

The Russian Revolution



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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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Contents:

[Fundamental Significance of the Russian Revolution](#)

[The Bolshevik Land Policy](#)

[The Nationalities Question](#)

[The Constituent Assembly](#)

[The Question of Suffrage](#)

[The Problem of Dictatorship](#)

[The Struggle Against Corruption](#)

[Democracy and Dictatorship](#)

CHAPTER 1

FUNDAMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution is the mightiest event of the World War. Its outbreak, its unexampled radicalism, its enduring consequences, constitute the clearest condemnation of the lying phrases which official Social-Democracy so zealously supplied at the beginning of the war as an ideological cover for German imperialism's campaign of conquest. I refer to the phrases concerning the mission of German bayonets, which were to overthrow Russian Czarism and free its oppressed peoples.

The mighty sweep of the revolution in Russia, the profound results which have transformed all class relationships, raised all social and economic problems, and, with the fatality of their own inner logic developed consistently from the first phase of the bourgeois republic to ever more advanced stages, finally reducing the fall of Czarism to the status of a mere minor episode – all these things show as plain as day that the freeing of Russia was not an achievement of the war and the military defeat of Czarism, not some service of “German bayonets in German fists,” as the *Neue Zeit* under [Kautsky's](#) editorship once promised in an editorial. They show, on the contrary, that the freeing of Russia had its roots deep in the soil of its own land and was fully matured internally. The military adventure of German imperialism under the ideological blessing of German Social-Democracy did not bring about the revolution in Russia but only served to interrupt it at first, to postpone it for a while after its first stormy rising tide in the years 1911-13, and then, after its outbreak, created for it the most difficult and abnormal conditions.

Moreover, for every thinking observer, these developments are a decisive refutation of the doctrinaire theory which Kautsky shared with the Government Social-Democrats,^[1] according to which Russia, as an economically backward and predominantly agrarian land, was supposed not to be ripe for social revolution and [proletarian dictatorship](#). This theory, which regards only a *bourgeois* revolution as feasible in Russia, is also the theory of the

opportunist wing of the Russian labor movement, of the so-called Mensheviks, under the experienced leadership of Axelrod and Dan. And from this conception follow the tactics of the coalition of socialists in Russia with bourgeois liberalism. On this basic conception of the Russian Revolution, from which follow automatically their detailed positions on questions of tactics, both the Russian and the German opportunists find themselves in agreement with the German Government Socialists. According to the opinion of all three, the Russian Revolution should have called a halt at the stage which German imperialism in its conduct of the war had set as its noble task, according to the mythology of the German Social-Democracy, i.e., it should have stopped with the overthrow of Czarism. According to this view, if the revolution has gone beyond that point and has set as its task the dictatorship of the proletariat, this is simply a mistake of the radical wing of the Russian labor movement, the Bolsheviks. And all difficulties which the revolution has met with in its further course, and all disorders it has suffered are pictured as purely a result of this fateful error.

Theoretically, this doctrine (recommended as the fruit of “Marxist thinking” by the **Vorwärts** of Stampfer and by Kautsky alike) follows from the original “Marxist” discovery that the socialist revolution is a national and, so to speak, a domestic affair in each modern country taken by itself. Of course, in the blue mists of abstract formulae, a Kautsky knows very well how to trace the worldwide connections of capital which make of all modern countries a single integrated organism. The problems of the Russian Revolution, moreover – since it is a product of international developments plus the agrarian question – cannot possibly be solved within the limits of bourgeois society.

Practically, this same doctrine represents an attempt to get rid of any responsibility for the course of the Russian Revolution, so far as that responsibility concerns the international, and especially the German, proletariat, and to deny the international connections of this revolution. It is not Russia’s unripeness which has been proved by the events of the war and the Russian Revolution, but the unripeness of the German proletariat for the fulfillment of its historic tasks. And to make this fully clear is the first task of a critical examination of the Russian Revolution.

The fate of the revolution in Russia depended fully upon international events. That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political far-sightedness and firmness

of principle and of the bold scope of their policies. In it is visible the mighty advance which capitalist development has made in the last decade. The revolution of 1905-07 roused only a faint echo in Europe. Therefore, it had to remain a mere opening chapter. Continuation and conclusion were tied up with the further development of Europe.

Clearly, not uncritical apologetics but penetrating and thoughtful criticism is alone capable of bringing out treasures of experiences and teachings. Dealing as we are with the very first experiment in proletarian dictatorship in world history (and one taking place at that under the hardest conceivable conditions, in the midst of the world-wide conflagration and chaos of the imperialist mass slaughter, caught in the coils of the most reactionary military power in Europe, and accompanied by the most complete failure on the part of the international working class), it would be a crazy idea to think that every last thing done or left undone in an experiment with the dictatorship of the proletariat under such abnormal conditions represented the very pinnacle of perfection. On the contrary, elementary conceptions of socialist politics and an insight into their historically necessary prerequisites force us to understand that under such fatal conditions even the most gigantic idealism and the most storm-tested revolutionary energy are incapable of realizing democracy and socialism but only distorted attempts at either.

To make this stand out clearly in all its fundamental aspects and consequences is the elementary duty of the socialists of all countries; for only on the background of this bitter knowledge can we measure the enormous magnitude of the responsibility of the international proletariat itself for the fate of the Russian Revolution. Furthermore, it is only on this basis that the decisive importance of the resolute international action of the proletariat can become effective, without which action as its necessary support, even the greatest energy and the greatest sacrifices of the proletariat in a single country must inevitably become tangled in a maze of contradiction and blunders.

There is no doubt either that the wise heads at the helm of the Russian Revolution, that Lenin and Trotsky on their thorny path beset by traps of all kinds, have taken many a decisive step only with the greatest inner hesitation and with the most violent inner opposition. And surely nothing can be farther from their thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the midst of the roaring whirlpool of events, should be regarded by the International as a

shining example of socialist polity toward which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order.

It would be no less wrong to fear that a critical examination of the road so far taken by the Russian Revolution would serve to weaken the respect for and the attractive power of the example of the Russian Revolution, which alone can overcome the fatal inertia of the German masses. Nothing is farther from the truth. An awakening of the revolutionary energy of the working class in Germany can never again be called forth in the spirit of the guardianship methods of the German Social-Democracy of late-lamented memory. It can never again be conjured forth by any spotless authority, be it that of our own "higher committees" or that of "the Russian example." Not by the creation of a revolutionary hurrah-spirit, but quite the contrary: only by an insight into all the fearful seriousness, all the complexity of the tasks involved, only as a result of political maturity and independence of spirit, only as a result of a capacity for critical judgement on the part of the masses, whose capacity was systematically killed by the Social-Democracy for decades under various pretexts, only thus can the genuine capacity for historical action be born in the German proletariat. To concern one's self with a critical analysis of the Russian Revolution in all its historical connections is the best training for the German and the international working class for the tasks which confront them as an outgrowth of the present situation.

