

The Principles of Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship

By LEON TROTSKY

As Marxists, we have never been idol-worshippers of formal democracy. In a society of classes, democratic institutions not only do not eliminate class struggle, but also give to class interests an utterly imperfect expression. The propertied classes always have at their disposal tens and hundreds of means for falsifying, subverting and violating the will of the toilers. And democratic institutions become a still less perfect medium for the expression of the class struggle under revolutionary circumstances. Marx called revolutions "the locomotives of history." Owing to the open and direct struggle for power, the working people acquire much political experience in a short time and pass rapidly from one stage to the next in their development. The ponderous machinery of democratic institutions lags behind this evolution all the more, the bigger the country and the less perfect its technical apparatus.

The majority in the Constituent Assembly proved to be Social Revolutionists, and, according to parliamentary rules of procedure, the control of the government belonged to them. But the party of Right Social Revolutionists had a chance to acquire control during the entire pre-October period of the revolution. Yet, they avoided the responsibilities of government, leaving the lion's share of it to the liberal bourgeoisie. By this very course the Right Social Revolutionists lost the last vestiges of their influence with the revolutionary elements by the time the numerical composition of the Constituent Assembly formally obliged them to form a government. The working class, as well as the Red Guards, were very hostile to the party of Right Social Revolutionists. The vast majority of soldiers supported the Bolsheviks. The revolutionary element in the provinces divided their sympathies between the Left Social Revolutionists and the Bolsheviks. The

sailors, who had played such an important role in revolutionary events, were almost unanimously on our side. The Right Social Revolutionists, moreover, had to leave the Soviets, which in October—that is, before the convocation of the Constituent Assembly—had taken the government into their own hands. On whom, then, could a ministry formed by the Constituent Assembly's majority depend for support? It would be backed by the upper classes in the provinces, the intellectuals, the government officials, and temporarily by the bourgeoisie on the Right. But such a government would lack all the material means of administration. At such a political center as Petrograd, it would encounter irresistible opposition from the very start. If under these circumstances the Soviets, submitting to the formal logic of democratic conventions, had turned the government over to the party of Kerensky and Chernov, such a government, compromised and debilitated as it was, would only introduce temporary confusion into the political life of the country, and would be overthrown by a new uprising in a few weeks. The Soviets decided to reduce this belated historical experiment to its lowest terms, and dissolved the Constituent Assembly the very first day it met.

For this, our party has been most severely censured. The dispersal of the Constituent Assembly has also created a decidedly unfavorable impression among the leading circles of the European Socialist parties. Kautsky has explained, in a series of articles written with his characteristic pedantry, the interrelation existing between the Social-Revolutionary problems of the proletariat and the regime of political democracy. He tries to prove that for the working class it is always expedient, in the long run, to preserve the essential elements of the democratic order. This is, of course, true as a general rule. But Kautsky has reduced this historical truth to professorial banality. If, in the final analysis, it is to the advantage of the proletariat to introduce its class struggle and even its dictatorship, through the channels of democratic institutions, it does not at all follow that history always affords it the opportunity for attaining this happy consummation. There is noth-