

## **The Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

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## Chapter I

### The Problem

The present Russian Revolution has, for the first time in the history of the world, made a Socialist Party the rulers of a great Empire. A far more powerful event than the seizing of control of the town of Paris by the proletariat in 1871. Yet, in one important aspect, the Paris Commune was superior to the Soviet Republic. The former was the work of the entire proletariat. All shades of the Socialist movement took part in it, none drew back from it, none was excluded.

On the other hand, the Socialist Party which governs Russia to-day gained power in fighting against other Socialist Parties, and exercises its authority while excluding other Socialist Parties from the executive.

The antagonism of the two Socialist movements is not based on small personal jealousies: it is the clashing of two fundamentally distinct methods, that of democracy and that of dictatorship. Both movements have the same end in view: to free the proletariat, and with it humanity, through Socialism. But the view taken by the one is held by the other to be erroneous and likely to lead to destruction.

It is impossible to regard so gigantic an event as the proletarian struggle in Russia without taking sides. Each of us feels impelled to violent partisanship. And the more so because the problem which to-day occupies our Russian comrades will to-morrow assume practical significance for Western Europe, and does already decisively influence the character of our propaganda and tactics.

It is, however, our party duty not to decide for one or the other side in the Russian internal quarrel before we have thoroughly tested the arguments of both. In this many comrades would hinder us. They declare it to be our duty blindly to pronounce in favour of the section now at the helm. Any other attitude would endanger the Revolution, and Socialism itself. This is nothing less than to ask us to accept as already proved that which is still to be examined, viz., that one of the sections has struck out in the right path, and we must encourage it by following.

We place ourselves, of course, by asking for the fullest discussion, already on the ground of democracy. Dictatorship does not ask for the refutation of contrary views, but the forcible suppression of their utterance. Thus, the two methods of democracy and dictatorship are already irreconcilably opposed before the discussion has started. The one demands, the other forbids it.

In the meantime, dictatorship does not yet reign in our Party; discussion amongst us is still free. And we consider it not only as our right, but as our duty to express our opinions freely, because an appropriate and fruitful decision is only possible after hearing all the arguments. One man's speech is notoriously no man's speech. Both sides must be listened to.

We will, therefore, examine the significance which democracy has for the proletariat – what we understand by the dictatorship of the proletariat – and what conditions dictatorship, as a form of government, creates in the struggle for freedom of the proletariat.

## Chapter II

### Democracy and the Conquest of Political Power

The distinction is sometimes drawn between democracy and Socialism, that is, the socialisation of the means of production and of production, by saying that the latter is our goal, the object of our movement, while democracy is merely the means to this end, which occasionally might become unsuitable, or even a hindrance.

To be exact, however, Socialism as such is not our goal, which is the abolition of every kind of exploitation and oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race.

We seek to achieve this object by supporting the proletarian class struggle, because the proletariat, being the undermost class, cannot free itself without abolishing all causes of exploitation and oppression, and because the industrial proletariat, of all the oppressed and exploited classes, is the one which constantly grows in strength, fighting capacity and inclination to carry on the struggle, its ultimate victory being inevitable. Therefore, to-day every genuine opponent of exploitation and oppression must take part in the class struggle, from whatever class he may come.

If in this struggle we place the Socialist way of production as the goal, it is because in the technical and economic conditions which prevail to-day Socialistic production appears to be the sole means of attaining our object. Should it be proved to us that we are wrong in so doing, and that somehow the emancipation of the proletariat and of mankind could be achieved solely on the basis of private property, or could be most easily realised in the manner indicated by Proudhon, then we would throw Socialism overboard, without in the least giving up our object, and even in the interests of this object. Socialism and democracy are therefore not distinguished by the one being the means and the other the end. Both are means to the same end. The distinction between them must be sought elsewhere. Socialism as a means to the emancipation of the proletariat, without democracy, is unthinkable.

Social production, it is true, is also possible in a system other than a democratic one. In primitive conditions communistic methods became the basis of despotism, as Engels noted in 1875, when dealing with the village communism which has existed in India and Russia down to our own day.