The first period of the Russian Revolution, from its beginning in March to the October Revolution, corresponds exactly in its general outlines to the course of development of both the Great English Revolution and the Great French Revolution. It is the typical course of every first general reckoning of the revolutionary forces begotten within the womb of bourgeois society.

Its development moves naturally in an ascending line: from moderate beginnings to ever-greater radicalization of aims and, parallel with that, from a coalition of classes and parties to the sole rule of the radical party.

At the outset in March 1917, the "[Cadets](#)", that is the liberal bourgeoisie, stood at the head of the revolution. The first general rising of the revolutionary tide swept every one and everything along with it. The Fourth Duma, ultra-reactionary product of the ultra-reactionary four-class right of suffrage and arising out of the *coup d'état*, was suddenly converted into an organ of the revolution. All bourgeois parties, even those of the nationalistic

right, suddenly formed a phalanx against absolutism. The latter fell at the first attack almost without a struggle, like an organ that had died and needed only to be touched to drop off. The brief effort, too, of the liberal bourgeoisie to save at least the throne and the dynasty collapsed within a few hours. The sweeping march of events leaped in days and hours over distances that formerly, in France, took decades to traverse. In this, it became clear that Russia was realizing the result of a century of European development, and above all, that the revolution of 1917 was a direct continuation of that of 1905-07, and not a gift of the German “liberator.” The movement of March 1917 linked itself directly onto the point where, ten years earlier, its work had broken off. The democratic republic was the complete, internally ripened product of the very onset of the revolution.

Now, however, began the second and more difficult task. From the very first moment, the driving force of the revolution was the mass of the urban proletariat. However, its demands did not limit themselves to the realization of political democracy but were concerned with the burning question of international policy – immediate peace. At the same time, the revolution embraced the mass of the army, which raised the same demand for immediate peace, and the mass of the peasants, who pushed the agrarian question into the foreground, that agrarian question which since 1905 had been the very axis of the revolution. Immediate peace and land – from these two aims the internal split in the revolutionary phalanx followed inevitably. The demand for immediate peace was in most irreconcilable opposition to the imperialist tendencies of the liberal bourgeoisie for whom Milyukov was the spokesman. On the other hand, the land question was a terrifying spectre for the other wing of the bourgeoisie, the rural landowners. And, in addition, it represented an attack on the sacred principle of private property in general, a touchy point for the entire propertied class.

Thus, on the very day after the first victories of the revolution, there began an inner struggle within it over the two burning questions – peace and land. The liberal bourgeoisie entered upon the tactics of dragging out things and evading them. The laboring masses, the army, the peasantry, pressed forward ever more impetuously. There can be no doubt that with the questions of peace and land, the fate of the political democracy of the republic was linked up. The bourgeois classes, carried away by the first stormy wave of the revolution, had permitted themselves to be dragged along to the point of republican government. Now they began to seek a base of support in the rear and silently

to organize a counter-revolution. The Kaledin Cossack campaign against Petersburg was a clear expression of this tendency. Had the attack been successful, then not only the fate of the peace and land questions would have been sealed, but the fate of the republic as well. Military dictatorship, a reign of terror against the proletariat, and then return to monarchy, would have been the inevitable results.

From this we can judge the utopian and fundamentally reactionary characters of the tactics by which the Russian “Kautskyans” or Mensheviks permitted themselves to be guided. Hardened in their addiction to the myth of the bourgeois character of the Russian Revolution – for the time being, you see, Russia is not supposed to be ripe for the social revolution! – they clung desperately to a coalition with the bourgeois liberals. But this means a union of elements which had been split by the natural internal development of the revolution and had come into the sharpest conflict with each other. The Axelrods and Dans wanted to collaborate at all costs with those classes and parties from which came the greatest threat of danger to the revolution and to its first conquest, democracy.

It is especially astonishing to observe how this industrious man (Kautsky), by his tireless labor of peaceful and methodical writing during the four years of the World War, has torn one hole after another in the fabric of socialism. It is a labor from which socialism emerges riddled like a sieve, without a whole spot left in it. The uncritical indifference with which his followers regarded this industrious labor of their official theoretician and swallow each of his new discoveries without so much as batting an eyelash, finds its only counterpart in the indifference with which the followers of Scheidemann and Co. look on while the latter punch socialism full of holes in practice. Indeed, the two labors completely supplement each other. Since the outbreak of the war, Kautsky, the official guardian of the temple of Marxism, has really only been doing in theory the same things which the Scheidemans have been doing in practice, namely: (1) the International an instrument of peace; (2) disarmament, the League of Nations and nationalism; and finally (3) democracy *not* socialism.^[2]

In this situation, the Bolshevik tendency performs the historic service of having proclaimed from the very beginning, and having followed with iron consistency, those tactics which alone could save democracy and drive the revolution ahead. All power exclusively in the hands of the worker and peasant masses, in the hands of the soviets – this was indeed the only way out of the

difficulty into which the revolution had gotten; this was the sword stroke with which they cut the Gordian knot, freed the revolution from a narrow blind-alley and opened up for it an untrammelled path into the free and open fields.

The party of Lenin was thus the only one in Russia which grasped the true interest of the revolution in that first period. It was the element that drove the revolution forward, and, thus it was the only party which really carried on a socialist policy.

It is this which makes clear, too, why it was that the Bolsheviks, though they were at the beginning of the revolution a persecuted, slandered and hunted minority attacked on all sides, arrived within the shortest time to the head of the revolution and were able to bring under their banner all the genuine masses of the people: the urban proletariat, the army, the peasants, as well as the revolutionary elements of democracy, the left wing of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The real situation, in which the Russian Revolution found itself, narrowed down in a few months to the alternative: victory of the counter-revolution or dictatorship of the proletariat – Kaledin or Lenin. Such was the objective situation, just as it quickly presents itself in every revolution after the first intoxication is over, and as it presented itself in Russia as a result of the concrete, burning questions of peace and land, for which there was no solution within the framework of bourgeois revolution.

In this, the Russian Revolution has but confirmed the basic lesson of every great revolution, the law of its being, which decrees: either the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy, resolute tempo, break down all barriers with an iron hand and place its goals ever farther ahead, or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution. To stand still, to mark time on one spot, to be contented with the first goal it happens to reach, is never possible in revolution. And he who tries to apply the home-made wisdom derived from parliamentary battles between frogs and mice to the field of revolutionary tactics only shows thereby that the very psychology and laws of existence of revolution are alien to him and that all historical experience is to him a book sealed with seven seals.

Take the course of the English Revolution from its onset in 1642. There the logic of things made it necessary that the first feeble vacillations of the

Presbyterians, whose leaders deliberately evaded a decisive battle with Charles I and victory over him, should inevitably be replaced by the Independents, who drove them out of Parliament and seized the power for themselves. And in the same way, within the army of the Independents, the lower petty-bourgeois mass of the soldiers, the Lilburnian “Levellers” constituted the driving force of the entire Independent movement; just as, finally, the proletarian elements within the mass of the soldiers, the elements that went farthest in their aspirations for social revolution and who found their expression in the Digger movement, constituted in their turn the leaven of the democratic party of the “Levellers.”

