

After One Year in Soviet Russia

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Address to the Convention of Delegates of the Committees of Agricultural Laborers (Poor Peasants) and Agricultural Communes (December, 1918).

COMRADES: The composition of this convention in itself indicates, in my opinion, the considerable change and the big step forward that has been made by us, the Soviet Republic, in the field of Socialist reconstruction; and particularly in adjusting our agricultural relations, the most important for our country. In this convention are united representatives from the Land Committees, from the Committees of the Poor Peasants, and from the agricultural communes; and this unity shows that during a brief period—just a year—our Revolution has gone very far in reconstructing those relations which are the hardest to change, which in previous revolutions were the most difficult obstacles to Socialism, and which require fundamental reconstruction in order to insure the victory of Socialism.

The first period, the first link in the development of our Revolution was characterized mainly by the victory over the common enemy of the peasantry, the victory over the *pomieschicks* (land-owning nobility).

All of you comrades know very well that the March (1917) Revolution—the Revolution of the bourgeoisie and the compromisers—promised this victory over the land-owners, but did not fulfill the promise. Only the November Revolution and the victory of the proletariat in the cities, only the power of the Soviets made it possible in reality to clean up all Russia from end to end of the disease of serfdom, to deliver the peasantry from the old feudal exploitation, from feudal land-ownership, and generally from the yoke of the *pomieschicks*.

In this struggle against the land-owners, the peasants rose in mass. They couldn't do otherwise. In this struggle were united all the poor peasants, those who did not live by hiring and exploiting other men. In this struggle, also, were united the most prosperous and richest of the peasantry, who cannot exist without hired labor.

While our Revolution had this task on its hands, while it had to use all the efforts of the united poor peasantry and the city proletariat in order to annihilate the power of the land-owners, the Revolution had to remain a peasant's, an agrarian revolution, and couldn't break through its bourgeois limits.

The Revolution as yet didn't touch the more powerful and more modern enemy of the toilers—Capital. There was danger that it would end half way, as did the revolutions of western Europe, where the united efforts of the peasantry and the proletariat destroyed the monarchies, and more or less completely annihilated the remnants of feudalism and feudal land-ownership, but where the fundamentals of the power of Capitalism were not affected.

And this much more important and most difficult task we started to accomplish at the end of the summer of 1918 and in the fall, by means of our Revolution. The counter-revolutionary movement, which began in the summer of 1917, became very strong. The invading armies of the imperialists of western Europe were re-inforced by the hiring Czecho-Slovaks and by all the forces of exploitation and oppression still existent in Russia. This counter-revolutionary movement developed new currents and a new life in the rural districts.

The desperate counter-revolts against the Soviets brought together all the European imperialists, the Czecho-Slovaks and everyone in Russia who stood for the feudal land-owners and Capitalism. The rich peasants joined the counter-revolutionary movement.

The rural districts ceased to be united. The peasants who had fought as one man against the land-owners (*pomieschicks*) were split into two antagonistic groups, the rich and the poor peasants.

The poorest toiling peasants went hand in hand with the proletariat toward Socialism, continuing the struggle against Capitalism. The feudal nobility being eliminated they now had to fight against the power of money, against the speculators and the rich peasants, who tried to use the great change in land-ownership for their own personal profit. In this struggle all the bourgeois and exploiting classes were swept aside, and our revolution started as a whole on the march toward Socialism, which the city proletariat had initiated in November, 1917; but which did not become general—and never could—until the rural population, the peasantry, gave the proletariat united and determined support.

There we have the tremendously important link of our Revolution forged during the last summer and autumn. The Revolution penetrated the most backward and isolated sections of Russia, spreading all through the rural districts. It was not quite so spectacular and conspicuous a movement as the *coup d'etat* of November 1917, but of much more importance and deeper significance.

The forming of Committees of the Poor (agricultural laborers, hired farm-workers) in the villages signaled that the fight against the nobility was completed and that the working class had begun the much harder and historically much more important struggle for Socialism. It was an immense task to awaken the class-consciousness of the agricultural laborers and poorest peasants, and to weld them into one class with the city proletariat. Without this, the decree socializing the land would have been a paper decree. The agricultural laborers and the poorest peasants, together with all those who do not exploit other men and do not live upon the toil of others, constitute the vast majority of the people. They are not interested in the continuance of exploitation, and were capable of going beyond the abolition of the feudal land-owners. They did go beyond this, emerging definitely into the proletarian struggle against Capitalism and for the establishment of Socialism.

This was the difficult task. Everybody who doubted the possibility of a Socialist revolution in our country prophesied inevitable failure in this task. Upon it depends our success in the future. The formation of committees of the agricultural laborers and poorest peasants, that soon covered the whole country like a net, the growth and transformation of these committees into actual and powerful Soviets, was destined to assume control of the proletarian constructive work in rural Russia. This is the distinctive feature of our Revolution, that differs so profoundly from the usual bourgeois democratic revolutions of western Europe.

No doubt, in a country so dominantly agricultural as Russia, Socialist reconstruction is hampered by very large obstacles. It was comparatively an easy job to depose the Czar, to abolish the power of the nobility. This was accomplished in a few days in the larger centres, in a few weeks all over the country. But the problem we are facing now can be solved only through a long period of hard work. Here we must go on step by step, inch by inch, to conquer Russia for actual Socialism, to cultivate land on a communistic basis.

