

13. THE STRUGGLE FOR THE GREAT OCTOBER SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

THE BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION MUST BE TURNED INTO A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The growing revolutionary movement could be checked neither by imperialist-bourgeois persecution and suppression nor by opportunist preaching about "civil peace". The revolutionary crisis caused by the imperialist war broke out first in Russia. The Bolshevik Party which had been nurtured by Lenin himself, successfully put into effect the slogan "Convert the imperialist war into a civil war", having firmly resisted the corrosion of chauvinism during the period of the war and having long made adequate ideological, political and organizational preparations along the lines laid down by Lenin.

In March 1917 (February in the old Russian calendar), the Bolsheviks led the workers in armed uprising, overthrew the tsarist government and established the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. But while the Bolsheviks were in the streets leading the masses in struggle against the enemy, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries took advantage of the occasion, pushed their way into the Soviets and secured a majority there. At the same time, they collaborated with the bourgeoisie and established the Provisional Government.

Thus, at the very outset of the revolution a dual power came into being. In essence, the Provisional Government was a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, while the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was a democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants.

Informed of the February Revolution, Lenin hastily prepared to return from exile and give direct leadership to the Russian revolution which was already under way. Before setting out, he wrote letter after letter telling the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary masses that they must push the revolution ahead, must maintain the independence of the Party, and must do all their work in a revolutionary way. In one of these letters, dated March 17, Lenin wrote:

Our immediate task is to widen the scope of our work, to organise the masses, to arouse new social strata, the backward elements, the rural population, the domestic servants, to form nuclei in the army for the purpose of carrying on a systematic and detailed *exposé* of the new government, to prepare the seizure of power by the *Soviets of Workers' Deputies*. Only this power can give bread, *peace*, and freedom.

Right now, complete the rout of reaction; refuse *all* confidence or support to the new government (not a shadow of confidence to Kerensky, Gvozdev, Chkhenkeli, Chkheidze and Co.); keep armed watchfulness; armed preparation of a broader base for a *higher* stage.¹

On April 3, 1917, Lenin arrived back in Russia from Switzerland. At the conclusion of his speech at the mass meeting to welcome him, he used the slogan "Long live

¹"Two Letters to A.M. Kollontai", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XX, Book I, p. 21.

the socialist revolution!". The following day he published the famous "April Theses" which provided answers to the important problems confronting the Russian revolution and laid down the line of development for the socialist revolution. In the Theses he pointed out that the war which the Provisional Government was carrying on after the February Revolution was still an imperialist war and that only by overthrowing the rule of the bourgeoisie could it be ended. The Provisional Government represented state power in the hands of the bourgeoisie and therefore should be given no support whatsoever. All power should be transferred to the Soviets. The Theses clearly stated that the task of the Bolsheviks and the people of the whole country was to struggle for the transition from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. Lenin wrote:

The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that it represents a *transition* from the first stage of the revolution — which, owing to the insufficient class consciousness and organization of the proletariat, placed the power in the hands of the bourgeoisie — *to the second* stage, which must place the power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest strata of the peasantry.¹

The opportunists opposed Lenin's revolutionary line. Plekhanov published an article in which he said:

This has been forgotten here by people who summon the Russian labouring masses to seize political power, an act which would be logical only if the objective condi-

¹"On the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 14.

tions necessary for a social revolution were present. These conditions are not yet present. . . .¹

Right up to the eve of the October Revolution the opportunists continued to use such hackneyed phrases as: "We are not yet ripe for Socialism";² the proletariat "will not be able to set this [the state] apparatus in motion"; "the situation is exceptionally complicated"; the proletariat "will be incapable of resisting the whole of that pressure of the hostile forces".³ Their arguments were simply Russian versions of the opportunist theory of the Second International. They made a dogma of the particular principle that socialism cannot triumph in one country alone, which had been put forward by Marx in the light of the conditions in the 19th century. Like parrots the Russian opportunists repeated that it was quite impossible for backward Russia to launch a socialist revolution on its own.