Without the moral influence of the revolutionary proletarian elements on the general mass of the soldiers, without the pressure of the democratic mass of the soldiers upon the bourgeois upper layers of the party of the Independents, there would have been no “purge” of the Long Parliament of its Presbyterians, nor any victorious ending to the war with the army of the Cavaliers and Scots, or any trial and execution of Charles I, nor any abolition of the House of Lords and proclamation of a republic.

And what happened in the Great French Revolution? Here, after four years of struggle, the seizure of power by the Jacobins proved to be the only means of saving the conquests of the revolution, of achieving a republic, of smashing feudalism, of organizing a revolutionary defense against inner as well as outer foes, of suppressing the conspiracies of counter-revolution and spreading the revolutionary wave from France to all Europe.

Kautsky and his Russian co-religionists who wanted to see the Russian Revolution keep the “bourgeois character” of its first phase, are an exact counterpart of those German and English liberals of the preceding century who distinguished between the two well-known periods of the Great French Revolution: the “good” revolution of the first Girondin phase and the “bad” one after the Jacobin uprising. The Liberal shallowness of this conception of history, to be sure, doesn’t care to understand that, without the uprising of the “immoderate” Jacobins, even the first, timid and half-hearted achievements of the Girondin phase would soon have been buried under the ruins of the revolution, and that the real alternative to Jacobin dictatorship – as the iron course of historical development posed the question in 1793 – was not “moderate” democracy, but ... restoration of the Bourbons! The “golden mean” cannot be maintained in any revolution. The law of its nature demands

a quick decision: either the locomotive drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent, or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom; and those who would keep it with their weak powers half way up the hill, it drags down with it irredeemably into the abyss.

Thus it is clear that in every revolution only that party capable of seizing the leadership and power which has the courage to issue the appropriate watch-words for driving the revolution ahead, and the courage to draw all the necessary conclusions from the situation. This makes clear, too, the miserable role of the Russian Mensheviks, the Dans, Zeretellis, etc., who had enormous influence on the masses at the beginning, but, after their prolonged wavering and after they had fought with both hands and feet against taking over power and responsibility, were driven ignobly off the stage.

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party and which, by the slogan – “All power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry” – insured the continued development of the revolution.

Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of “winning a majority of the people,” which problem has ever weighed on the German Social-Democracy like a nightmare. As bred-in-the-bone disciples of parliamentary cretinism,^[3] these German Social-Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the home-made wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority. The same, they say, applies to a revolution: first let’s become a “majority.” The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that’s the way the road runs.

Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things (“all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry”), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hid like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks immediately set as the aim of this seizure of power a complete, far-reaching revolutionary program; not the safeguarding of bourgeois democracy, but a dictatorship of the proletariat for the purpose of realizing socialism. Thereby they won for themselves the imperishable historic distinction of having for the first time proclaimed the final aim of socialism as the direct program of practical politics.

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and all the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honor and capacity which western Social-Democracy lacked was represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism.

FOOTNOTES

[1] During the war the German Social-Democracy divided into three factions: the majority leadership, which openly supported and entered into the Imperial government; the Kautsky section, which declined responsibility for the conduct of the war but supplied many of the theoretical arguments for those who accepted such responsibility; and the section led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, which openly opposed the war and counterposed international solidarity and proletarian revolution to it.

[2] Here, as at various points in the manuscript, the passage is still in the form of rough notations which Rosa Luxemburg intended to complete later. Her murder by military agents of the Social-Democratic coalition government prevented her from completing and revising the work. The expression, “the International an instrument of peace” refers to the excuses Kautsky gave for its bankruptcy during the war (“an instrument of peace is not suited to times of war”). It probably refers also to the theory that the International, being peaceful, is not an instrument for revolutionary struggle. Kautsky substituted utopian talk of disarmament (without the removal of the causes and roots of war!) for a revolutionary struggle against war. He provided apologetics for the League of Nations which was supposed to have banished war from the world, and he justified socialists who abandoned internationalism, supported their own governments and ruling classes, and became in theory and practice

nationalists instead of internationalists. When the struggle for socialism began in earnest, the Scheidemanns defended capitalism against socialism in practice, while Kautsky did so in theory by explaining that capitalist “democracy” was democracy in the abstract, and that they were defending “democracy.” Hence the third point means: the advocacy of democracy as against socialism.

The passage in slightly expanded form might read something as follows:

(1) the International as an instrument for peace-time only and for the maintenance of peace; (2) advocacy of the doctrines of disarmament, apologetics for the League of Nations and nationalism against internationalism; (3) and the advocacy of “democracy” as against socialism.

[3] A term first applied by Marx to those parliamentarians who think that all history is decided by motions, votes and points of parliamentary debate.

CHAPTER 2

THE BOLSHEVIK LAND POLICY

The Bolsheviks are the historic heirs of the English Levellers and the French Jacobins. But the concrete task which faced them after the seizure of power was incomparably more difficult than that of their historical predecessors. (Importance of the agrarian question. Even in 1905. Then, in the Third Duma, the right-wing peasants! The peasant question and defense, the army.)^[4]

Surely the solution of the problem by the direct, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants was the shortest, simplest, most clean-cut formula to achieve two diverse things: to break down large land-ownership, and immediately to bind the peasants to the revolutionary government. As a political measure to fortify the proletarian socialist government, it was an excellent tactical move. Unfortunately, however, it had two sides to it; and the reverse side consisted in the fact that the direct seizure of the land by the peasants has in general nothing at all in common with socialist economy.

A socialist transformation of economic relationships presupposes two things so far as agrarian relationships are concerned:

In the first place, only the nationalization of the large landed estates, as the technically most advanced and most concentrated means and methods of agrarian production, can serve as the point of departure for the socialist mode of production on the land. Of course, it is not necessary to take away from the small peasant his parcel of land, and we can with confidence leave him to be won over voluntarily by the superior advantages first of union in cooperation and then finally of inclusion in the general socialized economy as a whole. Still, every socialist economic reform on the land must obviously begin with large and medium land-ownership. Here the property right must first of all be turned over to the nation, or to the state, which, with a socialist government, amounts to the same thing; for it is this alone which affords the possibility of organizing agricultural production in accord with the requirements of interrelated, large-scale socialist production.

Moreover, in the second place, it is one of the prerequisites of this transformation, that the separation between rural economy and industry which is so characteristic of bourgeois society, should be ended in such a way as to bring about a mutual interpenetration and fusion of both, to clear the way for the planning of both agrarian and industrial production according to a unified point of view. Whatever individual form the practical economic arrangements may take – whether through urban communes, as some propose, or directed from a governmental center – in any event, it must be preceded by a reform introduced from the center, and that in turn must be preceded by the nationalization of the land. The nationalization of the large and middle-sized estates and the union of industry and agriculture – these are two fundamental requirements of any socialist economic reform, without which there is no socialism.

