

Thesis On The Agrarian Question.

ADOPTED at the SECOND WORLD CONGRESS of the COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

1. No one but the city industrial proletariat led by the Communist Party, can save the laboring masses in the country from the pressure of capital and landlordism, from dissolution and from imperialistic wars, ever inevitable as long as the capitalist regime endures. There is no salvation for the peasants except to join the Communist proletariat, to support with heart and soul its revolutionary struggle to throw off the yoke of the landlords and the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, the industrial workers will be unable to carry out their universal historic mission, and to liberate humanity from the bondage of capital and war, if they shut themselves within their separate guilds, their narrow trade interests, and restrict themselves self-sciently to a desire for the improvement of their sometimes tolerable bourgeois conditions of life. That is what happens in most advanced countries possessing a "labor aristocracy," which forms the basis of the would-be parties of the Second International, who are, in fact, the worst enemies of Socialism, traitors to it, bourgeois jingoes, agents of the bourgeoisie in the labor movement. The proletariat becomes a truly revolutionary class, truly Socialist in its actions, only by acting as the vanguard of all those who work and are being exploited, as their leader in the struggle for the overthrow of the oppressors; and this cannot be achieved without carrying the class struggle into the agricultural districts, without making the laboring masses of the country all gather around the Communist Party of the town proletariat, without the peasants being educated by the town proletariat.

2. The laboring and exploited masses in the country, which the town proletariat must lead on to the fight, or at least win over to its side, are represented in all capitalist countries by the following groups:

In the first place, the agricultural proletariat, the hired laborers (by the year, by the day, by the job), making their living by wage labor in capitalist, agricultural, or industrial establishments; the independent organization of this class, separated from the other groups of the country population (in a political, military, trade, co-operative, educational sense), and an energetic propaganda among it, in order to win it over to the side of the Soviet power and of the dictatorship of the proletariat, must be the fundamental task of the Communist parties in all countries.

In the second place, the semi-proletariat or small peasants, those who make their living partly by working for wages in agricultural and industrial capitalist establishments, partly by toiling on their own or a rented parcel of land yielding but a part of the necessary food produce for their families; this class of the rural population is rather numerous in all capitalist countries, but its existence and its peculiar position are hushed up by the representatives of the bourgeoisie and the yellow "Socialists" affiliated to the Second International. Some of these people intentionally cheat the workers, but others follow blindly the average views of the public and mix up this special class with the whole mass of the "peasantry". Such a method of bourgeois deception of the workers is used more particularly in Germany and France, and then in America and other countries. Provided that the work of the Communist Party is well organized, this group is sure to side with the Communists, the conditions of life of these half-proletarians being very hard, the advantage the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat would bring them being enormous and immediate. In some countries there is no clear-cut distinction between these two groups; it is, therefore, permissible under certain conditions to form them into separate organizations.

In the third place, the little proprietors, the small farmers who possess by right of ownership or on rent small portions of land which satisfy the needs of their family and of their farming without requiring any additional wage labor; this part of the population as a class gains everything by the victory of the proletariat, which brings with it: a) liberation from the payment of rent or of a part of the crops (for instance, the *matayers* in France, the same arrangements in Italy, etc.) to the owners of large estates; b) abolition of all mortgages; c) abolition of many forms of pressure and of dependence on the owners of large estates (forests and their use, etc.); d) immediate help from the proletarian state for farm work (permitting use by peasants of the agricultural implements and in part of the buildings on the big capitalist estates expropriated by the proletariat, the immediate transformation by the proletarian state power of all rural co-operatives and agricultural companies, which under the capitalist rule were chiefly supporting the wealthy and the middle peasantry, into institutions primarily for the support of the poor peasantry, that is to say, the proletarians, semi-proletarians, small farmers, etc.).

