**Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte**
Herausgegeben vom Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris
(Institut historique allemand)
Band 21/3 (1994)

DOI: 10.11588/fr.1994.3.59023

# Zur Forschungsgeschichte und Methodendiskussion

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## LENIN AND BABEUF

Amid the libraries that have been written about Lenin, a good deal has been written about his intellectual ancestry: the derivation of his ideas from Marx, and the relation of the former to the latter. But Lenin was also a man of action, in a way that Marx never was: he was the creator and leader of an activist political movement, which he successfully conducted through to the attainment of political power, again in a way that was wholly unexampled in Marx's experience; indeed, the experience of political organization and political activity in a very practical sense was something that Marx never knew, the episode of the International being a poor substitute, a shadow play. Lenin, then, was a political leader, a practical revolutionary, and a statesman in a way that owed little or nothing to the precedent of Marx; in these respects, if not ideologically, he was his own man; and here, if anywhere, we should expect to find his true originality.

Or should we? For what has just been said by no means necessarily establishes his originality, but merely opens the question of the ancestry or derivation of his practical political methods. If not from Marx, then from whom may these have been derived, or at least, by whom may they have been influenced? On this subject there appears to be a much less considerable body of literature. Lenin's intellectual kinship with Marx has absorbed so much attention that there seems to have been correspondingly little attention paid to him as a practical political practitioner. Marx, it has been widely assumed, foretold the revolution of the proletariat; Lenin saw it through to successful realization: what more is there to say? But Marx said little about the revolution in practical terms, or about what would follow it; here, it may be suggested, Lenin had largely to carve his own path; and insofar as he may have owed something to predecessors, albeit less successful ones than himself, there is surely a subject here.

Again, students of Lenin have commonly seen in him a Russian revolutionary and statesman, and studied him in the context of Russian history. This is of course justified; but just as Marx was not Russian, Marxism was not merely a Russian movement, but an international one, and was intended to be so; so, indeed, Lenin himself regarded it; consequently, it would not be surprising if there were extensive non-Russian influences on Lenin – not merely intellectual ones, in the form of Marxism, but practical ones also, influences on his revolutionary and political practice. The need, therefore, is to bring Lenin into his connection with the wider European revolutionary movement that existed in the nineteenth century. This, broadly, is the problem that the present paper will seek to address.

Mention of the European revolutionary movement of the nineteenth century inevitably takes us back to its great starting point (in the late eighteenth), the French Revolution. It is suggested that there is a common chain of revolution that links all the revolutionary manifestations of the nineteenth century with their progenitor, the French Revolution, and, forward in time, to the Russian Revolution and the upheavals that in central Europe accompanied the end of the First World War. The author of this paper has elsewhere attempted to describe this link and to account for it. The present paper will attempt to fit

Lenin into his context as a representative, indeed as the last great representative and the most successful of all, of the line of revolutionaries who, taking their cue from the French Revolution, sought to reproduce or to carry further that revolution, and in doing so ensured that that tradition was carried forward throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Marx was commonly adopted as the guru of that movement: revolutionaries henceforth described themselves as Marxists, and Lenin partook of this intellectual affiliation; for Marx seemed successfully to have assimilated the revolutionary tradition (stemming from 1789) to industrial society and its destiny. But what concerns us here, as has been implied already, is the intellectual parentage, not of Lenin's ideas, but of his revolutionary praxis. Thus we are infallibly drawn back to the French Revolution, or rather to its immediate aftermath, and to one figure in particular: Babeuf.

