

# «The Russian Revolution Will Become The First Stage Of The Socialist World Revolution» - 1905

(Continued from page 1)

If, as a result of exceptional or exceptionally unfavorable circumstances—let us say, a successful military intervention from the outside or irreparable mistakes on the part of the Soviet Government itself—capitalism should arise again on the immeasurably wide Soviet territory, together with it would inevitably arise also its historical inadequacy, and such capitalism would in turn soon become the victim of the same contradictions which caused its explosion in 1917. No tactical recourses could have called the October Revolution into being, if Russia had not carried it within its body. The revolutionary Party in the last analysis can claim only the role of an obstetrician, who is compelled to resort to a Caesarian operation.

One might say in answer to this: "Your general considerations may adequately explain why old Russia had to suffer shipwreck, that country where backward capitalism and an impoverished peasantry were crowned by a parasitic nobility and a rotten monarchy. But in the simile of the chain and its weakest link there is still missing the key to the real riddle: How could the socialist revolution conquer in a backward country? History knows of more than a few illustrations of the decay of countries and civilizations accompanied by the collapse of the old classes for which no progressive successors had been found. The breakdown of old Russia should, at first sight, rather have changed the country into a capitalist colony than into a socialist state."

This objection is very interesting. It leads us directly to the kernel of the whole problem. And yet, this objection is erroneous; I might say, it lacks internal symmetry. On the one hand, it starts from an exaggerated conception of the backwardness of Russia; on the other, from a false theoretical conception of the phenomenon of historical backwardness in general.

Living beings, including man, of course, go through similar stages of development in accordance with their ages. In a normal five-year old child, we find a certain correspondence between the weight, and the size of the parts of the body and the internal organs. But when we deal with human consciousness, the situation is different. Contrary to anatomy and physiology, psychology, both individual and collective, is distinguished by expectation, power of absorption, flexibility and elasticity; there consists the aristocratic advantage of man over his nearest zoological relatives, the apes. The absorptive and flexible psyche, as a necessary condition for historical progress, confers on the so-called social "organisms", as distinguished from the real, that is, biological organisms, an exceptional instability of internal structure. In the development of nations and states, particularly capitalist ones, there is neither similarity nor regularity. Different stages of civilization, even polar opposites, approach and intermingle with one another in the life of one and the same country.

Let us not forget, my esteemed listeners, that historical backwardness is a relative concept. There being both backward and progressive countries, there is also a reciprocal influencing of one by the other; there is the pressure of the progressive countries on the backward ones; there is the necessity for the backward countries to catch up with the progressive ones, to borrow their technology and science, etc. In this way arises the combined type of development: features of backwardness are combined with the last word in world technology and in world thinking. Finally, the historically backward countries, in order to escape from their backwardness, are often compelled to rush ahead of the others.

The flexibility of the collective consciousness makes it possible under certain conditions to achieve the result, in the social arena, which in individual psychology is called "overcoming the consciousness of inferiority". In this sense we can say that the October revolution was a heroic means whereby the people of Russia were able to overcome their own economic and cultural inferiority.

But let us pass over from these historic-philosophic, perhaps somewhat too abstract generalizations, and put the same question in concrete form, that is, within the cross-section of living economic facts. The backwardness of Russia expressed itself most clearly at the beginning of the twentieth century in the fact that industry occupied a small place in that country in comparison with agriculture, the city in comparison with the village, the proletariat in comparison with the peasantry. Taken as a whole, this meant a low productivity of the national labor. Suffice it to say that on the eve of the war, when Tsarist Russia had reached the peak of its well-being, the national income was 8 to 10 times lower than in the United States. This is expressed in figures, the "amplitude" of its backwardness, if the word "amplitude" can be used at all in connection with backwardness.

At the same time, however, the law of combined development expresses itself in the economic field at every step, in simple as well as in complex phenomena. Almost without highways, Russia was compelled to build railroads. Without having gone through the stage of European artisanry and manufacture, Russia passed on directly to mechanized production. To jump over intermediate stages is the fate of backward countries.

While peasant agriculture often remained at the level of the 17th century, Russia's industry, if not in scope, at least in type, stood at the level of the progressive countries and rushed ahead of them in some respects. It suffices to say that the giant enterprises, with over a thousand employees each, employed, in the United States, less than 18 percent of the total number of industrial workers, in Russia over 41 percent. This fact is hard to reconcile with the conventional conception of the economic backwardness of Russia. It does not, on the other hand, refute this backwardness, but complements it dialectically.

The same contradictory character was shown by the class structure of the country. The finance capital of Europe industrialized Russian economy at an accelerated tempo. Thereby the industrial bourgeoisie assumed a large-scale capitalistic and anti-popular character. The foreign stockholders, moreover, lived outside of the country. The workers, on the other hand, were naturally Russians. Against a numerically weak Russian bourgeoisie, which had no national roots, stood therefore a relatively strong proletariat, with strong roots in the depths of the people.