At the same time the Communist Party should be thoroughly aware that during the dictatorship of the proletariat, at least some partial hesitations are inevitable in this class, in favor of unrestricted free trade and free use of the rights of private property. For this class, being a seller of commodities (although on a small scale), is necessarily demoralized

by profit-hunting and habits of proprietorship. And yet, provided there is a consistent proletarian policy and the victorious proletariat deals relentlessly with the owners of the large estates and the landed peasants—the hesitations of the class in question will not be considerable, and cannot change the fact that on the whole this class will side with the proletarian revolution.

3. All these three groups taken together constitute the majority of the agrarian population in all capitalist countries. This guarantees in full the success of the proletarian revolution not only in the towns but in the country as well. The opposite view is very widely spread but it persists only because of a systematic deception on the part of bourgeois science and statistics. They hush up by every means any mention of the deep chasm which divides the rural classes we have indicated, from the exploiters, the landowners and capitalists on the one hand, from the landed peasants on the other. It holds further because of the incapacity and the failure of the "heroes" affiliated to the yellow Second International and the "labor aristocracy," demoralized by imperialistic privileges, to do genuine propaganda work among the poor in the country. All the attention of the opportunists was given and is being given now to the arrangement of theoretical and practical agreements with the bourgeoisie, including the landed and the middle peasantry (see Paragraph concerning these classes) and not to the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois government and the bourgeois class by the proletariat. In the third place, this view persists because of the force of inveterate prejudice possessing already a great stability (and connected with all bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices), the incapacity to grasp a simple truth fully proved by the Marxian theory and confirmed by the practice of the proletarian revolution in Russia. This truth consists in the fact that the peasant population of the three classes we have mentioned above, being extremely oppressed, scattered, and doomed to live in half-civilized conditions in all countries, even in the most advanced, is economically, socially, and morally interested in the victory of Socialism; but that it will finally support the revolutionary proletariat only after the proletariat has taken the political power, after it has done away with the owners of the large estates and the capitalists, after the oppressed masses are able to see in practice that they have an organized leader and helper sufficiently powerful and firm to support and to guide, to show the right way.

The "middle peasantry," in the economic sense, consists of small landowners who possess, according to the right ownership or rent, portions of land, which, although small, nevertheless may: 1) usually yield under capitalist rule not only scanty provision for the family and the needs of the farming, but also the possibility of accumulating a certain surplus, which, at least in the best years, could be transformed into capital; and 2) necessitate the employment of (for instance, in a family of two or three members) wage labor. As a concrete example of the middle peasantry in an advanced capitalist country, we may take the situation in Germany, where, according to the registration of 1917, there was a group tilling farms from five to ten acres, and in these farms the number of hired agricultural laborers made up about a third of the whole number of farms in this group.* In France, the country of a greater development of special cultures, for instance, the vineyards, requiring special treatment and care, the corresponding group employs wage labor probably in a somewhat larger proportion.

The revolutionary proletariat can not make it its aim, at least for the nearest future and for the beginning of the period of the proletarian dictatorship, to win this class over to its side. The proletariat will have to content itself with neutralizing this class, i.e., with making it take a neutral position in the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The vacillation of this class is unavoidable, and in the beginning of the new epoch its predominant tendency in the advanced capitalist countries will be in favor of the bourgeoisie, for the ideas and sentiments of private property are characteristic of the possessors. The victorious proletariat will immediately improve the lot of this class by abolishing the system of rent and mortgage, by the introduction of machinery and electrical appliances into agriculture. The proletarian state power cannot at once abolish private property in most of the capitalist countries, but must do away with all duties and levies imposed upon this class of people by the landlords; it will also secure to the small and middle peasantry the ownership of their land holdings and enlarge them, putting the peasants in possession of the land they used to rent (abolition of rents).

The combination of such measures with a relentless struggle against the bourgeoisie guarantees the full success of the neutralization policy. The transition to collective agriculture must be managed with much circumspection and step by step, and the proletarian state power must proceed by the force of example without any violence toward the middle peasantry.

