

# Aspects of the Russian Revolution

## 1.—What is Bolshevism?

**B**OLSHEVISM is the Social Revolution to which Socialists have looked forward for more than half a century. It is the inevitable struggle which must accompany the transition of society from Capitalism to Socialism. It is the final battle of the workers of the world for power to end forever the tyranny of class rule, and the misery of exploitation.

History is a chronicle of the slavery of the working class in many forms—chattel slavery, serfdom, wage slavery. At various periods one group of exploiters has wrested the power from another—kings from priests, barons from kings, merchants from barons, plutocrats from them all; but always the workers have toiled, and always the product of their labor has been taken from them.

Many attempts have been made by the workers to overthrow their exploiters, and to enjoy the fruits of their labor, in the words of John Ball, "without money and without price." Every attempt up to now has been crushed in blood and fire—the slave insurrections of Rome, the Communist risings in the Middle Ages, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Russian Revolution of 1905.

In Socialism the working class for the first time based its aspiration to freedom on scientific fact. Bolshevism is Socialism put into practice. Today the workers are becoming conscious of their power and ability to win the world for Labor. They always had the power, and sometimes the wish. But they lacked the will and the knowledge of the way. Bolshevism is the will and the way.

The word "Bolshevism," which can be freely translated as "program of the majority," originated at a convention of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, which split into two factions—the majority (*bolshinstvo*) adopting the principles which, after the actual experiences of the Revolution of 1905, developed into what we now call Bolshevism. The main idea of the Bolsheviks at that time was that the present is a revolutionary period—a period when the struggle of the working class turns into open revolution; that the power of the Army of Capitalism lies in the fact that its organization is centralized, and commanded by a General Staff—and that in order to overthrow Capitalism, the Army of the Working class must also be centrally organized, with its General Staff. The Staff of the Army of Capitalism is directed by capitalists, in the interest of the few. The Staff of the Working Class fights under the direction and in the interests of the many—the workers.

In this Convention the minority (*menshinstvo*)—afterward known as Mensheviks—held that the working class as yet had neither the knowledge of how to overthrow Capitalism, nor the ability to create a new social order; and that therefore Social Revolution was impossible for a long time to come. Moreover, they believed that Socialism was to be achieved by "education" and "democratic" political action.

Bolshevism is practical. It does not assume that the capitalist class is going to be legislated out of power without a fight. Power is based on private ownership. In order to secure power the workers must control capitalist property, and abolish ownership. This they can do only by force—the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Today the workers of all countries are resolving to make an end to Capitalism. Bolshevism asserts that it is the Socialists, the trained

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revolutionary thinkers, who must point out the way, and lead the workers along it.

As Lenin says, "If Socialism can only be realized when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see Socialism for at least five hundred years . . . . The Socialist political party—this is the vanguard of the working class; it must not allow itself to be halted by the lack of education of the mass average, but it must be the masses using the Soviets as organs of revolutionary initiative. . . ."

The Soviets are the representative bodies of the vast majority of the organized working class. Without the unhesitating support of this vast majority, revolutionary leaders could accomplish nothing. Bolshevism in Russia conquered only because the people were ready to follow it. Bolshevism is established today in Russia because it is supported by the greater part of the Russian people.

If this were not so, the Bolsheviks would have ceased to lead the Russian Revolution long ago. Their power is based upon the Soviets, for whom all persons who live by working may cast their votes—and the delegates to which are subject to instant recall. Local Soviets meet frequently, and may be summoned in extra session on short notice by a minority, for the voters, peasants or workers, are always gathered together in the fields and factories. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets, consisting of over 2,500 members, meets every three months, at which time the Government automatically resigns and a new Government is elected, responsible to the Congress and its Central Executive Committee. And between times, any or all members of the Government may be easily recalled from office.

The Socialist Commonwealth is not born without fearful birth-pangs—the Proletarian Dictatorship. Russia today is not a Socialist Commonwealth—nor does it pretend to be. There is a Proletarian Dictatorship, engaged in conducting the final struggle of the working class against the capitalist class—not, however, its own capitalist class, for that has been conquered, but International Capitalism. Until International Capitalism is overthrown, Proletarian Dictatorship will not, cannot end.

As it is, however, the Russian Soviet Republic, hampered by the lack of education of a people for centuries plunged by tyranny in darkness, and engaged in defending itself against the world, has already accomplished miracles in organizing industry, agriculture, and education—only hinting at the mighty achievements of the new order, when the removal of capitalist obstruction finally frees the creative genius of the workers.

When the working class, the basic stratum of society, heaves its giant shoulders, the entire superstructure of Capitalism cracks and falls in ruins.

Before our eyes nation after nation is drawn into the headlong current of Social Revolution, with Bolshevism at the helm.

Bolshevism is Socialism arrived at the point of social revolution—at the dictatorship of the proletariat foretold by Karl Marx.

The object of proletarian dictatorship is to seize the power of the capitalist class and transfer it to the workers. It has no other purpose.

The methods and expedients it must use vary according to conditions. In Russia today, half the strength of the proletarian dictatorship is employed in defending itself against

the assaults of International Capitalism. But both in its external and internal policies, the Russian Soviet Government is supported by the great majority of the people—peasants as well as industrial workers.

## 2.—Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution

Bolshevism saved the Russian Revolution. To the Russian people the Revolution meant Peace, Land to the peasants, and workers' control of Industry. The propertied classes would not surrender their property; and the "moderate" Socialists, who compromised with the land-owners and capitalists, could not accomplish the will of the people. Only a government exclusively of and for the workers and peasants could satisfy these demands.

The Bolsheviks advocated such a Government, and made these popular demands the basis of their program. And the history of the Russian Revolution is the chronicle of the awakening of the masses to the political realities of the situation.

The overthrow of Czarism, in March, 1917, was accomplished by the spontaneous action of the popular masses. The bourgeois Liberals did not participate in the Revolution. Only after the Revolution was accomplished did they step in, through the Provisional Government, and try to bridle it for the purpose of perpetuating Capitalism.

Meanwhile the masses were themselves organizing. On March 14th the newly-formed Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies proclaimed: "All together we will fight for the removal of the old Government."

The Soviets, representing truly the masses of workers, soldiers and peasants, thus appeared as the real Government of the people—which, if it had not been diverted by the "moderate" Socialists, could have become the Government of Russia early in the Revolution.

This was what the Bolsheviks never ceased to urge, with their slogan, "All Power to the Soviets!"

The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries controlled the Soviets; at first they announced that the Soviets would be "a pistol at the head of the Provisional Government, to compel it to keep its promises"—but they ended by supporting the Provisional Government and trying to dissolve the Soviets.

These "moderate" Socialists held that owing to the economic backwardness of Russia, the Revolution could only be a *political* Revolution—not a *social* Revolution. Therefore, naturally, a capitalist state must first be established in Russia. Distrusting both the masses and themselves, they refused to take the power for the Soviets.

The capitalist Ministers, aware of their weakness, threatened to resign unless the Soviet leaders would enter the Government. The "moderate" Socialists complied; on May 19th the first Coalition Cabinet was formed—which, with the economic life still controlled by the capitalists, made the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries defenders of Capitalism in Russia.

For the "Moderate" Socialists needed the capitalists worse than the capitalists needed the "Moderate" Socialists.

Impelled by the attitude of the masses, the Soviet leaders proclaimed the Russian peace-terms: "No annexations, no indemnities, the right of self-determination of peoples." But the Provisional Government had ratified the secret treaties concluded between the Czar and the Allies, and the "moderate" Socialists continued to support a war which they themselves