Lenin: ideologue of 'equal wages'

In August and September 1917 Lenin wrote *The Sate and Revolution* to propound a theoretical justification for the uprising he was planning. He declared:

"*We*, the workers, shall organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, … shall reduce the role of the state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid "foremen and accountants" (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees). This is *our* proletarian task … a state-capitalist monopoly … once we have overthrown the capitalists … a mechanism which can very well be set going by the workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them *all*, as indeed *all* "state" officials in general, workmen's wages. Here is a concrete, practical task which can be immediately fulfilled … a task whose fulfillment will get rid the working people of exploitation. …Accounting and control – that is *mainly* what is needed for the "smooth working", for proper functioning, of the *first phase* of communist society. *All* citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. *All* citizens become employees and workers of a *single* countrywide state "syndicate". All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay. … The whole society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay." Employing "Marx's terms the "first" or lower phase of communist society" Lenin read, "The means are no longer the private property of individuals. The means of production belong to the whole society …the *exploitation* of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the *means of production* - the factories, machines, land, etc. – and make them private property." (Lenin, Selected Works, 2, pp.303-4, 344, 345, 337-8)

First, if the state owns and controls the means of production and articles for distribution, transforming all citizens into "hired employees of the state", the workers are not in a position to hire other workers such as "technicians, foremen and accounts". The state functionaries become the de facto owners of what the state lawfully owns. They become the buyers of labour-power, hence exploiters of labour.

Second, Lenin's "proletarian task" never got going simply because it was impractical. You cannot equate unequal expenses. Wages or salaries are prices of labour-power. Prices of unskilled and skilled labour can never be equal. The longer the time consumed and greater the expenses incurred in training the higher must to be these prices, even though the interaction of demand and supply of labour-power has a fluctuating effect – happily in times of boom and miserably in times of slumps.

This is not to deny that the "general principle of modern industry: to replace adults by children, skilled workers by unskilled, men by women". It tends towards "*equalization* of wages", as Marx analyzed in the context of constantly simplified "division of labour" vis-à-vis "Growth of capital = accumulation and concentration of capital … which constantly requires a reserve army of unemployed workers for times of overproduction. … Overpopulation is therefore in the interest of the bourgeoisie." (*Wages*, Marx Engels Collected Works, 6, p.436)

Clearly, the tendency towards "*equalization* of wages" relates to the tendency of equalization of skills. However, "tendency" notwithstanding, different skills always remain under competitive and uneven capitalist growth requiring a *hierarchy* of wage-slaves.

Thus, Lenin's "equality of labour and pay" conjecture with "*all* citizens" turned "employees and workers" was a sheer fancy. It couldn't and didn't work.

As early as in 1847 Marx had warned in his critique *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

"Thus, the whim of sovereigns is for M. Proudhon the highest reason in political economy. Truly,

one must be destitute of all historical knowledge not to know that it is the sovereigns who in all ages have been subject to economic conditions, but they have never dictated laws to them. Legislation, whether political or civil, never does more than proclaim, express in words, the will of economic relations. … That commerce is more sovereign than the sovereign. Let the sovereign decree that one mark shall in future be two marks, commerce will keep on saying that these two marks are worth no more than one mark was formerly." – https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch01c.htm

Third, if "the means of production belong to the whole society" appropriation of the products must also be social, which Lenin did not mean anyway. A 'Marxist' of any degree knows very well that *wages* imply *exploitation*. If *wages* exist, so does *profit* hence capital and capitalism – the wage labour/capital relation of production pure and simple. Yet Lenin ignored Marx's message as also that "*wages* and *private property* are identical".

Lenin was just using Marx's terms to dupe readers to support his own objective of safeguarding wages-slavery under state ownership and control of the means of production and articles for distribution.

Lenin actually shunned Marx to get along Proudhon's dogma.

