

# «The October Revolution Has Laid The Foundation For A New Civilization .....» - 1932

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dawn. The Bolsheviks would last twenty-four hours, a week, a month, a year. The period had to be constantly lengthened.... The rulers of the whole world armed themselves against the first workers' state: civil war was stirred up, interventions again and again, blockade. So passed year after year. Meantime history has recorded fifteen years of existence of the Soviet power.

## 15 Years of the Soviet Regime

"Yes, some opponent will say, 'the adventure of October has shown itself to be much more substantial than many of us thought. Perhaps it was not even quite an "adventure". Nevertheless, the question remains its full force: What was achieved at this high cost? Were then those dazzling tasks fulfilled which the Bolsheviks proclaimed on the eve of the Revolution?"

Before we answer the hypothetical opponent, let us note that the question in and of itself is not new. On the contrary, it followed the day of the birth of the October Revolution, since the right of its birth. The French journalist, Claude Auet, who was in Petrograd during the Revolution, wrote as early as October 27, 1917:

"Les maximalistes ont pris le pouvoir et le grand jour est arrivé. Enfin, me dis-je, je vais voir se réaliser l'Eden socialiste qu'on nous promet depuis tant d'années.... Admirable aventure! Position privilégiée!"

"The maximalists (which was what the French called the Bolsheviks at that time) have seized the power and the great day has come. At last, I say to myself, I shall behold the realization of the socialist Eden which has been promised us for so many years.... Admirable adventure! A privileged position!" And so on and so forth. What sincere hatred behind the ironical salutation! The very morning after the capture of the Winter Palace, the reactionary journalist hurried to register his claim for a ticket of admission to Eden. Fifteen years have passed since the Revolution. With all the greater absence of ceremony our enemies reveal their malicious joy over the fact that the land of the Soviets, even today, bears but little resemblance to a realm of general well-being. Why then the Revolution and why the sacrifices?"

Worthy listeners—permit me to think that the contradictions, difficulties, mistakes and want of the Soviet regime are no less familiar to me than to anyone else. I personally have never concealed them, whether in speech or in writing. I have believed and I still believe that revolutionary politics, as distinguished from conservative, cannot be built up on concealment. "To speak out that which is" must be the highest principle of the workers' state.

But in criticism, as well as in creative activity, perspective is necessary. Subjectivism is a poor adviser, particularly in great questions. Periods of time must be commensurate with the tasks, and not with individual caprices. Fifteen years! How much that is in the life of one man! Within that period not a few of our generation were borne to their graves and those who remain have added innumerable gray hairs. But these same fifteen years—what an insignificant period in the life of a people! Only a minute on the clock of history.

Capitalism required centuries to maintain itself in the struggle against the Middle Ages, to raise the level of science and technology, to build railroads, to stretch electric wires. And then? Then humanity was thrust by capitalism into the hell of wars and crises! But Socialism is allowed by its enemies, that is, by the adherents of capitalism, only a decade and a half to install Paradise on earth with all modern improvements. No, such obligations were never assumed by us. Such periods of time were never set forth. The processes of great changes must be measured by scales which are commensurate with them. I do not know if the Socialist Society will resemble the biblical Paradise. I doubt it. But in the Soviet Union there is no Socialism as yet. The situation that prevails there is one of transition, full of contradictions, burdened with the heavy inheritance of the past, and in addition under the hostile pressure of the capitalist states. The October Revolution has proclaimed the principle of the new society. The Soviet Republic has shown only the first stage of its realization. Edison's first lamp was very bad. We must know how to distinguish the future from among the mistakes and faults of the first Socialist construction.

But the unhappiness that rains on living men? Do the results of the Revolution justify the sacrifice which it has caused? A fruitless question, rhetorical through and through; as if the processes of history admitted of an accounting balance-sheet! We might just as well ask, in view of the difficulties and miseries of human existence, "Does it pay to be born altogether?" To which Heine wrote, "And the fool waits for answer"... Such melancholy reflections have not hindered mankind from being born and from giving birth. Suicides, even in these days of unimportant world crisis, fortunately constitute an unimportant percentage. But peoples never resort to suicide. When their burdens are intolerable, they seek a way out through revolution.

