

Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism, by Kevin Anderson. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 311 pages. Cloth, \$19.95.

In this book Kevin Anderson advances a thesis that will surprise many and antagonize some: that Lenin was not so much the creator of a “vanguard” Party dictatorship that supposedly represented the interests of the “traditional industrial working class” as an intellectual who “helped point the way to the only type of

Marxism that is viable today: one with a multiple concept of subjectivity . . ." (p. xiv). According to Anderson, Lenin not only anticipated the anticolonial movements of the 1950s—in Vietnam, Algeria, Iran, etc.—but he also (and more controversially) “helped to give birth in the 1960s to Black liberation and New Left movements in the United States and other Western industrial countries” (p. xiv). As Anderson sees it: “Those 1960s movements in turn helped to bring onto the historic stage still newer social forces, especially the worldwide women’s liberation movement” (p. xiv).

In a closely argued exegesis, Anderson describes how Lenin’s study of Hegel in 1914–1915 forced Lenin to revise some of his earlier writings like *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908). Anderson argues that Lenin’s better-known “post-1914 writings on imperialism and national liberation were grounded in some important ways in his Hegel notebooks,” written from 1914–1915 but not published until after Lenin’s death (p. 123). Anderson’s intent is to show that Lenin was not just the inspired revolutionary leader but “the first Hegelian Marxist of the twentieth century” (p. 97)—a theorist who anticipated much of the work of Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, Henri Lefebvre, and Raya Dunayevskaya.

I suspect that the author’s dense commentary on Lenin’s efforts to come to terms with some of the niceties of Hegelian thought will absorb only those with the most specialized interests. Nonetheless, the main thrust of Anderson’s argument is not narrow in focus: Anderson’s thesis is that Lenin was a much more complex and flexible thinker than is generally acknowledged and that many of the theoretical and political issues with which Lenin grappled did not disappear with the demise of the Soviet Union. Yet, while he is sympathetic toward Lenin, Anderson is not uncritical. He notes that Lenin’s inability to discover “a dialectical opposite” to bureaucracy and to the forms of organizational and political rationalization favored by Stalin was “a real barrier in Lenin’s thought” (p. 165), and he concludes that Lenin’s undoubted commitment to “the Old Guard of the Party” after the end of the civil war in Russia was forced by necessary expediency and by the understandable desire to see the gains of the revolution defended. Anderson recognizes that Lenin often ducked the need to acknowledge the indeterminacy of all political struggle. He points out, moreover, that Lenin never entirely managed to reconcile his post-1914 appreciation of Hegelianism with his earlier calls to “militant materialism.”

In the latter part of the book, Anderson describes how Marxists in the fifties, sixties, and seventies both underplayed the significance of Lenin’s Hegel notebooks and overemphasized the continuities among Engels, Plekhanov, Stalin, and Lenin. The latter was particularly true of the French Communist Party, which continued to defend Lenin’s “materialist” and “scientific” approach several years after Stalin’s death. In the United States, Dunayevskaya’s *Marxism and Freedom*

introduced English-speaking readers to Hegel's great influence on Lenin, but, as recently as 1981, Neil Harding's prize-winning two-volume study on Lenin's political thought did not cite Hegel even once.

In a measured conclusion, Anderson acknowledges that Lenin's thought cannot be a model for us today, first, because the world has changed and, second, because Leninism was "even for its own time deeply flawed" (p. 252). The purpose of *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* is neither to praise nor to bury Lenin but to attempt to show (1) that, in terms of Alvin Gouldner's (1980) distinction between the "Two Marxisms," Lenin was more "critical," humanistic, and Hegelian and less "scientific" than is often supposed, and (2) that Lenin's Hegelian-inspired approach has increasing relevance for today's crisis-ridden "global order." By these criteria the book succeeds. It will be valuable to anyone interested in Lenin's thought or in the history of twentieth-century Western Marxism.

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