That the Soviet government in Russia has not carried through these mighty reforms – who can reproach them for that! It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that, in the brief period of their rule, in the center of the gripping whirlpool of domestic and foreign struggles, ringed about by countless foes and opponents – to expect that under such circumstances they should already have solved, or even tackled, one of the most difficult tasks, indeed, we can safely say, *the* most difficult task of the socialist transformation of society! Even in the West, under the most favorable conditions, once we have come to power, we too will break many a tooth on this hard nut before we are out of the worst of the thousands of complicated difficulties of this gigantic task!

A socialist government which has come to power must in any event do one thing: it must take measures which lead in the direction of that fundamental prerequisite for a later socialist reform of agriculture; it must at least avoid everything which may bar the way to those measures.

Now the slogan launched by the Bolsheviki, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants, necessarily tended in the opposite direction. Not only is it not a socialist measure; it even cuts off the way to such measures; it piles up insurmountable obstacles to the socialist transformation of agrarian agriculture.

The seizure of the landed estates by the peasants according to the short and precise slogan of Lenin and his friends – “*Go and take the land for yourselves*” –

simply led to the sudden, chaotic conversion of large landownership into peasant landownership. What was created is not social property but a new form of private property, namely, the breaking up of large estates into medium and small estates, or relatively advanced large units of production into primitive small units which operate with technical means from the time of the Pharaohs.

Nor is that all! Through these measures and the chaotic and purely arbitrary manner of their execution, differentiation in landed property, far from being eliminated, was even further sharpened. Although the Bolsheviks called upon the peasantry to form peasant committees so that the seizure of the nobles' estates might, in some fashion, be made into a collective act, yet it is clear that this general advice could not change anything in the real practice and real relations of power on the land. With or without committees, it was the rich peasants and usurers who made up the village bourgeoisie possessing the actual power in the hands in every Russian village, that surely became the chief beneficiaries of the agrarian revolution. Without being there to see, any one can figure out for himself that in the course of the distribution of the land, social and economic inequality among the peasants was not eliminated but rather increased, and that class antagonisms were further sharpened. The shift of power, however, took place to the *disadvantage* of the interests of the proletariat and of socialism. Formerly, there was only a small caste of noble and capitalist landed proprietors and a small minority of rich village bourgeoisie to oppose a socialist reform on the land. And their expropriation by a revolutionary mass movement of the people is mere child's play. But now, after the "seizure," as an opponent of any attempt at socialization of agrarian production, there is an enormous, newly developed and powerful mass of owning peasants who will defend their newly won property with tooth and nail against every attack. The question of the future socialization of agrarian economy – that is, any socialization of production in general in Russia – has now become a question of opposition and of struggle between the urban proletariat and the mass of the peasantry. How sharp this antagonism has already become is shown by the peasant boycott of the cities, in which they withhold the means of existence to carry on speculation in them, in quite the same way as the Prussian Junker does.

The French small peasant became the boldest defender of the Great French Revolution which had given him land confiscated from the *émigrés*. As Napoleonic soldier, he carried the banner of France to victory, crossed all

Europe and smashed feudalism to pieces in one land after another. Lenin and his friends might have expected a similar result from their agrarian slogan. However, now that the Russian peasant has seized the land with his own fist, he does not even dream of defending Russia and the revolution to which he owes the land. He has dug obstinately into his new possessions and abandoned the revolution to its enemies, the state to decay, the urban population to famine.

(Lenin's speech on the necessity of centralization of industry, nationalization of banks, of trade and of industry. Why not of the land? Here, on the contrary, decentralization and private property.)

(Lenin's own agrarian program before the revolution was different. The slogan taken over from the much condemned Socialist-Revolutionaries, or rather, from the spontaneous peasant movement.)

(In order to introduce socialist principles into agrarian relations, the Soviet government now seeks to create agrarian communes out of proletarians, mostly city unemployed. But it is easy to see in advance that the results of these efforts must remain so insignificant as to disappear when measured against the whole scope of agrarian relations. After the most appropriate starting points for socialist economy, the large estates, have been broken up into small units, now they are trying to build up communist model production units out of petty beginnings. Under the circumstances these communes can claim to be considered only as experiments and not as general social reform. Grain monopoly with bounties. Now, *post-festum*, they want to introduce the class war into the village!)[4]

The Leninist agrarian reform has created a new and powerful layer of popular enemies of socialism on the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the noble large landowners.

FOOTNOTES

[4] Here, as in a number of other places, the manuscript consists only of rough notes which Rosa Luxemburg intended to expand later. As the meaning of these passages is in general clear, I have preferred to translate them literally, just as the author left them.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATIONALITIES QUESTION

The Bolsheviks are in part responsible for the fact that the military defeat was transformed into the collapse and breakdown of Russia. Moreover, the Bolsheviks themselves have, to a great extent, sharpened the objective difficulties of this situation by a slogan which they placed in the foreground of their policies: the so-called right of self-determination of peoples, or – something which was really implicit in this slogan – the disintegration of Russia.

The formula of the right of the various nationalities of the Russian empire to determine their fate independently “even to the point of the right of governmental separation from Russia,” was proclaimed again with doctrinaire obstinacy as a special battle cry of Lenin and his comrades during their opposition against Miliukovist, and then Kerenskyan imperialism.^[5] It constituted the axis of their inner policy after the October Revolution also, and it constituted the entire platform of the Bolsheviks at Brest-Litovsk; all they had to oppose to the display of force by German imperialism.

One is immediately struck with the obstinacy and rigid consistency with which Lenin and his comrades stuck to this slogan, a slogan which is in sharp contradiction to their otherwise outspoken centralism in politics as well as to the attitude they have assumed towards other democratic principles. While they showed a quite cool contempt for the Constituent Assembly, universal suffrage, freedom of press and assemblage, in short, for the whole apparatus of the basic democratic liberties of the people which, taken all together, constituted the “right of self-determination” inside Russia, they treated the right of self-determination of peoples as a jewel of democratic policy for the sake of which all practical considerations of real criticism had to be stilled. While they did not permit themselves to be imposed upon in the slightest by the plebiscite for the Constituent Assembly in Russia, a plebiscite on the basis of the most democratic suffrage in the world, carried out in the full freedom of a popular republic, and while they simply declared this plebiscite null and void on the basis of a very sober evaluation of its results, still they championed

the “popular vote” of the foreign nationalities of Russia on the question of which land they wanted to belong to, as the true palladium of all freedom and democracy, the unadulterated quintessence of the will of the peoples and as the court of last resort in questions of the political fate of nations.

The contradiction that is so obvious here is all the harder to understand since the democratic forms of political life in each land, as we shall see, actually involve the most valuable and even indispensable foundations of socialist policy, whereas the famous “right of self-determination of nations” is nothing but hollow, petty-bourgeois phraseology and humbug.

Indeed, what is this right supposed to signify? It belongs to the ABC of socialist policy that socialism opposes every form of oppression, including also that of one nation by another.

