



Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings

Vladimir Lenin, Henry M. Christman (Editor)

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Among the most influential political and social forces of the 20th century, modern communism rests firmly on philosophical, political and economic underpinnings developed by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later known as Lenin. In this volume, comprising the four works generally considered his most important publications, Lenin presents the goals and tactics of communism with remarkable directness and forcefulness.

His first major work was *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, written in prison after Lenin had been arrested for anti-government activities in 1895. Represented here by key sections, the book developed a number of crucial concepts, including the significance of the industrial proletariat as a revolutionary base. *What Is to Be Done?*, long regarded as the key manual of communist action, is presented complete, containing Lenin's famous dissection of the Western idea of the political party along with his own concept of a monolithic party organization devoted to achieving the goal of dictatorship of the proletariat. Also presented complete is *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in which Lenin examines the final "parasitic" stage of capitalism. Finally, this volume includes the complete text of *The State and Revolution*, Lenin's most significant work, in which he totally rejects the institution of Western democracy and presents his vision of the final perfection of communism.

Essential Works of Lenin: "What Is to Be Done?" and Other Writings Details

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Sinan Öner says

I read Lenin's Books; very useful sources to learn 20. Century's beginning conditions of Russia and the World.

Sidney Machin says

Must read for anybody interested in Lenin or Marxism. I would advise reading The Communist Manifesto before hand for an introduction. Lenins political thought shaped the world on a level unseen before in history, and this book is the works which made up his thought. This book will likely change your life at least a little, due to his arguments, especially on imperialism seeming all too relevant today.

Chelsey says

Essential reading for any Marxist-Leninist, especially in an era when Lenin is, even by leftists, regarded as a power-hungry evil genius. Given the general consensus about Lenin, I was very surprised (and almost underwhelmed*) that what Lenin advocates in this writing isn't a coup, or terrorism (in fact, he very deftly critiques terrorism) but a centralized newspaper which activists can use to agitate and inform and the creation of a political party composed of particularly talented activists to help lead the struggle.

It's important to remember the era in which this work was written-- during extreme political repression. Nevertheless, What is to Be Done is a classic which stands the test of time.

* Not that I actually *wanted* Lenin to advocate a coup or terrorism, I just thought his conclusion would urge for something bigger and more significant than a newspaper. (It makes sense when you think about it, and perhaps my writing-off of newspapers is the result of my living during a time in which newspapers are going under.)

Steve Mitchell says

This book shows that the Soviet Union during the Cold War was not Lenin's intention of how communism would work; Lenin had grand plans as laid out in this book. (Look to George Orwell's masterpiece 'Animal Farm' to see that Lenin's plan still would not actually work!)

Ariel says

The Development of Capitalism in Russia: 4/5

This was only portions of the full text, with the conclusions from Chapters 1 and 2 and Excerpts from Chapters 4, 6, and 7. These parts alone were very informative and I think reading the whole thing is worth it if you're interested in Russian history.

What is to be Done?: 4/5

Not sure if it was the translation but some portions felt awkward to read, the editor did include context for the first few chapters which was nice (although i'm not sure why they cut out the last chapter). Aside from the historic parts there are lots of good bits of knowledge in this (also humorous, which was unexpected).

Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism: 4.5/5

Really good and I can't really say much about it without just quoting praise for it. Interesting to see how this is applicable even today w/r/t Globalization and other issues. May have to re-read this later as I probably skimmed a lot of the economic stuff.

The State and Revolution: 5/5

Reading this was me reading and thinking "yup, this makes sense and i agree" in my head, didn't find much I had doubts or critiques about. One of my favorite quotes from it is

"In capitalist society, providing it develops under the most favourable conditions, we have a more or less complete democracy in the democratic republic. But this democracy is always hemmed in by the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation, and consequently always remains, in effect, a democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich. Freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. Owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, the modern wage slaves are so crushed by want and poverty that "they cannot be bothered with democracy", "cannot be bothered with politics"; in the ordinary, peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participation in public and political life."

The Introduction was good, along with all the pretexts to all the essays. The font choice felt a bit too bold at times but that's really not important lol

Steve Hart says

This was fine I guess. Certainly some good stuff in here. I found S&R to be the most readable of the bunch, but WITBD? is probably the most interesting (specially given his attack on identity politics in it. who knew?) where he made a reasonable argument for "vanguard" (though i'm still not convinced). Mostly though, I was struck how much of an asshole Lenin was. Geesh... poor Kautsky and the other so-called opportunists and social-chauvinists!! whatever dude, you and your "majority" got your power and look what happened...

Kaye says

I read this book in 2005 during a class on Russian history and thoroughly enjoyed the translation. Lenin had

some remarkable things to say about current class systems and distribution of wealth, and this book was very useful for understanding the specific conditions leading up to 1917.

Jake Deaven says

People should not have the right to question Soviet Communism, because Soviet Communism is a perfect system!

Brian Napoletano says

I've actually read everything in this anthology except "What is to be done."

Jason says

Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the 20th century and beyond. With the benefit of hindsight Lenin's works are textbook examples of the road to hell being paved with good intentions. Below I've pasted a few of my favorite quotes from the essays in this collection, along with some snarky backchat (since I can do that now without getting a bullet in the back of the head).

