

ULAR SOCIETY (NSS) affected the Leicester Secular Society. The conflict between the Bradlaughites (followers of Charles BRADLAUGH) and the dissenting group was partly personal, and partly a difference over strategy, whether to espouse forthright atheism or a more positive approach. The Leicester Secular Society supported the anti-Bradlaugh British Secular Union, and Gimson refused to let the Society's premises for NSS events. The division was healed by the end of the decade.

In 1869 the Society acquired premises with a reading room at 43 Humberstone Gate. (Reading was greatly important to nineteenth-century secularists.) In 1873 they moved to 77 Humberstone Gate with the hope of building a new hall. The Secular Hall Company was launched in 1872 with John Sladen of Sladen's Indigo Works as president, Josiah Gimson of Gimson's Engineering Works as treasurer, and W. H. Holyoak as secretary. The Secular Hall held its opening ceremony in 1881 with a lineup of luminaries in attendance that included Bradlaugh, George Jacob Holyoake, G. W. FOOTE, Charles WATTS, and Harriet LAW.

A renowned feature of the Hall was the sculptures decorating the front of the structure: busts of SOCRATES, VOLTAIRE, Thomas PAINE, Robert Owen, and—Jesus. Local Christians were outraged at the inclusion of Jesus in a secular pantheon, but the secularists considered that like the others, Jesus was a freethinker who had challenged the established religious orthodoxy of his day.

The Leicester Secular Society prospered better than most such groups in the latter part of the century. Their "positive" secularism compared favorably in the eyes of many with the purely negative atheism of the NSS. The hall was used for lectures, reading, a Sunday school, and social activities.

Two notables among the society's organizing secretaries were the former Franciscan Joseph McCABE (1898), a famous FREETHOUGHT writer and lecturer, and F. J. Gould (1899), who was well known for his espousal of moral education, that is, to encourage and promote the idea and practice of moral behavior in schools.

The society continued with rather varied success during the twentieth century, but the centenary of the hall was feted in 1981 with the well-known Labour politician Michael Foot on the platform. Today most of the building is rented out to other users, but it is still owned by the Leicester Secular Society which continues its existence in a modest way.

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**LENIN, VLADIMIR ILYICH** (1870–1924), Russian socialist revolutionary. Given the focus of the *New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, this article will stress Lenin's positions regarding religion and to a much lesser extent his positions regarding empiricism and POSITIVISM. None of these makes Lenin an important historical figure; his importance lies in his role as a political and revolutionary leader. What Lenin had to say about religion and philosophy was always subservient to his political and revolutionary agenda, and takes what importance it has from that.

Vladimir Lenin was the principal figure in the development of MARXISM in the early twentieth century, the first and a deeply influential leader of the Soviet Union, and the architect and developer of the Bolshevik Revolution. Still, the struggle against religion and to develop and to propagate ATHEISM so that it would become an integral part of popular consciousness in Communist societies—eventually in a Communist world—and to develop as a first step an atheist society free of religion, was a key aim of both Lenin and the Soviet Union (see PROPAGANDA, ANTIRELIGIOUS [SOVIET]). As Lenin and most others understood it, Marxism is materialist (see MATERIALISM, PHILOSOPHICAL), and as such left no room for belief in God or belief in immortality.

Capitalist democracies display a commitment to the independence of state from religion. The state must be neutral vis-à-vis religion; our societies must remain pluralist, and there must be neither an insistent state religion (demanding strict adherence by all its citizens and/or forming the official agenda of the state) nor state anti-religion. Religion, nonreligion, or irreligion are seen as a private matter exempt from state demand, a need for official authorization, or even expressions of state preference or orientation. Indeed, one of the key functions of the state, on standard liberal preconceptions, is to protect us from these things. Lenin's position was importantly different from this liberal ideal. It is important to understand that position and its rationale.

**Formation of Lenin's Views on Religion.** Lenin was brought up in a religious but unbogoted atmosphere. At age fifteen or sixteen he lost his faith; this occurred long before he had any contact with or knowledge of Marxism, and took a typical rationalistic, Enlightenment-based, and anticlerical form, much more in the tradition of Baron d'HOLBACH than Ludwig FEUERBACH (see RATIONALISM; ENLIGHTENMENT, UNBELIEF DURING THE; ANTICLERICALISM). He thought, and would continue to think throughout his life, that the development of science had made atheism obvious (see RELIGION IN CONFLICT WITH SCIENCE). For Lenin, the beliefs in God and immortality and their associated doctrines had been shown decisively to be illusions, and often dangerous illusions. A scientific education revealed that religion was little better than a nest of superstitions.

