

The phrase in italics had simply been deleted by the editors (*Komsomolskaya pravda*, 12 February 1992). The writer Vladimir Soloukhin compiled a collection of Lenin's gruesome statements, mainly concerning relations with the peasantry and in particular the supply dictatorship that allowed grain to be expropriated at will, often leaving the peasants with nothing to eat themselves (one of the factors that had exacerbated the famine on the Volga in 1921–2). The booklet represents a devastating critique of the Leninist style of politics. The following example begins with a quotation from Lenin followed by Soloukhin's commentary.

Lenin writes:

The Bolsheviks resolved the problem of seizing power in the capital as well as in the main industrial centres of Russia relatively easily. But in the provinces, in places far from the centre, Soviet power had to overcome resistance that took military forms and only now, some four months after the October revolution, this is coming to an end. At the present time the task of overcoming and suppressing resistance in Russia is broadly speaking over. *The Bolsheviks have conquered Russia.*

Soloukhin comments as follows:

When one country conquers another, as when the Russian empire conquered Central Asia, whatever the merits of the case, the purpose was clear and was not hidden by the conquerors themselves . . . Thus when one country conquers another and imposes there a harsh occupational regime, allowing it to crush popular resistance and maintain that conquered country under its control, a clear if not benign aim is pursued: to unite the conquered country with the metropolis.

But here Russia was conquered by a group, a handful of people. This group then pursued in the country the harshest occupational regime which no other age in the history of humanity has seen. This regime was pursued to maintain themselves in power. Suppress all and everyone to stay in power. They saw that practically the whole population was against them, apart from a very thin layer of 'advanced' workers, that is, a tiny percentage of the population of Russia, but kept suppressing, cutting, shooting, imposing famine, raped at will, to keep that country in their hands. Why? What for? With what aim? To achieve in their conquered country their political principles. Universal accounting and control of manufactured goods, a state monopoly of all types of goods and their controlled distribution. But this would have been only a half-victory. From a deep reading of Lenin we learn that this accounting and distribution was only a means and not an end. The aim was to achieve universal labour duty in the country, that is, to force people to work, to force them to subordinate themselves to a single leader, dictator, that is, a means to turn the whole population of the country into a single subservient mechanism.

Source: Vladimir Soloukhin, *Chitaya Lenina (Reading Lenin) (Moscow, samizdat mimeo)*, pp. 37–8.

### Document 4.13 Lenin's Last Testament

Lenin had always shielded Stalin from criticism but he was forced to change his mind when he heard about the incident of 22 December 1922; Stalin had subjected Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, to a 'storm of the coarsest abuse' (as she put it in a note to Kamenev the next day). It was at this time that Lenin, in preparation for the Twelfth Party Congress, made a number of recommendations of an organisational and of a personal nature. The themes of his organisational proposal were developed in his article 'Better Fewer, But Better', while his reflections on the personalities of his colleagues became known as his 'Last Testament'. Alarmed by the bitterness of personal conflict around him, Lenin commented on the qualities of his colleagues. Published abroad in 1926 as his 'Testament', they only became widely known in the USSR after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. In identifying the weak points of the main leadership contenders, the comments could not but exacerbate the conflicts. The postscript was penned after Stalin's abuse of Krupskaya became known to Lenin.

23 December 1922

I would urge strongly that at this Congress a number of changes be made in our political structure. I want to tell you of the considerations to which I attach most importance. At the head of the list I set an increase in the number of Central Committee members to a few dozen or even a hundred. It is my opinion that without this reform our Central Committee would be in great danger if the course of events were not quite favourable for us (and that is something we cannot count on).

Then, I intend to propose that the Congress should on certain conditions invest the decisions of the State Planning Commission [Gosplan, established in 1921] with legislative force, meeting, in this respect, the wishes of Comrade Trotsky – to a certain extent and on certain conditions.

As for the first point, i.e., increasing the number of CC members, I think it must be done in order to raise the prestige of the Central Committee, to do a thorough job of improving our administrative machinery and to prevent conflicts between small sections of the CC from acquiring excessive importance for the future of the Party. It seems to me that our Party has every right to demand from the working class fifty to one hundred CC members, and that it could get them from it without unduly taxing the resources of that class.