For those who may not be familiar with the period that immediately followed the Revolution proper – much less known, probably, than the highlights of the Estates General, the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies, the Convention, and the Year II –, a word or two of background may be in order. The would-be revolutionary who became known to history as Gracchus Babeuf figured against a background of successful reaction, following the overthrow of Robespierre on 9 Thermidor. After the failure of the popular uprisings of Germinal and Prairial, Year III (April and May 1795), revolution in France ceased to be a popular movement. The Revolution, essentially ended at Thermidor, was buried at Germinal and Prairial. And buried it was, for assuredly it went underground. Babeuf was the leader of those who reasoned that, in the face of a victorious counterrevolutionary regime, it was no longer possible to resume the Revolution merely by spontaneous popular uprisings. A new technique of revolution was necessary. Revolution must become the work of conscious artificers of revolution, working in secret, to trigger an uprising that had been long prepared. Specifically, revolution must have as its first objective the seizure of power at the centre: the overthrow of the hated regime by a swift, sharp act of violence at its very heart, which should lead to the installation of the revolutionary cadres in its place. The idea of the revolutionary coup d'état was born. So was the idea of the professional revolutionary, who, with his compeers, collectively made up the revolutionary elite, who were to give a lead to the benighted masses.

Babeuf was a conspicuously unsuccessful revolutionary: his plot was abortive, and resulted in his execution. Yet the Babeuf episode was big with consequences for the future. Through the agency of Babeuf's confederate and historian (or hagiographer), Buonarroti, his technique of revolution passed into the bloodstream of the subsequent European revolutionary movement of the nineteenth century, or, one might say, modifying the metaphor, became the backbone of that movement. The man who carried it on, in the generation after Buonarroti, was Blanqui. It seems to us that these two men, Buonarroti and Blanqui, have seldom been given their due weight in accounts of the history of the nineteenth century. This may be largely because they never acceded to power, never occupied a ministerial palace or left a significant deposit in national archives, apart from the police files. Teachers of history in schools and universities have perhaps concentrated unduly on the Cavourian and Bismarckian success stories, and have neglected the lives and careers of these putative failures. Yet Buonarroti and Blanqui have at least as much to tell us about the roots of the twentieth century. How would it be if a lineal successor of Babeuf surfaced in Petrograd in 1917, and did not end up merely consigned to a dungeon for his pains? It is the thesis of this paper that this is exactly what happened, and we will attempt to show how the connection may be established.

It is not claimed for this thesis that it is original or novel. Intelligent observers have grasped that there is a chain or genealogy of revolution stretching from the French to the Russian Revolution. They have also perceived the importance of Babeuf – scouted as unimportant by Establishment historians, who have been repelled by so nakedly anti-Establishment a figure, who moreover committed the unpardonably un-Whiggish offence of failing. Gwyn A. Wil-

liams knows better. Writing of the legacy of Babeuf, he remarks, »Most striking was the *technique* of revolution, which was ›inherited‹ through Buonarroti by a generation which included Blanqui – thence, so the argument runs, from Blanqui to Marx and on to the Finland Station.«[1] This paper seeks merely to make a significant historical phenomenon better known.

One other point should be made at this stage. Babeuf was a communist. His plans encompassed not only the seizure of power, but a full-blown scheme for the organization of a communist society. Let the non-specialist reader but peruse the accessible short account of Babeuf's programme in David Thomson's useful book on the Babeuf plot[2], and he will find an epitome of a command economy and planned society, prefiguring the model implemented in Soviet Russia after 1917. It is not suggested that Lenin was directly inspired by this – as we shall see, his direct knowledge of Babeuf seems to have been at best slight, and he probably never read the authoritative text on the subject, Buonarroti's *Conspiration pour l'égalite dite de Babeuf* – but, as will be argued, he belonged to a matrix of revolutionary ideas and practice that included many who undoubtedly had read Buonarroti, and it is reasonable to suppose that certain ideas regarding the organization of the future socialist society had become part of the common inheritance of socialist thought. Marx's ideas on the post-revolutionary society were notoriously vague. It is not stretching the bounds of probability to conjecture that in his ideas for social organization, as well as for revolutionary praxis, Lenin was a Babouvist rather than a literal Marxist. It is, however, the revolutionary technique that primarily concerns us here, because the evidence of affiliation is more compelling. All the same, Marx too was a professed communist; and the commonality of communism between Babeuf and Marx and Lenin is surely more than a verbal coincidence.