Besides, who becomes indignant over the victims of the socialist upheaval? Most often those who have paved the way for the victims of the imperialist war, and have glorified or, at least, easily accommodated themselves to it. It is now our turn to ask, "Has the war justified itself? What has it given us? What has it taught?"

The reactionary historian, Hippolyte Taine, in his eleven-volume pamphlet against the great French Revolution describes, not without malicious joy, the sufferings of the French people in the years of the dictatorship of the Jacobins and afterward. The worst off were the lower classes of the cities, the plebeians, who as "sansculottes" had given up the best of their souls for the revolution. Now they or their wives stood in line throughout cold nights to return empty-handed to the extinguished family hearth. In the tenth year of the revolution Paris was poorer than before it began. Carefully selected, artificially pieced-out facts serve Taine as justification for his annihilating verdict against the revolution. Look, the plebeians wanted to be dictators and have precipitated themselves into misery!

It is hard to conceive of a more uninspired piece of moralizing. First of all, if the revolution precipitated the country into misery, the blame lay principally on the ruling classes who drove the people to revolution. Second, the great French Revolution did not exhaust itself in hungry lines before bakeries. The whole of modern France, in many respects the whole of modern civilization, arose out of the bath of the French Revolution!

In the course of the Civil War in the United States in the '60's of the past century, 50,000 men

were killed. Can these sacrifices be justified?

From the standpoint of the American slaveholder and the ruling classes of Great Britain who marched with them—no! From the standpoint of the negro or of the British workingman—absolutely! And from the standpoint of the development of humanity as a whole—there can be no doubt whatever. Out of the Civil War of the '60's came the present United States with its unbounded practical initiative, its rationalized technology, its economic class. On these achievements of Americanism humanity will build the new society.

The October Revolution plunged deeper than any of its predecessors into the Holy of Holies of society—into its property relations. So much the longer time is necessary to reveal the creative consequences of the Revolution in all the domains of life. But the general direction of the upheaval is always clear: the Soviet Republic has no reason whatever to hank its head before its capitalist accusers and speak the language of apology.

To evaluate the new regime from the standpoint of human development, one must first answer the question, "How does social progress express itself and how can it be measured?"

## Balance Sheet of October

The deepest, the most objective and the most indisputable criterion says—progress can be measured by the growth of the productivity of social labor. The evaluation of the October Revolution from this point of view is already given by experience. The principle of socialist organization has for the first time in history shown its ability to record unheard-of results in production in a short space of time.

The curve of the industrial development of Russia, expressed in crude index numbers, is as follows, taking 1913, the last year before the war, as 100. The year 1920, the highest point of the civil war, is also the lowest point in industry—only 25, that is to say, a quarter of the pre-war production. In 1925 it rose to 75, that is, three-quarters of the pre-war production; in 1929 about 200, in 1932, 300, that is to say, three times as much as on the eve of the war.

The picture becomes even more striking in the light of the international index. From 1925 to 1932 the industrial production of Germany has declined one and a half times, in America twice; in the Soviet Union it has increased fourfold. These figures speak for themselves.

I have no intention of denying or concealing the seamy side of Soviet economy. The results of the industrial index are extraordinarily influenced by the unfavorable development of agriculture, that is to say, of that field which has essentially not yet risen to Socialist methods, but at the same time has been led on the road to collectivization with insufficient preparation, bureaucratically rather than technically and economically. This is a great question, which however goes beyond the limits of my lecture.