If, despite all this, such generally sober and critical politicians as Lenin and Trotsky and their friends, who have nothing but an ironical shrug for every sort of utopian phrase such as disarmament, league of nations, etc., have in this case made a hollow phrase of exactly the same kind into their special hobby, this arose, it seems to us, as a result of some kind of policy made to order for the occasion. Lenin and his comrades clearly calculated that there was no surer method of binding the many foreign peoples within the Russian Empire to the cause of the revolution, to the cause of the socialist proletariat, than that of offering them, in the name of the revolution and of socialism, the most extreme and most unlimited freedom to determine their own fate. This was analogous to the policy of the Bolsheviki towards the Russian peasants, whose land-hunger was satisfied by the slogan of direct seizure of the noble estates and who were supposed to be bound thereby to the banner of the revolution and the proletarian government. In both cases, unfortunately, the calculation was entirely wrong.

While Lenin and his comrades clearly expected that, as champions of national freedom even to the extent of “separation,” they would turn Finland, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic countries, the Caucasus, etc., into so many faithful allies of the Russian Revolution, we have instead witnessed the opposite spectacle. One after another, these “nations” used the freshly granted freedom to ally themselves with German imperialism against the Russian Revolution as its mortal enemy, and, under German protection, to carry the banner of counter-revolution into Russia itself. The little game with the

Ukraine at Brest, which caused a decisive turn of affairs in those negotiations and brought about the entire inner and outer political situation at present prevailing for the Bolsheviks, is a perfect case in point. The conduct of Finland, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic lands, the peoples of the Caucasus, shows most convincingly that we are not dealing here with an exceptional case, but with a typical phenomenon.

To be sure, in all these cases, it was really not the “people” who engaged in these reactionary policies, but only the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes, who – in sharpest opposition to their own proletarian masses – perverted the “national right of self-determination” into an instrument of their counter-revolutionary class politics. But – and here we come to the very heart of the question – it is in this that the utopian, petty-bourgeois character of this nationalistic slogan resides: that in the midst of the crude realities of class society and when class antagonisms are sharpened to the uttermost, it is simply converted into a means of bourgeois class rule. The Bolsheviks were to be taught to their own great hurt and that of the revolution, that under the rule of capitalism there is no self-determination of peoples, that in a class society each class of the nation strives to “determine itself” in a different fashion, and that, for the bourgeois classes, the standpoint of national freedom is fully subordinated to that of class rule. The Finnish bourgeoisie, like the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, were unanimous in preferring the violent rule of Germany to national freedom, if the latter should be bound up with Bolshevism.

The hope of transforming these actual class relationships somehow into their opposite and of getting a majority vote for union with the Russian Revolution by depending on the revolutionary masses – if it was seriously meant by Lenin and Trotsky – represented an incomprehensible degree of optimism. And if it was only meant as a tactical flourish in the duel with the German politics of force, then it represented dangerous playing with fire. Even without German military occupation, the famous “popular plebiscite,” supposing that it had come to that in the border states, would have yielded a result, in all probability, which would have given the Bolsheviks little cause for rejoicing; for we must take into consideration the psychology of the peasant masses and of great sections of the petty bourgeoisie, and the thousand ways in which the bourgeoisie could have influenced the vote. Indeed, it can be taken as an unbreakable rule in these matters of plebiscites on the national question that the ruling class will either know how to prevent them where it doesn't suit

their purpose, or where they somehow occur, will know how to influence their results by all sorts of means, big and little, the same means which make it impossible to introduce socialism by a popular vote.

The mere fact that the question of national aspirations and tendencies towards separation were injected at all into the midst of the revolutionary struggle, and were even pushed into the foreground and made into the shibboleth of socialist and revolutionary policy as a result of the Brest peace, has served to bring the greatest confusion into socialist ranks and has actually destroyed the position of the proletariat in the border countries.

In Finland, so long as the socialist proletariat fought as a part of the closed Russian revolutionary phalanx, it possessed a position of dominant power: it had the majority in the Finnish parliament, in the army; it had reduced its own bourgeoisie to complete impotence, and was master of the situation within its borders.

Or take the Ukraine. At the beginning of the century, before the tomfoolery of “Ukrainian nationalism” with its silver rubles and its “Universals”^[6] and Lenin’s hobby of an “independent Ukraine” had been invented, the Ukraine was the stronghold of the Russian revolutionary movement. From there, from Rostov, from Odessa, from the Donetz region, flowed out the first lava-streams of the revolution (as early as 1902-04) which kindled all South Russia into a sea of flame, thereby preparing the uprising of 1905. The same thing was repeated in the present revolution, in which the South Russian proletariat supplied the picked troops of the proletarian phalanx. Poland and the Baltic lands have been since 1905 the mightiest and most dependable hearths of revolution, and in them the socialist proletariat has played an outstanding role.

How does it happen then that in all these lands the counter-revolution suddenly triumphs? The nationalist movement, just because it tore the proletariat loose from Russia, crippled it thereby, and delivered it into the hands of the bourgeoisie of the border countries.

Instead of acting in the same spirit of genuine international class policy which they represented in other matters, instead of working for the most compact union of the revolutionary forces throughout the area of the Empire, instead of defending tooth and nail the integrity of the Russian Empire as an area of revolution and opposing to all forms of separatism the solidarity and

inseparability of the proletarians in all lands within the sphere of the Russian Revolution as the highest command of politics, the Bolsheviki, by their hollow nationalistic phraseology concerning the “right of self-determination to the point of separation,” have accomplished quite the contrary and supplied the bourgeoisie in all border states with the finest, the most desirable pretext, the very banner of the counter-revolutionary efforts. Instead of warning the proletariat in the border countries against all forms of separatism as mere bourgeois traps, they did nothing but confuse the masses in all the border countries by their slogan and delivered them up to the demagogy of the bourgeois classes. By this nationalistic demand they brought on the disintegration of Russia itself, pressed into the enemy’s hand the knife which it was to thrust into the heart of the Russian Revolution.

To be sure, without the help of German imperialism, without “the German rifle butts in German fists,” as Kautsky’s **Neue Zeit** put it, the Lubinskys and other little scoundrels of the Ukraine, the Erichs and Mannerheims of Finland, and the Baltic barons, would never have gotten the better of the socialist masses of the workers in their respective lands. But national separatism was the Trojan horse inside which the German “comrades,” bayonet in hand, made their entrance into all those lands. The real class antagonisms and relations of military force brought about German intervention. But the Bolsheviki provided the ideology which masked this campaign of counter-revolution; they strengthened the position of the bourgeoisie and weakened that of the proletariat.