Compare what Marx and Engels wrote about "the non-communist Proudhon" and his proposal for equal wages:

"Proudhon, who was as early as in 1841 strongly criticized by the communist workers' journal *La Fraternité* for advocating *equal wages* [emphasis added], community of workers in general and also other economic prejudices which can be found in the works of this outstanding writer: Proudhon, from whom the communists have accepted nothing but his criticism of property." (Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, written between November 1845 and August 1846, Collected Works, Vol. 5, Moscow, 1976, p. 216).

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx recognized that "wages and private property are identical" and went on:

" … even the *equality of wages* as demanded by Proudhon," said Marx, "only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labour into the relationship of all men to labour: Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist. … Wages are a direct consequence of estranged labour, and estranged labour is the direct cause of private property. The downfall of one must therefore involve the downfall of the other. From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it follows further that the emancipation of society from private property, etc. , from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*; not that *their* emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are but modifications and consequences of the relation." (Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1976, p. 280)

"*Organise labour!* But wage labour, that is the existing, [is] the bourgeois organization of labour. Without it there is no capital, no bourgeoisie, and no bourgeois society." (Marx, *The Class Struggle in France*, written between January and November 1, 1850, Marx Engels Selected Works, 1, Moscow 1969, p. 213)

Manifestly, wage-labour is the material of capital. In addition, the capitalists organized in enterprises as individual, joint stock, state, multinational, transnational, corporate, or whatever, remain capitalists as long as workers remain wage-slaves and their appropriations private; capitalists cannot turn themselves or their slaves into free human beings while both sides remain

what they are.

Wages never could be equal for all

Thus, Lenin's rhetoric of "*equal pay*" was not going to change a dot the nature of the beast – capital. Lenin's phrase was akin to a *Proudhon's dogma*, unworkable under capitalism, no matter what its form, since wages are prices of labour powers, different in kind and skill requiring different duration and costs of training and reproduction, thus embodying different amounts of socially necessary labour or values. Moreover, the *law of value* asserts itself objectively. Lenin's capsize from an arrogant *war communist* into a humble *NEP-man privateer* is a glaring proof in hand.

Marx wrote the *Poverty of Philosophy* in the first half of 1847 as answer to M. Proudhon's *Philosophy of poverty*. He severely criticized Proudhon's philosophic, economic and political views; exposed the unsoundness of Proudhonism. Touching upon Proudhon's preoccupation "with his theory of the person-society" giving "the name of *Prometheus"* (CW, 6, Moscow 1976, pp. 155, 157), having practical projects for the "solution of the social question", Marx refuted his ideas of the *"credit gratuit" and* the "people's bank", based on this, as "utterly *philistine* fantasy" vigorously advertised by the Proudhonist school.

Marx characterized Proudhon as a typical ideologue of the petty-bourgeoisie:

"It was left to *M. Proudhon* and his school to declare seriously that degeneration of *money* and exaltation of commodities was the essence of socialism and thereby to reduce socialism to an elementary misunderstanding of the inevitable correlation existing between commodities and money." (Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, written between August 3 and 15, 1859, Moscow, 1978, p. 86)

And:

"To the extent that commodity production, in accordance with its own inherent laws, develops further, into capitalist production, the property laws of commodity production change into the laws of capitalist appropriation," and criticizes "Proudhon, who would abolish capitalistic property by enforcing the eternal laws of property that are based on commodity production." (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow 1974, p. 551)

How then could one distinguish Lenin from Proudhon's school except by relying on his double-speaks? In his politics of *vanguard-anarchism* or *vandalism* so to say, he pretended a bit differently from M. Proudhon and Bakunin, but not an iota, save phrase-mongering, about *economics of exploitation* and deception – property, monopoly and competition, commodity production and distribution, buying and selling, money, capital, employment, wages and salaries, banking, accounting and whatnot.

A Promoter of "Vulgar Socialism"

Therefore, for Lenin 'workmen's wages' were to remain but not 'exploitation'. Whereas any serious student of Marx knows very well that existence of wages and salaries basically implies existence of profit hence exploitation. Moreover, Lenin's assertion about "equal pay" sounds like saying "equal wages and salaries for all and indeed a subsistence one"! Nevertheless, no government, dictatorial or democratic, malevolent or benevolent, could ever make wages equal for all. Simply because wages are the price-name of labour powers for all various kinds of jobs embodying various amounts of social labour when produced and reproduced like any other commodity with the only difference that workers can unite on their own *economically* for higher wages and better conditions and *politically* for the *"abolition of the wages system"*.