The index numbers cited require another important reservation. The indisputable and, in their way, splendid results of Soviet industrialization demand a further economic checking-up from the standpoint of the mutual adaptation of the various elements of economy, their dynamic equilibrium and consequently their productive capacity. Here great difficulties and even setbacks are inevitable. Socialism does not arise in its perfected form from the Five-Year Plan, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, or Venus from the foam of the sea. Before it are decades of persistent work, of mistakes, corrections and reorganization. Moreover, let us not forget that Socialist construction in accordance with its very nature can only reach perfection on the international arena. But even the most unfavorable economic balance-sheet of the results obtained so far could reveal only the incorrectness of the preliminary calculations, the errors of the plan and the mistakes of the leadership, but could in no way refute the empirically firmly established fact—the possibility, with the aid of Socialist methods, of raising the productivity of collective labor to an unheard-of height. This conquest, of world-historical importance, cannot be taken away from us by anybody or anything.

After what has been said, it is scarcely worth while to spend time on the complaints, that the October revolution has brought Russia to the downfall of its civilization. That is the voice of the disgruntled ruling houses and the salons. The feudal-bourgeois "civilization" overthrown by the proletariat upheaval was only barbarism with decorations à la Tahiti. Life it remained inaccessible to the Russian people, it brought little that was new to the treasury of mankind.

But even with respect to this civilization, which

is so bemoaned by the white emigres, we must put the question more precisely—in what sense is it ruined? Only in one sense; the monopoly of a small minority in the treasures of civilization has been destroyed. But everything of cultural value in the old Russian civilization has remained untouched. The Huns of Bolshevism have shattered neither the conquests of the mind nor the creations of art. On the contrary, they carefully collected the monuments of human creativeness and arranged them in model order. The culture of the monarchy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie has now become the culture of the museums.

The people visits these museums eagerly. But it does not live in them. It learns. It builds. The fact alone that the October Revolution taught the Russian people, the dozens of peoples of Tsarist Russia, to read and write, stands immeasurably higher than the whole former hot-house Russian civilization.

The October Revolution has laid the foundations for a new civilization, which is designed, not for a select few, but for all. This is felt by the masses of the whole world. Hence their sympathy for the Soviet Union, which is so passionate as once was their hatred for Tsarist Russia.

Worthy listeners—you know that human language is an irreplaceable tool, not only for giving names to events but also for evaluating them. By filtering out that which is accidental, episodic, artificial, it absorbs that which is essential, characteristic, of full weight. Notice with what nicety the languages of civilized nations have distinguished two epochs in the development of Russia. The culture of the nobility brought into world currency such barbarisms as *Tsar, Cossack, pogrom, nagalka*. You know these words and what they mean. The October Revolution introduced into the language of the world such words as *Bolshevik, Soviet, kolkhoz, Gosplan, Piatiletka*. Here practical linguistics holds its historical supreme court!

The profoundest significance, but the hardest to submit to immediate measurement, of that great Revolution consists in the fact that it forms and tempers the character of the people. The conception of the Russian people as slow, passive, melancholy-mystical, is widely spread and not accidental. It has its roots in the past. But in Western countries up to the present time those far-reaching change have not been sufficiently considered which have been introduced into the character of the people by the Revolution. Could it have been otherwise?

Every man with experience of life can recall the picture of some youth, that he has known, receptive, lyrical, all too susceptible, who later, all at once, under the influence of a powerful moral impulse, became hardened and unrecognizable. In the development of a whole nation, such moral transformations are wrought by the revolution.

The February insurrection against the autocracy, the struggle against the nobility, against the imperialist war, for peace, for land, for national equality, the October insurrection, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and of those parties which sought agreements with the bourgeoisie, the years of civil war on a front of 5,000 miles, the years of blockade, hunger, misery and epidemics, the years of tense economic reconstruction, of new difficulties and renunciations—these make a hard but a good school. A heavy hammer smashes glass, but forges steel. The hammer of the Revolution forged the steel of the people's character.

"Who will believe?" wrote a Tsarist general, Zaleski, with indignation, shortly after the upheaval, "that a porter or a watchman suddenly becomes a chief justice, a hospital attendant—the director of a hospital, a barber—an officeholder, a corporal—a commander-in-chief, a day worker—a mayor, a locksmith—the director of a factory?"