The revolutionary character of the proletariat was furthered by the fact that Russia in particular, as a backward country, under the compulsion of catching up with its opponents, had not been able to work out its own conservatism, either social or political. The most conservative country of Europe, in fact of the entire world, is considered, and correctly, to

be the oldest capitalist country—England. The European country freest of conservatism would in all probability be Russia.

But the young, fresh, determined proletariat of Russia still constituted only a tiny minority of the nation. The reserves of its revolutionary power lay outside of the proletariat itself—in the peasantry, living in half-serfdom, and in the oppressed nationalities.

## The Peasantry

The subsoil of the Revolution was the agrarian question. The old feudal-monarchic system became doubly intolerable under the conditions of the new capitalist exploitation. The peasant communal areas amounted to some 140 million desyatines.\* But thirty thousand large landowners, whose average holdings were over 2,000 desyatines, owned altogether 70 million desyatines, that is, as much as some 10 million peasant families or 50 millions of peasant population. These statistics of land tenure constituted a ready-made program of agrarian revolt.

The nobleman, Bokorkin, wrote in 1917 to the dignitary, Rodslanko, the chairman of the last municipal Duma, "I am a landowner and I cannot get it into my head that I must lose my land, and for an unbelievable purpose to boot, for the experiment of the socialist doctrine". But it is precisely the task of revolutions to accomplish that which the ruling classes cannot get into their heads.

In Autumn 1917 almost the whole country was the scene of peasant revolts. Of the 624 departments of old Russia, 482, that is, 77 percent, were affected by the movement! The reflection of the burning villages lit up the arena of the insurrections in the cities.

But the war of the peasants against the landowners—you will reply to me—is one of the classic elements of the bourgeois, by no means of the proletarian revolution!

Perfectly right, I reply—so it was in the past. But the inability of capitalist society to survive in an historically backward country was expressed precisely in the fact that the peasant insurrections did not drive the bourgeois classes of Russia forward, but on the contrary drove them back for good into the camp of the reaction. If the peasantry did not want to be completely ruined, there was nothing else left for it but to join the industrial proletariat. This revolutionary joining of the two oppressed classes was foreseen with genius by Lenin and prepared by him long ahead of time.

Had the bourgeoisie courageously solved the agrarian question, the proletariat of Russia would not, obviously, have been able to take the power in 1917. But the greedy and cowardly Russian bourgeoisie, too late on the scene, prematurely a victim of senility, did not dare to lift its hand against feudal property. But thereby it delivered the power to the proletariat and together with it the right to dispose of the destinies of bourgeois society.

In order for the Soviet state to come into existence, therefore, it was necessary for two factors of different historical nature to collaborate: the peasant war, that is, a movement which is characteristic of the dawn of bourgeois development, and the proletarian insurrection, that is, a movement which announces the decline of the bourgeois movement. Precisely therein consists the combined character of the Russian Revolution.

Once the peasant bear stands up on his hind feet, he becomes terrible in his wrath. But he is unable to give conscious expression to his indignation. He needs a leader. For the first time in the history of the world, the insurrectionary peasantry found a faithful leader in the person of the proletariat.

Four million industrial and transportation workers led a hundred million peasants. That was the natural and inevitable reciprocal relation between proletariat and peasantry in the Revolution.

## The National Question

The second revolutionary reserve of the proletariat was constituted by the oppressed nationalities, who moreover were also predominantly made up of peasants. Closely tied up with the historical backwardness of the country is the extensive character of the development of the state, which spread out like a grease spot from the center at Moscow to the circumference. In the East, it subjugated the still more backward peoples, basing itself upon them, in order to stifle the more developed nationalities of the West. To the 70 million Great Russians, who constituted the main mass of the population, were added gradually some 90 millions of "other races".

In this way arose the Empire, in whose composition the ruling nationality made up only 43 percent of the population, while the remaining 57 percent consisted of nationalities of varying degrees of civilization and legal deprivation. The national pressure was incomparably cruder in Russia than in the neighboring states, and not only those beyond the western boundary but beyond the eastern one, too. This conferred on the national problem a monstrous explosive force.

The Russian liberal bourgeoisie, in the national as well as in the agrarian question, would not go beyond certain ameliorations of the regime of oppression and violence. The "democratic" governments of Miliukov and Kerensky, which reflected the interests of the Great Russian bourgeoisie and bureaucracy, actually hastened to impress upon the discontented nationalities, in the course of the eight months of their existence, "You will obtain only what you tear away by force".

