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THE MYTH OF LENIN DURING THE
CIVIL WAR YEARS

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The cultural trauma of the Russian Revolution and Civil War brought into high relief the fantastic expectations of the oppressed. Monsters and heroes battled each other in the agitational posters and leaflets that streamed out of the Red Army and local Party committees during the Civil War years. Within this agitation, which had no central direction or management, the myth of Lenin emerged. The Communist Party leaders built on that myth and contributed to it in an effort to strengthen the acknowledged authority of the new political order. This myth was to provide the foundation for the pervasive, nationwide cult of Lenin that exploded upon Russia immediately after his death in 1924.

The Lenin Myth Begins

In the first ten months following the October Revolution Lenin was barely perceptible as a public figure beyond the speeches he delivered before live audiences. His widow, N.K. Krupskaya, later recalled that in the first weeks of Bolshevik rule "...nobody knew Lenin's face at that time. In the evening we would often... stroll around the Smolny, and nobody would ever recognize him, because there were no portraits then."¹ His first official photographic portrait was made in January 1918, a realistic depiction of a very tired man.² It was reproduced on the first published poster of Lenin. Bland and spare, it bore the simple caption of his name and government title.³ In the same year, 1918, the Petrograd Soviet

published an advertisement for its official organ, Izvestiia, which manifested Lenin's elevated stature as founding father of the new regime: two portraits of identical size were symmetrically placed on the page — one of Lenin, the other of Marx.⁴ In the press, Lenin was not singled out for praise or even special attention, except immediately after the seizure of power when the new leader was honored with a brief biographical sketch in Izvestiia⁵ and a smattering of verse. The most extravagant example of Leniniana in this period was a poem by Demian Bednyi, soon to become the Bolshevik poet laureate. Entitled "To the Leader" (Vozhdiu), it was a piece of occasional verse written for May Day, 1918 and was filled with religious imagery. "You were in a distant land,/ But in spirit you were with us always, --/ There grew, page by page, / The Holy Bible of Labor" Every day was fraught with danger, the poet continues, reminiscing about 1917, the danger of "open assault/ And the crafty designs of a hidden Judas."⁶

No Judas did appear, but there was an open assault on Lenin on August 30, 1918. On that morning Moshe Uritskii, head of the Petrograd Cheka, was murdered. Later in the day Fania Kaplan, an anarchist of Socialist-Revolutionary persuasion, shot and wounded Lenin. That shooting spurred the first major concentration of Leniniana and marked the first occasion in which Lenin evoked extravagant praise simultaneously from diverse sources. This was the first event in the gradual emergence of the cult of Lenin.

The central press immediately launched a campaign of agitation, vowing to avenge the treacherous attacks. Uritskii was lauded with eulogies and poems in memory of the "fallen leader."⁷ But overwhelmingly the agitational focus was Lenin. The first official response to the

shooting came from Iakov Sverdlov, president of the Soviet's Central Executive Committee. Calling him the "genuine leader of the working class," Sverdlov said that "the role of Com. Lenin, his significance for the working movement of Russia, the working movement of the whole world, was acknowledged among the broadest circles of workers of all countries." He vowed that in response to this attack on its leaders the working class would rally and unleash a merciless mass terror against the enemies of the revolution.⁸ Kaplan was speedily executed, and, although she had not been connected to any organization, hundreds of people were arrested in reprisal for the shooting.

The country was already in the grip of civil war and the attack on Lenin was interpreted as an act of war. Lev Trotskii, leader of the Red Army, hurried to Moscow from the Kazan front. In an address to the All-Union Central Executive Committee on September 2, he spoke of Lenin's struggle against death as a "new front", for Kaplan's bullets had been a direct attack on the Bolshevik regime. Trotskii affirmed his faith in Lenin's victory, but at the same time observed that no other defeat would be as tragic for the working class as the death of Lenin. Lenin was the "leader of the new epoch", and the "greatest human being of our revolutionary epoch". Trotskii was well aware that "the fate of the working class does not depend on individual personalities". But, he continued, the individual can help the working class to fulfill its role and attain its goal more quickly. Lenin, he said, was brought forth by Russian history for the new epoch of "blood and iron" as the "embodiment of the courageous thought and the revolutionary will of the working class." Lenin's greatness as a revolutionary leader lay in his

unshakable will, unusual perspicacity, and in his acute "revolutionary gaze".⁹ Trotskii's speech was an intentional agitational weapon; it was published not only in the press, but in pamphlet form, together with a speech by Lev Kamenev, head of the Moscow Soviet, in an edition of one million.¹⁰

