

PREFACE

A considerable number of left-wing dictatorships have appeared on the international political scene since World War II, the only precedent for states of this type being the Soviet Union, which is now celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. These fifty years of socialist experience could no doubt be very useful to the new states if they took the trouble to acquire a thorough knowledge of them and to reflect on the vicissitudes of the first proletarian dictatorship. Thus the failure of the “agroindustrial combines” created in the USSR in 1929–1930 foreshadowed that of the communes of the People’s China, and Nikita Khrushchev was a victim of the same megalomania when he tried to launch his *agroroda* in 1950. However, apart from a small number of Soviet writers, it is largely the English-speaking specialists who have pointed out how singularly rich in economic and social lessons is the period of the New Economic Policy, and it is they who have least to gain from such knowledge. Many other periods and other aspects of Soviet history remain, to a greater or lesser degree, in obscurity, illuminated here and there by the researches of a few scholars. It is unlikely that the governing elite of the USSR knows the history of its country—apart from what each individual has experienced at first hand—

for Marxist countries, for some peculiar reason, tend to treat their history as a state secret. The leaders seem to believe that knowledge of an often tragic past acts as a discouragement for those whose duty it is to build the future; whereas in fact ignorance of history destroys any forward-looking attitude far more surely than its divulgence and analysis. But as long as history can be publicized only with official permission it will remain obscure, for it is the scientific discipline most likely to be vitiated by state monopoly.

This study of Lenin and of his thought during his last year is not, of course, entirely new. A good deal was learned on this subject from Trotsky's revelations in the 1920s, and again from the repercussions of the affair of Lenin's "testament," set in train by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. But recent Soviet publications have enabled us to take up this subject again and to attempt a more accurate and more detailed reconstruction of the relations that emerged among the top Party leaders at the time of Lenin's illness. We hope at the same time to extend the analysis of Lenin's "testament," that is, of his political thinking during this last period, and to offer on occasion a new interpretation of it.

Among the documents from which our source material has been taken, three are of exceptional importance: first, the latest edition of Lenin's *Works*—the fifth edition—not only more complete than previous ones but accompanied by an important body of notes and commentary; second, the memoirs of Fotieva, one of Lenin's personal secretaries; and third, the "Journal of Lenin's Secretaries," working notes made between November 21, 1922, and March 6, 1923, and published for the first time in 1963 by a Soviet historical review.¹ These notes are as important in content as they are

¹ *Voprosy Istorii*, No. 2, 1963. The "Journal" is also reproduced in V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniya* (Works), 5th ed. (Moscow, Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1958-65), Vol. XLV, pp. 455-86.

peculiar in form. They are in the form of a four-columned notebook showing the date, the secretary's name, instructions given, and notes on how they were carried out; the last column also contains notes on the day's events in the office of the chairman of the Sovnarkom, the Council of People's Commissars. Accounts are given, sometimes day by day, of the chairman's appointments, his correspondence, and even his slightest actions and gestures. This information is enlightening as to Lenin's working methods, but at the outset it provides no particularly startling revelation. It soon becomes obvious, however, that Lenin is slowing down the pace of his work; he no longer comes to his office regularly, but often prefers to send for one of the secretaries and dictate in his private apartment. His health was already failing and his doctors had ordered him to work less, to take frequent rests in the country, and to miss certain meetings of the Council of Commissars or of the Politburo. On December 13, 1922, the day after an important meeting with Dzerzhinsky, Lenin had two serious attacks and was forced at last to obey the orders of his doctors to postpone his work and take to his bed. At this point the "Journal" begins to be quite fascinating. When Lenin sends for his secretaries, in order to give them instructions or to dictate, they observe him with scrupulous attention, and hang on his every word and movement, which they note down in the "Journal." Lenin was confined to his bed in a small room of his Kremlin apartment, his right hand and right leg paralyzed, almost completely isolated from the outside world and, apparently, cut off from all government activity. The doctors' orders were strict on this matter and they were reinforced by a decision of the Politburo.

But however fragmentary the notes of the "Journal" may be, they are enough to show the intense and passionate struggle that Lenin, paralyzed and no doubt aware of his ap-

proaching end, was waging not only against physical decline but also against the leadership of his party. With great effort he drew up a comprehensive survey of the situation of the country, worked out a program of action, and tried hard to persuade his colleagues on the Politburo and the Central Committee to accept it. This program, which was not requested by the members of the Politburo, involved considerable changes in government methods, in personnel, and to some extent in objectives. The majority of the Politburo were unenthusiastic.