Such a reform would considerably increase the stability of our Party and ease its struggle in the encirclement of hostile states, which, in my opinion, is likely to, and must, become much more acute in the next few years. I think that the stability of our Party would gain a thousandfold by such a measure.



*Continuation of the Notes: 'Lenin's Last Testament', 24-5 December 1922*

By stability of the Central Committee, of which I spoke above, I mean measures against a split, as far as such measures can at all be taken. For, of course, the White Guard in *Russkaya Mysl* (it seems to have been S. E. Oldenburg) was right when, in the first place, in his play against Soviet Russia he banked on the hope of a split in our party, and when, in the second place, he banked for that split on serious disagreements in our party.

Our party rests upon two classes, and for that reason its instability is possible, and if there cannot exist agreement between those classes its fall is inevitable. In such an event it would be useless to take any measures or in general to discuss the stability of our Central Committee. In such an event no measures would prove capable of preventing a split. But I trust that is too remote a future, and too improbable an event, to talk about.

I have in mind stability as a guarantee against a split in the near future, and I intend to examine here a series of considerations of a purely personal character.

I think that the fundamental factor in the matter of stability – from this point of view – is such members of the Central Committee as Stalin and Trotsky. The relation between them constitutes, in my opinion, a big half of the danger of that split, which might be avoided, and the avoidance of which might be promoted, in my opinion, by raising the number of members of the Central Committee to fifty or one hundred.

Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated an enormous power in his hand; and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution. On the other hand Comrade Trotsky, as was proved by his struggle against the Central Committee in connection with the question of the People's Commissariat of Ways of Communication, is distinguished not only by his exceptional abilities – personally he is, to be sure, the most able man in the present Central Committee – but also by his too far-reaching self-confidence and disposition to be too much attracted by the purely administrative side of affairs.

These two qualities of the two most able leaders of the present Central Committee might, quite innocently, lead to a split; if our party does not take measures to prevent it, a split might arise unexpectedly.

I will not further characterise the other members of the Central Committee as to their personal qualities. I will only remind you that the October episode of Zinoviev and Kamenev was not, of course, accidental, but that it ought as little to be used against them personally as the non-Bolshevism of Trotsky.

Of the younger members of the Central Committee I want to say a few words about Bukharin and Pyatakov. They are, in my opinion, the most able forces (among the youngest), and in regard to them it is necessary to bear in mind the following: Bukharin is not only the most valuable and leading theoretician of the party, but also may legitimately be considered the

favourite of the whole party, but his theoretical views can only with the very greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxist, for there is something scholastic in him (he never has learned, and I think never has fully understood, the dialectic).

And then Pyatakov – a man undoubtedly distinguished in will and ability, but too much given over to administration and the administrative side of things to be relied on in a serious political question.

Both of these remarks, of course, are made only for the present, on the assumption that both of these outstanding and devoted party workers fail to find an occasion to enhance their knowledge and amend their one-sidedness.

*Postscript, 4 January 1923*

Stalin is too rude, and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a General Secretary. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that position and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc. This circumstance may appear to be a negligible detail. But I think that from the standpoint of safeguards against a split and from the standpoint of what I wrote above about the relationship between Stalin and Trotsky it is not a detail, or it is a detail which can assume decisive importance.

*Sources: Lenin, PSS, vol. 45, pp. 343-6; Selected Works, pp. 681-3.*

This letter was circulated among delegates at the Thirteenth Party Congress, held after Lenin's death in January 1924, but the proposals contained therein, above all Stalin's transfer from the post of General Secretary, were not discussed. The Fifteenth Party Congress in 1927 returned to the matter, and while the letter was published in the verbatim report of the congress, Lenin's recommendations on internal party changes were not. Only after 1956 were these latter materials made available and published in Lenin's collected works.

**Document 4.14 Lenin's Advocacy of Co-operatives**

Faced with a wartorn and relatively backward economy, in a society dominated by peasants, and in the retreat conditions of NEP, Lenin began to see the way forward in the development of 'socialist' co-operatives. This work has been taken as an indication of Lenin's conversion to the merits of gradualism in the transition to socialism, and thus by implication to a long-term future for NEP. Lenin's notion of a 'cultural revolution' was used in a distinctive sense, to signal the gradual acceptance of the organised and efficient collective management of the economy.



complete socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, must have a certain material base).

