

Reader Raya Dunayevskaya's Commentary on

NIKOLAI BUKHARIN AND THE TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO SOCIALISM
by Michael Haynes

The work is well written, which makes it easy for readers to grapple with the difficult subject. It is difficult, however, to see any originality in this study of Bukharin, who certainly does deserve a serious presentation of his analyses as a Bolshevik theoretician. Michael Haynes makes some large claims for the reason he has undertaken his study when he states that all other studies have tended "to disparage Bukharin's Marxism" (p.9) and deal with him only as an important political figure, whereas "In this book we should not be so cavalier with Bukharin's Marxism...we shall then argue for the power and the vision and centrality of his general analysis. Without a development, albeit a critical one, of his arguments the modern world cannot be understood" (p.10).

Nikolai Bukharin and the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism hardly lives up to that goal. Thus, the claim for the originality and comprehensiveness of Bukharin's Imperialism and World Economy is based on the claim that Marxists, faced with the new phenomenon of imperialism and world (the word, world, is constantly emphasized) economy, supposedly found "important parts of Marx's analysis incomplete and on some accounts 'fatally flawed'"; and the fact that, while they "were still digesting Luxemburg's radical challenge to radical orthodoxy in her Accumulation of Capital," Bukharin came out with his "path-breaking analysis." Outside of the fact that, far from "still digesting Luxemburg's radical challenge," they were all busy attacking it as a deviation from Marx's central theory on the accumulation of capital, and outside of the fact that Michael Haynes can hardly be said to be erudite in his comprehension of Marx's analysis of capital, it is still hard to see how he can conclude from Lenin's laudatory introduction to Bukharin's work that Lenin's and Bukharin's views on the subject are very nearly one and the same. How then do you explain why Lenin decided to embark on his own study of Imperialism, and the many debates between Bukharin and Lenin that followed, which show their difference both on the economic nature of imperialism and, above all, on the dialectics of its development in producing the totally opposite movements of national self-determination. (We will deal with the latter topic further on.)

The author's corollary feature and main point -- that Bukharin's greatest work, The Economics of the Transition Period, likewise met with very nearly unstinted praise from Lenin -- points not only to an error (easily disproved since the English translation of this important work of Bukharin's is translated along with Lenin's critical remarks on the work) but to fundamentally different concepts of what is at issue. So strictly economist is the view that characterizes this study of Bukharin that the author is constantly mixing up what is serious theory and what is a mere footnote to history -- and not from original source, but from an informal discussion. We will see this when we come to the question of the state, before and after the revolution, when Haynes offers as "proof" of Lenin's agreement with Bukharin's view, Krupskaya's remark when Lenin returned to Russia in the spring of 1917: "Lenin asked me to tell you that he had no difference with you over the question of the state."

Haynes makes the claim that "Lenin's main differences with Bukharin relate not to the analysis of the capitalist state but the post-revolutionary situation in Russia" (p. 35). The truth is the exact opposite. As against the elementary Marxist view of the capitalist state as "the executive committee of capitalism," (with which all Marxists agreed), with the coming of imperialism Lenin's view was so at variance from Bukharin's (who had made a whole new category of the imperialist state as a "robber state"), that Lenin accused Bukharin of being so overwhelmed by imperialism that it had "suppressed" his reasoning and had led him to "imperialist economicism". All that is very well documented. (Indeed, Haynes does have to refer to the substantiated views of both Bukharin and Lenin in The Bolsheviks and World War by Gankin and Fisher, especially pp. 213-236.) The trouble is that when he first speaks of the state (Chapter 3, "Capital and the State") this reference is missing. He puts it, instead, first in Chapter 4, "Towards a Political Economy and the Transition Period: the Revolution and Civil War" (fn. 13), at the point when the question of national self-determination is dealt with, and on that they were on opposite sides of the question. Even that was a matter of a difference arising not only after the question of gaining power, but before.

Haynes' main error is a most fantastic claim, totally unsubstantiated, and at variance with all historic fact and dialectic concept. Thus -- despite the fact that Lenin had been the only Marxist who, with the collapse of the Second International, returned to work out Marx's rootedness in the Hegelian dialectic in the context of what was new, in Hegel's Science of Logic -- Haynes concludes out of the blue: "Lenin had come around to Bukharin's view (on the state--rd) and he was busy filling out the notebooks that would provide the basis for State and Revolution." The facts, however, are these: (1) At the very height of the war and when Lenin and Bukharin were fighting intensely on the nature of the state, Lenin, under the impact of reality and of re-reading all of Marx after he worked out the Hegelian dialectic, began the notes he then called "Marx on the State." (2) So highly did he think of those 1915-1916 notes that, upon his return to Russia, fearing he might be assassinated, he told his co-leaders: If they "bump me off" be sure to get from Switzerland the green notebooks which has all the quotations from Marx and my commentary and publish them. (3) In the spring of 1917, as he was actually working out the dialectics of revolution and preparing for the actual revolution, all of this was written in its final form as State and Revolution. There is no one in the world -- friend or enemy or anarchist -- who doesn't credit Lenin with the originality of that work, even when the anarchists claim that Lenin "didn't really mean" destruction of the state. That Haynes should wish to attribute that work to Lenin's allegedly "coming around to Bukharin's view" (especially when his goal is to prove Bukharin's originality, "poor and vision" as different from all others, including Marx himself, and applicable to the modern world) shows that he certainly does not swim easily either in all the debates and topics, or in the relations between leaders, between leaders and ranks, and between spontaneity and party. Dialectics completely escapes him.