On September 6, in Petrograd, Grigorii Zinoviev, the chairman of its Soviet, made a long address which was also published in book form (200,000 copies).¹¹ Its tone combines religious fervor and melodrama. He began by saying that for the entire previous week every honest Russian worker had but one concern; would the leader recover? Zinoviev then provided the happy news that Lenin had indeed recovered from his wounds. The speech was purportedly a "factual" biography of Lenin. It began with a lie: Lenin's father, said Zinoviev, came from peasant stock.¹² Zinoviev depicted Lenin as a saint, an apostle, and a prophet. He described Lenin's long years in emigration as the trial of an ascetic: "He lived like a beggar, he was sick, he was malnourished — especially during his years in Paris."¹³ Lenin came to be the "apostle of world communism." What Is to Be Done? Zinoviev called the "gospel" (evangelie) of the Iskraists. And then Lenin grew into a leader of cosmic stature, a mover of worlds:

Someone powerful and strong has disturbed
the petty-bourgeois swamp. The movement of
the waters begins. On the horizon a new
figure has appeared

He is really the chosen one of millions.
He is the leader by the grace of God. He is
the authentic figure of a leader that is born
once in 500 years in the life of mankind.

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Trotskii's and Zinoviev's

praises of Lenin. The Bolshevik seizure and retention of power had been a remarkable achievement and Lenin's leadership has been a crucial component of its success at every stage. Moreover, their speeches were calculated to show that they perceived the assassination attempt as an attack on the very principle of the Bolshevik domination of Russia, one which warranted mass reprisals. Lenin had only been wounded, not killed, and yet hundreds of Socialist-Revolutionaries were executed in the "Red Terror" on the grounds that their party had attacked the embodiment of the entire proletariat. These Communist dignitaries of the highest order had begun to create their myths of Lenin. The process must have been conscious. Trotskii and Zinoviev were the most renowned orators in the Party. They doubtless understood the effect and significance of every phrase, every image with which they described the stricken leader. They were setting the tone of respect, reverence and fervent solidarity that reflected the official Party position on Lenin. As they sought simultaneously to inspire anger toward the Socialist-Revolutionaries and praise of Lenin they were laying down the fundamental tenet on which the Lenin cult would be based: loyalty to Lenin and the Party he founded meant death to his opponents and detractors. Fervent love and undying hatred were to accompany each other and were invariably to be expressed together in the flood of articles unleashed by the attempt on Lenin's life.

One of the most striking was written by Lev Sosnovskii, a Bolshevik journalist who was editor of Bednota, a newspaper aimed at the broad mass of peasant readers. Two days after the shooting Sosnovskii wrote an article in Petrogradskaia pravda in which he described Lenin in

Christ-like terms — a formula he was to repeat after Lenin's death.¹⁴ First he spoke of Lenin as a symbol to workers of the whole world, a symbol of the struggle for peace and socialism. Then he added a corollary inversion common to the Leniniana that followed the attempted murder. Capitalists, he wrote, hate Lenin for that very reason; they see him as their main enemy. He went on to speak of Lenin as a leader of such universal stature that Italian mothers, according to their tradition of naming their children after heroes, were now naming their babies after him. Sosnovskii devised a Christ-like formula for Lenin: "Lenin cannot be killed . . . Because Lenin is the rising up of the oppressed. Lenin is the fight to the end, to final victory . . . So long as the proletariat lives — Lenin lives. Of course, we, his students and colleagues were shaken by the terrible news of the attempt on the life of dear 'Il'ich', as the Communists lovingly call him." Il'ich is the mortal man and Lenin is the immortal leader and universal symbol. "A thousand times we tried to convince him to take even the most basic security precautions. But 'Il'ich' always rejected these pleas. Daily, without any protection, he went to all sorts of gatherings, congresses, meetings." The mortal man exposed himself to danger, but Lenin cannot be harmed. Again the Christ parallel is striking. Lenin's wounding appears as a voluntary sacrifice of a man who consciously made himself vulnerable.¹⁵

Lenin's sacrifice and martyrdom was the theme of one of the many poems the shooting inspired:

You came to us, to ease
Our excruciating torment,

You came to us as a leader, to destroy
The enemies of the workers' movement.

.....

We will not forget your suffering,
That you, our leader, endured for us.
You stood a martyr¹⁶

Other poems called Lenin a martyr, suffering for the salvation of the
poor.¹⁷ He was an "enlightened genius," a "dear father," a "savior."¹⁸

And finally he was a cross between Christ and St. George.