The inevitability of the development of the centrifugal national movement had been early taken into consideration by Lenin. The Bolshevik Party

\* One desyatines equals 140 acres.

struggled obstinately for years for the right of self-determination for nations, that is, for the right of full secession. Only through this courageous position on the national question could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed peoples. The national independence movement, as well as the agrarian movement, necessarily turned against the official democracy, strengthened the proletariat, and poured into the stream of the October upheaval.

## The Permanent Revolution

In these ways the riddle of the proletarian upheaval in an historically backward country loses its veil of mystery.

Marxist revolutionaries predicted, long before the events, the march of the Revolution and the historical role of the young Russian proletariat. I may be permitted to repeat here a passage from a work of my own in 1905:

"In an economically backward country the proletariat can arrive at power earlier than in a capitalistically advanced one...."

"The Russian Revolution creates the conditions under which the power can (and in the event of a successful revolution must) be transferred to the proletariat, even before the policy of bourgeois liberalism receives the opportunity of unfolding its genius for government to its full extent.

"The destiny of the most elementary revolutionary interests of the peasantry... is bound up with the destiny of the whole revolution, that is, with the destiny of the proletariat. The proletariat, once arrived at power, will appear before the peasantry as the liberating class.

"The proletariat enters into the government as the revolutionary representative of the nation, as the acknowledged leader of the people in the struggle with absolutism and the barbarism of serfdom.

"The proletarian regime will have to stand from the very beginning for the solution of the agrarian question, with which the question of the destiny of tremendous masses of the population of Russia is bound up."

I have taken the liberty of quoting these passages as evidence that the theory of the October Revolution which I am presenting today is no casual improvisation, and was not constructed ex post facto under the pressure of events. No, in the form of a political prognosis it preceded the October upheaval by a long time. You will agree that a theory is in general valuable only insofar as it helps to foresee the course of development and influences it purposively. Therein, in general terms, is the invaluable importance of Marxism as a weapon of social and historical orientation. I am sorry that the narrow limits of the lecture do not permit me to enlarge the above quotation materially. I will therefore content myself with a brief resume of the whole work which dates from 1905.

In accordance with its immediate tasks, the Russian Revolution is a bourgeois revolution. But the Russian bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary. The victory of the Revolution is therefore possible only as a victory of the proletariat. But the victorious proletariat will not stop at the program of bourgeois democracy; it will go on to the program of Socialism. The Russian Revolution will become the first stage of the Socialist world revolution.

This was the theory of the permanent revolution formulated by me in 1905 and since then exposed to the severest criticism under the name of "Trotskyism".

To be more exact, it is only a part of this theory. The other part, which is particularly timely now, states:

The present productive forces have long outgrown their national limits. A Socialist society is not feasible within national boundaries. Significant as the economic successes of an isolated workers' state may be, the program of "Socialism in one country" is a petty-bourgeois Utopia. Only a European and then a world federation of Socialist republics can be the real arena for a harmonious Socialist society.

Today, after the test of events, I see less reason than ever to dissociate myself from this theory.

## The Bolshevik Party

After all that has been said above, is it still worth while to recall the Fascist writer, Malaparte, who ascribes to me tactics which are independent of strategy and amount to a series of technical recipes for insurrection, applicable in all latitudes and longitudes? It is a good thing that the name of the luckless theoretician of the coup d'Etat makes it easy to distinguish him from the victorious practitioner of the coup d'Etat; no one therefore runs the risk of confusing Malaparte with Bonaparte.

Without the armed insurrection of November 7, 1917, the Soviet state would not be in existence. But the insurrection itself did not drop from Heaven. A series of historical prerequisites was necessary for the October revolution.

1. The rooting away of the old ruling classes—the nobility, the monarchy, the bureaucracy.
2. The political weakness of the bourgeoisie, which had no roots in the masses of the people.
3. The revolutionary character of the peasant question.
4. The revolutionary character of the problem of the oppressed nations.
5. The significant social weight of the proletariat.

To these organic pre-conditions we must add certain conjunctural conditions of the highest importance:

6. The Revolution of 1905 was the great school, or in Lenin's words, the "dress rehearsal" of the Revolution of 1917. The Soviets, as the irreplace-

able organizational form of the proletarian united front in the revolution, were created for the first time in the year 1905.

7. The imperialist war sharpened all the contradictions, tore the backward masses out of their immobility and thereby prepared the grandiose scale of the catastrophe.

But all these conditions, which fully sufficed for the outbreak of the Revolution, were insufficient to assure the victory of the proletariat in the Revolution. For this victory one condition more was needed:

8. The Bolshevik Party.

When I enumerate this condition as the last in the series, I do it only because it follows the necessities of the logical order, and not because I assign the Party the last place in the order of importance.