Dutch colonial policy in Java for a long time based the organisation of agricultural production under the so-called "culture" system upon land communism for the profit of the government who exploited the people.

The most striking example of a non-democratic organisation of social work was furnished in the eighteenth century by the Jesuit State of Paraguay. There the Jesuits, as the ruling class, organised with dictatorial power the labour of the native Indian population, in a truly admirable fashion, without employing force, and even gaining the attachment of their subjects.

For modern men, however, such a patriarchal regime would be intolerable. It is only possible under circumstances where the rulers are vastly superior to the ruled in knowledge, and where the latter are absolutely unable to raise themselves to an equal standard. A section or class which is engaged in a struggle for freedom cannot regard such a system of tutelage as its goal, but must decisively reject it.

For us, therefore, Socialism without democracy is unthinkable. We understand by Modern Socialism not merely social organisation of production, but democratic organisation of society as well. Accordingly, Socialism is for us inseparably connected with democracy. No Socialism without democracy. But this proposition is not equally true if reversed. Democracy is quite possible without Socialism. A pure democracy is even conceivable apart from Socialism, for example, in small peasant communities, where complete equality of economic conditions for everybody exists on the basis of participating in privately owned means of production.

In any case, it may be said that democracy is possible without Socialism, and precedes it. It is this pre-Socialist democracy which is apparently in the minds of those who consider that democracy and Socialism are related to each other as the means to an end, although they mostly hasten to add that, strictly speaking, it is really no means to an end. This interpretation must be most emphatically repudiated, because, should it win general acceptance, it would lead our movement into most dangerous tracks.

Why would democracy be an unsuitable means for the achievement of Socialism?

It is a question of the conquest of political power.

It is said that if in a hitherto bourgeois democratic State the possibility exists of the Social Democrats becoming the majority at an election, the ruling classes would make use of all the forces at their command in order to prevent democracy asserting itself. Therefore, it is not by democracy, but only by a political revolution that the proletariat can conquer the political power.

Doubtless, in cases where the proletariat of a democratic State attains to power, one must reckon with attempts of the ruling classes to nullify by violence the realisation of democracy by the rising class. This, however, does not prove the worthlessness of democracy for the proletariat. Should a ruling class, under the suppositions here discussed, resort to force, it would do so precisely because it feared the consequences of democracy. And its violence would be nothing but the subversion of democracy. Therefore, not the uselessness of democracy for the proletariat is demonstrated by anticipated attempts of the ruling classes to destroy democracy, but rather the necessity for the proletariat to defend democracy with tooth and nail. Of course, if the proletariat is told that democracy is a useless ornament, - the needful strength for its defence will not be created. The mass of the people are everywhere too attached to their political rights willingly to abandon them. On the contrary, it is rather to be expected that they would defend their rights with such vigour that if the other side endeavoured to destroy the people's privileges, a political overthrow would be the result. The higher the proletariat values democracy, and the closer is its attachment to its rights, the more may one anticipate this course of events.

On the other hand, it must not be thought that the forebodings above mentioned will everywhere be realised. We need not be so fainthearted. The more democratic the State is, the more dependent are the forces exerted by the Executive, even the military ones, on public opinion. These forces may become, even in a democracy, a means of holding down the proletarian movement, if the proletariat is still weak in numbers, as in an agrarian State, or if it is politically weak, because unorganised, and lacking self-consciousness. But if the proletariat in a democratic State grows until it is numerous and strong enough to conquer political power by making use of the liberties

which exist, then it would be a task of great difficulty for the capitalist dictatorship to manipulate the force necessary for the suppression of democracy.

As a matter of fact, Marx thought it possible, and even probable, that in England and America the proletariat might peacefully conquer political power. On the conclusion of the Congress of the International at the Hague in 1872. Marx spoke at a meeting, and among other things said:

The worker must one day capture political power in order to found the new organisation of labour. He must reverse the old policy, which the old institutions maintain, if he will not, like the Christians of old who despised and neglected such things, renounce the things of this world.

