Lenin—from a drawing by Y. Manukhin
Lenin was born almost a hundred years ago, on April 22, 1870, in a little town on the banks of the Volga. Lenin was a name he took many years later, in the revolutionary movement. He was born Vladimir Ulyanov, son of a progressive teacher, in the town of Simbirsk—now renamed Ulyanovsk in his honour.

He was one of six children, three boys and three girls—and all of them became revolutionaries. His eldest brother, Alexander, was executed in 1887, for implication in an attempt to assassinate the tsar, Alexander III.

Vladimir Ulyanov was little more than a boy when he began studying Marxism.

At 17 he was already an active revolutionary. In December 1887, he was expelled from Kazan University for participating in a student protest meeting, and banished to a tiny village in Kazan region.

From then on he was under police surveillance. In the village he read and studied. Applications for readmission to the university were rejected and so, in 1889, he went to the Volga town of Samara (now Kuibyshev).

His four years (1889-93) in Samara were a very important period in Lenin's life. It was then that he accumulated knowledge for the impending revolutionary struggle, and that his Marxist communist views took final shape.

But Samara couldn't give him the scope he needed. In August 1893, he left for the capital, St. Petersburg.

There he contacted a circle of social-democratic students and, with progressive workers, ran Marxist classes.

In 1894 came Lenin's first major work: "What the 'Friends of the People' Are, and How They Fight the Social Democrats."

It was aimed against the Narodniks—groups of revolutionary intellectuals who believed that capitalism wouldn't develop in Russia, which would follow a special unique path.

The Narodniks regarded the peasants as the main revolutionary force and tried to rouse them to struggle against tsarist autocracy.

For that purpose, the revolutionary intellectuals went "into the midst of the people," to the villages.

Lenin demolished the views of the Narodniks. He was the first Russian Marxist to put forward fundamental arguments to show that it was the historic role of Russia's working class to become the leading, advanced revolutionary force of society.

He put forward, for the first time, the great idea of the alliance of the working class and the peasantry.

He saw clearly that, without that alliance, the overthrow of tsarism and the establishment of working-class rule would be impossible.

In a second book* that year, Lenin's target, as well as the Narodniks were the "Legal Marxists"—the intellectuals who "interpreted" Marxism in the open, uncensored, publications.

Denying its revolutionary character, they tried to adapt Marxism to capitalist ideas.

Lenin plunged into revolutionary work with tremendous energy and passion. He wrote leaflets, articles and pamphlets in clear and lucid language, understandable even to those who had little or no education.

In them, Lenin exposed the state of the workers, their lack of rights and the ruthless way the capitalists exploited them.

Soon Lenin became the recognized leader of the St. Petersburg Marxists.

In the autumn of 1895, he united the city's Marxist groups into one body: the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class.

The embryo of a revolutionary Marxist party, it was based on the mass working-class movement. But it was short-lived—that December, Lenin and many of its other members were arrested.

Lenin spent 14 months in solitary confinement in a St. Petersburg jail—but that didn't silence him.

He still wrote pamphlets and manifestos, which were smuggled out and printed on secret presses.

In February 1897, Lenin was banished for three years to Smolenskoye, a village on the Yenisei in the frozen heart of Siberia. . .

A year later he was joined there by Nadezhda Krupskaya, a girl he had met in the revolutionary work in St. Petersburg in 1894.

She, too, had been banished as a member of the
“League of Struggle.” Lenin and Nadezhda soon married, to live and work together for the rest of his life. While in exile, Lenin drafted a programme for the party, wrote more than 30 works and completed his preparations for a major research work called “The Development of Capitalism in Russia.” These all had a tremendous influence on the Russian socialist movement.

In these days, after a number of successful strikes, a section of the Russian social-democrats were urging the workers to confine themselves to economic struggle—for higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions. The political struggle should be left to the capitalists, they claimed. These social-democrats came to be known as “economists,” and Lenin regarded their activities as highly dangerous.

The “economists,” trying to subordinate the workers’ interests to those of the capitalists, were the first groups in Russia around the principles of revolutionary party, wrote more than 30 works and completed his Marxism.

The first step, he believed, was a political newspaper, which would rally the socialist-democratic committees and groups in Russia around the principles of revolutionary Marxism. He therefore began all-round preparations for a party congress and work out a united programme and rules for the party.

