

Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship

By N. Lenin

(Continued from last week.)

THE chief point which Socialists do not understand and which constitutes their shortsightedness in matters of theory, explains their dependence upon bourgeois prejudice, accounts for their political betrayal of the proletariat, is this, that in capitalistic society, in the event of a sharpening of the class-struggle which is its foundation, there can be no middle way between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dreams of a third possibility are but the reactionary lamentations of the petit bourgeois. The experiences of more than a century of evolution of bourgeois democracy and of the labor-movement in all advanced countries, and especially the experiences of the last five years, bear witness to this fact. The entire theory of political economy bears on this subject-matter; it is the whole content of Marxism, which demonstrates the necessity of a bourgeois dictatorship in every factory, the dictatorship which can be terminated only by the class which through the development of capitalism itself undergoes a constant development of its own, a growth in size, unification, and strength, namely the class of the proletariat.

XIII.

The second theoretical and political error of the Socialists consists in the fact that they do not understand that forms of democracy have undergone inevitable changes in the course of thousands of years, beginning with their germs in antiquity and the succession of one ruling class upon another. In the republic of ancient Greece, in the city-states of the Middle Ages, in advanced capitalistic states, democracy has had a variety of forms and varying degrees of inclusiveness. It would be gross stupidity, indeed, to assume that the most profound revolution in the history of mankind, the first transfer of power from the hands of the minority, the exploiters, to the hands of the Majority, the exploited, can be accomplished within the structure of the old bourgeois parliamentary democracy, without great upheavals and the creation of new forms of democracy, new institutions, new conditions for their functioning, etc.

XIV.

The dictatorship of the proletariat resembles the dictatorship of the other classes in that like every other dictatorship, it is called into being by the necessity of suppressing with force the resistance of the class that is losing its political power. The fundamental difference between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the other classes, the dictatorship of the mediaeval holders of great estates, of the bourgeoisie in all capitalist countries, consists in the fact that the dictatorship of the great landlords and of the bourgeoisie was a suppression by force of the resistance of the overwhelming majority of the population, i. e., the working masses. In contrast to this, the dictatorship of the proletariat is a suppression by force of the resistance of the exploiters, i. e., of the decided minority of the population—the great landlords and the capitalists.

From this it follows that, in general, the dictatorship of the proletariat must bring with it not only an inevitable alteration of democratic forms, and institutions, but such an alteration as will yield a hitherto unknown extension of the actual application of democracy among those who are enslaved by capitalism, among the working classes.

And, as a matter of fact, the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which has already been worked out in practice, i. e., the Soviet Government in Russia, the Räte-system in Germany, the Shop Stewards Committees and other analogous institutions in other countries, all these realize and signify for the working classes, i. e., for the overwhelming majority of the population, a practicable possibility of this sort for the achievement of democratic rights and privileges such as has never before existed in even approximately equal measure.

The nature of soviet-rule consists in the fact that the mass-organization of precisely those classes which have been oppressed by capital, i. e., the workers and the semi-proletariat (peasants who do not exploit the labor of others and who are compelled regularly to sell at least a part of their own labor power), constitute the permanent and only basis of the whole state-power. Precisely those masses, which even in the most democratic bourgeois republics have equal rights under the law, but as a matter of fact are prevented by a thousand means and devices from participation in the political life and from enjoyment of democratic rights and liberties, are now enlisted in a permanent, unconditioned, and decisive participation in the democratic rule of the state.

XV.

The equality of citizens without regard to sex, religion, race, nationality, which has always and everywhere been the promise of bourgeois democracy, but which has nowhere been fulfilled and could nowhere be fulfilled because of the domination of capital, has been realized suddenly and completely by the soviet government, since only the power of the workers, who have no interests at stake in private property, in the means of production, and in the struggle for their distribution and redistribution, can realize this ideal.

Bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism are so organized that it is precisely the working classes who have least to do with the administrative apparatus. The Soviet Power, i. e., the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the other hand, is so organized that it brings the working classes closer to the administrative apparatus. The same end is also served by the union of the legislative and executive functions in the soviet organization of the state, and by the replacement of geographical voting-districts by production-units, such as shops and factories.

XVII.

The army was an instrument of oppression not only under the monarchy; it retained this character in all the bourgeois republics, even in the most democratic. Only the Soviet Power, as the sole established state-organization of the classes oppressed by capital, is in a position to release the military from its subjection to bourgeois leadership, and to bring about a real identification of the army with the proletariat.

XVIII.

The soviet organization of the state is designed to place the leadership of the state in the hands of the proletariat as the class which has undergone the greatest concentration and enlightenment under Capitalism. The experiences of all revolutions and of

all movements of enslaved classes, the experiences of the international Socialist movement teach that only the proletariat is capable of carrying along and uniting the scattered and backward levels of the working and exploited population.

XIX.

Only the soviet organization of the state is capable of destroying suddenly and completely the bourgeois bureau-and-court machinery which remained intact, and had to remain intact, under Capitalism, even in the most democratic republics, since it developed into the greatest bulwark against the laboring classes in their attempt to realize democracy. The Paris Commune took the first world-historical step in this direction; the Soviet Power has taken the second.

XX.

All Socialists, and among them their leader, Marx, have set up as their goal the destruction of the power of the State. If this goal is not achieved, true democracy, i. e., equality and freedom, are not attainable. But the only practicable means to this goal is the soviet or proletarian democracy, for it sets out forthwith to prepare the complete atrophy of all State machinery by enlisting the mass-organizations of the working-people in permanent and unconditioned participation in the state-administration.

XXI.

The complete bankruptcy of the Socialists who assembled in Berne, the utter lack of comprehension of proletarian democracy which they revealed, is especially patent in the following. On February 10, 1919, Branting dismissed the conference of the Yellow International at Berne. On February 11, 1919, their colleagues in Berlin published in "Die Freiheit" an appeal to the proletariat by the Independents. In this appeal the bourgeois character of the Scheidemann government is admitted, it is accused of the intention of abolishing the "Räte" (soviets) which it designates as the "defenders of the revolution," and the proposition is advanced that the "Räte" be legitimized, entrusted with certain rights in the State.

A proposal of this sort indicates the complete spiritual bankruptcy of the theoreticians who defend democracy and do not understand its bourgeois character. The laughable attempt to combine the Räte-system, i. e., the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the National Assembly, i. e., the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, reveals conclusively the intellectual poverty of the yellow Socialists and Social-Democrats, and the reactionary policies of the petit bourgeois, as well as their cowardly concessions to the irresistibly increasing strength of the new proletarian democracy.

XXII.

The majority of the Yellow International at Berne, which condemned Bolshevism, but did not dare enter a formal vote on a resolution condemning Bolshevism, since it feared the working masses, behaved quite correctly from the class-viewpoint. This majority is completely in tune with the Russian Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries and with the Scheidemann-group in Germany. The Russian Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries who complain of Bolshevik persecution, take pains to conceal the fact that this

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