Then, what about in Lenin's 'socialism'? He does not speak here, as Marx and Engels did of the "abolition of the wages system".

You could at best call Lenin a promoter of "Vulgar socialism".

No wonder, in "*Can The Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*", written on the eve of the uprising, he sketched 'the skeleton of socialist society", taking "ready-made from capitalism" the "excellent" "state apparatus" "big banks" without which "socialism would be impossible". "A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory", was to "constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus". This would be "country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of production and distribution of goods". Even, "The important thing will not even be the confiscation of the capitalists' property, but country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists and their possible supporters…. Instead of confiscation, we could easily impose a fair tax". Whereas, we Marxists know, industrial profit, interest, rent, tax, subsidies, philanthropy etc., 'fair' or unfair – call them as you may, are inalienable parts of surplus value extracted via exploitation of the working class and realized in a price-form as gross profit to be shared off by all various sections of capital – industrial, financial, landed, state, philanthropic etc. functionaries.

Distribution: hierarchical

Then what could Lenin and his coterie do after their Petrograd *coup d'état*? They simply grabbed all power and rearranged the wages structure in January 1919 through the Second All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions passing the resolution on *Soviet wages policy* based on (1) *piece-rate* and (2) *a hierarchical structure*. First, there were three divisions, the top two reserved for the "highest technical, commercial and administrative personnel" and for "similar personnel of medium grade". Each division had sub-divisions into 12 categories graded according to skill and other required qualifications. Was this any different from capitalist indexation of wages to productivity?

In 1918 in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* Lenin's directives involved "raising the productivity of labour [i.e., raising the rate of exploitation] and *socialising* production *in practice*" [i.e., for Lenin, nationalization or statification] … "to resort to the old bourgeois method and to agree to pay a very high price for the "services" of the top bourgeois experts" [i.e., by accepting differential or unequal wage rates] … "nationalisation of banks, monopolisation of foreign trade, the state control of money circulation, the introduction of a property and income tax [whilst tax is a part of surplus value realized as gross profit in the first place] …and the introduction of compulsory labour service" [i.e., forcible extraction of surplus labour] … "People's Bank" [Proudhon's prejudice !] … "piece-work" and making "wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out … the Taylor system [i.e., intensifying the rate of exploitation]." (SW. 2, Moscow 1967, pp.649 – 664)

Compare: "Income tax presupposes various sources of income of various social classes, and hence capitalist society," wrote Marx (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking 1976, p. 29); and Lenin was well aware that "The maintenance of the special public power standing above society requires taxes and state loans." (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, SW 2, p.274)

No later than in January 1923, the state-capitalist functionaries ("Vanguards of the proletariat", "the dozen wise men", "talented leaders") were receiving in salaries more than 68 times the minimum wage received by workers, exclusive of profit sharing and so-called 'personal' (i.e., extra salary) income. The magnitude of the top two items was state secret. On top of that, there was also non-monetary income, not to mention other benefits. At the 13th party conference in January 1924, Mikoyan revealed the following: One enterprise attempted to recruit a "red manager" by offering the following (on top of monetary income): a house with four rooms, a horse-earning with horse,

two months' annual leave and a summer resort house all the coast of Black Sea. Yet the "red manager" turned the offer down because he had found an even better one elsewhere. According to Mikoyan, similar condition of service was quite common. (See Carr, The *Interregnum*, 1954, pp. 41-42).

Lenin's claim in his *The State and Revolution* was hollow:

"The socialist principle, "He who does not work shall not eat" is already realized; the other socialist principle, "An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labour"* is also already realized. But this is not yet communism." (Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Selected Works, 2, p.339) [*compare Lassalle's 1875 programme about "undiminished proceeds of labour" in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*]

He repeated the same dictum in his *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat" (Lenin, *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, written October 1, 1917, SW 2, p. 401) As if such blunt phrases originated from Marx. Pathetically, though, the Christian preacher Paul had invented the dictum.

