

Study Guide for *The Foundations of Leninism* by Joseph Stalin

First Edition

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Introduction

The Foundations of Leninism by Joseph Stalin is another one of Stalin's landmark Marxist-Leninist documents, which, as the name suggests, acts as an educational document about how Marxism-Leninism works. While many potential readers may be immediately repulsed by the author due to neoliberal propaganda, it must be noted that we as Marxist-Leninists are *supposed* to critique other Marxist-Leninists while also *not* dogmatically discarding actually useful theory.

Joseph Stalin provides incredible contributions to Marxism-Leninism, both writing theory from his own observations, and serving as a good teacher in that he demonstrated an excellent ability to both summarize and reinforce existing Marxist-Leninist theory, much alike Vladimir Lenin was able to do with the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels before him.

As new terms come up in the document that may be unfamiliar or have experienced lingual drift, they'll be clarified for their individual sections. Additionally, to encourage reading the document rather than seeking summaries, key takeaways for different sections will be presented as questions for the reader to answer, allowing them to seek the answers themselves and come to a greater understanding of the document.

This is unfortunately due to the fact that—while being somewhat viable as onboarding to reading Socialist theory, assuming someone is actively encouraged to learn and possibly assisted in doing so (as opposed to berated)—summarized Socialist theory significantly waters down the original documents and will only provide a rudimentary understanding.

The headings beyond this point in the document will simply denote the relevant sections of *The Foundations of Leninism*.

Introduction

Key Takeaways:

- Is Leninism specific to Russian specific conditions?

- How did Leninism respond to the Second International? How did he contribute to Marxism?
- What is Leninism?

Chapter 1: The Historical Roots of Leninism

Key Takeaways:

- What was the historical context that allowed Leninism to come into being?
- What is imperialism? What are its three key contradictions?
- Why did Leninism start in Russia? How did this affect its internationalism?

Chapter 2: Method

Important Context:

- The term here which may be interpreted as an anti-Palestinian slur should be substituted with *anti-intellectual*.

Key Takeaways:

- What was the problem of the Second International? How did Leninism respond to this? Why?
- What were the required methods of Leninism in response to the Second International? (Note: How is this relevant to the current social democratic and democratic socialist movements?)
- What were the three dogmas of the Second International? What were their flaws?
- What is the relationship between theory and praxis? How does this compare to the method of the social democrats of the Second International?
- What should Communists do in response to mistakes of their movement? Why are objections to this ludicrous? (Note: How does this apply to criticisms of the countries of actually existing Socialism?)

Chapter 3: Theory

Key Takeaways:

- What is the purpose of theory? What makes theory useful?
- What is the theory of spontaneity? What are its flaws?
- What makes materialist theory useful?
- What is the preliminary condition for the creation of truly revolutionary parties in the West?
- What are the three theses of the theory of proletarian revolution? What is the general conclusion which follows this?

- What were the pre-Leninist views of Marxists? Why are these no longer adequate?
- Where do Leninists understand that revolutions will begin?
- In countries where the peasantry still exists, what should the proletariat do to succeed in revolution?
- What leads to the possibility and necessity of the victory of the proletariat? What are the necessary conditions for a proletarian revolution?
- What should the proletariat do once it achieves power in one country? How does this reflect on the international situation?

Chapter 4: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Important Context:

- Via the *Marxist-Leninist Reading Hub*: ["All is not quiet at the Shipka Pass" is a] Russian saying carried over from the Russo-Turkish war. Heavy fighting was taking place at the Shipka Pass, in which the Russians were suffering severe losses; but Russian headquarters in their *communiqués* reported, "All quiet at the Shipka Pass."
- Despite anarchists frequently using the phrase, Karl Marx is the origin of the phrase, "smash the state," in reference to lessons learned from the Paris Commune (the first Marxist experiment), discussing how the dictatorship of the proletariat must be created.
- The Soviet model of the dictatorship of the proletariat is based on the Paris Commune.
- When Stalin discusses collaboration here, he's referring to collaboration between the industrial proletariat and the agricultural peasantry (hence, labouring masses); this is also the meaning of the hammer-and-sickle. This is distinct from the social democratic, democratic socialist, and fascist concept of class collaboration between the proletariat and bourgeoisie.

Key Takeaways:

- What are the two purposes of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Why does it need to exist, as opposed to immediate abolition of the state?
- What are the three key tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat as soon as it achieves victory?
- Where does the strength of the bourgeoisie come from, even after the dictatorship of the proletariat is achieved? What was Lenin's answer for the third source? (Note: This was later reinforced by Mao Tse-Tung in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, after first outlining its preceding principles in *On Practice* and *On Contradiction*.) What are Stalin's answers for the other two sources, echoing Lenin?
- What is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie? Is a coup d'etat enough, or is a full restructuring of the state necessary?