In one respect, however, Marx decisively carried the day as against Babeuf: in the field of theory. Marx had a theory, Babeuf had none – beyond the conviction, common to all socialists, that the rich oppress the poor. Marx produced what purported to be a scientific analysis of contemporary capitalist society, and, still more compelling, a historical theory, which professed to show how that society had emerged and how it would develop. The nineteenth century prided itself on being scientifically minded, and also was historically minded. Marx spoke the idiom of his age. He was, in the opinion of a great many people, a triumphantly successful theorist and ideologue. Babeuf was merely a failed revolutionary. Small wonder, then, that revolutionaries from the later nineteenth century onward, including Lenin, hastened to call themselves Marxists, not Babouvists. But theory and practice turned out to be not as united in Marxism as its exponents professed to believe. Lenin may have taken his theory from Marx, but for his practice, it is suggested, he had to look elsewhere – for there the master could help him little. Marx may have been a great theorist, but he was not, in spite of his own aspirations, a great man of action: in Lenin these aptitudes or achievements were reversed. The model of an underground revolutionary organization, plotting in secret against a repressive regime, which had been inherited from Babeuf, fitted the situation in Imperial Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – as it did, by that time, nowhere else in Europe. It was almost natural that Lenin should adopt that model, and give it a coherence and potency it had not hitherto known. It was as a revolutionary activist and practitioner that Lenin took up the mantle of Babeuf, whatever he may have owed to Marx in the realm of theory.

It is time that we moved on to investigate in detail the affinity between Lenin and Babeuf. This can be done most aptly by examining Lenin's own words. Our first reaction, unfortunately, will be one of anticlimax. In all Lenin's voluminous works there is barely a handful of

1 Gwyn A. Williams, Artisans and sans-culottes: popular movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution, London 1968, p. 113.
2 David Thomson, The Babeuf plot, London 1947, pp. 47–8.

references to Babeuf. They are so short that it will not be amiss to transcribe them verbatim here – giving them, it may be said, for what they are worth.

Chronologically the first references occur in an early manuscript, ›Conspectus of the book *The Holy Family* by Marx and Engels', written in 1895 but not published till 1930. This is simply Lenin's notes on the book. In them he says first:

> »The French Revolution gave rise to the ideas of communism (Babeuf), which, consistently developed, contained the idea of a new Weltzustand [world order].«[3]

And a little later:

»The *Babouvists* were crude, immature materialists.«[4]

Not much to go on here. And the only other explicit reference to Babeuf in all Lenin's works comes also relatively early in his career, a few years later, in an article published in *Iskra* in 1902. Criticizing the Socialist Revolutionaries, he speaks of their placing

> »socialisation of the land *alongside* of cooperation [i.e. cooperatives] in a *minimum* programme. Their minimum programme: Babeuf, on the one hand, and Mr Levitsky [a Populist], on the other.«[5]

The extent of the knowledge of Babeuf displayed by Lenin in these extracts is no more than what one would expect of an undergraduate reading modern history or possibly politics. They suggest no detailed study whatever of Babeuf, but merely information acquired secondhand or randomly. Scanty as they are, they are not even wholly accurate: it is not true that communist ideas originated with the French Revolution: such ideas were already current in eighteenth-century France. Babeuf too had predecessors.

The editors of the Collected works help us by indicating the interpretation of Babeuf in Marxist-Leninist ideology. They describe him as a ›utopian communist‹ – ›utopian‹ of course meaning pre-Marxian or pre-scientific[6].

If we were to seek to establish the link between Lenin and Babeuf on the basis of the extracts just cited, we should not get very far. But we should not of course restrict ourselves to so narrow a definition of our task. We should search for traces in Lenin's writings of intellectual acquaintance with Babeuf's disciples and successors, Buonarroti and Blanqui. With Buonarroti we are out of luck: Lenin never mentions him at all. But with Blanqui the field is much more fruitful. There are in Lenin's collected works some thirty references to Blanqui and Blanquism (they are helpfully assembled in the subject index). This discrepancy is not surprising. Blanqui was a contemporary of Marx, as Babeuf and Buonarroti (who died when Marx was nineteen) were not; he was a prominent part of the scene of the European extreme Left during the lifetime of Marx and Engels; the founders of Marxian socialism could not fail to be insistently aware of him. Consequently it is no accident that his name crops up fairly frequently in the writings of Marx's most famous disciple. But this fact in itself should instil an element of caution: Lenin, it is to be supposed, looked at Blanqui through the eyes of a Marxist; his glance, moreover, probably coloured by the animus that affects Marxists in their attitude to rival radicals.