*Source: Lenin, 'On Co-operation', 4, 6 January 1923, Pravda, 26, 27 May 1923, in Selected Works, pp. 690-1, 692-3, 695.*

Bukharin was to interpret this and other final writings of Lenin as the assertion of a gradualist path to socialism. As Bukharin put it in conversation with Boris Nicolaevsky in 1936: 'The main point of his testament was that it is possible to arrive at Socialism without applying more force to the peasantry' (Nicolaevsky, 1965, p. 13). The central issue was indeed the relationship of Soviet power with the peasants, who comprised 80 per cent of the population.

#### Document 4.15 Lenin on the Possibility of Socialism in Russia

In commenting on the memoirs of the Menshevik Sukhanov, Lenin conceded that Russia lacked the material conditions for socialism, but insisted that the Communist government could by its own endeavours create them. Once again Lenin's voluntarism triumphed over classical Marxist materialism.

I have lately been glancing through Sukhanov's notes on the revolution. What strikes one most is the pedantry of all our petty-bourgeois democrats and of all the heroes of the Second International. Apart from the fact that they are all extremely faint-hearted, and that when it comes to the minutest deviation from the German model, even the best of them fortify themselves with reservations – apart from this characteristic, which is common to all petty-bourgeois democrats and has been abundantly manifested by them throughout the revolution, what strikes one is their slavish imitation of the past . . .

Infinitely stereotyped, for instance, is the argument they learned by rote during the development of West European Social Democracy, namely, that we are not yet ripe for socialism, that, as certain 'learned' gentlemen among them put it, the objective economic premises for socialism do not exist in our country. It does not occur to any of them to ask: but what about a people that found itself in a revolutionary situation such as that created during the first imperialist war? Might it not, influenced by the hopelessness of the situation, fling itself into a struggle that would offer it at least some chance of securing conditions for the further development of civilisation that were somewhat unusual? . . .

If a definite level of culture is required for the building of socialism (although nobody can say just what that definite 'level of culture' is, for it differs in every West European country), why cannot we begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of culture in a revolutionary way,

and *then*, with the aid of the workers' and peasants' government and the Soviet system, proceed to overtake the other nations?

You say that civilisation is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilisation in our country as the expulsion of the landlords and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving towards socialism? Where, in what books, have you read that such variations of the customary historical order of events are impermissible or impossible?

Napoleon, I think, wrote: *On s'engage et puis . . . on voit*. Rendered freely this means: 'First engage in a serious battle and then see what happens.' Well, we did first engage in a serious battle in October 1917, and then saw such details of development (from the standpoint of world history they were certainly details) as the Brest peace, the New Economic Policy, and so forth. And now there can be no doubt that in the main we have been victorious.

*Source: Lenin, 'Our Revolution (Apropos of N. Sukhanov's Notes)', 16-17 January 1923, Pravda, 30 May 1923, in Selected Works, pp. 696-8.*

#### Document 4.16 Lenin's 'Better Fewer, But Better'

In this classic analysis Lenin condemned the bureaucratic morass in which the Soviet state found itself mired. The flaws in his analysis of the problem (however trenchant the condemnation might have been) were reflected in the inadequacy of his proposals for reform; thus, as with Kollontai earlier (Document 3.23), his suggested remedies only undermined his aspirations. He fundamentally failed to understand the root causes of the inefficiency and extreme bureaucratisation of Soviet life, seeing the cultural legacy of the past as the main problem whereas the Soviet system itself spawned the ills which so vexed him in the last year of his life. Disappointed by the delay in the revolution in the West, Lenin began to look to the East for support.

Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not yet been overcome, has not reached the stage of a culture that has receded into the distant past. I say culture deliberately, because in these matters we can only regard as achieved what has become part and parcel of our culture, of our social life, our habits. We might say that the good in our social system has not been properly studied, understood and taken to heart; it has been hastily grasped at; it has not been verified or tested, corroborated by experience, and not made durable, etc. Of course, it could not be otherwise in a revolutionary epoch, when development proceeded at such breakneck speed that in a matter of five years we passed from tsarism to the Soviet system . . .