It was only later, after studying Karl MARX and Friedrich Engels, that he came to see something of the

extent of the class content of religion and the harmful social functions of religion. Lenin maintained that the very idea of God "has always lulled to sleep and dulled 'social sentiments' substituting dead for living things, always being an idea of slavery . . . [that] *tied down* the oppressed *classes* with a faith in 'the divine character of the oppressors.' The real content of the idea of God consists of 'filth, prejudices, sanctification of stupor. Religion was in the service of autocracy; churches were means of keeping the masses submissive and humble, an "ideological knot" used to keep the exploiters in power and the masses in a state of misery, on the one hand, and of serfdom and monarchy on the other.'"

This is strong stuff, but Lenin's hatred of and opposition to religion was very strong. He had no interest in inquiring into or discussing religion in order to see whether it has any justification or a *raison d'être*. That it had neither, he believed, except as an ideological instrument of suppression by the ruling classes, was so obvious that it was not worth discussing. The merits, or lack thereof, of religion were not something to be discussed; rather, our energies should be devoted to eradicating religion whenever and wherever possible. Any deviation from that aim was merely temporary and tactical. He was interested in ascertaining how and under what conditions religion could be brought to an end and be replaced by a thoroughly materialist and revolutionary outlook.

Lenin's interest in religion, to repeat, was tactical and political. He saw religion as an ideological weapon of the exploiting classes; what was required was to struggle effectively against it, not to prattle on concerning whether it could have any justification. Enlightenment philosophers and scientists had already conclusively established the case for atheism.

**Lenin's Tactics toward Religion.** We should distinguish three periods during which Lenin, always taking his tactical approach to religion, faced sharply different situations with regard to it. The first period was slightly before and around the revolution of 1905. During that period Lenin's tactical consideration of religion centered mainly on opportunities to expand political agitation. The second stage peaked around 1917, in the context of the second and successful Bolshevik Revolution. At this time, in his struggle with certain tendencies and factions within the revolutionary party, he set forth a Bolshevik program and tactics on religion. The third stage came when, as the leader of the newly formed Soviet Union, he was charged with leading its governance in very difficult circumstances. In the latter situation he was faced with a massively religiously orthodox population hostile to the aspirations of the Soviet Union. Against this background, he had to make policy for the new society in accordance with his (and the party's) antireligious social program: a social program for a thoroughly secular socialist society.

During the first phase Lenin stressed presenting the Orthodox Church as a servant of czarist aristocracy: an

oppressor of the people, keeping them ignorant and superstitious, leading them into slavish obedience and subservience, and promising that if they obeyed church doctrine and the established order, they would in their "next life" be rewarded with a glorious heavenly kingdom and with perpetual bliss. The clergy—"gendarmes in cassocks"—perpetuated this heavenly swindle along with a host of other superstitions. The clergy aimed to keep the masses docile in their ignorance and fear. (The fear of hell was particularly driven into them.) Lenin lay stress on exposing these things, and in an anticlericalism that demanded complete separation of the church from the state and of the church from the schools, as well as freedom of conscience. Here he supported the cause of sectarian religious opposition to the established church, hoping to bring the sectarian faithful over to supporting the revolution.

During the second phase, which peaked in 1917 but began with the 1905 revolution, Lenin turned his attention to setting a Communist Party program toward religion. In his *Socialism and Religion*, written in 1905 and probably his most important general statement concerning religion, Lenin wrote:

We demand that religion be regarded as a private matter in relations to the state, but under no circumstances can we consider religion to be a private matter with regard to our own party. The state must not concern itself with religion; religious societies must not be connected with the state power. Everyone should be absolutely free to profess whatever religion he prefers or to recognize no religion. . . . There must be no discrimination whatever in the rights of citizens on religious grounds. . . . No subsidies must be paid to the state church, and no state grants must be made to ecclesiastical and religious societies, which must be absolutely free, voluntary associations of like-minded citizens independent of the state. . . . As for the party of the socialist proletariat, religion is not a private matter. Our party is a league of conscious, leading fighters for the liberation of the working class. Such a league cannot and must not be indifferent to lack of consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs. We demand a complete separation of church from state in order to fight against religious fog with purely ideological and only with ideological weapons—our press, our word. We created our league, the RSDWP [Russian Social Democratic Workers Party], among other things, precisely for such a struggle against all kinds of religious deception of the workers.