The best proof is the Ukraine, which was to play so frightful a role in the fate of the Russian Revolution. Ukrainian nationalism in Russia was something quite different from, let us say, Czechish, Polish or Finnish nationalism in that the former was a mere whim, a folly of a few dozen petty-bourgeois intellectuals without the slightest roots in the economic, political or psychological relationships of the country; it was without any historical tradition, since the Ukraine never formed a nation or government, was without any national culture, except for the reactionary-romantic poems of Shevschenko. It is exactly as if, one fine day, the people living in the *Wasserkante*^[2] should want to found a new Low-German (*Plattdeutsche*) nation and government! And this ridiculous pose of a few university professors and students was inflated into a political force by Lenin and his comrades through their doctrinaire agitation concerning the “right of self-determination including etc.” To what was at first a mere farce they lent such importance that

the farce became a matter of the most deadly seriousness – not as a serious national movement for which, afterward as before, there are no roots at all, but as a shingle and rallying flag of counter-revolution! At Brest, out of this addled egg crept the German bayonets.

There are times when such phrases have a very real meaning in the history of the class struggles. It is the unhappy lot of socialism that in this World War it was given to it to supply the ideological screens for counter-revolutionary policy. At the outbreak of the war, German Social-Democracy hastened to deck the predatory expedition of German imperialism with an ideological shield from the lumber-room of Marxism by declaring it to be a liberating expedition against Russian Czarism, such as our old teachers (Marx and Engels) had longed for. And to the lot of the Bolsheviki, who were the very antipodes of our government socialists, did it fall to supply grist for the mill of counter-revolution with their phrases about self-determination of peoples; and thereby to supply not alone the ideology for the strangling of the Russian Revolution itself, but even for the plans for settling the entire crisis arising out of the World War.

We have good reason to examine very carefully the policies of the Bolsheviki in this regard. The “right of self-determination of peoples,” coupled with the League of Nations and disarmament by the grace of President Wilson, constitute the battle-cry under which the coming reckoning of international socialism with the bourgeoisie is to be settled. It is obvious that the phrases concerning self-determination and the entire nationalist movement, which at present constitute the greatest danger for international socialism, have experienced an extraordinary strengthening from the Russian Revolution and the Brest negotiations. We shall yet have to go into this platform thoroughly. The tragic fate of these phrases in the Russian Revolution, on the thorns of which the Bolsheviki were themselves, destined to be caught and bloodily scratched, must serve the international proletariat as a warning and lesson.

And from this there followed the dictatorship of Germany from the time of the Brest treaty to the time of the “supplementary treaty.” The two hundred expiatory sacrifices in Moscow. From this situation arose the terror and suppression of democracy.^[8]

[5] Luxemburg refers to the governments of Miliukov and Kerensky were two regimes preceding that of the Bolsheviks during the earlier months of 1917, after the downfall of the Czar. Both of these governments attempted to continue the war for the imperialist objectives of the old Russian Empire and denied the right of the national minorities to separation from Russia.

[6] The manuscript speaks of *Karbowentzen*, which I take to be a Germanization of the Russian word for “silver rouble,” probably referring to a special Ukrainian coinage, and of “*Universals*,” the name applied to certain manifestoes or declarations of the Ukrainian Rada (national assembly).

[7] A region in Germany where the German dialect known as *Plattdeutsch* is spoken.

[8] Six weeks after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, there was a codicil or supplement signed. The “two hundred expiatory sacrifices” may refer to the execution of persons charged with complicity in the assassination of the German ambassador to Russia, Count von Mirbach. He was shot by members of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary party, which had cooperated with the Bolsheviks until the signing of the Brest treaty and then went into opposition and tried by various means to prevent the signing of the treaty. From this time forward, the Russian government was a one-party government

CHAPTER 4

THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

Let us test this matter further by taking a few examples.

The well-known dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in November 1917 played an outstanding role in the policy of the Bolsheviks. This measure was decisive for their further position; to a certain point it represented a turning point in their tactics.

It is a fact that Lenin and his comrades were stormily demanding the calling of a Constituent Assembly up to the time of their October victory, and that the policy of ragging out this matter on the part of the Kerensky government constituted an article in the indictment of that government by the Bolsheviks and was the basis of some of their most violent attacks upon it. Indeed, Trotsky says in his interesting pamphlet, **From October to Brest-Litovsk**, that the October Revolution represented “the salvation of the Constituent Assembly” as well as of the revolution as a whole. “And when we said,” he continues, “that the entrance to the Constituent Assembly could not be reached through the Preliminary Parliament of Zeretelli, but only through the seizure of power by the Soviets, we were entirely right.”

And then, after these declarations, Lenin’s first step after the October Revolution was ... the dissolution of this same Constituent Assembly, to which it was supposed to be an entrance. What reasons could be decisive for so astonishing a turn? Trotsky, in the above-mentioned pamphlet, discusses the matter thoroughly, and we will set down his argument here:

“While the months preceding the October Revolution were a time of leftward movement on the part of the masses and of an elemental flow of workers, soldiers and peasants towards the Bolsheviks, inside the Socialist-Revolutionary Party this process expressed itself as a strengthening of the left wing at the cost of the right. But within the list of party candidates of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the old names of the right wing still occupied three-fourths of the places ...”

“Then there was the further circumstance that the elections themselves took place in the course of the first weeks after the October Revolution. The news of the change that had taken place spread rather slowly in concentric circles from the capital to the provinces and from the towns to the villages. The peasant masses in many places had little notion of what went on in Petrograd and Moscow. They voted for ‘Land and Freedom,’ and elected as their representatives in the land committees those who stood under the banner of the ‘Narodniki.’ Thereby, however, they voted for Kerensky and Avksentiev, who had been dissolving these land committees and having their members arrested ... This state of affairs gives a clear idea of the extent to which the Constituent Assembly had lagged behind the development of the political struggle and the development of party groupings.”

All of this is very fine and quite convincing. But one cannot help wondering how such clever people as Lenin and Trotsky failed to arrive at the conclusion which follows immediately from the above facts. Since the Constituent Assembly was elected long before the decisive turning point, the October Revolution,^[2] and its composition reflected the picture of the vanished past and not of the new state of affairs, then it follows automatically that the outgrown and therefore still-born Constituent Assembly should have been annulled, and without delay, new elections to a new Constituent Assembly should have been arranged. They did not want to entrust, nor should they have entrusted, the fate of the revolution to an assemblage which reflected the Kerenskyan Russian of yesterday, of the period of vacillations and coalition with the bourgeoisie. Hence there was nothing left to do except to convoke an assembly that would issue forth out of the renewed Russia that had advanced further.

Instead of this, from the special inadequacy of the Constituent Assembly which came together in October, Trotsky draws a general conclusion concerning the inadequacy of any popular representation whatsoever which might come from universal popular elections during the revolution.

“Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,” he writes, “the laboring masses acquire in the shortest time an accumulation of political experience, and they climb rapidly from step to step in their political development. The bigger the country and the more rudimentary

its technical apparatus, the less is the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions able to keep pace with this development.”

Here we find the “mechanism of democratic institutions,” as such called in question. To this we must at once object that in such an estimate of representative institutions there lies a somewhat rigid and schematic conception which is expressly contradicted by the historical experience of every revolutionary epoch. According to Trotsky’s theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period, much as the heavens of Herschel always show us the heavenly bodies not as they are when we are looking at them but as they were at the moment they sent out their light-messages to the earth from the measureless distances of space. Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.

