

*Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study.* By Kevin Anderson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995. xx, 311 pp. Bibliography. Index. Hard bound.

Dispassionate and serious study of Lenin's thought that conforms to the rigor of contemporary scholarship on other major political thinkers is still in its infancy. Prevalent judgments on Lenin are still based more on prejudice and political partisanship than they are on normal canons of textual and contextual evidence. A symptom of the primitive state of Lenin studies is the virtual absence of thorough and detailed studies of his major (and allegedly seminal) texts. Kevin Anderson's *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* is an attempt to remedy that deficiency as far as Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* is concerned. Anderson's title might lead one to suppose that the broader issue of the Hegelianization of Marxism in the twentieth century is his major theme, whereas, in fact, the third part of the book (the least satisfactory) is largely concerned with the much narrower issue of how later Marxists received Lenin's *Notebooks* (or explained why they neglected them). Part I, "Lenin on Hegel and Dialectics," is undoubtedly the most impressive and original part of the book in which the claim that Lenin's whole mind-set was transformed by his reading of Hegel in 1914 is made and sustained. There is an earnestness about Anderson's exegesis and a proper scholarly concern for the detail of those passages in Hegel's *Science of Logic* that Lenin highlighted as well as those he ignored. This, one feels, is Anderson's métier, he is a man for detailed annotation and careful exegesis.

It is the larger picture that unhappily tends to be set aside. Nowhere do we really get the flavor of Lenin's original. Anderson's careful commentaries and reflections lead us to suppose that what we are dealing with is a finished and continuous original text expressing a considered and distinctive philosophical position, but Lenin's text is not like that at all. The *Philosophical Notebooks* are notoriously difficult to interpret precisely because there is very little of Lenin in them. There are underlinings, extracts in boxes, exclamations, quotations with emphases, brief marginalia, occasional reflections combined with a virtual absence of continuous narrative. These are undigested notebooks of Lenin's reflections on other thinkers—particularly Hegel. For that reason, they are the most difficult texts to construe and to integrate into Lenin's oeuvre. There is, about this section of Anderson's book, something of the law of diminishing fleas. Anderson is himself too engaged ever to reflect that what he is doing is offering us Anderson (via Raya Dunayevskaya) on Lenin on Hegel (and Anderson's filial piety to Dunayevskaya pervades not merely the acknowledgments but the whole of his book).

There are some rather curious omissions in Anderson's treatment of the *Notebooks*. In the first place there is no attempt to compare and contrast what we can make of Lenin's philosophical position in 1914 with the certainties of his own *Materialism and Empirio Criticism* of 1908. There is, second, little discussion of the immediate context that prompted Lenin's absorption with Hegel from September 1914. There is, admittedly, an initial chapter on "The Crisis of World Marxism in 1914," but it offers no convincing explanation of why Lenin plunged so abruptly and enthusiastically into Hegel. The wartime context and the abrupt "betrayal" of the leaders of the Second International is alluded to but nowhere features as a central aspect of Lenin's "conversion" to Hegel.

Anderson has written a solid and thorough book that adds to a growing scholarly view that Lenin is to be understood more as doctrinaire than as opportunist. In An-

derson's account the distinctive feature of mature Leninism was its dialectical roots in Hegelianism (and here my *Leninism* [1996] is in full agreement). What Anderson, following Dunayevskaya, never questions is whether this newfound emphasis on the dialectic itself led to, or at least disposed Lenin to, an overweening certainty about the correctness of his philosophical-political line and an exaggerated intemperance toward and intolerance of the views of others. For a "critical study" centered on the Hegelianization of Lenin and western Marxism, these questions surely need to be broached.

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