (16), 1917, Lenin returned from emigration, and his return had an enormous impact on the Party and the revolution. In Petrograd, thousands of workers gathered at the Finland Station to welcome the leader of the Bolsheviks, where he made a speech in which he called on the people to carry out the socialist revolution. The next day, at a meeting of the Bolshevik Party, he laid out the detailed plan for the transformation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist one: the famous *April Theses.*

In the economic sphere, he proposed measures such as the nationalization of all the land of the country and the confiscation of the lands of the landowners; the existence of a single National Bank, subject to the control of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies; workers' control over the production and distribution of products. With regard to the political sphere, the Theses pointed out the following: *"The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution -- which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie -- to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants."*[3] Lenin stated that the political form to take this step could no longer be the parliamentary republic, but the Republic of Soviets: *Not a parliamentary republic -- to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step -- but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom."*[4]

At the end of April 1917, the Seventh Conference of the Bolshevik Party met (for the first time in the open), at which Lenin expounded the points contained in the *April Theses.* Lenin summed up the content of the Party's political action at that time in one sentence: ***"All power to the soviets!"***

[3] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 21.
[4] Ibid., p. 23.

The Bolshevik Revolution Triumphs

The triumph of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917 sharpened the political confrontation in Russia: the working class pressed for further advances, while the liberal bourgeoisie and reformist opportunism did their best to quell the struggle of the masses. The slogan raised by the Bolsheviks, *"All power to the soviets!"*, caught on among the workers, peasants and soldiers who were massively mobilizing in the streets. One such great mobilization took place on July 3, 1917, in Petrograd, which was brutally suppressed by the Provisional Government. *"The streets of the capital were covered with blood and the prisons full of Bolsheviks. The editorial office of Pravda, where Lenin had sat moments before, was destroyed. He escaped and went into hiding."*[1] He took refuge for a time in a small hut on the shores of Lake Razliv near the Finnish border, but the surveillance of government agents forced him to leave for Finland.

A reaction from the Provisional Government took place; for the moment conditions changed in favor of the bourgeoisie in control of the government, which, in turn, had gained positions in the soviets thanks to the support given it by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. This forced the temporary withdrawal of the slogan *All Power to the Soviets!* This was approved by the Sixth Party Congress, which met in secret at the end of July and beginning of August in Petrograd, because of the

[1] Elio Bolsanello. *A Brief Illustrated History of Lenin.*

persecution of the Bolsheviks. Lenin could not be present, but he directed its work from underground.

From July to October 1917, while he remained in hiding, Lenin took advantage of the time to write the text *Marxism on the State*, known as *The State and Revolution*. In the postscript to the first edition of that work, Lenin said that he had laid out a plan for the contents of Chapter VII of the work, but *"I had no time to write a single line of the chapter; I was 'interrupted' by a political crisis – the eve of the October Revolution of 1917. Such an 'interruption' can only be welcomed;... It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of the revolution' than to write about it."*

The tireless work of the Bolsheviks in exposing the opportunist and reactionary nature of the Provisional Government, the work of explaining the need to advance towards socialism, the courageous confrontation which the Bolsheviks had with General Kornilov's attempt to crush the revolution by means of weapons, enabled the RSDLP to gain space and influence among the masses of workers and peasants and within the soviets. The defeat of Kornilov's forces opened a new political moment in the development of the revolution; the Bolshevik Party showed itself to be the decisive force in the ongoing process, and the soviets, which were gradually recovering their class political action, once again showed themselves to be a great political force of resistance and revolutionary action.

The *History of the Communist Party of the CPSU(B)* describes this moment as a turning point of the revolution: *"There ensued a period of revival of the Soviets, of a change in their composition, their bolshevization."*[2] Lenin recognized that the change in the balance of forces showed that the fundamental premises necessary for the transition to insurrection now existed. Again the slogan of *All Power to the Soviets!*, was on the agenda, but now they were Bolshevik-led soviets.

