

Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship

By N. Bucharin

IF we are to have a dictatorship of the workers and peasants with the object of putting down the bourgeoisie, of depriving the bourgeoisie of any opportunity to undertake attempts to reestablish its power, it is clear, that there is no room for any wide liberties for the bourgeoisie, nor for extending the right of suffrage to the bourgeoisie, nor for transforming the Soviet power into a bourgeois-republican parliament.

The Communist (Bolshevik) Party is assailed from all sides with expressions of dissatisfaction, and even with threats, to this effect: "You are closing up the newspapers, dispersing meetings, violating the freedom of speech and of the press; you are establishing an autocracy, you are highwaymen and murderers" and other similar things. We must therefore go into the question of "liberties" in the Soviet Republic in considerable detail.

Let us take an example. When, in March 1917, the revolution broke out, and the Czarist ministers (Sturmer, Protopopov, etc.) were arrested, did anyone object? No one did. And yet, these arrests, like any other arrests, were a violation of *Personal Liberty*. Why was this violation approved by all? And why did we then say: "So it is and so it should be?" Simply because these arrests were of persons who were dangerous counter-revolutionaries. And in revolutionary times more than in any other it is necessary to observe the eleventh commandment: "Thou shalt not be caught napping!" If we do not remain constantly watchful, if we allow full freedom of action to all the enemies of the people and make no effort to restrict them, there soon will be very little left of the revolution.

Another example. At the time the Sturmers and Goremykins were being arrested, the Black Hundred press was also suppressed. This was very clearly a violation of *the freedom of the press*. But was this violation of the freedom of the press justifiable? Of course it was. And not one reasonable man will attempt to deny that this act was as it should be. Why? Again simply for the reason that in a life and death struggle it is necessary to deprive the enemy of his weapons. And one of these is the press.

In the November Revolution, in Kiev, the Black Hundred organization, "The Double-Headed Eagle," was suppressed, in addition to a number of others. This was a violation of the *liberty of association*. Yet it was a proper act, since the revolution cannot tolerate liberty of association to organizations directed against the revolution.

When Kornilov was advancing on Petrograd, a number of generals went on strike, refusing to submit to the orders of the Provisional Government. They declared themselves to be entirely in favor of Kornilov. Could we afford to support this kind of *liberty of a "general's" strike*? It was necessary to proceed against such strikes on the part of the Black Hundred generals with the most severe measures.

What is the point of all this? We see that violations of every variety of liberty are necessary in dealing with the *opponents of the revolution*. There cannot in revolutionary eras be any liberties for the enemies of the people and of the revolution. That is a clear, irrefutable position.

From March to November, neither the Mensheviks, nor the right Social-Revolutionaries, nor the bourgeoisie, raised any outcry against the "forcible seizures" undertaken in March, against the abrogation of the freedom of the (Black Hundred) press, of the (Black Hundred) speech, etc. No outcry was raised, because these acts were carried out by the power seized by the *bourgeoisie* in March: the Guchkovs, Milyukovs, Rodzyankos, Tereschenkos and their faithful servants, the Kerenskys and Tseretellis.

In November the situation had changed. Then the workers came out against the bourgeoisie, which on March had been sitting on their necks. In November the peasants supported the workers. Of course the bourgeoisie was inspired with an insane hatred of the workers' revolution, which was hardly exceeded by the hatred felt by the feudal landholders. All the great property owners now united against the working class and the poorest peasants. All rallied to the support of the so-called party of popular liberty (actually the party of popular treason) against the people. And naturally, when the people began to put some pressure on these their enemies, the latter began to shout in impotent rage: "Mob violence!" "Highwaymen!" etc.

The following is, however, clear to the workers and peasants. The Communist Party not only does not demand any liberties whatever for the *bourgeois*

FOREWORD

N. Bucharin is a dominant factor in the Communist Party of Russia, and since early in the Revolution head of the Moscow Soviet. He was for years, together with Lenin, the brains of the Bolsheviks. During the Revolution Bucharin was aggressive and implacable; and after the conquest of power by the proletariat and the organization of the Soviet State, he was the representative of the extreme left of the Communist Party, opposing Lenin as moderate on many issues, although one with Lenin on the general theory and policy of revolutionary proletarian dictatorship and communism.

Bucharin is an original thinker as well as an extraordinary able propagandist. His writings on Imperialism are of first importance and it is the intention of *The Revolutionary Age* soon to make them available to American Socialists. This article is a chapter from Bucharin's book *The Program of the Communist Party*, published in Russia about eight months ago. We shall publish other chapters from time to time.

A quiet, restrained and unassuming man, Bucharin is consumed by an intense energy and revolutionary spirit.

enemies of the people (such as, liberty of the press, of speech, of association, assembly, etc.). On the contrary: it demands constant readiness to confiscate the bourgeois press, to disperse the meetings of the enemies of the people, to prevent them from disseminating lies, intrigues, and panic; to put down in the most ruthless manner every effort they make to return to power. For that is what the *dictatorship of the proletariat means*.

In other words, when we speak of the press, our first question should be: What press is under discussion, the bourgeois or the proletarian? When it is a matter of meetings, we must first ask: whose meetings, those of workers, or those of counter-revolutionaries? When the question of strikes is raised, our first concern is this: is it a strike of the workers against the bourgeoisie or a sabotage of the bourgeoisie or the bourgeois *intelligentsia* against the proletariat? Anybody who can't see this can't see anything. The press, meetings, association, etc., are instruments of the class struggle, and in a revolutionary epoch they are instruments of civil war, no less than the physical military supplies, such as machine-guns, gunpowder, shell. And the whole question amounts simply to this: by what class are they being used, and against what class? The working class cannot offer liberty of organization to the uprisings of Kornilovs, Dutovs and Milyukovs, against the toiling masses. Similarly, it cannot grant absolute liberty of action, organization, speech, press, assembly, to counter-revolutionary chieftains who with great persistence are carrying through their program and only waiting for a chance to hurl themselves against the workers and peasants.

