

# Lenin for the future

Savas Mikhail Matsas (Christian Rakovsky  
International Socialist Center)

*Introductory Session.*

*Opening speech on behalf of the “Christian Rakovsky” International Socialist Center*

1. Dear Comrades, товарищи, compañeros y compañeras, camarades, compagne e compagne, yoldaşlar, σύντροφοι και συντρόφισσες

Welcome to the International Conference on *Lenin’s Legacy 100 Years On* organized by the International Socialist Center “Christian Rakovsky” and the RedMed web network!

Our deliberations today, January 21, 2024, exactly 100 years from the day when Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the leader of the Great October 1917 Socialist Revolution passed away to eternity, marks the beginning of a much needed, fresh, collective reflection on his revolutionary legacy. It is not a formal celebration of a “harmless icon”, of a legacy reduced into a fossilized, dead dogma. We need a new dialectical-critical turn to a historical source, which is not at all dried up. It remains an indispensable source of inspiration and creativity for revolutionary theory and practice for all those who today fight for the self-emancipation of the working class, for the liberation of the exploited and oppressed humanity. With this spirit, we want to declare this year 2024 as the *Year Lenin!*

Vladimir Lenin, the architect of the victory of the Red October, the October

Revolution itself as well as the epic and tragic trajectory of the Soviet Union is not a relic of the past but a necessary *preparation for the future!*

2. By opening our Conference, we want to pay tribute to all those who heroically defended against all its gravediggers and creatively developed Lenin's legacy the last 100 years both in the Soviet Union and all over the world.

Particularly, today, in this Conference, we want to pay tribute to our Comrade **Alexander Vladimirovitch Buzgalin**, an internationally well known Marxist, Professor of Political Economy and of Marxist Studies in Lomonosov Moscow State University, a founder of the *Alternativnyi* movement and journal, author of many important theoretical books and articles, organizer of many successful scientific, cultural and political events, in Russia and internationally.

He dedicated all his life of theoretical research and political struggle, specially in the tragic period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, to defend communism against bureaucratic deformations and bourgeois slanders, to promote internationalism in action, to develop Lenin's heritage, to renew a creative Marxism, to educate a new young generation for the paths of emancipation, towards a *Homo Novus Creator*.

3. Why to return to Lenin today? Why we need to rediscover his theoretical and political revolutionary contribution now, in our turbulent times?

At the Centenary of Marx's birth, in 2018, we had noticed<sup>1</sup> the reactions of well known spokesmen of the capitalist class and of the mainstream bourgeois Press: the respectful bourgeois American newspaper *New York Times*, on April 30, 2018, has published an article, with the cheerful title: *Happy Birthday, Karl Marx, You Were Right!*<sup>2</sup> Soon after, on May 4, 2018, the voice of the City of London, the equally respectful and bourgeois *Financial Times* hosted a book review by the economic historian Adam Tooze under the impressive headlines "*Why Karl Marx is more relevant than ever*"<sup>3</sup>.

**Nothing similar could be noticed today, at the Centenary of Lenin's death. Why?**

The belated, after the event, recognition of Marx by his opponents is caused by the eruption, in 2008, of an explosive, unexpected by them, on-going global capitalist crisis, which is spiraling without solution up to now. They have to turn back to Marx, with horror, because of the total inability of bourgeois economics to explain the crisis. They have to admit that it "*cannot explain the past- the lack of prognosis of the 2007 global crisis and the lack of understanding of its deepest causes; also it cannot understand the present – why the crisis remains unresolved despite the extraordinary, heterodox measures of gigantic stimulus packages, quantitative easing, and nearly zero interest rates, taken by central banks*

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1 See Savvas Matsas (2019) Karl Marx and the Future, *Critique* 47:1 63-69.

2 Jason Barker, *Happy Birthday, Karl Marx, You Were Right!* *New York Times*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/30/opinion/karl-marx-at-200-influence.html>, assessed on 05/01/2018.

3 Adam Tooze, *Why Karl Marx is more relevant than ever*, *Financial Times*, May 4, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/cf6532dc-4c67-11e8-97e4-13afc22d86d4?segmentId=a7371401-027d-d8bf-8a7f-2a746e767d56>, assessed on May 4, 2018.

and governments; and, last but not at all least, **it cannot foresee the future** although sinister signs appear already in the horizon.”<sup>4</sup> As one of them, Chris Giles wrote: “*The future is uncertain. The present is uncertain. The past is uncertain.*”<sup>5</sup>

In these conditions of theoretical bankruptcy, epistemological impasse and generalized disorientation, liberal economists like Nouriel Roubini can “agree that Marx’s conviction that capitalism has an inbuilt tendency to destroy itself remains as prescient as ever.”<sup>6</sup>

The ruling class, its think tanks, analysts and apologists can agree that a destruction of capitalism, even an end of the world is possible **-but never a victorious socialist revolution!** And **Lenin is insolubly connected precisely with the victorious October Revolution.**

To add insult to the injury, the Bolshevik leader himself characterized this event as the **beginning of a world socialist revolution**, a historical prospect and a horrifying future for all rulers in the present world!