After the February Revolution Lenin wrote many articles denouncing the antiquated theories of the opportunists against the carrying out of socialist revolution in Russia. He said that victory was assured for the proletariat in Russia if it took power, for behind them stood the immeasurably bigger world forces of the proletariat. He added that the entire capitalist class would offer most stubborn resistance, but this resistance would be broken by organizing the entire population into Soviets. As for the ability of the proletariat to lay hold of the state ap-

¹ Quoted by Lenin in "One of the Basic Questions", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XX, Book I, p. 236.

² Quoted by Lenin in "The Threatening Catastrophe and How to Fight It", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XXI, Book I, p. 210.

³ Quoted by Lenin in *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* F.L.P.H., Moscow, p. 19.

paratus, Lenin pointed out that only when the proletariat and the toiling masses took power would they be in a position to learn how to administer the state, and they would certainly learn in the course of practice. He said:

The chief thing now is to abandon the prejudiced bourgeois-intelligentsia view that only special officials, who by their entire social position are entirely dependent upon capital, can administer the state.¹

In denouncing the argument that "the situation is exceptionally complicated", Lenin pointed out:

. . . a revolution, a real, profound, a "people's" revolution, to use Marx's expression, is the incredibly complicated and painful process of the dying out of the old and birth of the new social order, of the mode of life of tens of millions of people. . . .

If the situation were not exceptionally complicated there would be no revolution. If you are afraid of wolves don't go into the forest.²

THE OLD STATE MACHINE MUST BE SMASHED AND A NEW ONE BUILT

Lenin declared:

The basic question in any revolution is that of state power. Unless this question is understood, there can be no conscious participation in the revolution, not to speak of guidance of the revolution.³

¹ *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* *op. cit.*, p. 49.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ "On the Dual Power", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 20.

The imperialist war greatly accelerated the process of change from monopoly capitalism to state monopoly capitalism. The state was merging more and more with the all-powerful capitalist associations. The imperialist countries had become "military convict prisons for the workers". How was the proletariat to deal with the bourgeois state machine and what kind of state machine should the victorious proletariat set up? This became the most pressing problem of both theory and practice at the time when the international proletarian revolution was making conspicuous progress and the opportunists were grossly distorting the Marxist theory of state. While in Switzerland, Lenin had made an intensive theoretical study of the problem and prepared copious notes on it. On his return to Russia, under extremely trying and dangerous conditions he wrote his great work *The State and Revolution*. It provided a penetrating reply to the basic question confronting the revolution, defending and developing the Marxist theory of the state, scientifically expounding the historical function of the dictatorship of the proletariat throughout the entire period of transition from capitalism to communism, and ruthlessly criticizing the opportunists, especially Kautsky.

Kautsky had expressed the view that "we can safely leave the solution of the problem of the proletarian dictatorship to the future".¹ He had declared that "we are not discussing here the form the 'future state' will be given by victorious Social-Democracy, but how the present state is changed by our opposition".² He had also said, "The aim of our political struggle remains, as

¹Quoted by Lenin in "The State and Revolution", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 310.

²*Ibid.*, p. 319.

hitherto, the conquest of state power by winning a majority in parliament and by converting parliament into the master of the government."¹

Basing himself on the literature of Marxism, Lenin summed up the experience of the proletariat in its struggle for state power from the middle of the 19th century onwards and elaborated the principle that the proletariat cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machine, that the revolutionary proletariat must smash the old state machine. He said:

Revolution consists not in the new class commanding, governing with the aid of the *old* state machine, but in this class *smashing* this machine and commanding, governing with the aid of a *new* machine. Kautsky slurs over this *basic* idea of Marxism, or he had utterly failed to understand it.²

Lenin considered that the only way for the proletariat to establish its rule was to set up a state modelled on the Paris Commune. The Soviets which had been set up during the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and February 1917 were of the type of the dictatorship of the proletariat established by the Paris Commune. Lenin said:

The teaching on the class struggle, when applied by Marx to the question of the state and of the socialist revolution, leads of necessity to the recognition of the *political rule* of the proletariat, of its dictatorship, i.e., of power shared with none and relying directly upon the armed force of the masses. The overthrow of the

¹*Ibid.*, p. 323.