To examine Lenin's allusions to Blanqui is none the less worth while, because this is a means, as it were, of approaching Lenin's hypothetical relation to Babeuf by an indirect way: Blanqui was the most notable exponent in the nineteenth century of Babeuf's revolutionary technique; if Lenin was reticent or uninformed about the founder of that technique, in writing

3 V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, 47 vols, London and Moscow, 1960–80, XXXVIII. p. 40.
4 Id., XXXVIII. p. 44.
5 ›Revolutionary adventurism‹, Iskra, no. 23, 1 Aug., and no. 24, 1 Sept. 1902. Collected Works, VI. p. 203.
6 Collected Works, XXXVIII. p. 566.

more copiously about Blanqui he may in that way have indicated his attitude to Babouvism. In fact, the greater part of Lenin's references to Blanqui or (more usually) Blanquism are short and slight; as has been suggested already, they involve looking at Blanquism from the standpoint of a dogmatic Marxist, and therefore are correspondingly curt and dismissive. Inevitably they involve reference to the historical period in which Blanqui and Marx both lived; this means primarily to the Paris Commune of 1871 – the Commune was for the followers of Blanqui (though not for Blanqui himself, who was in gaol), as for Marx, as publicist and theoretician, a high point of their public endeavours. There are thus half a dozen references to Blanquism in connection with the Paris Commune, and they say nothing that could not have been predicted of an orthodox Marxist. For much of the time, in fact, Lenin treats Blanquism as no more than an incidental or peripheral feature, or an irritant, in the history of Marxism. But there are also some references that indicate a slightly deeper perception of the nature of Blanquism, though still from a critical Marxist standpoint. In several places Lenin refers to Blanquism as a conspiratorial movement; he does so in a tone of condemnation. This, again, is the orthodox Marxist view: Marxism strove to advance its cause by the publication of its aims, and by the formation of a public mass-movement – which the freedoms vouchsafed by liberal society allowed it to do. Blanquism belonged to the authentic Babouvist world of clandestine conspiracy against a repressive regime.

But here an objection intrudes. With whose environment did that of Lenin as a young revolutionary have more in common: Babeuf and Blanqui, or the German Social Democratic Party? The concession of manhood suffrage enabled the formation of mass working-class parties of real electoral efficacy; this had not been possible under the *régime censitaire* of the July Monarchy, when Blanquist methods had known their heyday. Under the Third Republic, such methods ceased to be relevant, and withered away. But Russia, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was still not part of the liberal west. As was said earlier, the Babouvist-Blanquist technique seemed still appropriate there, indeed the only option.

Here, it may be surmised, a split appears between Lenin's theory and practice. As an ostensibly orthodox Marxist, he had to eschew Blanquist methods; he did so explicitly[7]. Indeed, his disavowal became so strident that one is tempted to suspect that he felt a need to rebut possible criticism on this score – which would have amounted to criticism of his Marxist orthodoxy. This emerges most plainly in something he wrote about the revolution of 1905:

> »Is it true that the December struggle was a manifestation of Blanquism? No, it is not. Blanquism is a theory which repudiates the class struggle. Blanquism expects that mankind will be emancipated from wage slavery, not by the proletarian class struggle, but through a conspiracy hatched by a small minority of intellectuals. Was there such a conspiracy, or anything like one, in December? No, there was not. It was the class movement of vast masses of the proletariat ...«[8].

That Blanquism is a theory that denies the class struggle is an assertion that has been cogently questioned, indeed refuted[9]. But the point here, for our present purposes, is that Lenin is taking the official Marxist line. His whole ideological posture compelled him to do so. Yet he fudges one essential point. His remarks overlook his own concept of the vanguard party that should give a lead to the proletariat when the time was ripe. This concept is a straight transcription of the idea of the revolutionary elite. It is lineally descended from Babeuf's Equals.