The vast majority of them try to console themselves thinking that Lenin is buried for ever in 1991 under the ruins of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. They conclude, consequently, that, together with Lenin, was buried the threat, which emerged in 1917 of a revolutionary overthrow of world capitalism.

This dominant wishful thinking proved to be an illusion. It ended together with Fukuyama’s fallacy of the “end of History”, of the “final and complete victory of liberal capitalism”, and of the delusion of a “monopolar moment” of an American ruled “world Empire”. Contrary to bourgeois expectations, History has accelerated its march, liberal capitalism plunged into a protracted and escalating global crisis, the decline of American capitalism and of its world hegemony are manifest in more and more brutal forms, intensifying its imperialist war drive. *War is the continuation and extension, with other means of a desperate policy to counteract the decline and fall of a historically outdated social system.*

If everything was historically settled for US and global capitalism with the catastrophe of the USSR **why they need to complete the 1991 disaster by a NATO proxy war to fragment, colonize and rule under puppet regimes the former Soviet space, the post-Soviet Russia and, on this war path, China?**

Is it accidental that US/NATO imperialism considers as primary strategic targets and urgent need to attack Russia and China, two countries where the greatest social revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took place? Why their absorption in a decaying global capitalism produces and needs the drive towards a catastrophic world war?

They are simply afraid from competition by another belated rival entering within the limits of their declining world system or they are terrified **by the possibility of a reversal of the 1991 disaster?**

With wars at the heart of Europe and in the Middle East, and dozens other military conflicts in the Global South, declining US and global capitalism, **imperialism** as Lenin has profoundly analyzed its nature, brings humanity at the brink of the abyss

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4 Savvas Matsas op.cit.

5 Chris Giles, Has Economics Failed? *Financial Times* April 23, 2018.

6 Jason Barker, *Happy Birthday, Karl Marx, You Were Right!* *New York Times*, April 30, 2018.

of a nuclear holocaust.

*Are they afraid less from an end of the world than from a new “Lenin moment”?*

4. In today's conditions of an insoluble global capitalist crisis escalating into an impending imperialist world war catastrophe, Lenin's theoretical work on **imperialism** acquires a burning actuality.

After the eruption of the First World War, the unfolding barbarism in Europe and the collapse of the international socialist Left, Lenin's struggle, often in solitude or within a small minority, represents the most dramatic but also the most creative period of his revolutionary life. It was absolutely vital for preparing, politically re-arming and leading, Lenin together with Trotsky, the Bolshevik Party at the head of the masses organized in Soviets to the triumph of the 1917 October Revolution.

The rise of a new revolutionary subjectivity was a process neither automatic nor linear at all. The road to Soviet power was full of obstacles, traps, conflicts, splits, mortal counter-revolutionary dangers, repression of the vanguard of the working class, realignment and re-orientation of revolutionary forces within and beyond the Bolsheviks. *Without a leap in revolutionary theory, no such a tremendous leap in revolutionary practice could be possible.*

Trotsky had made, in his autobiography the following profound assessment meditating on the victory of Soviet power in 1917:

Marxism considers itself the conscious expression of the unconscious historical process. But the “unconscious” process, in the historic – philosophical sense of the term not in the psychological, coincides with its conscious expression only at its highest point, when the masses, by sheer elemental pressure, break through the social routine and give victorious expression to the deepest needs of historical development. And at such moments the highest theoretical consciousness of the epoch merges with the immediate action of those oppressed masses who are farthest away from theory. The creative union of the conscious with the unconscious is what one usually calls “inspiration.” Revolution is the inspired frenzy of history.<sup>7</sup>

From the eruption of the Great War and the capitulation of the Second International, Lenin had to grasp the *specific historical nature of imperialism*. On this scientific, historical-dialectical materialist understanding, he clearly conceived the entire field of forces in conflict on the world historical scene. The imperialist war was not only a clash between solely the Great Powers, a military conflict between States. It involved also popular masses, class forces with objectively irreconcilable interests in conflict, in class struggle.

On this basis, Lenin developed the line of *transformation of the imperialist world war into an international socialist revolution*. Finally, with this internationalist line as a compass, he succeeded to make the Bolsheviks and the Soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers able to transform a war catastrophe into the triumph of socialist revolution in Russia.