²"The State and Revolution", *op. cit.*, p. 319.

bourgeoisie can be achieved only by the proletariat becoming transformed into the *ruling class*, capable of crushing the inevitable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie, and of organizing *all* the toiling and exploited masses for the new economic order.¹

In the same work Lenin pointed out that the state was the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, that it was an instrument for the oppression of one class by another and a special repressive force. Thus he thoroughly exposed the real nature of the bourgeois state and bourgeois democracy. He said:

The forms of bourgeois states are extremely varied, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*.²

The bourgeois-democratic republic was also a form of bourgeois state. A democratic republic was the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital had gained control of this very best shell, it established its power so securely, so firmly, that "no change, either of persons, of institutions, or of parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic, can shake it".³

Lenin criticized Kautsky's argument about "the conquest of state power by winning a majority in parliament". He said, "This is nothing but the purest and the most vulgar opportunism: repudiating revolution in deeds, while accepting it in word."⁴ Kautsky's view came

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

entirely within the concept of the bourgeois parliamentary republic. The real essence of bourgeois parliamentarianism was "to decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament".¹ On a later occasion Lenin pointed out:

Only scoundrels or simpletons can think that the proletariat must win the majority in elections carried out *under the yoke of the bourgeoisie*, under *the yoke of wage-slavery*, and that only after this must it win power. This is the height of folly or hypocrisy, is substituting voting, under the old system and with the old power, for class struggle and revolution.²

In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin expounded on the theory of the inevitability of violent revolution developed by Marx and Engels, precisely because the opportunists usually did not "talk or even think about the significance of this idea, and it plays no part whatever in their daily propaganda and agitation among the masses".³ He said:

The latter [i.e. the bourgeois state] *cannot* be superseded by the proletarian state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) through the process of "withering away," but, as a general rule, only through a violent revolution. The panegyric Engels sang in its honour, and which fully corresponds to Marx's repeated declarations (recall the concluding passages of *The Poverty of Philosophy* and the *Communist Manifesto*,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

² *Greetings to Italian, French and German Communists*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, p. 16.

³ "The State and Revolution", *op. cit.*, p. 218.

with their proud and open proclamation of the inevitability of a violent revolution; recall what Marx wrote nearly thirty years later, in criticizing the Gotha Program of 1875, when he mercilessly castigated the opportunist character of that program) — this panegyric is by no means a mere “impulse,” a mere declamation or a polemical sally. The necessity of systematically imbuing the masses with *this* and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of *all* the teachings of Marx and Engels. The betrayal of their teaching by the now predominant social-chauvinist and Kautskyite trends is expressed in striking relief by the neglect of *such* propaganda and agitation by both these trends.¹

To cover up their own shameful servility to the bourgeois state and their fear of violent revolution, the Kautskyites when discussing the problem of the state merely talked about anti-anarchism but avoided the subject of anti-revisionism; in addition, they maliciously blurred the line of demarcation between Marxism and anarchism. In *The State and Revolution* Lenin made a clear demarcation between Marxism and anarchism, criticized the errors of anarchism, and at the same time smashed the ignominious attempt of the opportunists to slander the Marxists. He said:

. . . (1) the former [i.e., the Marxists], while aiming at the complete abolition of the state, recognize that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of Socialism, which leads to the withering away of the state; the latter [i.e., the

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

anarchists] want to abolish the state completely overnight, failing to understand the conditions under which the state can be abolished. (2) The former recognize that after the proletariat has conquered political power it must utterly destroy the old state machine and substitute for it a new one consisting of an organization of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune; the latter, while insisting on the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no clear idea of *what* the proletariat will put in its place and *how* it will use its revolutionary power; the anarchists even deny that the revolutionary proletariat should use the state power, they deny its revolutionary dictatorship. (3) The former demand that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilizing the present state; the anarchists reject this.¹

