

## **Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study.**

By Kevin Anderson. University of Illinois Press, 1995. 311 pp. \$15.95.

Reviewer: JOAN ALWAY, *University of Miami*

In 1914-15, Lenin undertook an intensive study of Hegel, a study that would lead him to assert that no one could fully understand *Capital* without first thoroughly studying Hegel's *Logic*. Lenin's engagement with Hegel, Kevin Anderson argues, led to his break with the scientific Marxism of the Second International and his own earlier writings. In this compelling, critical study, Anderson provides a careful and comprehensive examination of Lenin's turn to Hegel and its effects on his later work. In addition to comparing Lenin's early and later work, Anderson contrasts Lenin's reading of Hegel with those of an impressive array of radical thinkers, ranging from Marx and Engels, through Plekhanov, Lukács and Korsch, Marcuse and Althusser, to the Johnson-Forest Tendency. In the process, he argues for the originality and significance of Lenin's Hegelian Marxism, making a case for a new appreciation of Lenin as a theorist and the relevance of *his* work to contemporary efforts to reconstruct Marxism.

The study is comprised of three parts, with the first devoted to Lenin's reading of Hegel, the second to the effects of this reading on his later works, and the third discussing the impact of Lenin's study of Hegel on Western Marxism. The heart of part 1 is found in chapters 2 and 3, which present a detailed analysis of Lenin's "Abstract on Hegel's *Science of Logic*." This is fascinating reading. Anderson details the twists and turns of Lenin's study, from his initial resistance and skepticism through the gradual transformation of his understanding and appreciation of the Hegelian dialectic. (Any who have struggled with Hegel's writings will also be heartened by the inclusion of Lenin's exasperated descriptions of certain sections as "extremely abstruse and almost complete nonsense" [68].) *Imperialism and State Revolution* are the focus of discussion in part 2. Here Anderson shows the extent to which the dialectic pervades Lenin's analyses, most notably in his recognition that new objective conditions (imperialism and monopoly capitalism, and the bureaucratic state) call forth new forms of revolutionary subjectivity (national liberation movements and the soviets of workers and peasants). The fact that the concept of the vanguard party remained immune from any fundamental dialectical rethinking is also

noted, but Anderson offers no explanation for this beyond indirect references to political and economic conditions and frequent (here and throughout the book) references to and examples of Lenin's "ambivalence." While this ambivalence is amply demonstrated, in not probing it further Anderson misses an opportunity to explore more fully the issue of theory and practice.

The discussion of the impact of Lenin's *Hegel Notebooks on Western Marxism* in part 3 is less successful than the title promises. Indeed, the argument itself is not always clear: did Lenin's study of Hegel simply create an atmosphere which allowed others to turn to Hegel? or actually inspire others to study Hegel? or directly influence their study of Hegel? or was it simply that the crises of Marxism had a similar effect on many radical thinkers? To show that later writers knew of, and in fact read (however problematically), Lenin's *Hegel Notebooks* does not establish the influence of the *Notebooks* on their work. But, this may just be a matter of semantics.

Although the problem of theory and practice in Lenin's work could have been more fully developed and the significance of Lenin's study of Hegel to Western Marxism remains unclear, this is an important and impressive study. This book inspires me to look again at both Hegel's *Science of logic* and Lenin's later works; it will do the same for others interested in reassessing and reconstructing Marxism.