It might well be argued that such a conception is far more realistic and practical than the unadorned Marxist version of the class struggle. Revolutions do not happen simply through a

7 Collected Works, IV. p. 177.
8 The Congress summed up [1906]. Collected Works, X. p. 392.
9 W. J. Fishman, The insurrectionists, London 1970, p. 61.

class-conscious proletariat rising spontaneously as one man. Here Lenin's superiority to Marx as a man of action and practical revolutionary shows itself. But the point is that Lenin could not afford to be seen to diverge significantly from Marx. Lenin was to carry through, for the first time, what purported to be a Marxist revolution. In those circumstances, it was not permissible that his methods, any more than his theory, be seen to be anything other than Marxist. It is probably for this reason that, as the climax of his career approached, Lenin felt himself impelled all the more strongly to repudiate Blanquism, to dissociate himself from it – at the same time as he was, arguably, moving towards a historic act that would be the consummation of Blanquism.

It is noteworthy that all of Lenin's significant pronouncements on the subject of Blanquism, apart from that of 1906 already quoted, date from 1917, the most important year of his career, when he ›made history‹ as few men in modern times have done. A mere eleven days after his return to Russia, he expressed himself in the following terms:

> »Blanquism was a striving to seize power with the backing of a minority. With us it is quite different. We are still a minority and realise the need for winning a majority.«[10]

And nine days later:

> »Anybody who says ›take the power‹ should not have to think long to realise that an attempt to do so *without as yet* having the backing of the majority of the people would be adventurism or Blanquism ...«[11]

Four days later the message is repeated:

> »When the masses are free, any attempts to act in the name of a minority, without explaining things to the masses, would be senseless Blanquism, mere adventurism.«[12]

By this stage it is clear what Lenin's, or the Marxist, attitude to Blanquism is, and the nub of the criticism of it, at least as so far divulged. In the mind of Lenin or of his hearers or readers, Blanquism is equated with ›adventurism‹ – which might be paraphrased as putschism. Indeed, one can discern the emergence, in Marxist-Leninist terminology, of ›adventurism‹ as a code name for Blanquism.

On 8 May (21 May N.S.) Lenin elaborated his meaning:

> »Only dreamers and plotters believed that a minority could impose their will on a majority. That was what the French revolutionary Blanqui thought, and he was wrong. When the majority of the people refuse, because they do not yet understand, to take power into their own hands, the minority, however revolutionary and clever, cannot impose their desire on the majority of the people.«[13]

So far, then, Lenin has been explicitly dissociating himself from Blanquism, on the grounds that it represents the forcible seizure of power by a conspiratorial minority against the will of the majority. Such methods ran counter to the Marxist principle of mass action by the working class. In view of what Lenin was shortly to carry out, was he sincere in what he said? Or was he able to convince himself that his practice was consistent with Marxist theory, or that the

10 The Petrograd city conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks). 14–22 April (27 April – 5 May) 1917. 1. Report on the present situation and the attitude towards the Provisional Government. 14 (27) April. Collected Works, XXIV. p. 145.

11 ›How a simple question can be confused‹, Pravda, no. 39, 23 Apr. (6 May) 1917. Collected Works, XXIV. p. 217.

12 The seventh (April) All-Russia conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (B.) 24–29 April (7–12 May) 1917. 8. Speech in favour of the resolution on the war. 27 April (10 May). Collected Works, XXIV. p. 263.

13 Report on the results of the seventh (April) All-Russia conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (B.) at a meeting of the Petrograd organisation. 8 (21) May 1917. Collected Works, XLI. p. 433.

circumstances that he was manipulating corresponded to the Marxist rather than the Blanquist model?