On October 7, 1917, Lenin clandestinely left Finland and arrived in Petrograd, the capital of Russia. On the 8th he wrote the famous letter known as *Advice of an Onlooker*, in which he urged the need to work for the transfer of power to the Soviets, warning that "*in practice the transfer of power to the Soviets now means armed uprising.... But armed uprising is a special form of political struggle, one subject to special laws to which attentive thought must be given. Karl Marx expressed this truth with remarkable clarity when he wrote that 'insurrection is an art quite as much as war'.*

[2] P. 202.

"Of the principal rules of this art, Marx noted the following:

"(1) Never play with insurrection, but when beginning it realise firmly that you must go all the way.

"(2) Concentrate a great superiority of forces at the decisive point and at the decisive moment, otherwise the enemy, who has the advantage of better preparation and organisation, will destroy the insurgents.

"(3) Once the insurrection has begun, you must act with the greatest determination, and by all means, without fail, take the of offensive. 'The defensive is the death of every armed rising.'

"(4) You must try to take the enemy by surprise and seize the moment when his forces are scattered.

"(5) You must strive for daily successes, however small (one might say hourly, if it is the case of one town), and at all costs retain 'moral superiority'."[3]

On October 24 (November 6), the newspaper *Senda Obrera* (then the central organ of the Bolshevik Party) called for the overthrow of the provisional government; detachments of revolutionary soldiers and Red Guards were concentrated in Smolny (the headquarters of the revolution) and at various strategic points. He had started the insurrection. On the night of October 25 (November 7), Lenin went to Smolny to personally take over the leadership of the movement. On the same day, October 25, a communiqué from the Bolshevik Party reported that the Provisional Government had been overthrown and that power was in the hands of the Soviets. Lenin's plan had led to victory in the world's first socialist revolution.

[3] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 179-180.

The Early Years of the Soviet Republic

Once having taken power, the efforts of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were focused on the tasks of building socialism, but to achieve that aim it was necessary to solve an essential problem: putting an end to the war. The first decree of the nascent Socialist State was the Decree on Peace, which in turn established a policy of friendship with all peoples; the Soviet government's efforts for the governments of France, England, and the United States to enter into joint negotiations with Germany went unheeded. In December 1917 in Brest-Litovsk, a city on the Russian-Polish border, the Peace Conference was held. Leon Trotsky (People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs) had express instructions to sign the peace accord, even if it was under difficult conditions for Russia, because it was essential to execute the socialist program. Moreover, Lenin understood that in the near future, the German freedom movement would annul the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. However, Trotsky's suicidal policy of "no peace,

no war" led him to refuse to sign the peace accord and he told the Germans that the Soviets would not make war and would continue to demobilize their army. Germany went on the offensive. In the discussions held by the Party leadership on the subject, Lenin pointed out that Trotsky and Bukharin "were in fact aiding the German imperialists and hindering the advance and development of the revolution in Germany."[1] The betrayal of Trotsky and Bukharin cost the nascent Soviet Republic dearly, Germany annexed Latvia, Estonia and Poland; Ukraine was separated from the Soviet Republic and became a vassal state of Germany[2]. In March 1918, the Seventh Congress of the Party decided to change its name to the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Russia, as Lenin had already suggested in the April Theses (1917). In April 1918 the pamphlet The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government was published, which laid down general guidelines for the building of socialism. It said" "*We must fully realise that in order to administer successfully, besides being able to convince people, besides being able to win a civil war, we must be able to do practical organisational work. This is the most difficult task, because it is a matter of organising in a new way the most deep-rooted, the economic, foundations of life of scores of millions of people. And it is the most gratifying task, because only after it has been fulfilled (in the principal and main outlines) will it be possible to say that Russia has become not only a Soviet, but also a socialist, republic.*" Lenin pointed out in the same article that "*the task of the day is to restore the productive forces destroyed by the war and by bourgeois rule; to heal the wounds inflicted by the war, by the defeat in the war, by profiteering and the attempts of the bourgeoisie to restore the overthrown rule of the exploiters; to achieve economic revival; to provide reliable protection of elementary order. It may sound paradoxical, but in fact, considering the objective conditions indicated above, it is absolutely certain that at the present moment the Soviet system can secure Russia's transition to socialism only if these very elementary, extremely elementary problems of maintaining public life are practically solved in spite of the resistance of the bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks and the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries.*"[3].