THE WORKING CLASS WOULD PREFER TO TAKE POWER
PEACEFULLY BUT THE BOURGEOISIE WILL NEVER
VOLUNTARILY RETIRE FROM THE STAGE
OF HISTORY

The political situation in Russia after the February Revolution was characterized by the existence of a dual power. In other words, besides the bourgeois Provisional Government there was another government — the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. This situation could not last for ever. The course of events demanded that all state power should be in the exclusive possession of one or the other — either the Provisional Government or the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. These were the circumstances under which Lenin, in his "April Theses", put forward his plan for the transition from the democratic revolution to the socialist revolution. With regard to the Provisional Government, Lenin's slogan was: "No support for the Provisional Government!" He said that the Bolsheviks should work hard to help the masses understand that the Soviet was the only possible form of revolutionary state power and that all state power should be turned over to the Soviets. Hence, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who supported the Provisional Government, should be expelled from the Soviets and the Bolsheviks made the majority party in order that the policy of the Soviets could be changed. Lenin drew this conclusion in anticipation of a peaceful development of the revolution. He arrived at it in conditions which were very rare in revolutionary history.

Lenin said:

. . . [at that time] the Soviets were composed of delegations from the mass of free (*i.e.*, not subject to external coercion) and armed workers and soldiers. The *essence* of the situation was that the arms were in the hands of the people, and that no coercion was exercised over the people from without. That is what opened up and ensured a peaceful path for the development of the revolution. The slogan, "All power to the Soviets," was a slogan for the next immediate step, which could be directly effected in this peaceful path of development.¹

¹"On Slogans", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, pp. 167-68.

Lenin had declared long before that the workers would prefer to take power peacefully. "But," he said, "to *renounce* the revolutionary seizure of power would be *madness* on the part of the proletariat, both from the theoretical and the practical-political points of view; it would mean nothing but a disgraceful retreat in face of the bourgeoisie and all other propertied classes. It is very probable — even most probable — that the bourgeoisie will not make peaceful concessions to the proletariat and at the decisive moment will resort to violence for the defence of its privileges."¹ Thus, while anticipating a peaceful development of the revolution, Lenin did not cease his revolutionary education and organization of the masses, nor did he fail to make actual preparations for non-peaceful revolution.

As was to be expected, the Provisional Government, which included the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, made no peaceful concessions to the proletariat. On July 4, it suppressed a peaceful mass demonstration with great violence. It took all state power into its own hands and virtually ended the dual power.

Although the Bolsheviks had tried to restrain the demonstrations which took place and were suppressed on July 4, Lenin, unlike the opportunists, did not rebuke the revolutionary masses. He wrote:

Had our party refused to support the July 16-17 [July 3-4] movement, which burst out spontaneously despite our attempts to restrain it, it would have been a direct and complete betrayal of the proletariat, since

¹"A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 4, p. 276.

the masses came into motion because of their well-founded and just indignation. . . .¹

He added:

The real error of our party on July 16-17, as now revealed by events, was only that the party considered the national situation *less* revolutionary than it proved to be, that the party *still* considered possible a peaceful development of political transformations through a change in the policies of the Soviets, whereas in reality the Mensheviks and S.-R.'s had already so much entangled and bound themselves by agreements with the bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie had become so counter-revolutionary, that there could no longer be any idea of peaceful development.²

The July events showed that a peaceful development of the revolution was no longer possible. On this point Lenin wrote as follows:

That [i.e., the peaceful development of the revolution] would have been the most easy, the most advantageous course for the people. Such a course would have been the least painful, and it was therefore necessary to fight for it most energetically. Now, however, this struggle, the struggle for the timely transfer of power to the Soviets, has ended. A peaceful course of development has been rendered impossible.³

¹ "Draft Resolution on the Political Situation", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XXI, Book I, pp. 158-59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³ "On Slogans", *op. cit.*, p. 169.

Under his guidance, a policy of armed insurrection was decided upon at the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party.