Great leader of the iron Host,
Friend and brother of all oppressed people,
Welding together peasants, workers, and soldiers
In the flame of crucifixions.
Invincible messenger of peace,
Crowned with the thorns of slander,
Prophet who has plunged his sword into the vampire,
Fulfiller of the fiery dream . . .¹⁹

The popular avowals of Lenin's martyrdom were certainly not responses to any directive from above. At this time no apparatus existed to indicate appropriate epithets and images, although the press of Moscow and Petrograd was making an attempt in this direction. Some atavistic process was turning Lenin into a "passion-sufferer" resembling the medieval saintly princes whose sanctity derived from the tragic ends they met as princes.²⁰ Like the officially-sponsored cult of Alexander II after his assassination in 1881, the cult of Lenin derived its beginnings in the public avowals of his voluntary self-sacrifice for his people. But Lenin's superhuman stature was complicated by the fact that he had martyred himself-- and then survived. Some literature immediately following the incident attributed his physical survival to a miracle.

A dramatic example demonstrates the syncretism of ideology and

mysticism that came to characterize the later cult of Lenin. An article in a Moscow regional newspaper said that it was only the will of the proletariat that saved Lenin from certain death. "The history of firearm wounds during the last war is full of truly 'miraculous' occurrences ... when a little notebook, medallion, or even button deflected a bullet and saved a person's life." But those involve shots at a great distance. Lenin's "murderess" fired point-blank. A few centimeters to the left or to the right and the bullet that pierced his neck would have killed him. The bullet in his shoulder could have penetrated his lung. Not a button and not a medallion, but the "will of the proletariat" intervened to save Lenin, whose trust had made him open to attack.²¹ This story is reminiscent of those which filled government and church publications in Russia after an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Alexander II in 1866. The gunshots missed the emperor due to the "Divine Hand of Providence" which cause the bullets to whiz past their target.

Whatever popular rumors there may have been to the same effect, the stories about Alexander were officially generated. What of the stories about Lenin in 1918? What does it mean to have Lenin portrayed as a martyr or a recipient of supernatural grace? Were the authors of poems and eulogies expressing their real feelings or were they deliberately attempting to create a myth with which to mobilize readers? These questions can have no definitive answers. It is certain, however, that the flamboyant poetry and prose about Lenin sparked by the shooting was not modeled on what appeared in the central press. Only Zinoviev's writings matched the extravagance of what was published in local

newspapers, and his speech was published a full week after the assassination attempt. The mythologizing of Lenin began immediately after the event. Probably some journalists and poets expressed sincere sentiments of sorrow and anger in the vocabulary that came naturally to them. Others may have consciously attempted to paint Lenin in forms and colors they believed would move their readers. And many simply were expressing solidarity with the Bolsheviks in the strongest language available to them. Doubtless all of these elements were at work in this earliest mythologizing of Lenin, but the solidarity urge probably comes closest to an inclusive explanation of the flamboyant and quasi-religious rhetoric eulogizing Lenin in September of 1918. The Civil War was on and the Kremlin had not waited to unleash its "Red Terror" as an immediate response to what it perceived as an attempted Socialist-Revolutionary coup d'etat. It was a time to demonstrate loyalty clearly and sharply.

Feelings of religious veneration and political loyalty spring from a common source in the human psyche, and no gradual secularization had effected a separation between the two in the minds of the narod, or common people. Saints' lives, the favorite reading of the narod, had provided a vocabulary of power even for many members of the revolutionary intelligentsia, particularly those from the provinces who were only a generation or two removed from humble origins. Moreover, the highly developed demonology of Russian popular religion included constant tensions between good and bad spirits, saints and devils. The language of this culture provided the earliest vocabulary of the emerging Lenin myth. It was evident in the popular mythologizing about Lenin that counterposed him to a monstrous and demonic enemy. A memorable example

is provided in an article published in a provincial weekly of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Moscow-Kiev-Voronezh railroad:

The counterrevolutionary hydra, as the devoted companion and consistent betrayer of all good, truth, and justice, is extending its poisonous tentacles from the depths of the nether regions, searching for a weak spot on the body of the world revolution ... This sea creature, a marvel of ugliness, a freak of nature, a fright to the world -- called octopus at sea and the bourgeoisie on land -- is a freak of nature, blind at birth and a result of the demon's own creation in the world

And so on August 27, the organized enemy of Soviet Russia -- the bourgeoisie -- and its devoted companions, the social-traitor "Chernovites" committed an unheard of crime against the laboring class of the entire world -- they shot point blank at Lenin, the leader of the world proletariat the sole idol and divinity of the working class, the poorest of the peasantry, of every honest man and citizen of the entire world, and all of mankind²²

The author of this powerful if confused prose was an unsophisticated representative of the narod, most likely a railroad worker. His writing is ungrammatical and the primitive imagery could only reflect the popular imagination. The sentiments in this piece and others like it were doubtless genuine and indicate that Lenin's shooting had moved at least some portion of the Russian populace to envision Lenin in terms that transcended the natural world.