Yet how all historical experience contradicts this! Experience demonstrates quite the contrary: namely, that the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them. How else would it be possible to witness, as we do at times in every bourgeois parliament, the amusing capers of the “people’s representatives,” who are suddenly inspired by a new “spirit” and give forth quite unexpected sounds; or to find the most dried-out mummies at times comporting themselves like youngsters and the most diverse little *Scheidemännchen*^[10] suddenly finding revolutionary tones in their breasts – whenever there is rumbling in factories and workshops on the street.

And is this ever-living influence of the mood and degree of political ripeness of the masses upon the elected bodies to be renounced in favor of a rigid scheme of party emblems and tickets in the very midst of revolution? Quite the contrary! It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that delicate, vibrant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work for moment on the representative bodies in most wonderful fashion. It is on this very fact, to be sure, that the well-known moving scenes depend which invariably present themselves in the first stages of every revolution, scenes in which old

reactionaries or extreme moderates, who have issued out of a parliamentary election by limited suffrage under the old regime, suddenly become the heroic and stormy spokesmen of the uprising. The classic example is provided by the famous “Long Parliament” in England, which was elected and assembled 1642 and remained at its post for seven whole years and reflected in its internal life all alterations and displacements of popular feeling, of political ripeness, of class differentiation, of the progress of the revolution to its highest point, from the initial devout skirmishes with the Crown under a Speaker who remains on his knees, to the abolition of the House of Lords, the execution of Charles and the proclamation of the republic.

And was not the same wonderful transformation repeated in the French Estates-General, in the censorship-subjected parliament of Louis Phillipe, and even – and this last, most striking example was very close to Trotsky – even in the Fourth Russian Duma which, elected in the Year of Grace 1909 under the most rigid rule of the counter-revolution, suddenly felt the glowing heat of the impending overturn and became the point of departure for the revolution?^[11]

All this shows that “the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions” possesses a powerful corrective – namely, the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence – despite rigid party banners, outgrown tickets (electoral lists), etc. To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.

FOOTNOTES

^[2] Luxemburg is not quite correct. Elections for the Constituent Assembly were mostly *arranged* prior to the October Revolution, but the elections *took place* after October.

[10] “Little Scheidemen,” a play on the name of the pro-war, government Social-Democrat, Phillip Scheidemann.

[11] It was this Fourth Duma which, after popular demonstrations in February 1917, sent two emissaries to the Czar to request his abdication.

CHAPTER 5

THE QUESTION OF SUFFRAGE

Let's take another striking example: the right of suffrage as worked out by the Soviet government. It is not clear what practical significance is attributed to the right of suffrage. From the critique of democratic institutions by Lenin and Trotsky, it appears that popular representation on the basis of universal suffrage is rejected by them on principle, and that they want to base themselves only on the soviets. Why, then, any general suffrage system was worked out at all is really not clear. It is also not known to us whether this right of suffrage was put in practice anywhere; nothing has been heard of any elections to any kind of popular representative body on the basis of it. More likely, it is only a theoretical product, so to speak, of diplomacy; but, as it is, it constitutes a remarkable product of the Bolshevist theory of dictatorship.

Every right of suffrage, like any political right in general, is not to be measured by some sort of abstract scheme of "justice," or in terms of any other bourgeois-democratic phrases, but by the social and economic relationships for which it is designed. The right of suffrage worked out by the Soviet government is calculated for the transition period from the bourgeois-capitalist to the socialist form of society, that is, it is calculated for the period of the proletarian dictatorship. But, according to the interpretation of this dictatorship which Lenin and Trotsky represent, the right to vote is granted only to those who live by their own labor and is denied to everyone else.

Now it is clear that such a right to vote has meaning only in a society which is in a position to make possible for all who want to work an adequate civilized life on the basis of one's own labor. Is that the case in Russia at present? Under the terrific difficulties which Russia has to contend with, cut off as she is from the world market and from her most important source of raw materials, and under circumstances involving a terrific general uprooting of economic life and a rude overturn of production relationships as a result of the transformation of property relationships in land and industry and trade – under such circumstances, it is clear that countless existences are quite suddenly uprooted, derailed without any objective possibility of finding any

employment for their labor power within the economic mechanism. This applies not only to the capitalist and land-owning masses, but to the broad layer of the middle class also, and even to the working class itself. It is a known fact that the construction of industry has resulted in a mass-scale return of the urban proletariat to the open country in search of a place in rural economy. Under such circumstances, a political right of suffrage on the basis of a general obligation to labor, is a quite incomprehensible measure. According to the main trend, only the exploiters are supposed to be deprived of their political rights. And, on the other hand, at the same time that productive labor powers are being uprooted on a mass scale, the Soviet government is often compelled to hand over national industry to its former owners, on lease, so to speak. In the same way, the Soviet government was forced to conclude a compromise with the bourgeois consumers' cooperatives also. Further, the use of bourgeois specialists proved unavoidable. Another consequence of the same situation is that growing sections of the proletariat, for whom the economic mechanism provides no means of exercising the obligation to work, are rendered politically without any rights.

It makes no sense to regard the right of suffrage as a utopian product of fantasy, cut loose from social reality. And it is for this reason that it is not a serious instrument of the proletarian dictatorship. It is an anachronism, an anticipation of the juridical situation which is proper on the basis of an already completed socialist economy, but is not in the transition period of the proletarian dictatorship.

As the entire middle class, the bourgeois and petty bourgeois intelligentsia, boycotted the Soviet government for months after the October Revolution and crippled the railroad, post and telegraph, and educational and administrative apparatus, and, in this fashion, opposed the workers government, naturally all measures of pressure were exerted against it. These included the deprivation of political rights, of economic means of existence, etc., in order to break their resistance with an iron fist. It was precisely in this way that the socialist dictatorship expressed itself, for it cannot shrink from any use of force to secure or prevent certain measures involving the interests of the whole. But when it comes to a suffrage law which provides for the general disfranchisement of broad sections of society, whom it places politically outside the framework of society and, at the same time, is not in a position to make any place for them even economically within that framework, when it involves a deprivation of rights not as concrete measures for a

concrete purpose but as a general rule of long-standing effect, then, it is not a necessity of dictatorship but a makeshift, incapable of being carried out in life. This applies alike to the soviets as the foundation, and to the Constituent Assembly and the general suffrage law.^[12]

But the Constituent Assembly and the suffrage law do not exhaust the matter. We did not consider above the destruction of the most important democratic guarantees of a healthy public life and of the political activity of the laboring masses: freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly, which have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet regime. For these attacks (on democratic rights), the arguments of Trotsky cited above, on the cumbersome nature of democratic electoral bodies, are far from satisfactory. On the other hand, it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assemblage, the rule of the broad masses of the people is entirely unthinkable.