However, Lenin quickly qualified his stern stance by remarking that the party should not forbid the admission of believers who are committed to the proletarian revolution and to socialism. With a good tactical sense, he

remarked that the enemies of socialism would like to split the socialist movement by playing off its believers against its atheists. The party should for the time being tone down its antireligious propaganda (discursive agitation and indoctrination). As far as its platform was concerned, the party should remain firmly atheistic, but would not strike committed comrades from its ranks because of their religion. Lenin's hope and belief was that by participating in the class struggle, believing comrades would come to see the reactionary, obfuscating, and thoroughly instrumental role religion plays in supporting and furthering the interests of capitalism.

Lenin is again tactical here. He is "softening" neither his atheism nor his belief in the need for a Marxist socialism to display explicit atheism and a firm antireligious orientation. This can be clearly seen by his intense negative reaction to the so-called god builders, a faction of party intellectuals that included Anatoly V. Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorky. Lenin did not call for their expulsion from the party, but his criticism of their position was unqualifiedly hostile. The god builders argued for a humanist religion without God or any other "spookish" substitutes. They called for a completely secularized religion of humanity in the tradition of Auguste COMTE and Feuerbach, a religion of humanity and of love and respect for the "new proletarian man" who would come slowly into existence with the struggle for and finally the achievement of socialism.

One might have thought Lenin would have been mildly amused by the prospect of attaching such harmless decorations to the cause. Instead he reacted explosively. He saw god building as a subtle bit of illusory idealism and antimaterialism, dangerous because in effect, though not in intent, it served as propaganda to revive religion among the masses. For Lenin, it was all the more dangerous because it was cleverly disguised, though not by conscious subterfuge on the part of the god builders. He recognized that they were not aware of the ideological content of what they were setting forth. The god builders saw their program as a sanitized method by which a Communist should bring enlightenment to workers and peasants. Lenin believed it would have an entirely different effect. The problem with a refined secular religion without God, as Lenin saw it—again in tactical terms—was that (as he wrote to Gorky):

The crowd is much more able to see through a million *physical* sins, dirty tricks, violences and *physical* infections which are therefore much less dangerous than is the *subtle* spiritual idea of dear little god [bozhen'ka] arrayed in the smartest of ideological costumes. A Catholic priest who violates young girls (about whom I happened to read just now in a German newspaper) is *much less* dangerous . . . than are priests who do not wear cassocks, priests without vulgar religion, ideological and democratic priests who preach the creation and making of dear little gods. . . .

There was a time in history when . . . the struggle of democracy and the proletariat took the form of the struggle of *one religious* idea against the other. But this time had passed long ago. Now, both in Europe and in Russia, *every*, even the most refined, most well-intentioned, defence or justification of the idea of god is a justification of reaction.

Both "god-building" and "god-seeking" are essentially one and the same exercise in "ideological necrophilia." Regardless of the subjective intentions of their advocates, *objectively*, under the present relationship of class forces, they help to adorn and sweeten the political and economic oppression of the people.

According to Lenin, the party must oppose all forms of religion and religious consciousness, both Russian Orthodoxy and a Feuerbachian religion of humanity, with the firmly materialist and scientific worldview of the Marxism of Marx and Engels.

From where we stand now, this sounds more like Marxist fundamentalism, like a Communist church, than a scientific orientation. Moreover, there is little evidence that such humanistic religious talk ever seduced the masses. Where the masses noticed it at all, if they did, it would surely have seemed to them a perversion of their faith and of all the promises that religion held out for them. Atheism and Marxism had nothing to fear from those god builders. This dispute was purely an exercise in point-counterpoint among the chattering classes, with little ideological or practical effect.

The third phase of Lenin's treatment of religion began after the successful Bolshevik Revolution. It centered around the problem of leading the newly emergent Soviet Union in the face of an implacable and openly hostile Russian Orthodox Church, which had soaked the masses of the peasantry in the crudest form of religion. It was one thing to claim that the state must be religiously neutral while the party must not when the Bolsheviks were not in power—but it was quite another thing when the Bolsheviks were in power, when they, with their atheistic commitments and atheistic worldview, governed, and in some functional sense *were*, the state. In such a situation, how could the party's non-neutrality toward religion fit with state neutrality toward religion? It did not and could not.