At all events, by September 1917 Lenin found it necessary to defend his movement against the charge of Blanquism. Marxism was insurrectionary, indeed, but not in the way that Blanquism was:

> »To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that *turning-point* in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemy and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*.«[14]

Still, then, no intellectual compromise with Blanquism: Lenin continued to strive to differentiate himself from it – presumably to convince his comrades of his sound Marxist credentials. A month later – one week before the Bolshevik Revolution – he was persisting in the same vein:

> »Military conspiracy is Blanquism, *if* it is organised not by a party of a definite class, *if* its organisers have not analysed the political moment in general and the international situation in particular, *if* the party has not on its side the sympathy of the majority of the people, as proved by objective facts ...«[15]

This is orthodox enough in its historicist criticism of Blanquism for failing to analyze the historical situation and thus identify the correct time for the revolution. But was it really Lenin's knowledge of history, which may well have been greater than Blanqui's, that enabled him to succeed where Blanqui had failed? Lenin had indeed the advantage of having before him the entire revolutionary record of the nineteenth century, including Blanqui's own contribution, and he had studied it like a textbook. But did not equal or greater importance reside in Lenin's drive, determination and Gladstonian (!) ›right-timing‹ instinct (though the last momentarily failed him in July 1917)? Lenin had to contend, and knew he had to contend, with a crumbling polity, reeling beneath the effects of defeat in war. Blanqui had had to contend with the capable and self-confident July Monarchy, enjoying the security of peace-time. The circumstances of the two men were radically different, irrespective of their differing ideological outlook. Lenin may well have derived strength and dynamism from his conviction of being the demiurge of the historical process: a similar conviction has empowered many other Marxists. Blanqui, ideologically less well armed, had no such certainty. But ideology alone could not have ensured Lenin's success. Unless one believes that he was indeed the conscious instrument of history at its crucial point, one is likely to see the Bolshevik Revolution as a supreme example of political voluntarism, empowered less by ideology than by political talents of a very high order.

One other thing in Lenin's remarks of 17 October may repay notice. He is anxious to affirm that not all military conspiracy is Blanquist. Had he any military conspiracy in mind? The one that was being prepared by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, and that went into action on 25 October?

14 Marxism and insurrection. A letter to the central committee of the R.S.D.L.P. (B.). 13–14 (26–27) Sept. 1917. Collected Works, XXVI. p. 22–3.

15 Letter to comrades, written 17 (30) Oct., published 19–21 Oct. (1–3 Nov.) 1917. Collected Works, XXVI. p. 212.

A year after the coup he had carried out, Lenin was unrepentant and unabashed. He can be found referring to

> »a *Blanquist* distortion of Marxism, an attempt by the *minority* to impose its will upon the majority ...«[16]

Was this not exactly what the Bolshevik Revolution was? Yet Lenin persisted in his ostensible condemnation of Blanquism till the end. When one meets what appears to be such intransigent refusal to recognize what is unacceptable to the subject, one is tempted to deduce the presence of what Freudians call a reaction formation. The Bolsheviks in October 1917 numbered about 200.000[17]. The estimated population of the Russian Empire (excluding Finland) in 1913 was 170.902.900[18]. Even if, taking into account Russian losses in the First World War (1.700.000), but taking no account of births in the intervening years, we put the Bolsheviks at one in 846 of the population, that still makes them only 0.12 per cent of the population. A minority indeed.

We have then attempted, using Lenin's own words as far as possible, to establish a relation between him and Blanqui. A relation there surely was, even if, according to Lenin's own professions, a negative one: he was bound, it would seem, by the requirements of Marxist orthodoxy to disavow Blanquism – at the same time as he was practising it. And this connection with Blanqui is in turn the clue that shall lead us to Lenin's affinity with Babeuf, who was the real founder of the revolutionary method that became associated with the name of Blanqui. For ›Blanquism‹ read ›Babouvism‹, and the affinity is established. Lenin's debt to Babeuf is there, though unacknowledged – unacknowledged even by the negative acknowledgment that he gave Blanqui. As has been suggested, it was probably for historical reasons, having to do with Marx and Blanqui being contemporaries, that Marxist discourse focused on Blanqui, not Babeuf. Babeuf could be lost sight of, as a utopian communist and minor participant in the French Revolution. So, still more, could Buonarroti, who, as man of mystery, artist, and fantasist, was in many ways a Romantic, and therefore un-Marxist, figure – and who complicated things by the paradoxical fact that though, in a literary sense, he was the creator of Babeuf, he was himself intellectually not a Babouvist but a Rousseauist and Robespierrist[19]. These things probably represent the Marxist policy whereby anyone who preceded Marx is to be buried and, it is to be hoped, forgotten; interred beneath the dismissive epitaph ›utopian‹.