At the same time the central press sought to publicize this spontaneous adulation of Lenin and to set an example for its readers. It published numerous messages of goodwill to Lenin and letters to the editor praising the wounded leader. One letter noted that Christ died saying, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." But Lenin's opponents knew very well what they were doing. "Do they not know that Lenin is the world beacon, the light of whose love illuminates all the

dark corners of human suffering?"²³ Three weeks after the shooting Petrogradskaia pravda even reprinted a peasant's letter originally published in a provincial newspaper. "And when the little father /tsar'-batiushka/ with God's help was overthrown, the SRs appeared, but we, the rural poor, waited for the party that would give us the land. After the land decree of November we peasants were overjoyed. 'Who, then, is this good person who did everything so cleverly?' We read the signature on the decree -- 'Lenin.'" The letter ends, "Faith in the priest has fallen away and interest in and love for Lenin have grown."²⁴ The republication of this letter is an example of a very early step in the creation of Lenin's cult, for it seeks to arouse positive feelings for Lenin not through direct praise, but through a conscious underlining of his purported strong relationship with the narod.

While Bolshevik journalists were eager to strengthen the emotional bond between Lenin and the populace, they also followed the Party leadership in working to standardize Lenin's public persona, to establish an official biographical depiction of Lenin that would make the leader an effective political symbol within the framework of Marxist ideology. An acceptable standardization of Lenin's image was not effected until after his death in 1924, when the organized cult of his memory was in full force. But the process began immediately after the assassination attempt, when the Central Executive Committee rushed into print two biographies of Lenin for mass consumption, one aimed at workers and the other at peasants. These biographies were clear and deliberate attempts to establish Lenin's impeccable credentials as a focus of political loyalty for the Russian people, who, until the shooting, knew little about him.

Emilian Iaroslavskii, who was to head the Institute of Party History in the 1930's, wrote his biography, The Great Leader of the Workers' Revolution, the day after the shooting. In it Lenin is depicted as above all else beloved by the working class. In 1917 when the order went out for his arrest, it was the Petrograd workers who protected him "for the October revolution, of which he was the soul, the brain The Bourgeoisie does not yet know ... how dear this person is to the working class." And we the old Party workers, wrote Iaroslavskii, know that even when we disagree with him -- he is better than all of us.

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The Peasant Department of the Central Executive Committee also published a biography of Lenin. The pamphlet's title reflected its theme: The Leader of the Rural Poor, V. I. Ul'ianov-Lenin. One hundred thousand copies were published, an enormous edition testifying to the fact that it was destined for a mass readership. "The history of the Russian peasantry has its bright heroes," it begins. "There are not many of them -- Stenka Razin, Pugachev, and a few intelligentsia-populists who considered themselves friends of the peasantry" But recent history has brought forth a new hero "whose name is always on the lips of the entire peasantry. In the past two years this hero appeared in the dark Russian countryside with a brightly burning torch, and is scattering the blinding sparks of his fiery brain far beyond the borders of Soviet Russia. The wireless radio catches these sparks and sends them out across the surface of the globe. This hero is Vladimir Il'ich Ul'ianov-Lenin." Even though Vladimir Il'ich can rightly be called the leader of the socialist revolution in Russia and the world, the Russian countryside considers him above all "its leader-hero." The next sentence, which leads directly

into the biography, exemplifies the conscious distortion of Lenin's career that was the leitmotif of this agitational pamphlet: "Vl. Il'ich's entire life, all his teachings, his literary and political activity, were inseparably linked with the countryside." He was always the friend of the poor peasant, while the Socialist-Revolutionaries are the friends of the landlords. When the SR party tried to kill him, it was "fate" that saved him as well as his "iron heart in an iron organism," wrote the author. The biography ends with a pure fabrication about the shooting. When the would-be assassin fired, the workers began to panic, but "Vl. Il'ich shouted to them, 'Comrades, order! This is not important -- maintain order!'" This shows Lenin's spiritual nature, concludes the author. "To him it was not important that he was being killed on behalf of the toilers -- it was only important that the toilers themselves not cease even for a moment their organized struggle ... Such is our glorious leader, our dear Vladimir Il'ich"²⁶

