

A Study on Lenin's Discussion on Railway

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Abstract

Before the October Revolution, Lenin analyzed the role of railway in the development of capitalist economy, and he thought that the railway transportation accelerated the development of capitalism and opened up the world market. During the Russian Civil War, he repeatedly stressed the decisive role of railway during war time, and pointed out that the railway also played a leading role in the reform and construction of socialist cause. He proposed that the military and authoritative management with unified requirements should be adopted in the railway system. Besides, he believed that the department should strictly enforce the discipline of the railway workers, and rely on the training railway workers to serve for the socialist cause.

Key words: Lenin; Railway; Socialist construction

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Lenin's discussion on railway is based on the analysis of the history of Russian's capitalism, the practice in the maintenance of the Soviet regime under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, and the combining of Marxism with the actual development of Soviet Russia. It is an integral part of his theory on building socialism, which has important theoretical and practical significance. Before the October Revolution, railway transportation was a part of Russian capitalism. After the October Revolution, the Soviet Russian railway system was nearly paralyzed.

During this period, how did Lenin see the significance of railway in a country? How did he think about the way of rectifying and managing the railway system? How did he see the role of railway workers? At present, there are some related studies which focus mainly on the aspect of Lenin's practice in railway reform, seldom on the thoughts and discussions in general. Therefore, this paper tries to make a systematic analysis of Lenin's idea on railway.

1. THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF RAILWAY TRANSPORTATION

Lenin's idea on the significance of railway transportation mainly involves four aspects: economy, war, international communist movement, socialist revolution and construction.

1.1 The Role of Railway Transportation in Economic Development

Lenin believed that the railway transportation industry accelerated the disintegration of the feudal mode of production, accelerated the formation of the capitalist economic system, provided conditions for the development of commercial economy, and created a new world market. First of all, the construction of the railway changed the farmers' original way of life, making some farmers goes out to make a living and participate in the railway construction. At the same time, it also raised the price of agricultural products, made the handicraft industry bankrupt, and accelerated the disintegration of the feudal mode of production. Secondly, he pointed out that railway construction seemed to be a simple, natural, democratic and civilized cause, but it was, actually, a system network connecting the whole private ownership of the raw material. He believed that at that time railway construction was a tool for capitalism to employ slaves and to oppress the people of its subsidiary

countries, which accelerated the formation of capitalist economic system. (Lenin, 1959, p.182) In addition, the development of railway system promoted the development of commercial economy. Railway can link the world's economy, involving the most remote region. (Lenin, 1959, p.296) Taking melon garden production as an example, he pointed out that melon garden production in southern Russia began in the late 1860s and the early 1970s in a county of Astrakhan province. With the laying of the railway, the sales range of its products extended from the early Volga River to the Russian capital, so it made huge profits. The expansion of production also greatly increased the need for wage labor, thereby increasing profits and government rent. Meanwhile, in some border areas of Europe and Russia, due to the distance and inconvenient transportation, its economic development was relatively weaker than other developed transportation areas. For example, in the 1890s, the land and natural resources of Arkhangelsk Province in Russia had not been fully developed, and one of the main local products was wood, which was mainly transported to Britain. In this sense, it had become the foreign market of the UK, rather than the domestic market of Russia. Russian capital entrepreneurs saw profits from it. Once the railway network was laid in the province, the industrial sector in that region would flourish. (Lenin, 1959, pp.545-546) Finally, he believed that the development of railways opened up the world market for capitalism. Lenin criticized European capitalists for extending their power to Asia through railway transportation. For example, the railway on the East Bank of the Caspian Sea opened up central Asia for capital, and the great Siberian railway opened up Siberia. The construction of the railway expanded the world market, activated the local industry and trade, increased the pursuit of profits by the capitalists, and expanded the demand for the sales market. For example, at the end of the 19th century, Japan, Britain, Germany, France, Russia and other countries vied to seize the Chinese market in the late Qing Dynasty through railway construction. This kind of worldwide, crazy pursuit of the undeveloped new market caused a huge crisis of capitalist economy. (Lenin, 1959, p.72)

1.2 The Position of Railway Transportation in Wartime

After the October Revolution in Russia on November 7th, 1917, Lenin led the establishment of the world's first socialist state power. From 1918 to 1920, in order to meet the needs, the Soviet Union adopted the wartime communist policy, which played an important role in concentrating on smashing foreign armed intervention and winning the victory of the domestic war. During the war, Lenin stressed that railway transportation was crucial and had a decisive role in the victory of the war. He put forward that long-term and serious preparations should be made for the revolutionary war, and the first task was to

revitalize the economy and rectify the railways. (Lenin, 1959, p.50) The use of railway was necessary in modern war, and railway transportation was an important material factor in the war, which was of primary significance to the completion of each campaign and the weapons, clothing and grain of the Red Army. (Lenin, 1959, pp.366-367)