The revolutionary program was not an already given, fixed list of demands but a theoretically elaborated guide for action from the standpoint of the highest

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Trotsky, *My Life, chapter XX In Power* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/my-life/ch29.htm>.



quantitative and qualitative analysis of the changing reality. ***Without historical materialist dialectics, there is no revolutionary program of a combat proletarian Party***

After the initial shock in 1914, the first crucial step of Lenin was a decisive, original and deep re-working of ***materialist dialectics*** by a detailed study of Hegel's *Science of Logic* as well as a vast philosophical field from Antiquity and Aristotle to the philosophers of the Modern Times and early 20th century. Lenin's ***Philosophical Notebooks*** is a unique testimony on his theoretical laboratory and a vital document of his ***methodological break*** with the so-called "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International, the theoretical foundations of its reformist opportunism..

Lenin's intense philosophical-methodological work and break from mechanical thinking and linear gradualism penetrates and marks all his writings on imperialism, the political center of gravity of his research and activity during the Great War. His small book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* with the modest subtitle *A Popular Outline*, presents, under conditions of censorship, in a condensed form, the main results of an immense theoretical labor. It is based on a mountain of empirical facts and a critical study of the main debates on imperialism of that period, particularly from the works of Hobson and Hilferding. This tireless critical labor can be seen in his voluminous *Notebooks on Imperialism*.

In these *Notebooks* is not absent the evidence of his continuous attention to philosophy, with constant references to dialectics, its categories and concepts, even a note of interest to Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*.

The booklet on *Imperialism, Highest Stage of Capitalism* has to be carefully studied in connection and within this broader epistemological framework. Any eclectic separation of a particular quotation from the entire context of dialectical – historical materialist inquiry and exposition has disastrous political implications.

5. A typical example, repeated *ad nauseam*, is the misuse of Lenin's definition of imperialism by most often quoted than understood five basic economic features

- (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life;
- (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital," of a financial oligarchy;
- (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance;
- (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves and
- (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.<sup>8</sup>

This definition is taken out of context and reduced into an abstract, dead formula,

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<sup>8</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Chapter VII. "Imperialism as a special stage of Capitalism" [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin).

to be artificially imposed upon every concrete, living, specific social formation in uneven and combined world historical development. The dialectic between the universal, the particular and the singular disappears.

In this distorting way, the warnings of Lenin himself are ignored. Just before the definition in five basic features, he warns about “*the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general, which can never embrace all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development*”. Immediately after the definition, Lenin points out: “...*imperialism can and must be defined differently if we bear in mind not only the basic, purely economic concepts- to which the above definition is limited- but also the historical place of this stage of capitalism in relation to capitalism in general, or the relation between imperialism and the two main trends in the working class movement*”<sup>9</sup>- namely the opportunist and the revolutionary trend.

The opportunist trend in our days, sometimes claiming to be even “Leninist”, arbitrarily applies the 5 points definition to declare Russia and China as imperialist countries to legitimize their “equidistant” position in the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine or in the US imperialist aggressive antagonism against China.

In other versions, the same method of formal justification of a reactionary policy of “keeping equal distances”, while paying lip service to Lenin against Lenin, uses the pseudo-concept of “*sub-imperialism*” or of “*peripheral imperialism*” or of “*capitalism in transition to imperialism*” to describe conflicts between the Global North and the Global South.

These pseudo-concepts totally ignore and/or reject Lenin’s central approach to the *historical* nature of imperialism: its analysis and recognition as ***an epoch of transition from a “decaying”, “parasitic”, “rotten”, “agonizing” capitalism*** - the adjectives are Lenin’s- ***to Socialism***.

This transition to a higher social mode of production beyond capitalism, to a new higher form of social life beyond capital’s fetishist form [‘Die Gestalt des gesellschaftlichen Lebensprozesses’ -Marx<sup>10</sup>] can begin from one or several countries but it can be completed only on a *world* scale. There is an objective necessity for a ***permanent world revolution*** arising precisely from the *nature of the transitional epoch of imperialism* itself, which prevents a completion of a *world* transition to be fulfilled isolated ***in a single country***.

6. The contradictions and tendencies of the imperialist epoch of capitalist decline discovered by Lenin did not disappear at all. They immensely grew the last 100 years and are exacerbated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Decay and parasitism took monstrous dimensions. A tiny minority of a financial oligarchy, the infamous 1 per cent situated in the imperialist metropolitan centers, dominate and exploit the world economy sucking the surplus of the laboring humanity. Speculative finance capital in the Global North dominates productive capital while the center of gravity of industrial manufacturing activity has moved in the Global South, especially in Asia and China. Despite technological progress, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence, the rate of productivity growth is slowing

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9 op. cit.

10 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* I, Dietzverlag Berlin 1972 p.94.

in the US and European capitalist economy. Decline is manifest in all spheres-socioeconomic, geopolitical, political, cultural.