FOOTNOTES

^[12] The following passage was found crossed out on an unnumbered loose sheet of paper in the manuscript:

The Bolsheviks designated the soviets as reactionary because their majority consisted of peasants (peasant and soldier delegates). After the Soviets went over to them, they became correct representatives of public opinion. But this sudden change was connected only with peace and land questions.

CHAPTER 6

THE PROBLEM OF DICTATORSHIP

Lenin says [in [The State and Revolution: The Transition from Capitalism to Communism](#)] the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie. To a certain extent, he says, it is only the capitalist state stood on its head. This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.

“Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,” writes Trotsky, “the laboring masses accumulate in the shortest time a considerable amount of political experience and advance quickly from one stage to another of their development.”

Here Trotsky refutes himself and his own friends. Just because this is so, they have blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development by their suppression of public life! Or else we would have to assume that experience and development were necessary up to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and then, having reached their highest peak, become superfluous thereafter. (Lenin’s speech: Russia is won for socialism!!!)

In reality, the opposite is true! It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accumulation of experience.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.

The Bolsheviks themselves will not want, with hand on heart, to deny that, step by step, they have to feel out the ground, try out, experiment, test now one way now another, and that a good many of their measures do not represent priceless pearls of wisdom. Thus it must and will be with all of us when we get to the same point—even if the same difficult circumstances may not prevail everywhere.

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a socialist economy. But when it comes to the nature of the thousand concrete, practical measures, large and small, necessary to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relationships, there is no key in any socialist party program or textbook. That is not a shortcoming but rather the very thing that makes scientific socialism superior to the utopian varieties.

The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, an historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realization, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part – has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by *ukase*. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force – against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New Territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescing life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so

unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (Proof: the year 1905 and the months from February to October 1917.) There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new regime. Corruption becomes inevitable. (Lenin's words, Bulletin No.29) Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.

When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of the Soviet Congress from three-month periods to six-month periods!) Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc. (Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.)

CHAPTER 7

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CORRUPTION

A problem which is of great importance in every revolution is that of the struggle with the *Lumpenproletariat*. We in Germany too, as everywhere else, will have this problem to reckon with. The *Lumpenproletariat* element is deeply imbedded in bourgeois society. It is not merely a special section, a sort of social wastage which grows enormously when the walls of the social order are falling down, but rather an integral part of the social whole. Events in Germany – and more or less in other countries – have shown how easily all sections of bourgeois society are subject to such degeneration. The gradations between commercial profiteering, fictitious deals, adulteration of foodstuffs, cheating, official embezzlement, theft, burglary and robbery, flow into one another in such fashion that the boundary line between honorable citizenry and the penitentiary has disappeared. In this the same phenomenon is repeated as in the regular and rapid degeneration of bourgeois dignitaries when they are transplanted to an alien social soil in an overseas colonial setting. With the stripping off of conventional barriers and props for morality and law, bourgeois society itself falls victim to direct and limitless degeneration [*Verlumpung*], for its innermost law of life is the profoundest of immoralities, namely, the exploitation of man by man. The proletarian revolution will have to struggle with this enemy and instrument of counter-revolution on every hand.

And yet, in this connection too, terror is dull, nay, a two-edged sword. The harshest measures of martial law are impotent against outbreaks of the *lumpenproletarian* sickness. Indeed, every persistent regime of martial law leads inevitable to arbitrariness, and every form of arbitrariness tends to deprave society. In this regard also, the only effective means in the hands of the proletarian revolution are: radical measures of a political and social character, the speediest possible transformation of the social guarantees of the life of the masses – the kindling of revolutionary idealism, which can be maintained over any length of time only through the intensively active life of the masses themselves under conditions of unlimited political freedom.

As the free action of the sun's rays is the most effective purifying and healing remedy against infections and disease germs, so the only healing and purifying sun is the revolution itself and its renovating principle, the spiritual life, activity and initiative of the masses which is called into being by it and which takes the form of the broadest political freedom.^[13]

FOOTNOTES

^[13] The following section, found in the original manuscript on a separate sheet of paper, repeats substantially the same ideas of this chapter but in a schematic form, apparently the draft outline for this chapter:

In our case as everywhere else, anarchy will be unavoidable. The *lumpenproletarian* element is deeply embedded in bourgeois society and inseparable from it.

Proofs:

- East Prussia, the "Cossack" robberies.
- The general outbreak of robbery and theft in Germany. (Profiteering, postal and railway personnel, police, complete dissolution of boundaries between well-ordered society and penitentiary.)
- The rapid degeneration (*Verlumpung*) of the union leaders.

Against this, draconian measures of terror are powerless. On the contrary, they cause still further corruption. The only anti-toxin: the idealism and social activity of the masses, unlimited police freedom.

That is an overpowering objective law from which no party can be exempt.

CHAPTER 8

DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy. “Dictatorship *or* democracy” is the way the question is put by Bolsheviks and Kautsky alike. The latter naturally decides in favor of “democracy,” that is, of bourgeois democracy, precisely because he opposes it to the alternative of the socialist revolution. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favor of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby, in favor of the dictatorship of a handful of persons, that is, in favor of dictatorship on the bourgeois model. They are two opposite poles, both alike being far removed from a genuine socialist policy. The proletariat, when it seizes power, can never follow the good advice of Kautsky, given on the pretext of the “unripeness of the country,” the advice being to renounce socialist revolution and devote itself to democracy. It cannot follow this advice without betraying thereby itself, the International, and the revolution. It should and must at once undertake socialist measures in the most energetic, unyielding and unhesitant fashion, in other words, exercise a dictatorship, but a dictatorship of the *class*, not of a party or of a clique – dictatorship of the class, that means in the broadest possible form on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy.

“As Marxists,” writes Trotsky, “we have never been idol worshippers of formal democracy.” Surely, we have never been idol worshippers of socialism or Marxism either. Does it follow from this that we may throw socialism on the scrap-heap, *à la* Cunow, Lensch and Parvus [i.e. move to the right], if it becomes uncomfortable for us? Trotsky and Lenin are the living refutation of this answer.

“We have never been idol-worshippers of formal democracy.” All that that really means is: We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working

class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether.

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the *manner of applying democracy*, not in its *elimination*, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles.

A crude proof of this is provided by the use of terror to so wide an extent by the Soviet government, especially in the most recent period just before the collapse of German imperialism, and just after the attempt on the life of the German ambassador. The commonplace to the effect that revolutions are not pink teas is in itself pretty inadequate.

Everything that happens in Russia is comprehensible and represents an inevitable chain of causes and effects, the starting point and end term of which are: the failure of the German proletariat and the occupation of Russia by German imperialism. It would be demanding something superhuman from

Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in their own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced on them by necessity, they render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion – in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.

Let the German Government Socialists cry that the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia is a distorted expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is such, that is only because it is a product of the behavior of the German proletariat, in itself a distorted expression of the socialist class struggle. All of us are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realized. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle.

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: “I have dared!”

This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labor in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to “Bolshevism.”