

## BOOK REVIEW

### Lenin's Final Fight

*Speeches and Writings, 1922 - 1923*

BY V.I. LENIN

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**Reviewed by:** Dave Davies

#### **Against all odds**

In 1921 revolutionary Russia was faced with a situation no one could have predicted. It had successfully fought and won a devastating civil war which had decimated the already backward economy, as well as plundering the cream of the Russian working class—the class that had successfully led the Russian Revolution in October 1917. The Bolshevik Party, which had led the workers, was left suspended in government unable to call on this fountain of strength, the very lifeblood of its organization. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were left in a situation of having beaten the counter-revolution and having to govern the country, desperately hoping and waiting for a revolution in a more advanced industrial country to come to the rescue.

The economic crisis was unbelievably severe—overall factory production had fallen to one third of its 1913 levels, with steel production only 5 percent of the 1913 level. The transport system, particularly the railways, was wrecked and two and a half years of civil war had almost destroyed the fragile alliance between the workers and peasants.

It is because of the Bolsheviks' necessary responses to this situation that a myriad of historians have told us that the rise of Stalinism was an inevitable result of the 1917 revolution. The idea that Lenin led to Stalin is something that socialists have had to battle against for over 60 years. This book is a valuable weapon in that fight.

This collection of speeches and writings from March 1922 up to the stroke that ended Lenin's political life in March 1923 is an inspiration. What strikes you is that despite the terrible conditions, despite the impossibility of implementing the sort of changes the Bolsheviks dreamed of Lenin refused to give up. These writings show how he faced up to the task of trying to rebuild the economy rouble by rouble without losing the support of the peasants.

Lenin was at his best when he combined his sharp analysis of the world situation with the practicalities that the Soviet government had to deal with. In his speech to the eleventh party congress he defended the New Economic Policy (which reintroduced elements of capitalism into the Soviet economy) by explaining how the peasant masses would only accept the Soviet government if it could prove to run the economy at least as well as pre-revolutionary governments—not an easy task considering the devastation that had been wreaked on it. Lenin explains how, in order to slowly build

up the economy, the peasants had to be won to socialism by persuasion and practical example rather than by the sort of coercion that typified Stalin's regime.

Lenin was aware of the dangers of the growth of bureaucracy in Russia and fought to make the state less bureaucratic and more accountable. In the section on the workers' and peasants' inspection he outlines plans to reduce this bureaucracy in number and bring in more non-party worker and peasant members. All the time he was conscious of the need to rid the state apparatus of the professional bureaucrats and the opportunists. Lenin saw how these people were stifling the fight for socialism and struggled against them. It was the interests of these same people that Stalin represented when he consolidated his power after Lenin's death.

Another argument that differentiated him from Stalin was the national question. This book contains writings in which he argued that Russia should respect the rights of the independent republics (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, etc.). "I declare war to the death on dominant national chauvinism." It was this battle which Lenin was engaged in when he suffered a stroke which ended his active life.

This book's interest lies in the way it shows Lenin's commitment to socialism and world revolution throughout his life. It shows how he fought for the true hopes of the Russian Revolution, the freedom of oppressed nations, a society run by the masses for the masses, and an economy run for need and not profit.

Despite the need for retreat and the terrible conditions of the revolutionary state Lenin never gave in and always recognised that the spirit of October 1917 might inspire workers around the world to unite.