Lenin made a quick recovery from his wounds, returning to work within two weeks of the incident, and the flurry of Leniniana subsided.²⁷ But the cult of Lenin had been set on its course, although no one at the time would have predicted its future development. The attempt on Lenin's life had brought forth a new rhetorical convention for expressing solidarity with Bolshevik policies: extravagant adulation of Lenin. This had taken many linguistic forms. Some of the language was religious, some was folkloric, some was militant. All of it was emotional and intense. Its range reflected both the social and cultural heterogeneity of its users and the richness of revolutionary rhetoric in this early, formative, period of Soviet culture. More than a decade would pass before it was

pruned and molded into a standardized rhetoric of uniform formulae, epithets and cliches. The cult of Lenin played a primary role in this process by providing an official object of Communist enthusiasm whose exalted status ultimately gave the highest authorities in the Party the full power to determine the language fit to describe him.

In 1919, the year following the shooting, Lenin inspired isolated paeans and poems. But the next spring he once again evoked collective praises from the highest Party dignitaries. These were occasioned not by some threat to Lenin either from a political opponent as in 1918, or from illness as in 1923. The occasion was Lenin's fiftieth birthday, April 22, 1920.

Lenin's Fiftieth Birthday

In the spring of 1920 the eventual Red victory in the Civil War was already apparent, and popular discontent with War Communism was making itself felt. The failed socialist revolution in Germany in the fall of 1918 and the gradual restoration of capitalist order in Europe after the end of World War I had destroyed the hope -- shared by virtually all Bolshevik leaders in 1917 -- of an imminent westward spread of revolution. Soviet Russia was isolated and faced the difficult transition from war to peace, from revolutionary struggle to the extraordinary task of consolidating power and restoring the ravaged economy. The "nationalities question" loomed progressively larger as the central Party organization worked to control the non-Russian areas of the empire. Lenin's personal grip of the Party was tightening as its new organizational apparatus moved to replace the soviet rule of Russia.

The Eighth Party Congress in the spring of 1919 had confirmed the creation of the Politburo and the Organizational Bureau (Orgburo) as part of a general centralizing tendency within the Communist Party. Party discipline was defined as adherence to the following maxim: "All decisions of the higher jurisdiction are absolutely binding for the lower."²⁸ As a wartime measure this ruling was acceptable to the Party at large, but in March and April of 1920, with the end of hostilities in sight, the growing centralism of the Party provoked strident opposition at the Ninth Party Congress. Lenin, who had, as always, made the opening speech, was singled out for attack by delegates opposed to what they perceived to be an attempt at dictatorship of the Party by its center. Lev Kamenev responded: "Yes, we have administered with the aid of dictatorship We must develop a dictatorship based on complete trust that we have taken the correct line ..." In 1919 a Party faction known as the Democratic Centralists launched a vocal opposition to War Communism and the increasing centralization of the Party. At the Ninth Party Congress one of its leaders, Lev Saprnov, warned of the possible consequences of the continuing domination of the Party by its higher bodies:

I then put this question to comrade Lenin: Who will appoint the Central Committee? You see, there can be individual authority here as well. Here also a single commander can be appointed. It does not appear that we will reach this state, but if we do, the revolution will have been gambled away"²⁹

The acrimonious congress closed on April 5, 1920. Little more than a fortnight later came Lenin's fiftieth birthday. The highest Party officials seized on the occasion and turned it into a rally in support of Lenin and his continuing domination of the Party. At the same time,

Agitprop, the newly formed Agitation and Propaganda section of the Party's Central Committee, used his birthday to launch an agitational campaign around Lenin. This marked the next stage in the emergence of the Lenin cult.

On April 23, 1920 the central press was filled with greetings, paeans and poems honoring Lenin's fiftieth birthday. Pravda and Izvestiia devoted almost all their news coverage to the event and, in particular, published articles praising Lenin, written by leading members of the Party.