For a few days in September the peaceful development of the revolution again became possible. At that time the people's armed forces led by the Bolsheviks had routed Kornilov's rebellion. The Soviets had begun to shift over to the Bolsheviks. The bourgeois Provisional Government was facing a crisis. In the article "Compromises", Lenin said that if the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries would agree to form a government responsible solely and exclusively to the Soviets, if the Bolsheviks had full freedom of propaganda, and if the members of the Soviets could be re-elected for the immediate realization of a new type of democracy, the Bolsheviks would take all power into their own hands and the revolution would develop peacefully. But this possibility vanished very quickly. The Mensheviks, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Constitutional-Democrats arrived at an agreement behind the scenes, and helped the landlords and capitalists to consolidate their rule. Three days after Lenin wrote the article "Compromises" he added in an appended note that "the days when by chance the road of peaceful development became possible have already passed"¹ and that his article had become nothing but "belated thoughts".²

Lenin said:

Imperialism — the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, the era of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly

¹ "Compromises", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, p. 214.

² See *ibid.*

capitalism — has demonstrated with particular force an extraordinary strengthening of the “state machine” and an unprecedented growth of its bureaucratic and military apparatus, in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries.¹

In such an era it was all the more necessary for the proletariat to overthrow bourgeois rule and destroy its state machine.

THOSE WHO REFUSE TO UNDERTAKE ARMED INSURRECTION WHEN THE DECISIVE BATTLE HAS TO BE FOUGHT ARE “MISERABLE TRAITORS TO THE PROLETARIAN CAUSE”

Lenin pointed out that before the decisive battle was fought the political party of the working class should not abandon any possible open work, including parliamentary struggle. But “we should have devoted to this talkshop one hundredth of our strength, and given 99 per cent to the masses”.² “Do not miss a single hour of open work. But do not cherish any constitutional and ‘peaceful’ illusions.”³ Whoever refused to undertake armed uprising when the decisive battle had to be fought “would be *miserable traitors* to the proletarian cause”.⁴

¹ “The State and Revolution”, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-32.

² “Concerning the Heroes of Forgery and the Errors of the Bolsheviks”, *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 26, p. 29.

³ “The Political Situation”, *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XXI, Book I, p. 38.

⁴ “The Crisis Has Matured”, *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, p. 229.

Just at the time when it was certain that armed insurrection would become a political reality in Russia the opportunists maliciously slandered Lenin and the Bolsheviks as being advocates of Blanquism. Lenin gave the lie to this slander. He said:

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon the revolutionary spirit of the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon the *crucial moment* in the history of the growing revolution, when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemies and in the ranks of the *weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point. And these three factors in the attitude towards insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*.¹

On the question of the right moment for the insurrection, Lenin said in “The Crisis Has Matured”, “The beginning of October (end of September) undoubtedly marked a definite turning point in the history of the Russian revolution and, to all appearances, of the world revolution also.”² The tendency, or views, of those who were “*opposed to the immediate seizure of power and an immediate insurrection*”³ had to be overcome for “otherwise the Bolsheviks will cover themselves with

¹ “Marxism and Insurrection”, *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, p. 218.

² *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, p. 224.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

eternal shame and destroy themselves as a party".¹ Obstruction by Kamenev and Zinoviev caused the insurrection to be postponed over and over again. Lenin conducted a bitter struggle against them in order to stage an early insurrection. From late September (old Russian calendar) up to the eve of the October Revolution he incessantly called for immediate insurrection. He repeatedly warned that to postpone the insurrection would be "a crime", that it would "truly mean death" and that it would "*doom the revolution to failure*".² Thanks to Lenin's persistent, indefatigable struggle the armed insurrection eventually resulted in victory on October 25 (November 7).

As a result of the theoretical and political struggles that had been waged, the clouds of revisionism and opportunism which had darkened the road of revolution were dispersed and the brilliant light of Leninism finally illuminated the way forward for the struggle of the proletariat in Russia and the whole world. Under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the proletariat and the working people of Russia launched their armed insurrection, overthrew the state power of the bourgeoisie, accomplished the great October Revolution and established the first socialist country in the world, thus opening a new era in the history of mankind. Basically, the road of the October Revolution is the glorious road of all human progress.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 232.