When his term of exile ended in January, 1900, Lenin and his wife left Shushenskoye. The government forbade him to live in the capital or any industrial centre, so he decided to settle in Piskov. This would bring him as near as possible to the capital.

He went abroad with plans for the paper—but soon realized he would have to publish it abroad. And so, in 1895, he left for Germany, where he started the newspaper Iskra (The Spark). The subtitle of the paper was “The Spark Will Kindle a Flame.” It was smuggled into Russia by devoted revolutionaries, many of them later to be internationally famous for their underground work.

Lenin was its guiding spirit and an active contributor. In the spring of 1902, he and the other members of the editorial board moved to London and then to Geneva. Iskra did in fact play a decisive role in the building of the party. Lenin contributed many articles to it and to Zarya, the theoretical organ of the social-democrats.

He also drafted an agrarian programme. Lenin’s pamphlet at this period, “To the Poor in the Country,” played a big part in explaining the new party’s programme.

It explained in plain and simple terms the aims of the working-class party, the significance of alliance with the workers for the village poor and the meaning of socialism.

“We want to achieve a new and better social order,” he wrote. “This new and better society there must be neither rich, nor poor: everyone will have to work.

“Not a handful of rich people but all the working people must join in this,” were the first capitalist ideas of the 19th century. “Machines and other improvements must ease the work of all and not enable a few to grow rich at the expense of millions and tens of millions.”

Also in 1902, he wrote “What is to Be Done?”, a detailed plan for a working-class Marxist party.

Lenin had in mind was a truly revolutionary workers’ party, different from the parties of the Second International and capable of leading the working class in the fight against tsarist autocracy and capitalism.

To lead the working-class movement the party had to be built on a firm Marxist revolutionary theory. Marxism, and had to bring that theory to the working-class movement.

Lenin’s ideas were borne out in the course of the revolutionary events. That first Russian revolution was headed by the working class, in alliance with the peasantry.

Lenin described it as a proletarian revolution in methods of struggle—armed insurrections, strikes, etc. But despite a heroic struggle, it was in these years that Lenin described Trotsky as an out-and-out factionalist and a traitor.

Lenin was also waging uncompromising struggle against the “leftists,” who denied the need to make use of any legal opportunities, including the Legislative Duma. Lenin believed that the party should use flexible tactics, a combination of legal and illegal forms of struggle. The Sixth Conference of the party was held in Prague in 1912. It decided to expel the Mensheviks from the party.

It called upon all party members to fight liquidationists, to explain its danger and to concentrate on recruiting and strengthening the illegal party organisations.

In the spring of 1912, a legal daily Bolshevik paper Pravda was started, on the initiative of St. Petersburg workers and with warm support from Lenin. Its first issue was a great occasion for the working-class press.

Lenin gave Pravda daily attention, carried on a lively correspondence with its editorial board, represented in the paper’s successes and helped it remedy its mistakes.

He worked hard to get the paper distributed quickly among the workers and to improve its circulation.

In the period 1912-1914, Pravda carried more than 280 articles by Lenin, many of them signed “V. I. Lenin,” “V. I.,” “V. I. Leningrad,” “V. I. Pravda,” and other pseudonyms. To be closer to Russian, Lenin moved from Prag to Cracow, Poland, in June 1912. He lived there for more than two years, until the outbreak of the First World War, spending the winter in Cracow and the summer in the village of Poronino. When war broke out, Lenin was arrested by the Austrian authorities on false charges of espionage for the tsarist government. Leading public figures in Poland and Austria spoke out in his defence, proving the absurdity of such a charge.

The Austrian military authorities were compelled to release Lenin, after keeping him in prison for about two weeks. Lenin was determined to continue to direct the revolutionary struggle of the Russian workers and to continue work interrupted by his arrest.

But that was very hard to do in Austria, a belligerent country. He therefore obtained permission to go to Switzerland, where he lived—first in Berns and then in Zurich—until April 1917.
Lenin launched a resolute struggle against the imperialist war from its very first day. The war, after all, was far from unexpected. Lenin had repeatedly warned that the capitalists were preparing for it and urged a struggle against it.

International socialist congresses had worked out the tactics of the social-democrats with regard to war. The leaders of West European socialist parties had pledged to fight against war and, in the event of one breaking out, to lead the working class to the overthrow of capitalism. But when war did break out, the leaders of those parties betrayed the interests of the workers and openly sided with the bourgeoisie of their own countries. In many countries the socialists entered the government, and in Germany they voted for war credits. They maintained that the struggle for socialism, the international class solidarity of the workers, was impossible in wartime.