But we do not assert that the way to reach this goal is the same everywhere. We know that the institutions, the manners and the customs of the various countries must be considered, and we do not deny that there are countries like England and America, and, if I understood your arrangements better, I might even add Holland, where the worker may attain his object by peaceful means. But not in all countries is this the case.

It remains to be seen whether Marx's expectations will be realised.

There are certainly in the above named countries sections of the ruling classes whose inclinations to use force against the proletariat grow. But, beside these there are other sections in whom the rising power of the proletariat gains respect and evokes a desire to keep it in good humour by concessions. Although the world war, for the period of its duration, has strictly confined the struggle of the masses for freedom everywhere, it has brought to the English proletariat a considerable extension of political power. It cannot to-day be foreseen how democracy in the various States will influence the forms which the conquest of political power by the proletariat will take, and how far it will avert the use of violent methods from both sides and promote the use of peaceful means. In any case, the institution of democracy would not lose its importance. In a democratic republic, where the people's rights have been firmly established for decades, perhaps centuries, rights which the people conquered by revolution, and maintained or extended, thus compelling the respect of the ruling classes for the masses, in such a community the forms of transition would certainly be different from those in a State where a military despotism has been accustomed to rule by force, and hold the masses of the people in check.

For us the significance of democracy in the pre-Socialist period is not exhausted with the influence it may have on the forms of transition to a proletarian regime. It is most important for us during this period, in so far as it bears on the ripening of the proletariat.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Democracy and the Ripening of the Proletariat**

Socialism postulates special historical conditions, which render it possible and necessary. This is pretty generally recognised. Yet there is by no means unanimity amongst us as regards the conditions which must be fulfilled in order to. make modern Socialism possible, should a country

be ripe for it. This divergence on such an important question is not a calamity, and so far as it causes us to be occupied with the problem at the present time is a matter for rejoicing. We are obliged to consider this matter because, for most of us, Socialism has ceased to be something that must be expected in hundreds of years, as we were assured by many at the time of the outbreak of war. Socialism has become a practical question on the order of the day.

What, then, are the pre-requisites for the establishment of Socialism?

Every conscious human action presupposes a will. The Will to Socialism is the first condition for its accomplishment.

This Will is created by the great industry. Where small production is uppermost in a society, the masses of the people are possessors of the means of production. He who happens to be without property conceives his ideal to be the acquirement of a small possession. This desire may, in some circumstances, assume a revolutionary form, but such a social revolution would not have a Socialist character – it would only redistribute the existing wealth in such a manner that everyone would receive a share. Small production always creates the Will to uphold or to obtain private property in the means of production which are in vogue, not the will to social property, to Socialism. This Will first appears amongst the masses when large scale industry is already much developed, and its superiority over small production is unquestioned; when it would be a retrograde step, if it were possible, to break up large scale industry when the workers engaged in the large industry cannot obtain a share in the means of production unless they take on a social form; when small production, so far as it exists, steadily deteriorates, so that the small producers can no longer support themselves thereby. In this way the Will to Socialism grows.

At the same time, the material possibilities of its achievement increase with the growth of the large industry. The larger the number of producers, and the more independent of each other they are, the more difficult it is to organise them socially. This difficulty disappears in the measure in which the number of producers decreases, and the relations between them become more close, and uniform. Finally, alongside of the will to Socialism, and its material conditions – the raw material of Socialism – the strength to realise it must also exist. Those who want Socialism must become stronger than those who do not want it.

This factor, too, is created by the development of the large industry, which causes an increase in the number of proletarians – those who have an interest in Socialism – and a decrease in the number of capitalists, that is a decrease as compared with the number of proletarians. In comparison with the non-proletarian classes, the small peasants and petty bourgeoisie, the number of capitalists may increase for some time. But the proletariat increases more rapidly than any other class in the State.