5. The landed peasants or farmers (*Grossbauern*) are capitalists in agriculture, managing their lands usually with several hired laborers. They are connected with the "peasantry" only by their rather low standard of culture, their way of living, the personal manual work of their land. This is the most numerous element of the bourgeois class, and the one element of the revolutionary proletariat. The chief attention of the Communist Party in the rural districts must be given to the struggle against this element, to the liberation of the laboring and exploited majority of the rural population from the moral and political influence of these exploiters.

After the victory of the proletariat in the towns, this class will inevitably oppose it by all means, from sabotage to open armed counter-revolutionary resistance. The revolutionary proletariat must, therefore, immediately begin to prepare the necessary force for the disarmament of every single man of this class, and together with the overthrow of the capitalists in industry, the proletariat must deal a relentless, crushing blow to this class. To that end it must arm the rural proletariat and organize Soviets in the country, with no room for exploiters, and a preponderant place must be reserved to the proletarians and the semi-proletarians.

But the expropriation even of the landed peasants can by no means be an immediate object of the victorious proletariat, considering the lack of material, particularly of technical material, and further of the social conditions necessary for the socialization of such lands. In some probably exceptional cases parts of their estates will be confiscated if they are leased in small parcels, or if they are specially needed by the small-peasant population. A free use must be also secured to this population, on definite terms, of a part of the agricultural machinery of the landed peasants, etc. As a general rule, however, the state power must leave the peasants in possession of their land, confiscating it only in case of resistance to the government of the laboring and exploited peasants. The experience of the Russian proletarian revolution, whose struggle against the landed peasants became very complicated and prolonged owing to a number of particular circumstances, nevertheless shows that this class has been at last taught what it costs to make the slightest attempt at resistance, and is now quite willing to serve loyally the aims of the proletarian state. It begins even to be penetrated, although very slowly, by a respect for the government which protects every worker and deals relentlessly with the idle rich.

The specific conditions which complicated and prolonged the struggle of the Russian proletariat against the landed peasantry after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, consist mainly in the fact that after the coup d'état of October 25 and November 7, 1917, the Russian revolution traversed a stage of "general democratic," actually bourgeois democratic, struggle of the peasantry as a whole against the landowners, and there were further the low standard of living and scarcity of the urban proletariat, and, finally, the enormous distances and exceedingly bad transport conditions. Insofar as these adverse conditions do not exist in the advanced countries, the revolutionary proletariat in Europe and America must prepare with much more energy and carry out a much more rapid and complete victory over the resistance of the landed peasantry, depriving it of all possibility of resistance. This is of the utmost importance, considering that until a complete, absolute victory is won, the proletarian state power cannot be regarded as secure and capable of resisting its enemies.

6. The revolutionary proletariat must proceed to an immediate and unconditional confiscation of the estates of the landowners and big landlords, that is, of all those who systematically employ wage labor, directly or through their tenants, who exploit all the small (and not infrequently also the middle) peasantry in their neighborhood, and who do not do any actual manual work. To this element belong the majority of the descendants of the feudal lords (the nobility of Russia, Germany, and Hungary, the restored seigneurs of France, the Lords in England, the former slave owners in America), or financial magnates who have become particularly rich, or a mixture of those two classes of exploiters and idlers.

No propaganda can be admitted in the Communist parties in favor of an indemnity to be paid to the owners of large estates for their expropriation. In the present conditions prevailing in Europe and America this would mean treason to Socialism and the imposition of a new tax on the laboring and exploited masses, who have already suffered from the war, which has increased the number of millionaires and has multiplied their wealth.

In the advanced capitalist countries the Communist International considers that it should be a prevailing practice to preserve the large agricultural establishments and manage them on the lines of the "Soviet farms" in Russia.* In regard to the management of the estates confiscated by the victorious proletariat from the owners of large landed property—the prevailing practice in Russia—the cause of economic backwardness was the partition of this landed property for the benefit of the peasantry, and in comparatively rare exceptions was there a preservation of the so-called "Soviet farm," managed by the proletarian state at its expense, and transforming the former wage laborers into workers employed by the state,