An epoch of historical decline, Hegel had pointed out<sup>11</sup> is the negative expression of the emergence of a higher principle of social organization. In the current epoch, declining Capitalism is its special historical stage “*when*”, Lenin writes, “*the features of the epoch of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system had taken shape and revealed themselves in all spheres*”<sup>12</sup> **This** is the **essential** point of Lenin’s analysis: imperialism is not an expansionary policy but the historical stage of a parasitic, decaying, agonizing capitalism. It is an epoch of transition to the higher **socialist** reorganization of society; a non linear process of transformation into a communist society, the realm of freedom. **This** is the **central** point ignored and/or rejected by all inventors of new “post-imperialist stages”.

7. Together with this essential point is interconnected another one: the transition beyond capitalism is **not**, as in the past, a transition from one form of class society to another form of class society. It is *an entire historical epoch of transition from class to a classless society, world communism*. It is not an automatic linear evolution but it needs **a world socialist revolution**.

The role of **revolutionary subjectivity** becomes **immense, preponderant.**, To lead the transition forward, it is needed the **conscious participation** of the **working class** as a **universal class**, which cannot emancipate itself without leading a universal human emancipation from all forms of exploitation and oppression To fulfill its historical task the working class has to be organized into its own independent organs of mass struggle and political power, first of all to be organized into **revolutionary combat parties of a revolutionary International**.

**Here, at this central point, palpitates the living heart of Lenin’s legacy.**

It belongs not to a remote past but to an open and necessary future. The future is **open**, not predetermined. Its outcome depends on the living struggle of living forces on national and international levels. It is **necessary** because it arises out of objective contradictions and tendencies.

The historical dilemma posed today to a humanity struggling amid the current global capitalist crisis, producing conditions of unprecedented social destruction, climate catastrophe, world war, including a nuclear holocaust, is not limited, as in the past to the alternative “*Socialism or barbarism*”. It is **Socialism or no future**.

January 2024

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11 Hegel, *Principles of Philosophy of the Right and State*, paragraph #347.

12 Lenin, *Imperialism...* op. cit. chapter VII.

## Book launch

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# In the Tracks of Marx's *Capital*

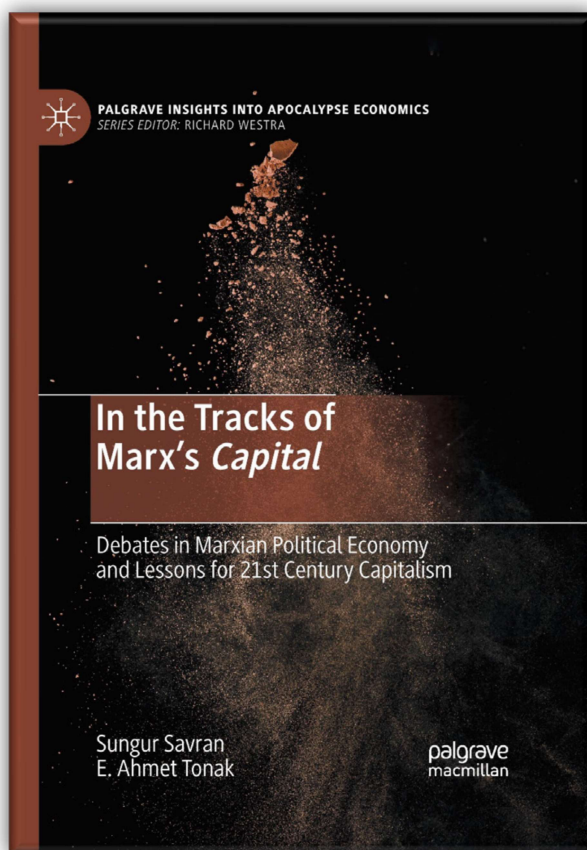
### Authors:

Sungur Savran

E. Ahmet Tonak

### Publisher:

Palgrave Macmillan



*“A masterly work... A passionate and intelligent application of Marxist categories.”*

—Guglielmo Carchedi

*“This thought-provoking book clarifies many of the controversies and confusions surrounding Marx’s Capital, and considers how to measure and assess some crucial Marxist variables.”*

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*“Tonak and Savran show convincingly that Marx’s Capital remains the bedrock for understanding the laws of motion of capitalist production.”*

—Michael Roberts

*“This is living Marxism!”*

—Tamás Krausz

*“Indispensable.”*

—Alfredo Saad-Filho

This book provides an accessible introduction to Marx’s seminal work *Capital* and explores the core ideas of Marxian political economy relevant for modern day economies. The first part gives an overview of *Capital* based on the authors’ original thinking in the methodology of *Capital*. The second part discusses the application of these ideas to some understudied questions of measuring profit on alienation, the rate of exploitation, the reconstruction of input-output tables, and the role of the welfare state and social wage. The third part sets forth new research in Marxian analysis in the 21st century, facing the challenges brought about by digital labor and the deep crisis of the global economy. The last part discusses the Marxism/Neo-Ricardianism controversy.