1.3 The Role of the Railway Workers' Movement in the International Communist Movement

Lenin believed that the railway workers' movement would greatly promoted the international communist movement. In the international communist movement, once the railway workers took part in the strike and the railway was interrupted, the strike may become a general one and develop into an armed uprising. For example, the railway strike would interrupt the postal work on the railway line, stop the work of the telegraph office, and led to a large-scale strike in the post and telecommunications industry. In addition, the organization of railway workers was relatively centralized. For example, in Russia, most of the cities, districts, and grass-roots organizations, including St. Petersburg, were organized according to regional principles, or professional and ethnic principles. Although the division of railway staff area provides concentrated personnel for the strike, it was very difficult for railway staff to strike because the railway system covered a wide range of specific locations, such as trains, lines, stations and carriages. (Lenin, 1959, pp.103-104)

1.4 The Position and Function of Railway in Socialist Revolution and Construction

Lenin believed that railway played an important role in socialist regime, socialist economy and other aspects, and his thoughts mainly included four aspects.

Firstly, Lenin thought that without railways, there would be no socialism. Lenin believed that the recovery and management of transportation system was directly related to the survival of the Soviet Russia, "without normal transportation, cities and large industrial centers could not be supported" (Lenin, 1959, p.375), and "the railway is an important link, which is one of the most obvious links between the city and the countryside, industry and agriculture. Socialism would be completely based on this link" (Lenin, 1959, p.284), therefore, "after the victory of the proletariat, it is necessary to put the restoration and construction of railway transportation in the first place." (Lenin, 1959, p.475) After the October Revolution, socialist saboteurs mobilized people to fight against the Soviet regime, organized bribery and speculation around railway hubs, and spent millions of rubles destroying transportation and train carriage. Besides, as the railway transportation was closely linked with the grain sector, the railway problem would lead to the shortage of grain. Thus, without the railway, people in certain area may starve to death because of the inability to transport. (Lenin, 1959, p.284) For example, in 1919,

due to the dilapidated locomotives and vehicles, grain could not be transported out by the railway, thus resulting in a serious crisis in Petersburg. What's more, transport deficiencies would make military operations difficult; Lenin proposed that "we must have greater perseverance to save the transportation front. We should mobilize again and again in this matter. We must forcibly transfer out the staff of many organs. If we can't do it at once, we must transfer it again, so as to eliminate the phenomenon of transport paralysis." (Lenin, 1977, pp.200-201) In order to further restore railway transportation, Lenin put forward specific measures in February 1920, they were: 1) increase food rations for transportation staff; 2) three-quarters of the staff in other sectors, in addition to the grain sector and the military sector, should be transferred to the railway transport sector and concentrate on the restoration work; 3) declare martial law beside the railway line and mobilize migrant workers to clean up the railway.

In general, during the wartime, Lenin asked all departments to "give all support as requested by the railway administration," (Lenin, 1980, pp.420-421) and restored the railway transportation with the help of the whole country. Specifically, it was determined that "as long as the railway departments put forward the request, all provincial, county and township executive committees must give full assistance, including loading grain, strengthening the financial work related to the operation of grain trains, strengthening the maintenance and rectification of railway transportation, and so on." (Lenin, 1980, p.311) Moreover, he thought that, in the railway system, only by correctly uniting the majority of railway workers and taking supporting the Soviet regime as their task can the workers, soldiers and peasants be completely liberated from the regime of capitalist oppressors and win the socialism.

Secondly, he thought that railway transportation was an important foundation for the recovery of economy. Lenin proposed that in the new economic period of Soviet Union, there must be material basis for the resumption of agriculture and industry. The material basis for linking industry and agriculture was railway transportation and waterway transportation, especially railway transportation. (Lenin, 1959, pp.312-313) Therefore, it was necessary to unite all transport workers to participate into the restoration of railway transportation. Lenin repeatedly stressed that the work of railway workers, more directly than other jobs, determined the fate of the revolution and affected the recovery of the national economy. In addition, in order to restore the railway transportation and get enough locomotives, the Soviet Union made the biggest concession in the agreement with Britain, and spent a lot of money to get locomotives from Sweden and Germany. (Lenin, 1959, pp.125-126)

Thirdly, he thought that the rectification and reform of railway transportation could serve for the development

of socialism. "In order to distribute grain correctly, there must be normal transportation." (Lenin, 1959, pp.193-194) During the period of the Soviet Union and Russia civil war, the railway transportation was seriously damaged, the paralysis of the railway led to a shortage of food. The recovery of railway transportation was the first priority, and its system was in a need to be strictly straightened and consolidated. Lenin believed that the characteristic of railway employees was that most of the workers were workers worthy of the name. It was necessary to correctly distribute labor and save labor force, rely on the Communist Party members among the railway staff, rely on the trade union, and combine the railway work with the dissemination work, so as to stimulate the sense of ownership of the workers. (Lenin, 1959, pp.208-209)