In Russia this policy was conducted by Plekhanov, Aptekaryev and Maslov, among others. Another section of the socialists, headed by Kautsky and Trotsky in Russia, adopted a stand known as "centrism." They declared their disagreement with both sides.

In practice, however, they supported the war camp. The treachery of the socialist leaders led to the collapse of the Second International, which was to have led the workers of the world in the struggle against the war. In that grim moment of history, Lenin and the Bolsheviks called for a declaration of war on war. Weapons should not be trained on brothers, but against those who were for or against the war. In practice, however, they supported the war camp. The treachery of the socialist leaders led to the collapse of the Second International, which was to have led the world to the struggle against the war.

Lenin set forth a concrete, clear-cut plan of struggle for the transformation from the bourgeois-democratic revolution—which had given power to the bourgeoisie to a socialist revolution which was to give power to the working class and the poor peasants. Lenin thought a peaceful development of the revolution possible under those conditions. When the bourgeois-democratic revolution broke out in Russia in February 1917, Lenin was in Switzerland. As soon as he learned of the victory of the revolution and the overthrow of tsarism, he called the Russian Bolshevik Party to meet at a congress in Petrograd. Lenin was eager to return to Russia. "You cannot even imagine what torture it is for all of us to stay here at such a time," he wrote. But, while allowing the enclaves of other parties who were for the war, the imperialists would not let Lenin and his associates through, for fear of their influence on the revolutionary masses. It was with great difficulty and with the help of Swiss social-democrats that Lenin finally succeeded in the revolutionary crisis, he cabled the Russian government: "You cannot even imagine what torture it is for all of us to stay here at such a time," he wrote.
At the Ninth Party Congress, even before the war was over, Lenin set the task of reviving the economy.

On the basis of his programme, the congress considered the questions of a single economic plan, laying the main emphasis on the electrification of the national economy.

Lenin held that large scale industry and electrification were essential for socialist and communist construction.

"Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country," he said.

A commission, made up of leading scientists and engineers and headed by Krichanovskii, a veteran member of the party, was set up on Lenin's initiative at the beginning of 1920.

One can get an idea of the guidance given by Lenin in the work of the commission from his numerous letters and notes to Krichanovskii, Klasson, Winter and other eminent scientists.

It was decided to build 30 large power stations within 10 to 15 years, to increase output 17 times over and total industrial output to almost 15 times the 1930 figure.

Lenin regarded this plan as the basis of the party's economic work, as its second programme. Work began on it right away, in the years of economic dislocation and fighting against internal and external enemies.

Lenin was overjoyed when he saw electric lights going on in the small village of Kashino near Moscow—dubbed "Ryab lamps" by the local peasants.

Lenin proposed that the surplus-requisitioning system be replaced by a tax in kind and that private trade in raw materials.

Industrial output was a mere seventh of the prewar figure and was decreasing. The situation was particularly bad in the areas where the whiteguards and foreign interventionists had held sway.

Many enterprises stood idle because of the lack of fuel and raw materials. Less than a couple of pounds of cast iron and a yard of cotton fabric were being produced per head.

Railway transport was totally disrupted. Factory workers in the towns were starving.

In that grim period Lenin's wisdom showed itself with particular force. He proposed a sharp turn in the economic policy of the party and the state.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was a development of the plan for laying the foundations of socialist economy, outlined by Lenin in 1918 in his pamphlet The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government.

Lenin explained that the rehabilitation of the national economy should start with agriculture, because it could not meet the needs of the industrial centres for grain and raw materials.

He pointed out that petty farming prevailed in the country. The working class had to get along with millions of peasants, it had to change their outlook and draw them into socialist construction.

And this could be achieved only by means of the new economic policy. What was the essence of that policy and why was it called "new"?

Lenin proposed that the surplus-requisitioning system be replaced by a tax in kind and that private trade in grain and other surplus products be allowed.

He set the party the task of improving the organisation of trade and reconvening the co-operatives. He demanded that communists should learn to trade and to study economic questions and peasants with better and cheaper goods that they had got from the capitalists.

This would make the peasants interested in producing more grain, which would serve as an impetus for the rehabilitation and development of the national economy.