- What is the purpose of a state? How does a proletarian state use this purpose? How is this inverse to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (the current system)? What are the two conclusions that come from this? (Note: Karl Kautsky's concept of democracy is oppositional to a Marxist-Leninist democracy, and is class collaborationism.)
- Why is an electoral transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat no longer possible in the imperial core? (Note: For those in the imperial periphery, study your social conditions, particularly in their relationship with the power of the imperial core—is it a meaningful cause to attempt an electoral transition, or is the revolution the only way forward? What does the aftermath of Salvador Allende's election teach us about the imperial core response to electoral transition?)
- Why is the Soviet model the blueprint for the dictatorship of the proletariat? How does it differ from the bourgeois state model? (Note: Particularly poignant, have Black people ever truly had the same rights as white people under capitalism? Should we focus more on freedom *of*, or freedom *from* (e.g. freedom *from* poverty, freedom *from* religion, freedom *from* exploitation, etc.)? (Additional note: these two concepts of freedom aren't mutually exclusive.))
- What is the vanguard?
- What does the Soviet model teach the proletariat? How does this prepare the withering of the state? (Note: For further context of this latter question, consider how a post office operates. Now, apply this to the state structure. With this being increasingly adopted as the bourgeoisie are withered into the proletariat, achieving classlessness, and with the understanding of the purpose of the state, will there be any reason for the state to maintain power? What would it turn into?)

Chapter 5: The Peasant Question

Important Context:

- This section is less relevant for the imperial core, where the peasantry is either nearly or wholly split into bourgeois and proletariat. However, Marxist-Leninists in the imperial core should still ally themselves with the *international* proletariat, even if none remain in their own countries.

Key Takeaways:

- What distinguishes Leninism?
- Why did the Second International repudiate the importance of alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry?
- Why is the peasantry still beneficial to the proletariat?
- How should the proletariat support the peasantry?
- What were the specific conditions that allowed Russia to transition rapidly from feudalism to capitalism to Socialism?

- How did the Russian proletariat and peasantry get out of the imperialist war?
- What were the two distinctions which allowed the Russian peasantry to be revolutionary?
- What does this prove about allying the proletariat with the peasantry?

Chapter 6: The National Question

Key Takeaways:

- What was the racist-chauvinist character of the Second International? How did Leninism repudiate this?
- Is stating solidarity with the proletariat of oppressed nations meaningful if isn't backed by the proletarian parties of those nations? (Note: How does this reflect on the anarchists?)
- How is the national question resolved?
- How should Marxist-Leninists respond to national movements? Is it necessary to support all of them?
- What were Lenin's theses on the national question?
- What are the contradictions of imperialism? Why does this result in the death of capitalism?

Chapter 7: Strategy and Tactics

Key Takeaways:

- What was the flaw of the Second International's strategy and tactics? What were Lenin's solutions?
- Should our strategies and tactics remain static? Why?
- Should Marxist-Leninists learn how to retreat?
- What are the two reserves of the proletariat comprised of, and how are they divided?
- What does the strategic utilization of the forces of a revolution involve?
- What are the conditions for the timing of a revolution?
- What is the task of tactical leadership?
- Does the vanguard require popular support?
- Why was Iskra useful? How does this, and its overlying principle, describe the necessary activities of the tactical leadership of the vanguard?
- How should Marxist-Leninists utilize reforms? Are they enough?

Chapter 8: The Party

Important Context:

- *Advanced detachment* is an alternate translation of *vanguard*.
- For more information on the flaws of the Mensheviks in regards to who should be considered a party member, please read *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* by Vladimir Lenin.

Key Takeaways:

- What are the tasks of the modern proletariat?
- What are the specific features of a Marxist-Leninist party? (Note: These are separated as individual paragraph-phrases throughout the document.)
- Why does the vanguard need to remain tied to the rest of the proletariat?
- Why are trade unions unable to fulfill the tasks of the vanguard?
- Why is party centralization necessary?
- What other organizations should the party work with? Why should the party lead these organizations? Should these party organizations be fully subordinate to the party, e.g. making party membership mandatory for union membership?
- What are the tasks of the party after it achieves the dictatorship of the proletariat? How should these be carried out?
- Why is democratic centralism necessary? Is self-criticism within the party a necessary factor of this? Why does this mean that there should be a single-party proletarian state?
- Why should the party push out social democrats? (Note: This includes democratic socialists.)

Chapter 9: Style in Work

Key Takeaways:

- What are the specific features of Marxist-Leninist work? What do these mean?