With the help only of a few women—Krupskaya, his wife, Maria Ilinichna, his sister, and three or four secretaries, notably Fotieva and Volodicheva—Lenin fought obstinately to get hold of the dossiers he needed. He spoke to influential members and suggested specific lines of action; he sought allies and sounded out the opinions of various leaders, by indirect means if necessary; he worked on a lengthy report for the next Party Congress and published articles, for he finally managed to obtain the permission either of his doctors or of the Politburo itself to continue with some of his activities. But there were other activities that he pursued in secret—and with good reason. With the help of his closest friends, Lenin was engaged in nothing less than a plot to ensure the future success of his life's work. The center of the "conspiracy"—the word is Lenin's own—consisted of a private commission that he had secretly formed to inquire into certain events in Georgia in which leading figures in the Party had been implicated. The circumstances of this affair, which the "Journal" enables us to reconstruct in detail, reveal or confirm what were the personal and political relations of the three leaders, Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. The notes also give us some idea of the physical and mental effort expended by a man as seriously ill as Lenin was; they help us to feel

his presence, the intensity of his feelings, the power of his personality, the charm of his laughter.

But at this point we are confronted by something that goes well beyond autobiographical trivia. Historians have often spoken of an "intellectual crisis" that Lenin may have experienced during this final period, of a "*coup d'état*" that he was preparing, of a revolt against the results of his own work, and of the tragedy of a great revolutionary who thought he could see his ideal of emancipating the masses disappearing before his eyes and who felt that he was losing all control of events because of the unfortunate coincidence of an accident in his physical life and implacable political realities. In the course of this study we shall have occasion to re-examine these postulates.

But the situation in which the Soviet regime found itself during Lenin's illness and the problems that confronted Lenin in his last months are still relevant to the world today. Consequently, we shall find ourselves confronted with issues that go beyond the scope of a biography. Lenin wanted to give the regime he had helped to establish an adequate socio-economic framework and to create methods of management that would be adaptable both to this framework and to the ultimate aims of the Revolution; the result was the NEP, the New Economic Policy. He tried to impart a new style, vigor and efficacy to the dictatorial machine. His behavior poses the problem of the duties and responsibilities incumbent on the leaders of a dictatorship that claims to be socialist. These three key questions are always interdependent during the earliest stages of a regime of the Soviet type and of a dictatorship that sets out to develop a backward country.

The first question, as it presented itself to Lenin, concerns the balance to be struck between the spontaneous forces necessary to the launching of the economy, namely the peas-

ant smallholders, artisans and businessmen, and the centralized, state-owned and more or less planned sector that must give the economy as a whole the general direction required. Under the NEP, this was already the dilemma of the "market" and the "plan." Even today, despite the disappearance of the peasant smallholders and of the middle classes of a capitalist type, it is still one of the major problems pre-occupying the minds of the Soviet leaders, who are discovering that the two notions are not mutually exclusive, but complementary if they can be implemented simultaneously in a harmonious fashion.

The second question, that of the functioning of the dictatorial state, will require more of our attention. In the beginning the dictatorship is organized with the aim of accomplishing its mission of developing the country and establishing a greater degree of social justice—the principles for which the revolution was fought. But the dictatorial state tends to become a rigid organism with its own laws and interests; it may become a mere distortion of its original purpose; it may escape the control of its founders and disappoint, for a long time at least, the hopes of the masses. The instrument then becomes an end in itself. A coercive system set up to promote freedom may, instead of providing the social forces outside the state machine with an increasing share of power, become a machine of oppression. Every state that tries to carry out in an efficient way difficult tasks that are often unpleasant for the masses inevitably creates a privileged body of cadres who enjoy a certain prestige and material and political advantages. If these privileges are not controlled and kept within strict limits by social and economic realities, they soon become dangerous and impede development.

There is always a risk that men will become corrupted by power and privilege. The leaders and administrators of the

state that has emerged from a revolution, even if they belong to the often courageous, idealistic and dedicated elite that made the revolution, are tempted to attach more value to their privileges than to the function that justifies them—especially if they are isolated among a mass of new administrators who are of neither the level nor the value of the founders. How then can decline be avoided and the purity of the revolution be preserved? There is no easy answer. All that can be said is that the moral level and political consciousness of the elite, together with certain institutional guarantees, are positive factors. In these conditions it is all the more valuable to remember Lenin's injunction to Communists to retain "strength and flexibility" and to be always ready "to go back to the beginning"; they must not lose their critical spirit and must be willing, if necessary, to rebuild all or much of what has been attempted.

No more will be said of the implications of these questions for the present day. After drawing attention to them here, we shall merely try as objectively as possible to provide the material required for such a reflection, as it comes out of Lenin's last struggle.