By decree, the Bolshevik vanguard party nationalized all ecclesiastical and monastic lands, separating the church from the state and schools from the church. The church was no longer a juridical person and had no right to own property. This in effect made the church dependent on the state. It was also the case that anti-religious propaganda was intensified. Freedom of conscience came in effect to mean freedom from "religious opium"; private religious instruction was forbidden for people under the age of eighteen; most monastic institutions were disbanded; the Soviet Commissariat of Justice

carried out a campaign of opening Orthodox religious relics to expose religious frauds; churches were deprived by government decree of all facilities for the training of clergy or the publication of religious literature.

Lenin remained zealously committed. He even wrote a new section for the party program adopted at the Eighth Congress in 1919 and reaffirmed in 1923 by the Comintern's executive committee, and declared obligatory for all its member parties. In this section Lenin wrote: "The party strives for the complete dissolution of the ties between the exploiting classes and the organization of religious propaganda, as well as for the real emancipation of the toiling masses from religious prejudices; to this end, the party organizes the widest possible scientific, educational and anti-religious propaganda."

Immediately afterward Lenin, always the astute tactician, added, "At the same time it is necessary carefully to avoid giving offence to the religious sentiments of believers as that only leads to that strengthening of religious fanaticism."

Lenin believed he must engage in the strategies and tactics necessary for the achievement and consolidation of socialism. With this aim in mind, Lenin pressed relentlessly for action on the antireligious front. But he still remained carefully tactical. In his last public statement concerning religion, "On the Significance of Militant Materialism" (1922), he acknowledged the need for flexibility as well as moderation in carrying a long-range approach to atheistic indoctrination. He recognized that this was often ignored in the practices of the party cadres, and he called for more intelligent defenses of atheism. In this, cadres should take instruction from the eighteenth-century materialists.

Despite his conviction that tactics should change with context, from the age of sixteen until the end of his life Lenin maintained his Enlightenment trust that science and reason would bring liberation from the mystifications and illusions of religion. Like Lenin himself, the party, even in the governing of the state, "could not be philosophically neutral: it was materialistic, therefore atheistic and anti-clerical, and this world-outlook could not be a matter of political indifference." What was needed, he thought, was a committed government led by a vanguard party for an atheist state.

**Leninism, Justice, and Unbelief.** Many secular humanists (including many who are firm atheists) are first shocked by Lenin, and then, on reflection, led to reject much of Lenin's stance concerning religion. Even some of those who are firm socialists as well as atheists are reluctant to embrace a view that commits socialism, even a Marxist socialism, to a militant atheism in matters of governing policy. They are reluctant, that is, to commit socialism to atheism (militant or nonmilitant) as a matter of state or even party policy. They have no wish to be the mirror image of the Vatican nation-state. To them, religious belief or unbelief should be purely a matter of private conviction. (Lenin, of course, would

view this as liberal shilly-shallying.) They recognize that there exist committed socialists (Simone Weil and David McLellan, for example) who also are firm religious believers—as attuned to the pervasive ills and ugliness of religion as socialist atheists, yet holding religious beliefs and commitments that form a central part of their lives and about which they have thought deeply.

Some socialist atheists (though not necessarily for the same reasons) may be as convinced as Lenin was of the unjustifiability, unreasonableness, and even the irrationality of religious belief. Some are as convinced as he that there is no God. Indeed some even think there can be no God as God has come to be construed in medieval and modern Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. But they will also recognize (as Lenin *seems* not to) that there exist some religious believers, even believers in the more orthodox conceptions of religion, who think otherwise—and that some of these are reasonable and informed persons, as intelligent as any atheist, and possessing as much integrity and thoughtfulness as even the most reflective atheists. Here, such atheists will feel to the full what John Rawls calls the burdens of judgment. Further, they recognize that in a pluralist society (indeed, a pluralist world), many divergent conceptions of the good life and many different worldviews are arguably reasonably held. The social glue that binds us, at least in modern societies—a thin though not insignificant adhesive—is a common family of general conceptions of social justice consistent with what Rawls would term a reasonable pluralism. Only the recognition and acceptance of these conceptions makes living together tolerable. In short, these atheists have bought into the Jeffersonian-Rawlsian compromise, and recognize as well that in the very weak (but practically acceptable) Rawlsian sense that some of these reasonable pluralisms are religious ones. Moreover, standing in back of this is a principle that is less normative, more of a *modus vivendi*. It is rooted (wittingly or unwittingly) in a recognition of the importance of the Treaty of Westphalia, which brought an end to Europe's religious wars. It is a pragmatic recognition, available to all who are not fanatics, that religious wars or deep religious civil strife are to be avoided, including wars or civil strife between belief and unbelief. And this conviction may remain, no matter how unreasonable, fantastic, and frequently ideological they may take religions, religious doctrines, and religious beliefs and practices to be. Such convictions incline atheists of this flavor to an almost knee-jerk rejection of Lenin's stance on religion.