In fact, Lenin sought to take cover behind Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* while preaching his anti-Marxist sermons such as Lassalle's 1875 programme about "undiminished proceeds of labour", which Marx had refuted listing six necessary *deductions* from the "proceeds of labour" before declaring: Only now do we come to the "distribution". (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking, p.14)

The *dishonesty* in Lenin's claim lies hidden behind his abuse of Marx's name. To be fair, he could have claimed straight away for himself what actually belonged in his queer caricature of Marxism, and seek support from workers, in which case, however, in his time, in no way could he present himself as a "Marxist". His situation would be more miserable than M. Proudhon ("equal wages", "people's bank", etc.), Bakunin ("anarchy"), Lassalle ("undiminished proceeds of labour", etc.), Dr. Dühring (a complete system), and the likes, were Marx and Engels to live up to 1902, even if not beyond, to dissect only Lenin's "*What Is To Be Done?*"

Obviously, except the introduction of a theory and practice of ruthless dictatorship – *vanguardism* in the name of Marxism – Lenin had no legs to stand on. Had he put forward such ideas of "vulgar socialism" as his own, instead of calling up Marx "in 1875", and Engels "in 1894", the working class would have readily recognized him as their foe. But, he had not the courage to oppose Marx and Engels.

Pitiably, the prevailing Leninist dogma – that "socialism" is a transitional stage between capitalism and "complete communism" – prevented many, including this author during his long Leninist detour, from looking at the *relations of production* characterizing the Russian economy.

Readers should note that we in the World Socialist Movement do not theorize on any transitional stage at all. In view of the present all-round productive abundance, we do not endorse any distinction between "lower" and "higher phases" of communism anyway. Today we do not envisage having to go through a "transitional period". We organize on Marx's vision about "a *political* transition" from capitalism to communism or socialism having only one single Object: "*The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community*."

Continued dishonesty

For another instance of continued dishonesty by the latter-day Leninists take a look into Marx

Engels *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, Progress, Moscow, 1989 edition, at p.740, "Subject Index" entry – *"Socialism*(first stage of communist society) – 83-88", which is intended to prejudice and mislead a reader first seeking a ready reference about the meaning of the two words – *"Socialism"*and *"Communism"*. The reader will get the impression that in Marx's idiom *"Socialism"* is the "first stage of communist society", hence something less than complete *"Communism"*. On the contrary, only when one gets across a doubt and has time and the book at hand to turn back to p.87 and read into Marx's "*Critique of the Gotha Programme*" about "the first phase of communist society" and "a higher phase of communist society", one will be surprised to find nowhere even a mention of the term "Socialism" at all. What is it if not a *crass* and *malicious* distortion?

A further hideous distortion has appeared in the Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1989 editions of Marx Engels *Collected Works*, Vol. 24 at p.85, and *Selected Works*, Vol. 3 at p.17, both converting the word "co-operative" into "collective". Compare this change first with the pamphlet, "MARX *Critique of the Gothe Programme*", Progress Publishers, Moscow "Eighth printing 1978" pages 15 and 16, and then with Peking, 1976 pamphlet, "KARL MARX CRITIQUE OF THE GOTHA PROGRAMME" to find the correct usage "co-operative". This reveals how Lenin's lie about *socialism* desperately tries to feed the Leninist family on Marx-distortions.

Even more significant is the Collins English Dictionaries' Assistant Lexicographer, Andrew Holmes's reply of 24 August 1994 to W. Robertson's letter of 15 August 1994. Mr. Holmes wrote, "I agree with your assertion as Marx did not describe any intermediate "socialist" stage between the collapse of capitalism and the establishment of communism. He used the terms "communism" and "socialism" interchangeably. It was, as you rightly pointed out, Lenin who created this distinction … You are correct to point out this error. … Thank you for taking the trouble to point out this mistake." Accordingly, subsequent editions of the dictionary do not carry this error.

BINAY SARKAR