

A Criticism of the Finnish Revolution

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This self criticism first appeared in a revolutionary publication published in Petrograd, Russia. Since its first appearance it has attracted much attention. For many years O. V. Kuusinen has been recognized as an intelligent and uncompromising representative of scientific social democracy. For seven years he has been the Social-Democratic party leader in the Finnish Diet; he has lectured at the Workers' College in Helsingfors. The European organized labor knows him because of his activity in the labor movement. When in the summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks established a Workers' Academy of Science in Moscow, they put Kuusinen on the faculty. Being directly connected with the Civil War in Finland, and being thoroughly acquainted with the course of action of the Russian Bolsheviks, Kuusinen has observed that revolution cannot be brought on by political action i. e. by the tactics of Social-Democracy. It is certain that American Labor has much to learn from the experience of the proletariat of Finland, and the valuable advice given by Kuusinen.—O. W. O.

forced. The Coalition government generally did nothing. It was like a lazy bull, the Socialist pulling by the horns and the bourgeoisie by the tail, thus holding him immovable. The exploitation flourished peacefully.

Soon the hungry workers entirely lost their faith in the coalition government and in the leadership of the social democrats. In Helsingfors the aggravated workers endeavored to search the butter warehouses and to distribute the butter; late in the summer a general strike broke out in the city, lasting for two days, when it was ended by organized labor. The pressure became so great that it seemed to interfere with our parliamentarism. This was democracy in reality; bringing the class struggle to a climax. But we, the representatives of the social democrats, did not see democracy in reality, but simply its hazy mirage.

This visionary mirage received its first knock from the hand of Kerensky's temporary government. Regardless of the stiff opposition by the bourgeois minority, the Diet had adopted the Russian Workingmen and Soldiers' Council methods for the procedure in the Nation's highest tribunal. From Petrograd a semi-official Menshevik delegation arrived to curb the accepting of this so-called "law of force;" but they arrived too late. Then, during the latter part of July, the Provisional Government dissolved the Diet and a new election was held. Our social democrats twice tried to continue the sessions of the dispersed Diet, but the first time Kerensky's hussars stood at the door; the second time only the seal of the Kerensky party was there; the session was held, but only the social democrats took part.

Our party did not refuse to take part in the new elections held the first of October. Because of the apparent increase in the votes, our party lost the majority place in the Diet. The greatest assistance to the bourgeoisie was the ballot-box stuffing. Immediately after the election newspapers commenced to report incidents where certain localities had more votes cast than there were voters in that district. Here and there in the possession of the chairmen of the election boards could be found ballots cast in favor of the social democrats. By mutual alliance the bourgeoisie also won a few seats in the Diet. But besides this must also be kept in mind that the discouragement of the proletariat, with the results of parliamentarism, also had effect on the election returns. The powerlessness of the Diet, the indefiniteness, delay and the weakening of the result of our work in the Diet, and also the depreciation of the political activity of the social democrats in the wake of the Coalition government, surely, lessened the enthusiasm for the election rather than increased it, as was expected in such a high state of political intensity. Our beautiful, parliamentary, democratic illusion thus received another blow, not only from a stimulus originating on the outside, but also from its inner nervousness and defectiveness.

Now the current of history flowed toward the first whirlpool. As might be well guessed the bourgeoisie, at once, used the advantage got in the election to usurp the dictatorial power and to subject the Diet under this dictatorship.

The working class again had lost all its hope for aid from the Diet and was consciously or unconsciously tending towards a revolution. The Coalition government had already broken up before the elections. Nothing could prevent the class struggle from becoming furious.

The atmosphere in Finland indicated that Russia was progressing towards a new and a more profound

THE proletarian revolution is at all times self critical, says Marx. Our partakers have, indeed, a reason to intelligently aid this self criticism without attempting to withdraw from activities of our early historical responsibility.

The Finnish Revolution had its beginning in January, 1918, but its fundamental errors originated already in 1917.

In the same manner as the war surprised the majority of the Socialist parties of the great European nations keeping them from performing their historic duty, so the Russian Revolution of 1917 surprised the Social Democrats of Finland. The freedom in the spring came to us like a flash from heaven, and our party was overcome by the events in March.

The official stand of our party was the same "independent class struggle" stand as the German Social Democrats had before the war. During the period of reaction this stand was easily safeguarded; it was not then under severe test, nor could the conservative Socialist then get wind into its sails. But in March our party met temptation and failure. In fact, our social democrats became corrupted with the bourgeoisie of Finland, and in the beginning with that of Russia (among the seducers were also the Russian Mensheviks). The Coalition Senate of Finland was the hot bed for this immoral affiliation. In March, when this corruption occurred, half of the members of the council opposed the uniting and only the conservative Socialists were represented. But the front of the rest of us was so passive that it did not interfere in the least with our co-operation with those Socialists who were specially busying themselves with the Finnish and Russian lords. And it was very typical that not a delegate at our June convention—where, by the way, we joined the Zimmerwald alliance!—voted to secede from the Socialists of the Coalition government.

That which blinded us was primarily the mirage of a parliamentary democracy. If the one-housed representation, the relative election methods, and the general ballot had not existed, and if our party had not received the majority at the polls in the summer of 1916, then probably it would have been a little easier for us to prepare ourselves for the spring torture. But now the way of parliamentary democracy seemed clear, smooth and open for the labor movement. The bourgeoisie of our country had no army, not even dependable police; nor could it legally get this, for in so doing it would need the approval of the social democrats in the parliament. The social democrats seemed to have every reason to obstruct parliamentary legality for in this position they would reap one benefit after another.

