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The Vanguard

Karl Marx is rightly attributed as a primary influence of Lenin's theories given their shared goal to emancipate humanity. However, Lenin diverges from Marx most notably in his articulation of the 'Vanguard', a technocratic solution to Lenin's (and Marx's mutual) concern of an emergence of counterrevolutionary sentiments within the socialist state. They both aim to replace a monarchical authority with a centralized authority composed of *true* representatives of the working masses and secure its authority by preservation of the *true* interests of the proletariat. However, the formulation of a particular group/entity that both *is* and *protects* proletarian interests has not in modern political thought, as it relates to Marxism, hitherto been articulated until Lenin. I discuss first the nature to which Lenin establishes a centralized authority not in line with Marx's call for popular work and governance, but by subordination to the Vanguard. I place Lenin's self-titled "pragmatism" ("New Times", 1921a) as the chief reason that bourgeois elements *intentionally* remain in the 'revolutionary government' (Sokolov, 1921b), so that he can address both theoretical *and* practical concerns for the proletariat's survival: the former concerns by declaring the *Vanguard* as capable of *being* and *preserving* the proletariat whilst the latter concerns are alleviated by state capitalism's revenue.

Lenin and Marx share in their conceptions of democracy but diverge on articulating *who* can represent the *true* interests of the proletariat. Lenin supports the conception of democracy as not merely being political emancipation, i.e., universal suffrage, as it alone is not the *true* expression of the popular will. He demands for 'democracy' to include "freedom [from] propaganda" ("Revolutionary Proletariat", 1906) because propaganda will delude the workers into consenting to the "[substitution] [of] real safeguards of liberty and revolution" for "empty promises" (1906, 5). But who is immune to delusion and propaganda, or, to put it another way, *who represents the true, uncorrupted interests of the proletariat across time?* Marx, in "Civil War" (1871), believes that we can protect the true interests despite everyone's susceptibility to manipulation by advocating limits on any individual acting on behalf of the whole's protection. The national militia in the Paris Commune was bound under "extremely short term(s) of service" and "each delegate was bound... to his constituents" (1871, 4). The literal and

legislative protections, thus, are protected by arranging individuals so that they all, in unity with species-being, share one another's positions across time and protect from any individual delusion in any given position. In contrast, Lenin introduces the centralized government, the RSFSR, after a complete removal of the Tsarist government, (1906, 5) by taking the emergent, "new class" as self-evidently the "best representatives of the proletariat" to serve as the 'Vanguard.' They proved their loyalty to the proletariat and immunity to propaganda/delusion by having "[built and led] the army [that defeated the Whites], set up [the] local government, and [continued to run] industry" (1921a, 4). Their achievements thus far, according to Lenin, serve as proof of their exceptional loyalty and incorruptibility. Therefore, according to Lenin, a subset of the proletariat—a fraction of the proletariat and thus technocratic in effect—can not only serve as the protection from individual delusions in society like the national militia was in Paris, but can identify itself, as it's presently composed, as the proletariat's uncorrupted interests *indefinitely*; it *protects* the proletariat, and it *is* the proletariat's interest.

Therefore, in accepting Lenin's radical contribution to modern political thought, we may justify otherwise unacceptable actions in modern Marxist thought like state capitalism because *what is necessary for the Vanguard's survival* is necessary for the *survival of the proletariat*. In response to criticisms from Marxist theorists, among others, Lenin reinforces his image as being pragmatic, in light of their enemies' superior economic capabilities, by resorting to rhetorical and argumentative strategies. In Lenin's letter to Myasnikov (1921c), he continuously aligns himself in language with the Vanguard, using "we" and "us" to refer to those "who sympathize with workers and peasants" so he may confirm his authority at the expense of the critic who, by fiat in criticizing the Vanguard, is labeled unsympathetic to the proletariat, even if Myasnikov holds the popular view. Furthermore, he continues by stating his actions are done "moderately," "within limits [so that the Vanguard may] remain the ruling class" (1921a, 6). Lenin justifies the leasing of land to make up for serious financial strain and lack of agricultural productivity following the Civil War under the pretext that the ultimate aim of social revolution cannot occur with a bankrupt, starved administration. In Sokolov's recognition of counterrevolutionary actions, e.g. property leasing and bourgeois taxes, Lenin uses its necessity for the financial maintenance of the existing Vanguard state to explain the inevitably for such reversals. "We must not [lose] heart at the first revers[al]" (1921b, 2) for if it occurs, it is of necessity, a temporary evil

later to be removed as it is necessary for the proletariat whilst it contributes to the Vanguard's sustenance.

In conclusion, Lenin offers a unique contribution to modern political thought by solving the problem of corruptible workers by empowering a technocratic Vanguard to protect the proletariat's interests while defining them with itself. The implications, therefore, are also unique as it emboldens justifications for state capitalism as a necessary evil.

Works Cited

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- 17c. V.I. Lenin to M.F. Solokov (May 1921)
- 17d. V.I. Lenin to G. Myasnikov (August 1921)
- 17e. V.I. Lenin, "New Times and Old Mistakes in a New Guise" (1921)
- 17f. V.I. Lenin, "Notes of a Publicist" (1921)