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Proletarian Dictatorship

A Speech by Nicolai Lenin

Translated by J. Wilenkin

THOUGH the last Moscow Soviet Congress came to the conclusion that the main task of the Russian Soviet Government is the creation of a rigid organization together with a strengthening of discipline, the majority of the workers do not consider the application of compulsion and dictation necessary to the realization of these decisions. The presumption that the transition from capitalism to Socialism will be possible without compulsion and dictation, is Utopian and senseless. The Marxian theory most emphatically refutes all such petty-bourgeois, denocratic, anarchistic nonsense. The development of Russia during the year 1917-18, has irrefutably confirmed the Marxian conception, and only those who are very stupid or who wilfully pervert the truth, can fail to comprehend this. Either the dictatorship of Kornilov or the dictatorship of the proletariat; there can be no other way thanks to the tremendous "tempo" of development in Russia and the sudden transitions due to the disorganization created by the war.

There are two causes which make dictatorship imperative during the transition period from capitalism to Socialism—and the dictatorship aims in two directions. The proletariat cannot conquer without suppressing the ruling classes, who are not willing to renounce their privileges, and who will endeavor to overthrow the hated power of the proletariat. On the other hand, no great revolution, and above all no Socialist revolution, is possible without civil war—even if no exterior war is fought. It does not require much mental exertion to understand that various elements, mostly those connected with the petty bourgeoisie, cannot but reveal themselves in their true light by robbery, speculation, bribery, etc., and time and an iron hand are required to suppress these things.

In all great revolutions the people have instinctively understood the true state of affairs, and acted without mercy against the burglars, who were often shot out of hand. The misfortune of former revolutions was that the enthusiasm, which is necessary for the realization of these measures, was of short duration. This enthusiasm animated masses only for a short time, because the workers played a relatively unimportant part in former revolutions. The proletariat is able, if it is numerically strong, disciplined and class-conscious, to attract the majority of the laboring and exploited masses and thus retain power long enough to effectively suppress all exploiters and all elements of decay. This supports the historic experience which Marx recapitulated in a brief but drastic formula: "the proletarian dictatorship."

That the Russian revolution trod the right path in order to fulfill the historic mission of the workers is proven by the triumph which has been attained by all the peoples of Russia, through the Soviet power. The Soviet power is the organization of the proletarian dictatorship, the vanguard of the class which is creating a new democracy and induc-

ing millions, nay tens of millions, of the laboring and exploited masses to participate independently in the affairs of the state—to administer the state. These masses learn through their own experiences to select the most reliable leaders among the disciplined and conscious vanguard of the proletariat.

But "dictatorship" is a word which should not be used merely as a hollow sound. Dictatorship means iron might, a revolutionary, energetic power, inexorable in the suppression of exploiters, as well as the slum-proletariat (hoodlums). Hitherto the proletarian dictatorship has not been steadfast enough. It must not be forgotten that the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie combat the Soviet power in two different ways: in the first place, by overt methods of conspiracy, Kornilovist riots, lies in the press of the Cadets, Mensheviks and Right-Social-Revolutionaries; and in the second place, by concealed means such as the utilization of all the decaying elements in order to augment bribery, lack of discipline, and chaos. The nearer the complete suppression of bourgeois power approaches, the greater becomes the petty bourgeois, anarchistic

stand that these courts are the organs of the power of the laborers and poorer peasants, a means of education and discipline.

The consciousness, that the main foes of the Russian revolution are hunger and unemployment did not sufficiently penetrate the minds of the masses, still less, the knowledge that each one who violates the discipline necessary during the process of labor, is causing hunger and unemployment and must be adequately punished; must be indicated before the people and unrelentingly punished. The petty bourgeois tendencies, which must be energetically combated, are due, to lack of understanding and to the circumstance that petty bourgeois relations still influence many who say to themselves: "As for me the rest may perish."

This combat between proletarian discipline and petty bourgeois tendencies appears in its most drastic form in the railroad problem. . . . (After pointing out the necessity of introducing dictatorial discipline in the railroad administration, Lenin sums up the question of personal dictatorship showing that not only was it necessary in former revolutions, but also that it does not conflict with the Soviet power.)

If we are not anarchists, we have thus to recognize the need of compulsion during the transition from capitalism to Socialism. The form of compulsion is determined by the degree of development of the predominant revolutionary class—is determined by that which was inherited from a long reactionary war, and by the armed power of resistance of the bourgeoisie. The difference between proletarian and bourgeois dictatorship lies in the fact that the former is directed against the exploiting minority in the interest of the exploited majority—each individual reform is promoted not only by the laboring and exploited classes but also through their organizations (as for instance the Soviet).

In the special case, which is determined by the modern situation, we must state that each large individual industry, i. e., the basis of production and the foundation of Socialism, requires strong unity of will, determining the labor of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands. This has always been acknowledged by students of Socialism as the first condition, and this can be created only by the subjection of the will of thousands to the will of one individual. This subjection may assume the mild form of management, if great class consciousness and discipline prevails in the ranks of the working class, or it will have to assume the sterner form of dictation if discipline is lax. But in each case absolute subjection is necessary. In the railroad concerns it is twofold, threefold as important.

The transition from one political problem to another, which seems to be entirely different, distinguishes the present-day period, and whereas this transition cannot avoid shocks and vacillations, the highest perfection of the vanguard of the proletariat is its iron discipline.

New York State Locals and Language Branches, Attention!

The first meeting of the Provisional Left Wing State Caucus was held in Albany, June 8th. The foundation of a State-wide organization was laid; in view of the expulsion tactics of our officialdom it behooves every Left Wing Local and Branch throughout the State to affiliate itself with the Provisional State Caucus so that we can all act in harmony.

Take this question up at the next Central Committee meeting of your Local or Branch and elect a delegate to Syracuse.

Minutes of previous meeting sent on request.

Don't forget!

Provisional Left Wing State Caucus meets in Syracuse, July 4th.

All communications and credentials should be sent to

MAXIMILIAN COHEN, Secretary

Provisional Left Wing Caucus
43 W. 29th St., N. Y. C.

These elements cannot be fought solely by means of agitation; the application of compulsion becomes necessary. The more the administration of society, and not the suppression of the bourgeoisie, becomes the chief activity of the Soviets, the more the People's Tribunals—not lynching courts—must serve as the means of compulsion.

The revolutionary masses have already taken the initial steps in the right direction by the creation of the People's Tribunals. But they are not yet strong enough; they have not yet liberated themselves sufficiently from the spirit of the bourgeoisie. The people are not yet conscious enough to under-

Friday, June 20th

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MONSTER MASS MEETING

FRIDAY, 8 O'CLOCK—MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

TO PROTEST THE RAID ON THE SOVIET BUREAU

COMRADE L. C. A. K. MARTENS WILL BE THE PRINCIPAL
SPEAKER. OTHER SPEAKERS TO BE ANNOUNCED

Under the auspices of The Russian Socialist Federation

Madison Square Garden

Madison Square Garden