The vision of a parliamentary democracy, admired in all its glory, was not shadowed by anything but the temporary tottering hand of the Russian government. The bourgeoisie of Finland grasped it as a drowning man grasps a straw. The social democrats wished to cast this parliamentary form of government aside, or at least to fence it up within the secure boundary of legality, so not to permit it to interfere with the internal affairs of the country, that is, to defend the advantages of the bourgeoisie of Finland. Thus our effort in behalf of Finnish independence, our patriotism, appeared most beautiful fundamentally; it, surely, was a direct fight for democracy; it was the organic part of our proletarian class struggle.

The treachery of our parliamentary delusion was further augmented by the results of legislation during the summer. From the eight hour workday law we succeeded in going to such an extent that no parliament has previously reached. Measures were also passed for the democratizing of the municipal government, which meant a change from the completely monopolized power of the capitalists to a general representation—a greater step than has been made anywhere through legislation at one time. It was very evident that these accomplishments were not attained solely through the action of the Diet, but an outside gale forced them out from the hidden shoals of parliamentarism. This gale appeared in the form of a mass demonstration with unusually violent spirit primarily because of the participation of the Russian soldier-comrades. This was nothing new to us, for we have frequently explained that the best results can be obtained from parliamentarism when the people of the outside begin to bring pressure to bear.

Adverse consequence of the result of parliamentary democracy was the fact that flourishing exploitation in the foodstuff market could not be checked. This indicated that the greater parliamentary achievements were achievements only on paper. We were able to draw up a bill and make it a law; but here the checking of the exploitation ceased, the law was not en-

revolution, the outbreak of which was a question of but a very short time. The Kerensky provisional government tottered like a twig in the storm. The Bolshevik strength grew like a thunder cloud.

Our social democrats, who should have used their strength in preparing for the revolution, waited peacefully for a session of the Diet. In November was introduced a provision by which the Nation's highest power would be entrusted into the hands of a three-man committee, but they did not dare pass this provision. At the same time they were negotiating an agreement with the Russian Provisional Government for an equal distribution of power, and the Kerensky Governor-General, Nekrasov, departed for Petrograd for a signature to the compromise.

He did not return to Helsingfors. Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the Russian proletariat overthrew the power of the bourgeoisie and their tools and took the leadership into their own hands. The goddess of revolution just then passed over our own nation. We did not step into her chariot, but bowed down and allowed her to fly over us. Then we joined in a commemoration for laying down our arms.

Could a revolution at this time lead to any victory in Finland? This is a different question from that—could the proletarian revolution then have been a victory, directly, as in Russia? The former question, to me, appears possible, the latter, impossible, now as then.

The general advantages of a revolution, surely, were not hopeless. The enthusiasm and desire for fight of the proletariat was at that time high pitched. The bourgeoisie were comparatively little prepared; it was in great need of weapons, having commenced to procure them from Germany. Truly, the proletariat lacked arms. We were able to borrow a few hundred rifles from the Russian soldiers stationed at Helsingfors—these are the only weapons worth mentioning. We would have, however, been able in a great need to have got some more rifles from the Russian comrades. What would have been more important, the Russian soldiers could have given the revolution greater support than during the winter when the break in the Russian army and navy was the greatest. It must be granted that there were some among the Russian soldiers who would not have supported the revolution.

Before these signs of the times, we, social democrats, who stood for class war, swayed from one stand to another, now supporting the revolution, now refraining. The conservative Socialists, numbering about a half of our party, divided, half favoring the revolution, half opposing it. A majority of the social democrats in the Diet opposed the revolutionary efforts in such a manner that it might be said they supported the bourgeoisie rather than the workers. The conservative Socialist leaders of the trades organizations, on the other hand, desired to carry on some sort of revolutionary strike, the chief purpose was to get the majority of seats in the government and the senate. With them our committee formed a "revolutionary central council," which, especially when there were added to it social democrats who took the stand of opposition, could talk of a revolution, but could not take active part in the revolution. This committee in the beginning decided to support the declaration of a general strike. At the trades organization convention, a general strike was declared. Did this mean revolution or simply a demonstration to emphasize the demands of the general strike? Everyone could draw his own conclusion as to this, for it was left undecided because there was disagreement as to it.

The general strike spreading, the question arose about its carrying on. We, vainly called Marxians, opposed its furtherance. Without us the trades organization—the then revolutionists—would not start out. Because we, the middle social democrats, failed to take part in this revolution, we remained in the same position we had been for years. We were social democrats and not Marxians. Our social democratic stand was first, the peaceful, gradual and not the revolutionary stand in the class struggle, but at the same time a stand independent of the bourgeoisie alliance. Both of these together determined our procedure.

First, we lacked faith in a revolution; we did not depend on it, nor did we strive for it. This usually is the common characteristic of the social democrats.

Social democracy, chiefly, is just that kind of labor movement, which organizes and develops the workers in the lines of bourgeois (parliamentary) class war. Its program, truly, has the same aim as Socialism, which, to a certain degree, determines the true or the so-called "nearest" direction of the program of the social democrats. But in the main this is there as a Utopian embellishment, for the reason that Socialism can never exist as a bourgeois state in whose borders the useful activity of the social democrats is limited. That means, which is historically inevitable, of getting from a bourgeois to a socialistic society, the relevant