"Who will believe it?" They had to believe it. They could do nothing else but believe it, when the corporals defeated generals, when the mayor—the former day worker—broke the resistance of the old bureaucracy, the wagon-greaser put the transportation system in order, the locksmith as director put the industrial equipment into working condition. "Who will believe it?" Let them only try and not believe it.

For an explanation of the extraordinary persistence which the masses of the people of the Soviet Union are showing throughout the years of the Revolution, many foreign observers rely, in accord with ancient habit, on the "passivity" of the Russian character. The revolutionary masses endure their privations patiently but not passively. With their own hands they are creating a better future and they want to create it, at any cost. Let the class enemy only attempt to impose his will from the outside on these patient masses! No, he would do better not to try it!

## Help Us Publish Trotsky's Speech On "The Defense of the October Revolution"

It is impossible to speak of the speech which comrade Trotsky made to the social-democratic students in Copenhagen without the greatest enthusiasm. It is a masterpiece. We know that it will take its place with the inspired teachings of our great revolutionary leaders.

It is, at the same time, a crushing and unanswerable refutation of the slanders with which the degenerated Stalinist regime seeks to maintain its crumbling prestige. Who, reading this speech, can lend credence to the boomerang-legend that Trotsky and the Left Opposition are counter-revolutionists? What belief could be placed in pieces like this? (*Daily Worker*, January 19, 1933): "Trotsky, like the Socialist Daily Forward, acts on the theory that any difficulty in the Soviet Union is his opportunity. The main line of imperialist attack consists in the attempt to discredit revolution as a weapon of the working class, as the way out of the miseries of capitalism; it consists in the attempt to convince the masses in the imperialist and colonial countries that no matter how bad their conditions are, things are still worse for the masses of the Soviet Union. This is Trotsky's line." Is not the speech itself, if we are to leave out of account for the moment, all the writings and deeds of the International Left Opposition, a sufficient answer to this trash of the Stalinists? We think it is. That is why we want

to bring it out as a pamphlet and give it a wide distribution.

Will you help us get this pamphlet out? The cost is about ninety dollars. That is the figure we must raise, and raise at once. Work on the pamphlet has already begun. The question is: can we raise the money necessary to get it out quickly? Our comrades and friends must give the answer.

Elsewhere in this issue we explain how the publishing fund works. Let us apply it now, concretely, to the problem of getting out this pamphlet. Let those of us who can afford it make donations for this purpose. No one should hesitate to send in what he can. No amount is too small, and, of course, no amount is ever too large. Perhaps, there are some friends who would like to help us get the pamphlet out but who are not in a position to make donations. They can help with loans.

No one should hesitate to make a loan. The money will be used exclusively for the purpose of getting out the pamphlet. A strict accounting will be kept and given. A record will be published in the *MILITANT*. And, of course, every penny will be paid back.

Now let us raise the money in the shortest possible time. Ninety dollars are not much. We can do it. Rush all funds to PIONEER PUBLISHERS, at 84 East 10th Street, New York.

## The Revolution and Its Place in History

Let us now in closing attempt to ascertain the place of the October Revolution, not only in the history of Russia but in the history of the world. During the year 1917, in a period of eight months, two historical curves intersect. The February upheaval—that belated echo of the great struggles which had been carried out in past centuries in the territories of Holland, England, France, almost all of Continental Europe—takes its place in the series of bourgeois revolutions. The October Revolution proclaims and opens the domination of the proletariat. It was world capitalism that suffered its first great defeat on the territory of Russia. The chain broke at its weakest link. But it was the chain that broke, and not only the link.