Lenin said that NEP would strengthen the alliance between the working class and the peasantry and consolidate Soviet power.

The Tenth Party Congress in 1921 adopted the New Economic Policy.
The Russian Revolution and the Prospects of World Revolution.

Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of World Revolution. He told delegates what Soviet power had accomplished on the basis of the new economic policy. And he called on the delegates to regard the Soviet experience in a creative, not dogmatic, way.

On November 10, Lenin spoke at a meeting of the Moscow Soviet. He voiced his firm conviction that "the Russia of the NEP will become a socialist Russia."

That was Lenin's last public speech.

Lenin had always fought against the oppression and inequality of non-Russian nationalities, which was so profound for the exploiters.

After the victory of the revolution he developed unfolding concerns for the development of the national republics, for his regard for the nation as the basis of the Soviet state's strength.

He proposed that the various Soviet republics unite into a single federal state. But how were they to be united and on what basis?

Lenin answered this question in his letters. "The formation of the USSR and the question of nationalities or 'Autonomisation'..." Lenin said that it was necessary to set up a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a voluntary alliance of equal and independent nations, based on the principles of proletarian internationalism—"an entirely new type of multi-national state based on friendship of nations."

The First All-Union Congress of the Soviets in December 1922 carried out Lenin's idea; it adopted a decision to set up the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics.

Lenin was elected Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR.

In December 1922, Lenin's health deteriorated, but he rallied somewhat in January and February. It was then that he dictated his last articles: Letter to the Congress, Pages from a Diary, On Co-operation, Our Revolution, How We Should Reorganise the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, Better Fewer But Better.

They were Lenin's political testament.

His indomitable will, his awareness of the responsibility he bore, his concern for the party and for the further development of the Soviet republic gave him strength to overcome the suffering attendant upon his illness and to do what appeared to be beyond human powers—to create a number of remarkable works in a mere six weeks, in defiance of serious illness.

At the request of the workers of Petrograd, the city of Petrograd was renamed Leningrad.

Lenin's death was a great loss to the party, the Soviet republic and the international working-class movement.

To compensate for this terrible loss, the party rallied under Lenin's leadership, the central committee announced a special issue of Lenin's works, carrying the ideas of communism to the whole world, would be the best monument to Lenin.

In Soviet times, Lenin's works have been published in big editions as Selected Works and Letters; he delivered a great number of speeches at Workers' and peasants' inscription meetings, in the light of new experience.

Leon Trotsky and his followers asserted that Russia lacked the conditions necessary for the construction of socialism. But how were they to be reorganised into a single federal state? And on what basis?

Lenin persevered to teach the people how to manage the state. He fought red tape, formalism and a false attitude towards work and success, and set a personal example of organisation.

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LENIN in LONDON

LENIN had many links with London — particularly with the area around Clerkenwell Green.

The two-storey building No. 37-38 Clerkenwell Green, now the Marx Memorial Library housed the press of the British social-democrats at the beginning of the century.

For more than a year, from April 1902 to May 1903, Lenin edited the newspaper Iskra. The paper was printed there on rice paper, and prepared for dispatch to Russia.

Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, first came to London at the beginning of April, 1902. At that time he was only 32.

The editors of Iskra had left Munich, where the paper had previously come out, because the German police, linked with the israell secret police, had begun to display suspiciously excessive curiosity.

The owner of the press on which they printed said he would take no further risks!

Where should they go? Lenin in favour of London. But Plekhanov and Axelrod, his colleagues on the editorial board, preferred Switzerland.

Lenin hoped that he and the other members of the editorial board would find it easier to work at a greater distance from Plekhanov, who regarded himself as the kingpin of the party, and was not very fond of the views of others if they cut across his own.

Most members of the editorial board supported Lenin, and Iskra came to London.

Lenin and Krupskaya travelled to Charing Cross station, where they were met by the exiled revolutionary Nikolai Alexeyev.

He was a member of the “League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class.”

In 1899, he had been arrested and banished to the Vyatskaia gubernia, but a year later he fled the country, coming to London.

Alexeyev spoke English well, and was regarded as an “old-timer” in England.

It was he who was the request of the editorial board of Iskra, started negotiations with Harry Quelch, editor of the English social-democratic weekly Justice, concerning facilities for printing Iskra at the Clerkenwell Green press.