The reaction of capital against the nascent soviet republic took shape with the foreign military intervention of several countries – including the United States, Great Britain, France and Japan – which forced them to face

[1] Elio Bolsanello. A Brief Illustrated History of Lenin.
[2] See: History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (B), p. 217.
[3] V. I. Lenin. The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 242-243.

a new war that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of men and women and the devastation of the country's economy. In October 1922, the victory of the Soviet Republic was celebrated with the defeat of the Japanese army at Vladivostok, leaving the territory clear of invaders.

The conspiracy was widespread and systematic, with attempts to form anti-Soviet governments and several terrorist attacks. Lenin was a victim of them. The first occurred at the beginning of January 1918, when Lenin, accompanied by his sister Maria and the Secretary of the Swiss Social Democratic Party, Fritz Platten, were leaving a meeting and were hit by shrapnel. Lenin escaped unharmed, but Platten was wounded in his arm. On August 30 of the same year he suffered a second attack, this one perpetrated by the Socialist-Revolutionary Fanny Kaplan, who fired three times at Lenin, two bullets wounding him in the left shoulder and lung. His good health allowed him a quick recovery, a month later he was already back in the Kremlin leading the country. On his initiative, the Union of Young Communists was founded, whose founding congress took place in October 1918. That same year he wrote the exemplary work The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, in which he denounced the betrayal of Kautsky and Social Democracy of the principles of Marxism. Lenin criticized Kautsky's talk of democracy in general instead of bourgeois democracy under capitalism, which has a clear class content. "*Kautsky has renounced Marxism by forgetting that every state is a machine for the suppression of one class by another, and that the most democratic bourgeois republic is a machine for the oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the proletarian state, which is a machine for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat, is not a "form of governing", but a state of a different type. Suppression is necessary because the bourgeoisie will always furiously resist being expropriated.*"[4].

In March 1919 Lenin took part in two extraordinary events: the Eighth Party Congress, which approved the new program, and the First Congress of the Communist Parties of various countries, which, on the initiative of Lenin and the CPSU(B), founded the Communist International. The congress was led by Lenin. In the Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, which he presented at the congress, the head of the Soviet Republic said: "*The Soviet organisation of the state is suited to the leading role of the proletariat as a class most concentrated and enlightened by capitalism. The experience*

[4] V. I. Lenin. The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 107-8

of all revolutions and all movements of the oppressed classes, the experience of the world socialist movement teaches us that only the proletariat is in a position to unite and lead the scattered and backward sections of the working and exploit - ed population.

"Only the Soviet organisation of the state can really effect the immediate break - up and total destruction of the old, i.e., bourgeois, bureaucratic and judicial machinery, which has been, and has inevitably had to be, retained under capitalism even in the most democratic republics, and which is, in actual fact, the greatest obstacle to the practical implementation of democracy for the workers and working people generally. The Paris Commune took the first epoch - making step along this path. The Soviet system has taken the second.

"Destruction of state power is the aim set by all socialists, including Marx above all. Genuine democracy, i.e., liberty and equality, is unrealisable unless this aim is achieved. But its practical achievement is possible only through Soviet, or proletarian, democracy, for by enlisting the mass organisations of the working people in constant and unfailing participation in the administration of the state, it immediately begins to prepare the complete withering away of any state."[5]

[5] *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 466-7.

His Last Years

Although October 1922 marks the date in which the territory of the nascent Soviet Republic of was liberated from the invading armies, it was at the beginning of 1920 that the balance of forces in the military field showed that the Soviet state had won the victory. On February 8 of that year, in the newspaper Pravda, Lenin wrote the following lines: *"We have victoriously ended the bloody war imposed on us by the exploiters. In two years we have learned to win and we have won. Now we are going to start another war, not bloody, a war against hunger, against cold, against disease, misery, disorganization, obscurantism... The workers and peasants have been able to create for themselves, without capitalists, a Red Army and to defeat the exploiters. They will also know how to create a red army of labor and win a new happiness by restoring agriculture and industry."*[1]