And it is obvious that the transition from individual small farming to communistic production will require a long period. It cannot be done in a day.

We know very well that in countries where small farming is predominant, the transition to Socialism requires many preliminary measures and gradual steps. Being aware of this during the November Revolution we put forward only the demand for the confiscation of the lands of the nobility—we made every effort to sweep away the power of the *pomieschicks*. Later on (March 1918) the new law of the socialization of land was introduced unanimously, by the representatives of the communist workers as well as by the peasants' delegates to the Soviets, who were not as yet communists. This law is the embodiment of the will and aspirations of the majority of the peasants, and it shows at the same time that the proletariat and the Communist Party (Bolsheviks), being aware of their duties, are relentlessly and patiently pursuing the path of Socialist reconstruction, taking systematic steps to awaken the poorer peasantry. Every step forward is based upon this awakening and organization of the peasantry.

We know very well that such a reconstruction in the life of tens of millions of people, which is transforming the deepest foundations of everyday relations and habits—the transition from private individual production to communist agriculture—is to be accomplished only by prolonged and insistent efforts, can be accomplished only when necessity compels the people to reconstruct their life.

And after the long and terrible world war we can perceive the beginning of the social revolution all over the world. Even in the most backward countries there now exists a necessity that—independent of all theories or Socialistic teachings,—speaks authoritatively to each and everyone that life cannot go on as before.

When a country has suffered such a gigantic destruction and has been thrown into chaos, when we see that this chaos is being spread all over the world, that all the results of civilization, science and technique acquired by humanity during ages of unrelenting toil—when we see all this wantonly destroyed in four years of a capitalistic war of plunder and conquest, when all of Europe has been brought back to barbarism—then the broad masses and especially the peasants, who suffered most of all from this war, begin to realize

that all forces and extraordinary efforts must be exercised in order to get rid of this inheritance of the damned war, that has brought us on the brink of utter exhaustion and misery. It has become impossible to continue to live as we did before the war, it has become impossible to continue the wastage of human energy in primitive production on a small individual basis. The results of human labor would be doubled or trebled, the conservation of human energy would be doubled or trebled if communistic production could be put in place of individual private production.

The devastation that we inherited from the war does not permit us to restore this system of small agricultural production. More than that. The majority of the peasants not only have been awakened by the war, not only are they aware of the wonders of technique for purposes of destruction of men and goods, but they are awakened also to the consciousness, that this marvelous technique must be applied in the most necessary and most backward branch of human economies—in agriculture. This applies to science which has been utilized for sinister purposes of Capitalism, from now on must serve humanity. Our duty is to turn agriculture to new roads, to abolish the old primitive methods and base production on the very last conquest of science and the achievements of modern technique. The consciousness of this necessity has been awakened by the war in higher degree than we really appreciate. Besides this awakening, the war also made a return to old methods quite impossible.

Those people who cherished the hopes of restoration of the old, are compelled to realize their blunder more and more with every passing day. The destruction brought about by the war was so monstrous, that our small individual farms do not have either cattle or implements or tools. The limit was reached. The poorest toiling peasantry, which gave highest number of martyrs for the revolution, which were most terribly victimized by the war—did not take the land from the nobility for the purpose of turning it over to the speculators from their own class—to the rich peasants. Before this poor peasantry life itself puts the problem of communism in agriculture, as the only means of restoring the civilization that was annihilated by war, as the only way out of the darkness, the misery and the oppression—these "blessings" of Capitalism for the peasants—which gave to the capitalists the possibility of torturing humanity for the war for four years, and from which the toilers have decided to liberate themselves all over the world.

Comrades, when we adopted the law of socialization of the land there was no full unity of opinion between the Communists and other parties. The left wing of Social-Revolutionists, who supported the Soviets, did not believe in communism in agriculture. And nevertheless the vote was unanimous. And this communistic law prevails and is gaining ground. The struggle in cities was simple. There we got a thousand workers against one capitalist. In rural districts the struggle became more complicated. The first onrush against the noble land-owners was crowned with complete and easy victory. Then the struggle among the peasantry itself took root. The speculators and exploiters of the peasant class set out to get fortunes out of the spoils and from the sufferings of the hungry industrial proletariat of the cities. A number of riots and revolts occurred during the summer of 1918. Later on we had to adjust the relations between the poorest and the medium, small peasantry. And our policy was to unite these two groups. The medium, small peasants are not enemies of the Soviets, neither of the proletariat, nor do they oppose Socialism. Certainly they are unreliable, they are with us only when they see on practical grounds, that socialization is a measure of necessity. They cannot be converted by theoretical discussion or by propaganda. We don't have illusions on that score. But they are being converted by the example set by the determined unity of the toiling peasantry with the city proletariat. Gradually during a longer period, by a number of transitory measures, the unity of the communists with the medium, small peasantry can be accomplished successfully.

The policy of the Soviets in agriculture is the introduction of communism all over the country. In this direction they are working systematically. For this purpose the Soviets are organizing land communes under their own management. To this end are made the provisions that the priority of the utilization of land belongs to the state, then to public organizations, next to agricultural communes. These provisions are necessary for the transition to complete Communism.

The Soviets are using unrelenting efforts to this end. They assigned a billion rubles for improvements, provided that this sum is spent for transition to communal production.