

About this issue's Cover: Mocking Lenin

In the late 1980s, some point after it closed, street artist Rocky Dobey retrieved an iconic base relief of Lenin's head in profile on a circular mount from a defunct Ukrainian Labour Temple in downtown Toronto (1579 Dupont Street).¹ He then cast over one hundred meticulous replicas in cement with sardonic slogans, including one proclaiming 'Police Morale' that he installed at an out-of-the-way location where Toronto police routinely beat people up to 'send them a message'.² A second notably instance: Dobey cross-hatched Lenin's head with the 'Police Morale' slogan in gold lettering and affixed the relief sculpture to a fiery red disk emblazoned with a fragment from the concluding declaration of the *Communist Manifesto*. 'Workers of the World' merges with 'I sez I sez I sez, I sez to myself, I sez' in circular text spiralling down to 'privilege power, I sez, I sez, I sez, deference, I sez I sez, power, I sez ...' Random lettering rendered in Cyrillic evoked Soviet Communism's aura of authoritarianism as Marx's ponderously abstract political prose seamlessly morphed into self-referential 'Leninist' street slang.³ A third (see cover) took aim at Lenin's enthusiasm for disciplining workers to raise productivity in the name of building socialism.⁴ Emblazoning the portrait with an antithetical declaration – 'A Decrease in Productivity is a Revolutionary Act' – Dobey painted the sculpture gold, leaving passages of exposed cement to suggest advanced weathering. He then pounded chunks off the edges, exerting anarchist labour toward ruination to signify late Soviet Communism's failure to boost production while simultaneously valorising 'slacking off' or going on strike as resistance politics.⁵ These and other abject Lenins were chained to the bottom of hydro polls, mounted on buildings, bridge abutments, and so forth. In a final gesture commemorating the regime's complete collapse in 1991, Dobey buried cement Lenins in public parks, as 'archeological' remnants of a dead era.⁶

Allan Antliff

NOTES

- 1 Rocky Dobey, Interview with Allan Antliff, 5 August 2021. Toronto had two Labour Temples founded in the late 1920s by Ukrainian supporters of the Soviet Union: the first (f. 1927) at a central location (300 Bathurst Street) and the second, smaller temple at 1579 Dupont Street in Toronto's west end. See

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- Rhonda L. Hinker, *Perogies and Politics: Canada's Ukrainian Left, 1891–1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
- 2 Rocky Dobey, Interview with Allan Antliff, 5 August 2021.
 - 3 The ubiquitous of the Lenin cult and its role in the Communist movement has been subject to numerous studies, notably, Kevin Morgan, *International Communism and the Cult of the Individual: Tribunes and Martyrs under Lenin and Stalin* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017). The path-breaking study is Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).
 - 4 For or an overview of Lenin's programme for building socialism through disciplinary, State-organised factory organisation and top-down productivity drives, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). Lenin's programme followed from his understanding of Marxism, namely that socialism was premised on 'an immense increase in the productivity of labour' to ensure a society of abundance. See V.I. Lenin, 'The Teaching of Mark Marx', *The Classics of Marxism: Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 194), pp29-30.
 - 5 The late Soviet Union was beset with strikes as the economy crumbled. For an overview of the multifaceted failure of its command economy, see David R. Marples, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union: 1985-1991* (Person Educational Ltd., 2004), pp27-38.
 - 6 Rocky Dobey, Interview with Allan Antliff, 5 June 2022.