The country's economy was tremendously affected by the war and discontent was growing, especially among the peasants, who saw that their longing was not being fulfilled by the revolution. During the years of foreign military intervention, the State had to establish rigorous policies to ensure the supply of products, the quota system that necessitated the seizure of all surplus production from the peasants to meet the needs of the country's defense, which was accepted by them. Once the war was over,

[1] Gerard Walter. Lenin (Biography)

there was no reason to continue with this policy (known as *war communism*), which, as Lenin said, clashed with the interests of the peasantry. The new situation demanded a new orientation, and the Tenth Party Congress (March 1921) decided to move on to the New Economic Policy (NEP).[2] *" War Communism had been an attempt to take the fortress of the capitalist elements in town and countryside by assault, by a frontal attack. In this offensive the Party had gone too far ahead, and ran the risk of being cut off from its base. Now Lenin proposed to retire a little, to retreat for a while nearer to the base, to change from an assault of the fortress to the slower method of siege, so as to gather strength and resume the offensive.*"[3] In November 1922, summing up the five years of Soviet power, Lenin expressed his conviction that "*NEP Russia will become Socialist Russia."*[4]

The intense work and the consequences of the 1918 shooting broke the health of the head of the nascent workers' and peasants' state. In December 1920, at a meeting of the Bolshevik bloc of the Eighth Congress of Soviets, Lenin confessed publicly for the first time that he was ill. After a month's rest in Gorky, he returned to Moscow. He participated in the Tenth Party Congress and the Third Congress of the Communist International (June-July 1921). In the first days of December of that year he had to take another break, he felt *"terribly fatigued".* He returned to Moscow for the meeting of the Central Committee of the Party and to present his report to the Ninth Congress of Soviets.

After an operation in May 1922 to remove the bullet lodged in his shoulder, doctors ordered him to stop work and rest, and he left for the countryside. Two days after arriving in Gorky he suffered an attack of cerebral palsy that affected his right leg and right arm. By October, he was feeling well enough to return to work, and once again he returned to Moscow. There, Lenin disregarded the doctors' orders not to work more than five hours a day.

On October 31, 1922, he made his first public appearance and delivered a speech at the session of the Executive Committee of the Soviets. On November 13, at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, he took stock of the five years of the Russian Revolution and outlined the prospects for the coming world revolution. His last public appearance was on November 19, at the Plenary Assembly of the Moscow Soviet.

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[2] We will not discuss this subject because it is not the purpose of these articles.

[3] History of the CPSU (B), p. 257.

[4] Ibid., p. 261

In March 1923. Lenin suffered a second attack that struck him severely. He was again transferred to Gorky, where he would live for eight more months, until he died – victim of a third attack – on the evening of January 21, 1924.

Gerard Walter's biography of Lenin describes the wake of the greatest leader of the world proletarian revolution as follows:

"His body, taken to Moscow on the 23rd, was exhibited in the great hall of the House of Trade Unions. A dais was erected in the middle, the walls were covered with red flags, and long red and black veils covered the beautiful white columns. The lit lamps were wrapped in crepes. The coffin, uncovered, was placed on the dais. An honor guard surrounded it. The parade of the people began, and they came in droves. In rows of four, men, women, and children entered the room, turned from the coffin, and left, head bowed, in silence. The old men crossed themselves. The parade never ended, and poor and humble people came from everywhere and waited outside for hours, with their feet in the snow, for their turn to enter.

"This lasted three days. On the 26th, at about 11 o'clock at night, it was ordered to contain the human river, the end of which was impossible to foresee. At midnight the doors of the great hall were reopened, the Congress of Soviets, which has been meeting since January 18 and had just held its funeral session, makes its entrance, presided over by the Central Committee of the Party. There were 2000 people, from all corners of Russia, representatives of all its provinces, all its large and small villages. It was the entire Soviet Republic that bowed to the mortal remains of its founder.

"The next day, at nine o'clock, the coffin was moved to Red Square. At four o'clock in the afternoon the slow complaint of the sirens of all the factories in Moscow was heard. To the sound of the cannon and a funeral march, Lenin entered his final resting place, from which, with his head eternally turned towards heaven, he would watch over the new world created by his will."