Trotskii, the most European of the Bolshevik leaders, strove to compensate for the internationalism of Marxism by depicting Lenin as above all a Russian leader. His article, "The National in Lenin," postulated that Lenin was the symbol of the new Russian nation, and that those who opposed him, opposed Russia. In this piece Lenin was, in a curious way, an idealized peasant. "This most indisputable leader of the proletariat not only has the outward appearance of a muzhik [peasant], but also ... the inner being of a muzhik." Lenin was a combination of Russia old and new; his was the shrewd wisdom of the Russian peasant developed to its highest degree and "armed with the latest word in scientific thought." Lenin embodied the vital forces of Russia and was thus a true national leader. In order to make his point, Trotskii even compared Karl Marx unfavorably with Lenin. Marx wore a frock-coat; Lenin would never wear a formal frock-coat. But then Marx's whole style was rich, elaborate and German. Lenin's was simple, ascetic, utilitarian, and Russian. ³⁰

Both Zinoviev and Stalin addressed themselves to Lenin as creator and moving force of the Communist Party. "To speak of Lenin is to speak of our Party," said Zinoviev. "To write a biography of Lenin is to write

the history of our Party." Lenin is to the Communist Party what Darwin was to the natural sciences and Marx to political economics. Lenin had steered his Party to power in Russia with his "iron hand, great heart, and intuitive genius."³¹ This was a reminder to the Party -- without Lenin none of them would have been where they had arrived. Stalin's praise of Lenin centered on a talent that later proved to be dangerously developed in Stalin himself: the ability to identify enemies early and the resolution to break with them. Stalin approvingly quoted the nineteenth century German socialist Lassalle as saying: "'The party becomes strong by purging itself.'"³²

Nikolai Bukharin was editor of Pravda and the Party's most brilliant theoretical spokesman. His speech, "Lenin as Revolutionary Theoretician," reflected his own proclivities. Lenin, he said, must finally be recognized not only for his genius as a revolutionary tactician and leader, but for the great theoretician that he is. Lenin founded a whole new theoretical school, and his April Theses have become the "gospel" of today's workers' movement.³³ Sosnovskii's peasant-oriented newspaper, Bednota, sent greetings to Lenin on behalf of all its readers and called his fiftieth birthday "a bright holiday on which all minds and hearts are directed to him who gave his entire life and all his strength to the cause of the emancipation of labor."³⁴

The evident purpose of this press campaign was to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the Party's centralized authority by concentrating it in the titanic talent and personal heroism of its idealized ruler. Lenin's supporters self-consciously equated him with the Party and its policies, and confirmed the convention of praising Lenin as a desirable

expression of solidarity with the direction the regime was taking. They were turning him into a mythical figure within the Party and, by celebrating the anniversary of his birth as a holiday, they were making him a focus of Party ritual. The tone of the campaign differed markedly from the strident articles bearing a spontaneous stamp of shock and anger after the shooting incident of 1918. The birthday paeans were formal, ceremonial and deliberate.

But that did not make them, of necessity, insincere. With the Civil War nearly over, Lenin had shown that he could indeed lead his party to power and maintain that power, in the face of extraordinary obstacles. Furthermore, Lenin had proven himself to be first among all Social-Democratic leaders, even though before 1917 the German Social Democratic Party had reigned supreme in international socialism. In 1920 Lenin was head of the first state to call itself socialist, and the acknowledged leader of the international Communist movement. In this Lenin's followers undoubtedly took pride. From the beginning they singled Lenin out as the leader of the world revolution, with emphasis on his global status. The claims for his internationalism may have represented both an effort to bolster national pride in a Russian leader and an attempt to strengthen Lenin as a symbol of political legitimacy in the eyes of the non-Russian peoples of the former empire. This last was to be a major factor in the Lenin cult after 1924, when a flood of Leniniana was produced in every republic, accompanied by avowals that Lenin was beloved by this or that national minority. Even before 1920 some poetry honoring Lenin had come from the pens of non-Russian poets. In 1919 an Armenian poet had lauded Lenin as a "genius, fighter, leader," and in the same

year the Kirghiz bard, Toktogul, wrote a poem entitled, "What Kind of Mother Gave Birth to Such a Son as Lenin!" The focus on Lenin's birth gives this poem a classically mythical quality: "Lenin was born for our happiness./ He became leader for our happiness."³⁵

Lenin's fiftieth birthday inspired a wave of occasional verse. Demian Bednyi's poem described Lenin as captain of the ship of state, guiding his vessel past dangerous rocks and through turbulent storms.³⁶ Another poem portraying Lenin as captain was consciously modeled on Walt Whitman's elegy on the death of Lincoln, "O Captain! My Captain!" The poet, a Siberian, dedicated to the sacred memory of Whitman "this joyful hymn to My captain."

Lenin! O Lenin! Your immutable fate
Has shown the world a resplendent path!

.

O! Then live! Your abundant genius
We need like the sun in our life and death struggle....³⁷

Vladimir Maiakovskii also dedicated a birthday poem to Lenin and began with a dramatic justification of it:

I know--
It is not the hero
Who precipitates the flow of revolution
The story of heroes--
is the nonsense of the intelligentsia!
But who can restrain himself
and not sing
of the glory of Il'ich?