It was acknowledged earlier that the thesis that links Lenin with Babeuf is not alleged to be novel. Indeed, it has been spelt out at length in a work to which we now wish to draw the reader's attention: W. J. Fishman's The insurrectionists[20]. This book sets out in detail the whole story of the Babouvist tradition, from the 1790s to the Bolshevik coup d'état. In so doing it describes in a connected fashion, as has been done in no other work known to us, an important element in European history. The facts have indeed been plain to see, for all who would see them, in the historical record for generations; but it has been left till the later twentieth century for the clarity of perception and the penetration of one scholar to identify the connections between them. Fishman makes out his case – which is essentially the same case as the one presented, within a smaller compass, in this paper – with, to our mind, complete cogency. He does not shirk the problem of why it has taken so long for a historian to grasp the point of a historical connection of secular importance. The essential reason has been the wish of Marxists, or of Marxist-Leninists, to protect the uniqueness of their hero, consequently to

16 The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky (written Oct.-Nov. 1918, published 1918). Collected Works, XXVIII. p. 304.
17 S. P. Melgunov, The Bolshevik seizure of power, Santa Barbara and Oxford 1972, p. XXIII.
18 Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1970 edn, art. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
19 See E. L. Eisenstein, The first professional revolutionist: Filippo Michele Buonarroti, Cambridge, Mass. 1959, esp. pp. 16, 26, 122, 144.
20 See above, note 9.

minimize or disparage the contribution of his predecessors, and, it may be added, to defend him against the imputation of heterodoxy – to which, as we have seen, Lenin himself was sensitive. One may add that the overspecialization that afflicts much historical study has probably made it acceptable for some specialists on Lenin or on Russian or Soviet history to remain ignorant of Babeuf and Blanqui. From another angle, the terms in which the history of the nineteenth century has often been studied and taught – Establishment history, as we should like to call it – have tended to downplay, or to ignore altogether, what ought to be a central strand, the revolutionary tradition. Thus both doctrinaire exclusivism and conservative prejudice have unwittingly conspired together to obscure the truth.

One theme that Fishman develops at length, and most valuably, has hardly been touched on in this paper. That is the Russian contribution to the revolutionary tradition – the contribution by which Lenin was most immediately influenced, indeed shaped. Here, the singularity, in many ways, of the Russian experience has perhaps conduced to a tendency to regard it as being, in this respect as in others, outside the European mainstream. In view of the importance that Russian revolutionism has had for international history in the twentieth century, this view is surely shortsighted. Moreover, it is a commonplace that the victory of Bolshevism in Russia meant the imposition of a western ideology there – even if, with hindsight, Bolshevism may seem a deviation from western Marxism, pretty much for the reasons given in this paper. At all events, Fishman describes very effectively how Babouvism-Blanquism was grafted onto Russian development, through the successive contributions of Ogarev, Chernyshevsky, Zaichnevsky, Nechaev and Tkachev. (Incidentally, he thereby gives a consecutive account of the Russian revolutionary movement that seems to be lacking elsewhere in historical literature.) A couple of these men seem to have been especially significant. Nechaev evolved, as the instrument with which the existing regime was to be overthrown, a new model of terrorism, which in its ruthlessness and fanaticism would have made even Blanqui quail. Tkachev enunciated the epoch-making idea that Russia could skip the intervening stage of development in its progression from feudalism to socialism. This idea was not exactly original – it had been adumbrated by Herzen and Chernyshevsky –, but it was Tkachev who directly influenced Lenin. Here was born the cardinal element of the Leninist deviation from Marxism. The key to the achievement of this historic leap was to be an inordinate emphasis on voluntarism – the principle that Lenin was to make his own. Indeed, it may be said that Lenin combined Nechaev's methods with Tkachev's ideology to produce Bolshevism. Once that is accepted, there is little about Lenin's contribution that is original. All that distinguished him, apart from his personal qualities, was his fortunate circumstances: he was able to take advantage of Russia's defeat in war. Even here he had been anticipated by Tkachev, who had foreseen this possibility; and in 1905, the dress rehearsal for 1917, the scenario miscarried.