When the right Social-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks utter the battle-cry of the "Constitutional Assembly," they are really concerned with votes for the *bourgeoisie*. Similarly, when they shout wildly about the annihilation of all liberties, they are concerned with the *liberties of the bourgeoisie*. No one may touch the bourgeois press, the bourgeois leaders, the counter-revolutionary bourgeois organizations—that is the position these people take.

"But," we are told, "you also closed down the Menshevik and Social-Revolutionist papers; more than once the Communist Party has failed to respect the persons of respectable people, people who had been jailed under the Czar's regime. How about that?" We shall answer this question with another: When Gotz, a right Social-Revolutionist, Colonel, organized an uprising of the military cadets and officers against the soldiers and workers, should we caress him fondly for this activity? When Rudtseff, a right Social-Revolutionist, organized a Moscow White Guard in November consisting of bourgeois boys, house-owners and other gentlemen, the gilded youth, and together with officers and military cadets tried to put down with machine guns and to drown in blood the November uprising of the workers and soldiers—were we for this to decorate him with an order? When the Menshevik paper *Forward* (which should have been called "Backward") and the Social-Revolutionist *Labor* lied to the Moscow workers at a most critical hour, saying that Kornilov had taken Petrograd (and they did this to crush the will of the workers), did they deserve our praise for this little provocatory prank?

What must we infer from all this? The following: If the social-traitor leaders and the social-traitor papers begin to serve the bourgeoisie with unmitigated ardor, if they cease to differ in any respect from the Black-Hundred-Cadet-Pogrom Band, in their public utterances, we shall have to adopt the same measures

in dealing with them as in dealing with their beloved masters and benefactors. Many such persons at present, who in their day fought against the Czar and the nobles, now set up a dying wail whenever the workers touch the possessions of the bourgeoisie. For the past—they have our gratitude. But if at the present conjuncture, they are going to resemble the Black Hundred in their actions, we must act against them.

While the bourgeoisie and all the other enemies of the proletariat and the poorest peasants must be muzzled, the proletarians and peasants themselves must have the fullest liberty of speech, association, press, etc., and they must have these not in words only, but in fact. Never under any system of society were there so many organizations of workers and peasants as there are now under the Soviet power. Never did any state support so many workers and peasants organizations, as in our day under the Soviet power. This is the result of the simple reason that the Soviet power is the power of the workers and peasants themselves, and it is not surprising that this power should support the organizations of the working class, in so far as that is possible, in so far as the strength and the means are present. And we repeat: the Communist Party is really introducing these liberties, not merely promising them to the world. Here is a little example: The liberty of the workers' press. Under the pressure of the working class even the bourgeoisie had consented to certain degree of liberty for the workers' press. But the workers have not the means: the printing offices are all in the hands of the capitalists. The paper is also in the hands of the capitalists, who have bought everything. The peasant has his liberty of the press, but he cannot make this liberty real, because he has not the wherewithal. The Communists turn to the gentlemen controlling the printing offices, declare them to be the property of the workers' and peasants' state, and places them at the disposal of the working comrades—they may now actually realize their right to a free press. Of course the capitalist gentlemen will set up a howl. But it is clear that the right to a free press can be realized *only* in this way.

They may put another question to us: why did not the Bolsheviks speak sooner concerning the abolition of full rights for the bourgeoisie? Why did they formerly stand for a bourgeois-democratic republic? Why did they themselves formerly stand for the Constituent Assembly? And not asking of depriving the bourgeoisie of the right of suffrage? Why, in a word, have they now changed their program on these questions?

The reason is very simple: the working class has hitherto not had the *strength* to attempt an open attack on the bourgeois fortress. They needed preparatory measures, a gathering of energies, enlightenment of the masses, organization.

They did, to be sure, have liberty of the workers' press, of their own, not of the press of their masters. But they could not go to the capitalists, and to their state power, and state the demand: Messrs. Capitalists, shut down your papers and open up ours! People would have laughed at them, for it is ridiculous to put any such demand to the capitalists: it would be equivalent to asking them to cut their own throats. Such demands can only be made at the height of a successful onslaught. No earlier time was suitable. That is why the worker, as well as our party, used to say: Hurrah for freedom of the press (the *whole* press, including the bourgeois). Or, to take another example: It is clear that employers' leagues, which throw the workers into the streets, keep blacklists, etc.—are harmful to the working class. But the working class could not openly demand: Abolish your organizations and establish ours! To do that they would first have had to *crush the capitalist power*. And for that they were not strong enough. That is why our party then also cried: we demand liberty of associations (in general, not only for the workers).

But the times have changed. Now we are no longer discussing prolonged preparations for the battle: we are already in the day of the final attack, after the first great victory over the bourgeoisie. The working class is now confronted with another task: *To crush the opposition of the bourgeoisie*.

And for that reason the working class, which is now acting for the liberation of all humanity from the cruelties and horrors of capitalism, must with inflexible resoluteness carry out this task: no consideration for the bourgeoisie, but full liberty, and the means of exercising such liberty, to the working class and the poorest peasants.