I too (though with some ambivalence) accept that Jeffersonian-Rawlsian compromise, particularly in its Rawlsian form. Moreover, I believe that we need something like the peace of Westphalia both between one religious belief and another, and between religious belief and unbelief. Most of the decrees and practices concerning religion carried out by the Soviet Union under Lenin's leadership were far too draconian, offering a

mirror image of the tendencies we deplore in the Vatican and reflecting a similar mind set.

However, in his general program for secular commitment on the part of a socialist party and its cadres, Lenin was committed to achieving class emancipation, and (with classlessness secured) to moving beyond that toward a general human emancipation. This, he thought, would require a secularist turn. It is not so clear to me that Lenin was wrong over such basics; it is not clear to me that we should instead embrace the Jeffersonian-Rawlsian compromise and insist on state neutrality concerning religion. To be sure, the state should remain neutral toward *liberal* religions, all of which are compatible with both socialism and a reasonable pluralism. In contrast to the liberal religions, the great orthodox faiths, including those Lenin set his face against—the Roman Catholic Church, Russian Orthodoxy, Calvinism, Orthodox Judaism, Orthodox Islam, and the various fundamentalist Jewish, Christian, and Islamic doctrinal stances—engage in practices that severely harm millions of people, causing grave injustices to women and children, to the lower classes, and sometimes to anyone whose religious or nonreligious orientation differs from their own. These orthodox creeds frequently breed hatred, intolerance, and repression. These are severe injustices in the very terms of the conception of justice that Rawls articulates. It is understandable that Lenin was so exercised about religion. *These* religious beliefs and belief systems are (to put it mildly) not compatible with a Rawlsian reasonable pluralism. To the extent that liberals and socialists tolerate them, it is *only* for modus vivendi reasons—for example, they will crush us if we don't; firmly opposing them will set in motion once again the horrors of religious wars; or we have no overlapping consensus from which we might develop a successful practical action program.

Given considerations such as these, we secularists (socialist and nonsocialist), if we are reasonable, will slog on through the slow processes of sober reasoning together with religious people, all the while hoping that increasing and more equally distributed wealth, increasing democracy, and increasing education (say, on the model of contemporary Scandinavian societies) will gradually lead them out of the religious and moral wilderness of their beliefs. Still, some of the most powerful of these religions (though not all of them to the same extent, nor over the same things) give rise to terrific injustices. Intransigent Catholic policy on the use of condoms condemns millions of very young children to parentless lives in poverty and neglect. Islamic sharia law and Orthodox Jewish law on divorce allow men to brutally dominate women. Many orthodox traditions exclude—and sometimes, as when the Taliban held power in Afghanistan, even murder—homosexuals. Many allow extreme wealth to accrue to religious hierarchs while the poor starve, or seek to undermine women's knowledge of and access to abortion and even

contraception. The injustices surge on owing to the commitment of these religions to obscurantist, utterly unjustifiable beliefs, and to their propagation and protection by a religious aristocracy. Faced with injustices as great as these, and recognizing their intractability, must we think Lenin so wrong in his militant atheism—so far afield in his demand that atheism form part of the platform of a political party devoted to the good of human beings? There is sense, even wisdom, in the Jeffersonian-Rawlsian compromise. But I think the question about Lenin's wrongness needs a sober second reconsideration.

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**LENNSTRAND, VICTOR EMANUEL** (1861–1895), Swedish teacher, lecturer, and publicist. Founder of the Utilistiska Samfundet (Utilitarian Society) in 1888, the first and only Swedish atheist organization at the time, numbering two thousand members (see SWEDEN, UNBELIEF IN), Victor Emanuel Lennstrand edited two periodical publications between 1890 and 1894, *Tänk Sjelv!* (Think for Yourself!) and *Fritänkaren* (Freethinker), the latter of which attained a circulation of thirty-five hundred copies. Elected a member of Sweden's first Convention for Popular Vote, Lennstrand delivered speeches in front of thousands of people and started a massive movement against the church and religion. He translated works by Robert Green INGERSOLL, Charles BRADLAUGH, John Stuart MILL, and others. In addition he published many of his own essays and lectures: "What We Believe and What We Want" (1888), "Jehovah Is Dead," "The Republic, the Popular Vote