From "What is To Be Done?"

[A]ll subservience to the spontaneity of the labor movement, all belittling of "the conscious element," of the role of Social-Democracy, *means, whether one likes it or not, the growth of influence of bourgeois ideology among the workers*. All those who talk about "exaggerating the importance of ideology," about exaggerating the role of the conscious elements, etc., imagine that the pure and simple labor movement can work out an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers "take their fate out of the hands of their leaders." But this is a profound mistake. (p. 81)

Lenin's authoritarian, ideologue nature shines through from the beginning.

From "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism"

The "democratization" of the ownership of shares, from which the bourgeois sophists and opportunists "would-be" Social-Democrats expect (or declare that they expect) the "democratization" of capital, the strengthening of the role of small-scale production, etc., is in fact one of the ways of increasing the power of the financial oligarchy. For this reason, among others, in the more advanced, or in the older and more "experienced" capitalist countries, the law allows the issue of shares of very small denomination. (p. 205)

Here I think Lenin makes a good point, and I cannot help but thinking of 401(k) plans and of getting regular

folks to buy small amounts of stock, not to ensure that they have solid retirement savings, but rather to ensure that tax-payers have an ongoing incentive to bail out financial capital.

From “The State and Revolution”

The exploiting classes need political rule in order to maintain exploitation, *i.e.*, in the selfish interests of an insignificant minority and against the interests of the vast majority of the people. The exploited classes need political rule in order completely to abolish all exploitation, *i.e.*, in the interests of the vast majority of the people, and against the interests of the insignificant minority consisting of the modern slave-owners—the landlords and the capitalists. (p. 287)

Yikes. Textbook definition of a double standard (a deadly one in this case), and an example of the sort of logic that is now endemic among the Tumblr crowd.

[Eduard] Bernstein simply cannot conceive the possibility of voluntary centralism, of the voluntary amalgamation of the communes into a nation, the voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes in the process of destroying bourgeois rule and the bourgeois state machine. Like all philistines, Bernstein can imagine centralism only as something from above, to be imposed and maintained solely by means of bureaucracy and militarism. (p. 319)

Looking back on the 20th century, I too cannot conceive of the possibility of "voluntary centralism," and based on the rest of the essay, Lenin didn't really believe it either, unless he meant something utterly different by "voluntary" than I do. Something to do with being at the wrong end of a gun.

Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force, *i.e.*, exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people—this is the change democracy undergoes during the *transition* from capitalism to communism.... Furthermore, during the *transition* from capitalism to communism, suppression is *still* necessary; but it is the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploiting majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the "state," is *still* necessary, but this is now a transitory state; it is no longer a state in the proper sense; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage-slaves *of yesterday* is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs, or wage-laborers, and it will cost mankind far less. This is compatible with the diffusion of democracy among such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a *special machine* of suppression will begin to disappear. The exploiters are, naturally, unable to suppress the people without a very complex machine for performing this task; but *the people* can suppress the exploiters with a very simple "machine," almost without a "machine," without a special apparatus, by the simple *organization of the armed masses*... (pp. 338, 339)

I'm still trying to reconcile "voluntary" and "suppression by force."

Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletariat's struggle for equality and the significance of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of *classes*. But democracy means only *formal* equality. As soon as equality is obtained for all members of society *in relation to* the ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labor and equality of wages, humanity will inevitably be confronted with the

question of going beyond formal equality to real equality, *i.e.*, to applying the rule, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” By what stages, by what practical measures humanity will proceed to this higher aim—we do not and cannot know. But it is important to realize how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, petrified, fixed once for all, whereas in reality *only* under socialism will a rapid, genuine, really mass movement, embracing first the *majority* and then the whole of the population, commence in all spheres of social and individual life. (pp. 346–7)

Talk about infinitely mendacious. I guess Lenin didn't have the benefit of hindsight.

The question of control and accounting must not be confused with the question of the scientifically educated stuff of engineers, agronomists and so on. These gentlemen are working today and obey the capitalists; they will work even better tomorrow and obey the armed workers. (p. 348)

Or else.

John Devlin says

Lenin's manifesto that's as wrongheaded as it can be about economics and as right on about the path of Russia.

Ryan says

This translation (Dover) is cheap and functional (it's got all the major writings in it -- What is to be Done, State and Revolution, Imperialism, and excerpts from the early analysis of capitalism in Russia) but not very accurate. Lots of articles in the wrong places, awkward phrasing, etc. I'd only recommend it to those pressed for cash and surrounded by inferior used bookstores.

Thankfully Lenin's prose remains scathing throughout.

Read Lenin for a very clear expression of "anti-establishment" politics dating back prior to the many intricate layers of cant heaped upon it in decades since.

rully says

semacam teori untuk pelaksanaan revolusi dalam sudut pandan lenin sebagai seorang komunis. banyak yang ditulis lenin dalam buku ini menjadi semacam pedoman bahkan mungkin semacam sunnah (jika das kapital marx adalah kitab sucinya) bagi kaum komunis.