Fishman's great merit, then, is to map out the connection between Lenin and Babeuf – the task that, approaching it from a different methodological angle, we have set ourselves in this paper –, and in doing so to identify the intervening links. For Lenin's relation to Babeuf was mediated through the intervening revolutionary tradition, especially that of Blanqui and the Russian revolutionaries. A very important theme in modern European history has at last found its historian; and Fishman's book deserves to be better known than, probably, it is. It seems to have gone largely unreviewed in the historical journals, except *History*.

We have reached the Bolshevik Revolution, our *terminus ad quem*; and no student who approaches that episode without preconceived ideas is likely to remain unconvinced that it accords with the Babouvist-Blanquist model of a revolutionary coup d'état. Let anyone who is unfamiliar with the details read the account in S. P. Melgunov's aptly titled The Bolshevik seizure of power[21]. The great difference between Lenin's coup d'état and the attempts of Babeuf and Blanqui is, of course, that the former succeeded. The reasons for its success have

21 Cited above, note 17.

already been discussed. In retrospect, therefore, Lenin seemed to have been vindicated by no less an authority than history itself; for does not history bestow its sanction on success? – at least in the writings of venal historians. In these circumstances, it was all the easier to accept Lenin's own interpretation of his achievement, that it was the proletarian revolution foretold by Marx at last successfully brought to life in Russia (even if with the embarrassing addition of peasants as well as workers). Western intellectuals no doubt believed this all the more readily because it was what they wanted to believe – this is the normal human pattern. Thus was constructed one of the great myths of the twentieth century. If we feel obliged to insist a little strenuously that it *is* a myth, this is attributable to an overlong experience of finding in undergraduate essays the Russian Revolution represented as a ›revolution of the working class‹.

It may be added that the principle of seizing power at the centre in order to gain control of the whole country – the principle applied successfully by the Bolsheviks – stems directly from the era of Babeuf, when the French Revolution had taught the lesson that he who had Paris had France. The lesson was to be underlined by the administrative centralization of Napoleon, and was to be acted upon, though ineptly, by Blanqui, and by the Paris Commune.

None of this is to deny the uniqueness of Lenin in certain respects: not merely his success, but the qualities that enabled him to achieve success, however baleful the ends to which those qualities may have been directed. Here again, no doubt, he parts company with his predecessors. And there is no gainsaying that, once in power, the Bolsheviks showed themselves conspicuously able in keeping the power they had won, through terror and in the throes of civil war. One has to go back to the Committee of Public Safety to find another example of terrorists in power wielding political and military power so ably. Lenin would have appreciated the comparison.

In only one way, to a superficial observer, would there seem to remain a residual similarity between the victorious Bolsheviks and the half-forgotten world of Buonarroti and the secret societies a century before. This is the singular circumstance that Lenin and his leading associates are known to history by names that were not their own. This is not usually remarked on as anything out of the ordinary. But it is surely unique in political history. It is the mark of conspirators having come to power. In this way, unexpectedly, the Bolsheviks reach back to the bizarre world of the Sublimes Maîtres Parfaits and the Carbonari. The legacy of Babeuf is imprinted on their very names.

We submitted earlier our contention that Marx, rather than Babeuf, became the figurehead of nineteenth-century revolutionaries because he was intellectually superior. The same factor probably came into play in accounting for the intellectual, as well as the political, success of Lenin. Intellectuals have a weakness for other intellectuals, in whom they see themselves. So it was with Lenin's appeal to western intellectuals, who took him at his own valuation. Malcolm Muggeridge in his memoirs records a scene of Beatrice Webb, his wife's aunt, wearing a mien of adoration before a picture of Lenin –

> »prostrating herself, metaphorically speaking, before the founding father of the twentieth-century totalitarian state, the arch-terrorist of our time!«[22]

Nothing succeeds like success.

22 M. Muggeridge, Chronicles of wasted time, 2 vols, London 1972–3, I p. 150.