Capitalism has outlived itself as a world system. It has ceased to fulfill its essential mission, the increase of human power and human wealth. Humanity cannot stand still at the level which it has reached. Only a powerful increase in productive force and a sound, planned, that is, Socialist organization of production and distribution can assure humanity—all humanity—of a decent standard of life and at the same time give it the precious feeling of freedom with respect to its own economy. Freedom in two senses—first of all, man will no longer be compelled to devote the greater part of his life to physical labor. Second, he will no longer be dependent on the laws of the market, that is, on the blind and dark forces which have grown up behind his back. He will build up his economy freely, that is, according to a plan, with compass in hand. This time it is a question of exposing the anatomy of society to the X-ray through and through, of disclosing all its secrets and subjecting all its functions to the reason and the will of collective humanity. In this sense, Socialism must become a new step in the historical advance of mankind. Before our ancestor, who first armed himself with a stone axe, the whole of nature represented a conspiracy of secret and hostile forces. Since then, the natural sciences, hand in hand with practical technology, have illuminated nature down to its most secret depths. By means of electrical energy, the physicist passes judgment on the nucleus of the atom. The hour is not far when science will easily solve the task of the alchemists, and turn manure into gold and gold into manure. Where the demons and furies of nature once raged, now rules ever more courageously the industrial will of man.

But while he wrestled victoriously with nature, man built up his relations to other men blindly, almost like the bee or the ant. Belatedly and most undecidedly he approached the problems of human society. He began with religion, and passed on to politics. The Reformation represented the first victory of bourgeois individualism and rationalism in a domain which had been ruled by dead tradition. From the church, critical thought went on to the state. Born in the struggle with absolutism and the medieval people, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the estate and of the rights of man and the citizen grew stronger. Thus arose the system of parliamentarism. Critical thought penetrated into the domain of government administration. The political rationalism of democracy was the highest achievement of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.

But between nature and the state stands economic life. Technology liberated man from the tyranny of the old elements—earth, water, fire and air—only to subject him to its own tyranny. Man ceased to be a slave to nature, to become a slave to the machine, and, still worse, a slave to supply and demand. The present world crisis testifies in especially tragic fashion how man, who dives to the bottom of the ocean, who rises up to the stratosphere, who converses on invisible waves with the Antipodes, how this proud and daring ruler of nature remains a slave to the blind forces of his own economy. The historical task of our epoch consists in replacing the uncontrolled play of the market by reasonable planning, in disciplining the forces of production, compelling them to work together in harmony and obediently serve the needs of mankind. Only on this new social basis will man be able to stretch his weary limbs and—every man and every woman, not only a selected few—become a full citizen in the realm of thought.

But this is not the end of the road. No, it is only this beginning. Man calls himself the crown of creation. He has a certain right to that claim. But who has asserted that present-day man is the last and highest representative of the species *Homo sapiens*? No, physically as well as spiritually he is very far from perfection, prematurely born biologically, sick in mind and without new organic equilibrium.

It is true that humanity has more than once brought forth giants of thought and action, who tower over their contemporaries like summits in a chain of mountains. The human race has a right to be proud of its Aristotle, Shakespeare, Darwin, Beethoven, Goethe, Marx, Edison, and Lenin. But why are they so rare? Above all because, almost without exception, they came out of the upper and middle classes. Apart from rare exceptions, the sparks of genius in the suppressed depths of the people are choked before they can burst into flame. But also because the processes of creating, developing and educating a human being have been and remain essentially a matter of chance, not illuminated by theory and practice, not subjected to consciousness and will.

Anthropology, biology, physiology and psychology have accumulated mountains of material to raise up before mankind in their full scope the tasks of perfecting and developing body and spirit. Psychoanalysis, with the inspired hand of Sigmund Freud, has lifted the cover of the well which is poetically called the "soul". And what has been revealed? Our conscious thought is only a small part of the work of the dark psychic forces. Learned divers descend to the bottom of the ocean and there take photographs of mysterious fishes. Human thought, descending to the bottom of its own psychic sources, must shed light on the most mysterious driving forces of the soul and subject them to reason and to will.

Once he has done with the anarchic forces of his own society, man will set to work on himself, in the pestle and the mortar of the chemist. For the first time mankind will regard itself as raw material, or at best as a physical and psychic semi-finished product. Socialism will mean a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom in that other sense too, that the present-day contradictory and disharmonious man will pave the way for a new and happier race.