.

Kindling the lands with fire
 everywhere,
 where people are imprisoned,
 like a bomb
 the name
 explodes:
 Lenin!
 Lenin!
 Lenin!

.....

I glorify
 in Lenin
 world faith
 and glorify
 my faith.³⁸

Maiakovskii's affirmation of faith in Lenin was echoed in the press campaign of April 23, 1920 which deliberately stressed the emotional bonding between Lenin and the narod. An article in Bednota maintained that "the toiling masses strongly believe in their leader." Bednota also published a reminiscence about the peasant response to the Decree on Land in October 1917. "What a wizard that Lenin is!" a peasant said, on learning of the decree. "The land belonged to the landlords, and now it is ours." "But won't he cheat us?" asked his neighbor. The author of the memoir next recalls explaining that Lenin had dedicated his whole life for the people. Then, he claims, all the twenty or so peasants gathered at the meeting during which the interchange took place "in one voice shouted: 'Such a man won't cheat (us)!'" The same newspaper carried an article by a peasant woman who had been to see Lenin in the Kremlin and had found him "more hospitable and concerned than words can say--just like your own father."³⁹ Not just the press but also agitational posters stressed the theme of Lenin's link with the narod. A special poster published for his birthday showed a portrait of Lenin and a peasant and worker gazing up at him. The caption read: "Long live our Il'ich!"

The change in the depiction of Lenin in posters at the end of the Civil War reflected his progressive development into a cult figure. Early posters of Lenin published in 1918 and 1919 had been little more than blown-up photographs of the leader's unsmiling face. But gradually he was portrayed with more dynamism. One poster, published in 1920 in Baku, shows Lenin standing atop a Grecian temple, his arm extended, finger pointed ahead, his face full of grim determination. The caption reads: "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of Communism." In the same year the graphic artist, Deni, published a playful poster--a cartoon of Lenin perched on top of the globe with a broom, sweeping away capitalists and kings.⁴⁰ In 1922 the Moscow Party Committee published a poster in which Lenin stands on a globe with outstretched arm; behind him are the rays of the rising sun.⁴¹ The image of Lenin in posters had shifted from a passive to an active one. He was becoming the subject not of mere portraiture, but of an iconography.

The demonology of Soviet agitation and propaganda developed more quickly and effectively than did its hagiography, and was to have a long and complex history. The double images of good and evil, monsters and heroes, were to reinforce each other and intensify after the Civil War, when the complement of designated enemies grew larger and larger, and drew closer and closer to the sacred Party nucleus. The war was fought against class enemies, Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, foreign interventionists, White armies, but it would not be long before state enemies were to include Party factionalists, trade union spokesmen, and the sailors of Kronstadt who rose in rebellion against the regime in March of 1921. Finally, after Lenin's death, they were to be joined

by members of the Politburo--first Trotskii and then, one by one, Lenin's oldest lieutenants, as the grisly purge of the 1930s was set in motion. As the line separating good from evil, friend from enemy grew thinner, as the "enemies'" purported claims grew greater and greater, so they were depicted in terms and images that were increasingly monstrous.

Concomitant with this process was the deification of Lenin. The cult of Lenin as an organized system of rites and symbols developed long after the Civil War, when illness had removed Lenin from the active rule of Russia. A centralized and expanded apparatus of agitation and propaganda sought to perpetuate Lenin's authority despite his incapacitation. When he died in 1924, this apparatus sprang into a frenzy of activity and spread across the land the trappings of a nationwide cult of his memory.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹N. K. Krupskaja, "Lenin v 1917 godu," O Lenine: sbornik stat'ei i vystuplenii (Moscow, 1965), p. 54. This article was first published in Izvestiia, January 20, 1960.
- ²M.S. Nappel'baum was the photographer (L.F. Volkov-Lannit, Lenin v fotoiskusstve /Moscow, 1967/, p. 82.)
- ³Poster No. 37428-45, 1918, Poster collection, Lenin Library, Moscow.
- ⁴B. S. Butnik Siverskii, Sovetskii plakat epokhi grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1921 (Moscow, 1960), p. 688.
- ⁵"Vladimir Ul'ianov (N. Lenin)," Izvestiia, November 5, 1917.
- ⁶Pravda, May 4, 1918.
- ⁷See, for example, Petrogradskaia pravda, August 31, 1918; Krasnaia gazeta, August 31, 1918.
- ⁸Krasnaia gazeta, Izvestiia, August 31, 1918.
- ⁹L.D. Trotskii, "O ranenom," O Lenine, materialy dlia biografa (Moscow, n.d.), pp. 151-156.
- ¹⁰L. Kamenev and L. Trotskii, Vozhd' proletariata (Moscow, 1918).
- ¹¹L.V. Bulgakova, comp., Materialy dlia bibliografii Lenina, 1917-1923 (Leningrad, 1924), p. 203. The speech was also published simultaneously in French, German and English (G. Zinoviev, Sochineniia, Vol. XV /Leningrad, 1924/, p. 297).
- ¹²This incorrect statement was edited out of the later edition of the speech published in 1924 in Zinoviev's collected works, Vol XV, pp. 5-50. Lenin's paternal grandfather was a tailor. Lenin's father was an inspector of schools who achieved hereditary nobility.