It is time we did something about it. We must show sound scepticism for too rapid progress, for boastfulness, etc. We must give thought to testing the steps forward we proclaim every hour, take every minute and then prove every second that they are flimsy, superficial and misunderstood. The most harmful thing here would be haste. The most harmful thing would be to rely on the assumption that we know at least something, or that we have any considerable number of elements necessary for the building of a really new state apparatus, one really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet, etc.

No, we are ridiculously deficient of such an apparatus, and even of the elements of it, and we must remember that we should not stint time on building it, and that it will take many, many years . . .

In order to renovate our state apparatus we must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter, or a fashionable catch-phrase (and we should admit in all frankness that this happens very often with us), that learning shall really become part of our very being, that it shall actually and fully become a constituent element of our social life. In short, we must not make the demands that are made by bourgeois Western Europe, but demands that are fit and proper for a country which has set out to develop into a socialist country . . .

We have been bustling for five years trying to improve our state apparatus, but it has been mere bustle, which has proved useless in these five years, or even futile, or even harmful. This bustle created the impression that we were doing something, but in effect it was only clogging up our institutions and our brains.

It is high time things were changed.

We must follow the rule: Better fewer, but better. We must follow the rule: Better get good human material in two or even three years than work in haste without hope of getting any at all . . .

I think that the time has at last come when we must work in real earnest to improve our state apparatus and in this there can scarcely be anything more harmful than haste. That is why I would sound a strong warning against inflating the figures. In my opinion, we should, on the contrary, be especially sparing with figures in this matter. Let us say frankly that the People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection [Rabkrin] does not at present enjoy the slightest authority. Everybody knows that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, and that under peasant conditions nothing can be expected from this People's Commissariat. We must have this firmly fixed in our minds if we really want to create within a few years an institution that will, first, be an exemplary institution, secondly, win everybody's absolute confidence, and, thirdly, prove to all and sundry that we have really justified the work of such a highly placed institution as the Central Control Commission. In my opinion, we must immediately and irrevocably reject all general figures for

the size of office staffs. We must select employees for the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection with particular care and only on the basis of the strictest test. Indeed, what is the use of establishing a People's Commissariat which carries on anyhow, which does not enjoy the slightest confidence, and whose word carries scarcely any weight? I think that our main object in launching the work of reconstruction that we now have in mind is to avoid all this . . .

In all spheres of social, economic and political relationships we are 'frightfully' revolutionary. But as regards precedence, the observance of the forms and rites of office management, our 'revolutionariness' often gives way to the mustiest routine. On more than one occasion, we have witnessed the very interesting phenomenon of a great leap forward in social life being accompanied by amazing timidity whenever the slightest changes are proposed . . .

The system of international relationships which has now taken shape is one in which a European state, Germany, is enslaved by the victor countries. Furthermore, owing to their victory, a number of states, the oldest states in the West, are in a position to make some insignificant concessions to their oppressed classes – concessions which, insignificant though they are, nevertheless retard the revolutionary movement in those countries and create some semblance of 'class truce'.

At the same time, as a result of the last imperialist war, a number of countries of the East, India, China, etc., have been completely jolted out of the rut. Their development has definitely shifted to general European capitalist lines. The general European ferment has begun to affect them, and it is now clear to the whole world that they have been drawn into a process of development that must lead to a crisis in the whole of world capitalism.

Thus, at the present time we are confronted with the question – shall we be able to hold on with our small and very small peasant production, and in our present state of ruin, until the West European capitalist countries consummate their development towards socialism? But they are consummating it not as we formerly expected. They are not consummating it through the gradual 'maturing' of socialism, but through the exploitation of some countries by others, through the exploitation of the first of the countries vanquished in the imperialist war combined with the exploitation of the whole of the East. On the other hand, precisely as a result of the first imperialist war, the East has been definitely drawn into the revolutionary movement, has been definitely drawn into the general maelstrom of the world revolutionary movement . . .

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what



the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured . . .

We must strive to build up a state in which the workers retain the leadership of the peasants, in which they retain the confidence of the peasants, and by exercising the greatest economy remove every trace of extravagance from our social relations.