Take, finally, the most original contribution Bukharin did make -- the book that is the centerpoint of Haynes' study, The Economics of the Transition period, and the concept of state-capitalism. The English translation

has the advantage of including Lenin's commentary, which shows that on that, too, Lenin was critical. ~~There~~ There is no reason for concluding otherwise, especially since the main point is to show Bukharin's originality. Nevertheless Haynes does tie it to claiming unstinting approval by Lenin. This bears further proof that dialectics is not a concept Haynes has dug deeply into -- although he quotes from Lenin's conclusion that Bukharin's "theoretical views can only with the very greatest doubt be regarded as fully Marxian ... (He has never learned, and I think never fully understood, the dialectic)."

Yet this quotation from the Testament (although Haynes does not quote it as fully as I have above) is preceded by this statement: "More often than not his disagreements with Lenin were not theoretical but over the relationship of theory into political practice. Here Lenin was a guiding force who constantly restrained his leaps from the right theory to the wrong politics." (p. 129) Then comes the author's greatest sweep: "Even had Bukharin made no hint about the applicability of his analysis of state-capitalism to the Soviet Union, the whole construction of his argument points that way. It is on this basis that Bukharin makes his claim on us (p.153)."

One word more needs to be said on the weakness of the author's footnotes. Forget for the moment Lenin and Trotsky (who gets such short shrift that even Chapter 6 on "The Degeneration of the Russian Revolution" has not one single reference to Trotsky's works) and limit yourself to Bukharin and his greatest contributions to theory, whether or not you agree with Bukharin's argumentation. How does it happen that neither Christian Rakovsky (one of the greatest revolutionaries who first spoke of the oncoming bureaucratization of the Soviet Union as leading to "state capitalism"), nor any of the modern studies of state capitalism, gets a single footnote, including my very first study of state-capitalism all based on the original three Five Year Plans, three short years after the execution of Bukharin? Instead, here is Haynes' conclusion: "With his analysis of the world economy, the state and the transition, he had taken Marx's own analysis forward a considerable way. That he, too, may have failed to complete his argument is no excuse for Marxists failing to do so today."

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Dec. 18, 1983

Dear Simon:

My enclosed reader's commentary on the Bukharin study by Michael Haynes has put me in an unenviable position since I hate to be responsible for any study of Bukharin as a Marxist theoretician possibly not being published. Since, however, I feel that Nikolai Bukharin and Transition from Capitalism to Socialism doesn't seriously contribute to the pic, I had no choice.

I was wondering whether if you do decide to publish the work, you could make some suggestions to the author that would not lead him to wrongly attribute the constructive suggestions to any kind of censorship. Here is what I thought of --I have full confidence in your diplomatic skill to know how to suggest it in a manner that would convince him of the truth--that it would be easier for the American reader to grapple with the subject if more footnotes would be available for his follow-up on the subject he raised. Thus, Leon Trotsky's name being a great deal more known than that of Bukharin, listing some of the many works he had written on the author's Ch.6 on the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, can't he chose some of them to list. Thus, it would certainly be impressive of a man of such great stature in the Russian Revolution and Marxism in general as Christian Rakovsky were listed as one who first raised the degeneration by saying, early, that bureaucratization is leading to state-capitalism in Russia. Or, take some English or American authors on the question of state-capitalism since Bukharin. For example, Michael Haynes does list Tony Cliff, but not on the question he is known for--state-capitalism--so why not add another book. I'll leave myself out, but, considering that 3 short years after Bukharin was executed, I developed the theory of state-capitalism, based directly on all 3 five year plans, and that he shouldn't be in any way aware of me either as Forrest or Dunayevskaya, doesn't speak highly of his erudition either on Marx's own works or that of the "late capitalism". The work definitely also needs an index.

Yours,

I should inform you that hereafter I "resign" from the job of being a reader; I just don't appreciate the experience and the responsibility that kind of task saddles on the kind of person I am.

P.S. I am having Olga return the Haynes manuscript to you under separate cover.

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Stalin:

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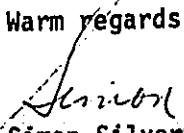
Directors
Simon Silverman
J.C. Harvey
Leigh A. Brohn

November 15, 1983

Dear Raya:

I write to ask a favor. We have a manuscript from a young Englishman, Michael Haynes, entitled MIKOLAI BUKHARIN AND THE TRANSITION FROM CAPITALISM TO SOCIALISM which I would like evaluated. Are you in a position to submit a reader's report for our usual fee of \$100? If you do not have the time, can one of your qualified associates undertake the job? It is a small manuscript of 160-odd pages plus notes and end matter. So it is not a major undertaking. I would be most appreciative of an early reply if you or one of your colleagues is prepared to read the work.

Warm regards to you and Olga from all of us here,


Simon Silverman
Jac

17054

November 17, 1983

Dear Simon:

Yes, I would be willing to submit a reader's report on Michael Haggard's manuscript, "Mikolai Bukharin and the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism," provided that I would have at least two weeks from the date I receive it.

Bukharin happens to be a revolutionary towards whom I have had a rather ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, he is the type one cannot help loving. On the other hand, as Lenin put it, the scholarly economism on his part made you tear your hair out. In any case, it is a subject with which I am very well acquainted. Indeed, Prof. Stephen F. Cohen of Princeton University, who has written quite a scholarly work on him and who sought my view, as well as Peter Bergman, who brought out Bukharin's Economics of the Transformation Period, had rather had different views from mine. Despite my Russian temper, I do know how to be objective.

Yours,

P.S. I just received a letter from Germany, which invites me to attend a Luxemburg-Graschi Conference in 1985. AND informs me they are trying to get a German edition for my Luxemburg book.

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