Quelch gave instant and willing consent.

For about a week Lenin and his wife lived in lodgings.

Then they found themselves two unfurnished rooms in Finsbury, at 30 Holborn Square.

This was about 15 minutes walk from Clerkenwell Green, near Kings Cross and literally within a stone’s throw of Judd Street, where half a century earlier Alexander Hertz had set up the “Free Russian Press” and printed Kolokol (The Bell).

In his reminiscences, Lenin in London, Alexeyev cites some interesting facts of Lenin’s life in the British capital.

Lenin’s landlady, Mrs. Yeo, Alexeyev recalls, was puzzled by the “exceedingly simple furnishing of the rooms.

As they were let unfurnished, Lenin had to buy furniture, but he bought only the simplest — a bed, chairs, table, and a few shelves (for books).

The landlady was particularly upset that Krupskaya were no wedding ring.

“She had to reconcile herself to this circumstance,” writes Alexeyev, “when it was explained to her that her lodgers were a quieter and more married couple, and that if she regarded the absence of a ring as reprehensible she ran the risk of being used for defamations of character!”

The landlady was reassured and no longer doubted the respectability of the “German lodgers.”

Lenin and Krupskaya lived very modestly.

“We were very rich financially,” wrote Krupskaya later.

She cooked their meals on a primus stove, and was herself up to the eyes in work.

To Mrs. Yeo, she was “just a housewife.”

It never occurred to her that when Krupskaya set out with her bag to go shopping, she was in fact spending whole days decoding secret messages, hiding letters over a flame to break out the “invisible ink.”

Her shopping bag was frequently full of cabled letters which she was sending to various centres in Russia.

Lenin was very interested in the working class districts of London. He loved to climb to the top of a bus to observe the street scenes.

He and Krupskaya would explore the east end, on comparing it with the fashionable districts to the west.

He attended many British workers’ meetings and rallies, to listen to the spirited speeches of political figures.

“Iskra was always a social-democratic magazine where, after the semaines, the congresses were opened and chanted the prayers,” wrote Lenin.

Lenin was interested in the kingdom of exploitation into the kingdom of socialism.

There were no days without reports of the accidents in their life in England.

The most important was the publication of Iskra, and the organisation of the 2nd Congress of the party.

A few days after his arrival in London, Lenin applied to the British Museum for a ticket for the Reading Room.

The entry in the Reading Room register for April 29, 1902, reads: “Jacob Richter, Dr. of Laws, 30 Holborn Square, Reading Room ticket No. A72453,” followed by Lenin’s signature, “J. Richter.”

According to Krupskaya, Lenin spent “half his time” in the Reading Room. He would arrive there each morning at nine and work until dinner time.

Lenin in London, wrote in his reminiscences, was just a “poor student,” but he had his articles which appeared in Iskra, and his first pamphlet for the Social-Democrats, To the Poor Peasantry.

He attended the British Museum Reading Room. “It’s a fine institution; there is a great deal to be learned from it. Especially this exceptional reference department,” he commented.

He worked there again several years later, when he was writing Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.

The whole burden of bringing out Iskra and preparing the 2nd Congress fell on Lenin.

The other editorial board members were missing, for one reason or another. Martov soon moved to Paris and Potresov was sick, Axelrod wasn’t in London, and Plekhanov came only once, while Vera Zasulich, who was living in London, was out of touch with Russia.

“The correspondence with Russia frayed his (Lenin’s) nerves terribly,” Krupskaya wrote.

“To wait weeks and months for answers to letters, to expect always that the whole of the work would fail, to be in a constant state of uncertainty, as to how things...
would go — all this could not be more out of keeping with his character.

In his visit to Russia, Lenin begged and prayed: "Write us more frequently and in greater detail, in words that express our condition, in words that express our suffering, in words that express our struggle!"

"When the winter visited Quelch in this editorial office, there was no room for another chair."

"This is a first and great struggle."

"We must bring the struggle of the proletariat to the Russian people and to the whole of mankind."

"Lenin’s attitude was so serious, so natural, so predominant — the passion in his eyes, the firmness of his hands."

"Lenin’s attitude was so serious, so natural, so predominant — the passion in his eyes, the firmness of his hands."

"In the beginning of the congress," Krupskaya wrote, "his nerves were stretched to the utmost... In London he had the feeling that he was completely unable to sleep, he was terribly worried."