Fourthly, he put forward that the construction of socialist railway was an important way to strengthen the alliance of the workers and the peasants. Lenin thought that with the combination of modern economy and the development of transportation technology, it was possible to organize more than half of the farmers' production according to a general plan. (Lenin, 1959, p.89) In villages with railway lines, farmers could understand the situation of the world according to the food price and daily necessities. They no longer lived in accordance with the old way, and showed a radical demand to overthrow the old land ownership system. (Lenin, 1959, pp.255-256) Therefore, the Russian proletariat "organized the peasant Soviet regime with the workers and soldiers together with the representatives of the peasants. Among the railway masses, we will certainly get such cooperation," (Lenin, 1959, pp.360-361) said Lenin. Furthermore, the needs of railway construction further strengthened the union of the workers and peasants, and "the Soviet regime can only be maintained with the support of a broad masses of the working people." (Lenin, 1959, pp.360-361)

2. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RAILWAY SYSTEM

Lenin's discussion on the organization and management of railway system can be divided into four aspects.

2.1 Authoritative Management and Unified Requirements

Lenin thought that the authoritative organization and unified leadership was necessary for the management of railway system. As early as in the preparation stage of the October Revolution, he had used Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels' views to prove the need for authoritative management in railway system. Taking factories, railways and sailing ships as examples, Engels criticized the idea that the Prussians denied any authority, any obedience and any power; Marx thought that these complex technology enterprises, which involved the use of machines and a

large number of workers in a planned way, need some kind of subordination, some kind of authority. (Lenin, 1959, p.423) During Soviet Union's civil war, the railway was used to transport military materials. It needed to be flexible and accurate, with no delay or wrong route. (Lenin, 1980, p.32) Therefore, the unified management and rectification of the railway system was very urgent and necessary. In terms of discipline, he thought that the strictest revolutionary record and self-record was needed to regulate and restrain the railway personnel. At the management level, it was necessary to put the railway transportation and railway network of all socialist republics under a unified leadership and management of the Ministry of Railway People's Committee of the Socialist Republic of the Russian Soviet Union, and revoke all laws and regulations that conflict with the supply of the Soviet Red Army, railway transportation or railway network management. (Lenin, 1959, pp.366-367)

2.2 Keep Contact With the Grass-Roots Unit and Mobilize the Talents

Lenin proposed that in order to spend the least effort, the railway workers should be trained with the management skills according to their practical experience, and the railway workers and other talented personnel should be organized and mobilized to participate into the work of management. (Lenin, 1980, p.160) At the same time, resolute measures should be taken to stop the passenger transport throughout the country, and more military personnel should be sent to assist the work of railway lines, so as to complete the work of grain transportation. (Lenin, 1959, pp.29-30) He also asked the related department to keep in touch with the branch of the Russian Communist Party and the grass-roots organizations of the trade union. (Lenin, 1977, p.193)

2.3 Develop Military Discipline and Unite the Workers

Lenin believed that to carry out the socialist revolutionary war needed the support of the railway, and the railway system needed the order and management. (Lenin, 1959, p.97) In the process of the training and the practice, it was necessary to implement the strictest railway transportation system and establish the iron discipline in rail system. (Lenin, 1959, pp.336-337) For example, a specialist should be sent to carry out irregular inspection to record such links as driving, operation and parking along the way. He stressed that "all the experience in building the Red Army should be applied to the railway labor force, and this army should be raised to the level of the Red Army. Without sacrifice, without iron discipline and without the use of the experts, the Red Army would achieve no victory, nor would the railway army." (Lenin, 1959, p.313) Lenin also pointed out that the second part for the victory of the revolution was to unite the workers. During the Soviet civil war, the domestic transportation

was sabotaged by the White army, the military action was hindered, and the food transportation was stagnated. (Lenin, 1959, pp.272-273) To solve these problems, the workers and peasants were needed. They should build up a Red Army engaged in peaceful labor, restore agriculture and industry, and seek new happiness; they should, as they do in the fighting, carry out the work of restoring transportation with revolutionary perseverance, firm unity, selflessness and speed.

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, Lenin's discussion on railway, combined with the thinking of Marx and Engels' ideas on railway and the specific situation of Soviet Russia, is a reflection on the history of Russia and its situation at home and abroad. It is also an integral part of Lenin's theory on building socialism, which has both important theoretical and practical significance. It experienced a process of formation and development. Before the October Revolution, Lenin discussed the role of railway in the economic development in analyzing the development of Russian capitalism. He believed that at that time the railway transportation industry provided conditions for the development of capitalism and opened up a world market. After the October Revolution, Lenin led the Bolshevik Party to establish the Soviet regime. During the civil war in Soviet Russia, Lenin repeatedly emphasized that the railway transportation played a decisive role during the war time, and that the railway was a fundamental guarantee for the reform and construction of the socialist cause. Besides, he proposed that military and authoritative management with unified requirements should be adopted in railway system, and the railway workers should be relied on to serve for the socialist cause.

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