We must reduce our state apparatus to the utmost degree of economy. We must banish from it all traces of extravagance, of which so much has been left over from tsarist Russia, from its bureaucratic capitalist state machine.

*Source: Lenin, 'Better Fewer, But Better', 2 March 1923, Pravda, 4 March 1923, in Selected Works, pp. 701, 702-3, 708, 711.*

### The 'New Course' Debate

In the summer of 1923 strikes broke out in a number of important industrial areas, provoked by delays in the payment of wages of up to three months. The State Bank in August sought to reduce industrial prices by cutting credits to industrial enterprises, while at the same time reducing prices for food products, thus undermining the peasant economy. In response to the mounting crisis at the end of September 1923 the Central Committee established three special commissions: one to examine the 'scissors' that had opened up between industrial and agricultural prices; one to investigate the wages issue; and one headed by Dzerzhinsky to find ways of overcoming factional activity within the party itself. It was in response to the latter's attempts to impose unity in the party that Trotsky launched the 'New Course' controversy.

#### Document 4.17 Trotsky's Letter to the CC

Losing the initiative in his struggle against the triumvirate (Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, the dominant group in Lenin's declining year), Trotsky sought to outflank them by launching a debate over the lack of democracy within the party. His opening salvo was a letter delivered to the Central Committee on 8 October 1923, many of whose themes were reiterated by the 'Letter of the 46'. A further letter by Trotsky called 'The New Course' gave the whole debate its title.

One of the proposals of Comrade Dzerzhinsky's commission declares that we must make it obligatory for Party members knowing about groupings in the Party to communicate the fact to the GPU, the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission. It would seem that to inform the Party organizations of the fact that its branches are being used by elements hostile to the Party is an obligation of Party members so elementary that it ought not to be necessary to introduce a special resolution to that effect six years after the October Revolution. The very demand for such a resolution is an

extremely startling symptom alongside of others no less clear . . . The demand for such a resolution means: (a) that illegal oppositional groups have been formed in the Party, which may become dangerous to the revolution; (b) that there exist such states of mind in the Party as to permit comrades knowing about such groups not to inform the Party organizations. Both these facts testify to an extraordinary deterioration of the situation within the Party from the time of the Twelfth Congress.

In the fiercest moment of War Communism, the system of appointment within the Party did not have one-tenth of the extent that it has now. Appointment of the secretaries of provincial committees is now the rule. That creates for the secretary a position essentially independent of the local organization . . .

The Twelfth Congress of the Party was conducted under the sign of democracy. Many of the speeches at that time spoken in defence of workers' democracy seemed to me exaggerated, and to a considerable extent demagogish, in view of the incompatibility of a fully developed workers' democracy with the regime of dictatorship. But it was perfectly clear that the pressure of the period of War Communism ought to give place to a more lively and broader Party responsibility. However, this present regime – which began to form itself before the Twelfth Congress, and which subsequently received its final reinforcement and formulation – is much farther from workers' democracy than the regime of the fiercest period of War Communism. The bureaucratization of the Party apparatus has developed to unheard-of proportions by means of the method of secretarial selection. There has been created a very broad stratum of Party workers, entering into the apparatus of the government of the Party, who completely renounce their own Party opinion, at least the open expression of it, as though assuming that the secretarial hierarchy is the apparatus which creates Party opinion and Party decisions. Beneath this stratum, abstaining from their own opinions, there lies the broad mass of the Party, before whom every decision stands in the form of a summons or a command. In this foundation-mass of the Party there is an unusual amount of dissatisfaction . . . This dissatisfaction does not dissipate itself by way of influence of the mass upon the Party organization (election of Party committees, secretaries, etc.), but accumulates in secret and thus leads to interior strains . . .

It is known to the members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission that while fighting with all decisiveness and definiteness within the Central Committee against a false policy, I decisively declined to bring the struggle within the Central Committee to the judgment even of a very narrow circle of comrades, in particular those who in the event of a reasonably proper Party course ought to occupy prominent places in the Central Committee. I must state that my efforts of a year and a half have given no results. This threatens us with the danger that the Party may be taken unawares by a crisis of exceptional severity . . . In view of the situation