No, I am far from such a thought. The liberal bourgeoisie—yes, it can seize the power and has seized it more than once as the result of struggles in which it took a part; it possesses organs of seizure which are admirably adapted to the purpose. But the working masses are in a different position; they have long been accustomed to give, and not to take. They work, are patient as long as they can be, hope, lose their patience, rise up and struggle, die, bring victory to the others, are betrayed, fall into despondency, again bow their necks, again work. This is the history of the masses of the people under all regimes. In order to take the power firmly and surely into its hands the proletariat needs a Party, which far surpasses the other parties in the clarity of its thought and in its revolutionary determination.

The Party of the Bolsheviks, which has been described more than once and with complete justification as the most revolutionary Party in the history of mankind, was the living condensation of the modern history of Russia, of all that was dynamic in it. The overthrow of Tsarism had long since become the necessary condition for the development of economy and culture. But for the solution of this task, the forces were insufficient. The bourgeoisie feared the revolution. The intelligentsia tried to bring the peasant to his feet. The muzhik, incapable of generalizing his own miseries and his aims, left this appeal unanswered. The intelligentsia armed itself with dynamite. A whole generation was burned up in this struggle.

On March 1, 1887, Alexander Ulianov carried out the last of the great terrorist plots. The attempted assassination of Alexander III failed. Ulianov and the other participants were executed. The attempt to substitute a chemical preparation for the revolutionary class suffered shipwreck. Even the most heroic intelligentsia is nothing without the masses. Under the immediate impression of these facts and conclusion grew up Ulianov's younger brother Vladimir, the later Lenin, the greatest figure of Russian history. Even in his early youth he placed himself on the foundations of Marxism, and turned his face toward the proletariat. Without losing sight of the village for a moment, he sought the way to the peasantry through the workers. Having inherited from his revolutionary predecessors their determination, their capacity for self-sacrifice, and their willingness to go to the limit, Lenin at an early age became the teacher of the new generation of the intelligentsia and of the advanced workers. In strikes and street fights, in prisons and in exile, the workers received the necessary tempering. They needed the searchlight of Marxism to light up their historical road in the darkness of absolutism.

In the year 1888 there arose among the emigres the first Marxist group. In the year 1898, at a secret meeting, the foundation of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party was proclaimed (we all called ourselves Social-Democrats in those days). In the year 1903 occurred the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. In the year 1912 the Bolshevik fraction finally became an independent Party.

It learned to recognize the class mechanics of society in struggle, in the grandiose events of twelve years (1905-1917). It educated cadres equally capable of initiative and of subordination. The discipline of its revolutionary action was based on the unity of its doctrine, on the tradition of common struggle and on confidence in its tested leadership.

Thus stood the Party in the year 1917. Despised by the official "public opinion" and the paper thunder of the intelligentsia press, it adapted itself to the movement of the masses. Firmly it kept in hand the control of factories and regiments. More and more the peasant masses turned toward it. If we understand by "nation", not the privileged heads, but the majority of the people, that is, the workers and peasants, then Bolshevism became in the course of the year 1917 a truly national Russian Party.

In September 1917, Lenin, who was compelled to keep in hiding, gave the signal, "The crisis is ripe, the hour of the insurrection has approached". He was right. The ruling classes had landed in a blind alley before the problems of the war, the land and national liberation. The bourgeoisie finally lost its head. The democratic parties, the Mensheviks and social-revolutionaries wasted the remains of the confidence of the masses in them by their support of the imperialist war, by their policy of ineffectual compromise and concession to the bourgeois and feudal property-owners. The awakened army no longer wanted to fight for the alien aims of imperialism. Disregarding democratic advice, the peasantry smoked the landowners out of their estates. The oppressed nationalities at the periphery rose up against the bureaucracy of Petrograd. In the most important workers' and soldiers' Soviets the Bolsheviks were dominant. The workers and soldiers demanded action. The ulcer was ripe. It needed a cut of the lancet.

Only under these social and political conditions was the insurrection possible. And thus it also became inevitable. But there is no playing around with the insurrection. Woe to the surgeon who is careless in the use of the lancet! Insurrection is an art. It has its laws and its rules.

The Party carried through the October insurrection with cold calculation and with flaming determination. Thanks to this, it conquered almost without victims. Through the victorious Soviets the Bolsheviks placed themselves at the head of a country which occupies one sixth of the surface of the globe.

The majority of my present listeners, it is to be presumed, did not occupy themselves at all with politics in the year 1917. So much the better. Before the young generation lies much that is interesting, if not always easy. But the representatives of the older generation in this hall will surely well remember how the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks was received: as a curiosity, as a misunderstanding, as a scandal; most often as a nightmare which was bound to disappear with the first rays of

(Continued on PAGE THREE)

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