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## *Preface*

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The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 heralded what has become the major social and political transformation of the twentieth century. Despite its failures, and its horrors, it is widely recognised as providing a model for the transition from capitalism (or pre-capitalism) to communism (or various forms of socialism). This book is addressed to analysing some of the theoretical presuppositions of Bolshevism: the ideas about revolution held by Lenin and their transformation into an ideology of Leninism after his death. It considers the impact on Russia of the political seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in 1917: but it is not a book about history – it deals with some of the major interpretations or explanations of the Revolution in Russia. The first chapters outline Lenin's approach to Marxism and consider those elements of his views which might be considered to be at the core of his theory of revolution. Studied thematically, the various parts of his thinking are shown to be complementary in providing an analysis of capitalism and the justification for socialist revolution. These chapters are not exhaustive: they do not consider in depth Lenin's views on many topics and they focus on his analysis of capitalist society rather than on his philosophy. It is believed that a relatively short, concise but not unsympathetic account of Lenin's thinking on revolution fulfils a current need, when so many books deal either with specialist aspects of his thought or (all too often) regard Lenin as a conspiratorial actor rather than as a thinker.

The objective of the first two chapters is to show how Lenin's ideas (and those of his fellow-revolutionaries) were conditioned by the environment of Russia at that time and the implications of this for political activity. In Chapter 1, an attempt is made to uncover the ideological and theoretical foundations of Lenin's approach to society. In Chapter 2, the major components of Lenin's theory of revolution are outlined and are set against the cultural heritage and changing economic structure of Tsarist Russia. Thirdly, we focus on the Bolsheviks in power. Attention

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is given to the process of revolution: what features of society continue into the supposedly new epoch and how do the forces for change retain their vigour? In this context, Stalinism is defined and considered from four contrasting viewpoints: Marxist–Leninist, transitional society, totalitarianism and cultural continuity. Here again the preconditions given by Russian culture and the impact of the ideology of Leninism, derived from Lenin's own writings, are emphasised. An attempt is made to provide a detached analysis of Stalin's policies by separating the theoretically sustained explanations from the denunciatory attacks. In pointing to some of the subsequent problems of the October Revolution, I have tried not to succumb to the current 'masked intellectual terrorism' (to use the words of Pierre Vilar) or the 'moral blackmail' (E. H. Carr) which pervades our intellectual culture in relation to Soviet society (quotations cited by Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1979: 6).

After considering the strengths and weaknesses of the various explanations, an attempt is made to generalise about the revolutionary process. Here the theories of Talcott Parsons and Karl Marx are seen to be complementary in many ways, and it is suggested that these two theoretical approaches may be synthesised to account for the happenings in Russia and a model of the revolutionary process is suggested. Finally, the limitations of Bolshevism as an approach to conditions pertaining in contemporary Western Europe are outlined. Comparison of present-day Western Europe and its problems (systemic though they may be) with Lenin's Russia show 'Leninism' as politics to be no longer appropriate to the problems of Western European socialist reconstruction – though its relevance to underdeveloped countries is another matter.

The approach of the book is not one of Talmudic exegesis concerned with textual analysis of items of Lenin's writings. Nor is it an attempt to 'prescribe' correct contemporary policy on some issue in terms of what Lenin said. At the same time this book does provide an interpretation of Lenin's ideas (and the role of ideas as ideologies) which has implications for the analysis of modern societies. The aim of the book is to provide an account of Lenin's method, of the interconnectedness of his ideas and of their relevance to the problems which confronted the socialist movement of his time in Russia. In so far as policy is concerned, my first aim is to uncover a Leninist approach to politics and society. Lenin's strength as a political activist lies in his method: the combination of serious Marxist sociological analysis and political tactics, and this is considered in contrast with the methods of non-Marxists. My interest in Lenin lies

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more in his political and economic analysis of the unfolding of Russian and world capitalism than in his more philosophical ideas. I have, therefore, attempted briefly to outline Lenin's methodological assumptions and to express in more detail his social analysis. My task is to point out that Lenin's work is historically specific, in so far as his tactics and politics are concerned, and that to tear out particular parts from the whole is illegitimate. From my own standpoint, much of the present literature which discusses Lenin is not so much incorrect, or based on an inadequate reading of Lenin, as it is inappropriate when applied to the world of Western Europe in the last quarter of the twentieth century. I have attempted to appraise the impact of revolution in Russia and to set Lenin's ideas against the happenings in the post-revolutionary period.

There are then four distinct, though related, topics: Lenin's analysis of revolution; Leninism as an ideology legitimating the Russian Revolution; a detached analysis of revolution, and the relevance today of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. This is an ambitious agenda and these are controversial questions. There is a clear danger that covering such a wide canvas will lead to superficiality and unevenness in the coverage of alternative positions. But I believe that a synoptic account of Lenin's ideas, the Russian Revolution and the sociology of revolution, in a relatively short book, will enable us to see these questions in a somewhat different light than hitherto. The book then does not set out to rival the more comprehensive works on these topics, neither can it attempt to cover in detail alternative views – these I have summarised to bring out their inadequacies in the light of my own approach. The work does not purport to be a history of Lenin's thought or of its interconnectedness with world history. Topics are considered *thematically* not historically. The book is intended for different constituencies: for historians, political scientists and sociologists who require a short and succinct analysis of Lenin's views on revolution, and an exposition of some of the more important interpretations of Stalinism, and it may also be of interest to those concerned with the theories and the process of social change.

I have followed the scientific citations practice of name of author followed by date of publication and, where relevant, page (e.g. Smith 1979: 241). For the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, I have amended this somewhat to indicate the brief title of the work or article, e.g. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 1951. I have referred to the pagination of the three-volume edition of Lenin's *Selected Works* (SW), 1977 edition, or to the *Collected Works* (CW), 1960–70 edition. (Note that there are various editions of the three-volume *Selected Works*, whose pagination and

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English translation are not consistent.) A complete list of articles or works cited by Lenin is to be found in the bibliography.

Many acknowledgements in a book of this kind are in order. I would like to thank Geoffrey Hawthorn, David Held and two anonymous referees for many comments and suggestions on earlier drafts. Cathy Marsh also saved me from making some mistakes.

*March 1980*