- ¹³ Lenin always lived in physical comfort during his emigre years. His Paris apartment in particular was large, light and elegant (N. Valentinov, Maloznakomyi Lenin /Paris, 1972/ pp. 59-64.)
- ¹⁴ Pravda, January 27, 1924.
- ¹⁵ L. Sosnovskii, "K pokusheniiu na tov. Lenina," Petrogradskaia pravda, September 1, 1918.
- ¹⁶ Akim Stradaiushchii, "V. Leninu," Bednota, September 11, 1918.
- ¹⁷ G. Gulov, "Dorogomu tovarishchu Leninu," Bednota, September 17, 1918.
- ¹⁸ F. K-v, "Mirovomu vozhdii proletariata V.I. Leninu," Bednota, September 12, 1918.
- ¹⁹ Iona Brikhnichev, "V.I. Leninu," Proletarskii sbornik, Bk. 1 (Moscow, 1918), p. 18, cited in M.E.O., "Vozhd' mirovoi revoliutsii," Zheleznyi put', No. 8, March 1919, p. 4.
- ²⁰ Michael Cherniavsky, Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths (London and New Haven, 1961), pp. 13-14.
- ²¹ N. Al-ov, "Takova volia proletariata," Okar' (Organ moskovskogo okskago oblastnogo komiteta), September 6, 1918.
- ²² I. Lipatnikov, "Udar v serdtse," Vestnik glavago voenno-revoliutsionnago komiteta Moskovski-Kievo-Voronezhskoi zheleznoi dorogi, September 9, 1918.
- ²³ Izvestiia, September 3, 1918.
- ²⁴ "Derevenskaia bednota o tov. Lenine," Petrogradskaia pravda, September 21, 1918.

- ²⁵ E. Iaroslavskii, Velikii vozhd' rabochei revoliutsii (Moscow, 1918), pp. 12, 14.
- ²⁶ A. M.....v (Mitrofanov), Vozhd' derevenskoi bednoty, V.I. Ul'ianov-Lenin (Moscow, 1918).
- ²⁷ According to V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, it was Lenin himself who ordered that the press cease publication of his praises (V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, Vospominaniia o Lenine /Moscow, 1965/, pp. 337-340).
- ²⁸ Robert V. Daniels, The Conscience of the Revolution (New York, 1960), citing Resolution of the Eighth Party Congress, "On the Organizational Question," CPSU in Resolutions, I, p. 444.
- ²⁹ Daniels, Conscience of the Revolution, citing Ninth Party Congress pp. 77, 57-68.
- ³⁰ Pravda, April 23, 1920. This speech was reprinted in Trotskii, O Lenine, pp. 145-150.
- ³¹ Pravda, April 23, 1920.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Bednota, April 23, 1920.
- ³⁵ Akop Akopian, "V.I. Lenin"; Toktogul, "Chto za mat' rodila takogo syna, kak Lenin!", Lenin v sovetskoi poezii (Leningrad, 1970), pp. 73-76.
- ³⁶ Pravda, April 23, 1920.
- ³⁷ Adrian Vechernii, "Vozhdiu mirovoi revoliutsii," Vlast' truda (Irkutsk) April 23, 1920, cited in Lenin v sovetskoi poezii, pp. 79-80.

³⁸ V.V. Maiakovskii, "Vladimir Il'ich," Sochineniia, Vol I (Moscow, 1965), pp. 172-174. Maiakovskii first read this poem at a meeting of publishers honoring Lenin on April 28, 1920. It was first published in Krasnaia gazeta, November 5, 1922.

³⁹ Bednota, April 23, 1920.

⁴⁰ Butnik-Siverskii, Sovetskii plakat, pp. 654, 625.

⁴¹ Poster No. 4416-55, Poster Collection, Lenin Library, Moscow.