These factors are the direct outcome of the economic development. They do not arise of themselves, without human co-operation, but they arise without proletarian co-operation, solely through the operations of the capitalists, who have an interest in the growth of their large industry. This development is in the first place industrial, and confined to the towns. The agrarian development is only a weak echo of it. Socialism will come from the towns and from industry, but not from agriculture. For its realisation yet another – a fourth – factor is needful besides those already mentioned. The proletariat must not only have an interest in the establishment of

Socialism, it must not merely have the material conditions for Socialism ready to hand, and possess the strength to make use of them; it must also have the capacity to retain its hold of them, and properly to employ them. Only then can Socialism be realised as a permanent method of production.

To the ripening of the conditions, the necessary level of the industrial development, must be added the maturity of the proletariat, in order to make Socialism possible. This factor will not, however, be created by the efforts of the capitalist to obtain rent, interest and profit, without the co-operation of the proletariat. It must, on the contrary, be obtained by the exertions of the proletariat in opposition to the capitalist.

Under the system of small production those without property fall into two sections. For one of them, viz., apprentices and peasants' sons, their lack of property is only a temporary condition. The members of this class expect one day to become possessors and have an interest in private property. The other section of the class without property are the vagabonds, who are unnecessary and even harmful parasites on society, without education, without self-consciousness, without cohesion. When a chance offers itself, they are quite ready to expropriate the possessors, but they neither want nor are able to construct a new social order.

The capitalist method of production makes use of this propertyless class of vagabonds, whose numbers assume large proportions in the beginning of the capitalist system. Out of superfluous, even dangerous parasites, they are transformed into the indispensable economic foundations of production, and therefore of society. Capitalism increases their numbers and multiplies their strength, but it exploits their ignorance, rawness and incapacity. It even seeks to depress the working classes to their level. By overwork, monotony and dullness of toil, labour of women and children, capitalism even presses the working classes below the level of the former vagabond class. The impoverishment of the proletariat increases in an alarming degree.

From it, however, the first striving towards Socialism appears as an effort to make an end of the growing poverty of the masses. It seemed, however, that this poverty must render the proletariat for ever incapable of emancipating itself. Bourgeois sympathy must save it, and bring Socialism about.

It is soon apparent that nothing can be expected from this sympathy. Sufficient strength to accomplish Socialism can only be expected from those whose interests lie that way, that is the proletarians. But were not they perishing without hope?

Not all, in fact. There were particular sections which had shown strength and courage to fight against poverty. This small fraction would do what the Utopians were not capable of doing.

By a sudden stroke it would capture the powers of the State, and bring Socialism to the people. This was the conception of Blanqui and Weitling. The proletariat, which was too ignorant and demoralised to organise and rule itself, should be organised and ruled by a government comprised of its educated elite, something like the Jesuits in Paraguay who had organised and governed the Indians.

Weitling foresaw the dictatorship of a single person, who would carry through Socialism at the head of a victorious revolutionary army. He called him a Messiah.

I see a new Messiah coming with the sword, to carry into effect the teachings of the first. By his courage he will be placed at the head of the revolutionary army, and with its help he will crumble the decayed structure of the old social order, and drown the sources of tears in the ocean of forgetfulness, and transform the earth into a paradise. –  
(Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom)

A generous and enthusiastic anticipation. It is based, however, solely upon the expectation that the revolutionary army will find the right man. But suppose one is not disposed to accept this belief in a coming Messiah, and holds the conviction that unless the proletariat can free itself Socialism must remain an Utopia?

In view of the fact that the proletariat has not attained to the capacity for self-government in any of the organisations with which it is concerned, is not the hopelessness of Socialism, in face of the impoverishment of the workers by capitalism, thereby demonstrated?

So it would appear. Yet practice and theory soon showed a way out. In England the industrial proletariat first became a mass movement, there it found some instalment of democratic rights, some possibilities of organisation and of propaganda, and was stirred into motion by being summoned to the aid of the bourgeoisie in the struggle with the nobles for the franchise.

Among the Trade Unions and the Chartists the beginnings of the Labour movement first arose, with the resistance offered by the proletariat to its impoverishment and disfranchisement. It commenced its strikes, and its great fight for the suffrage and the normal working day.

Marx and Engels early recognised the significance of this movement. It was not the “theory of impoverishment” which characterised Marx and Engels. They held this in common with other Socialists, but were superior to them by not only recognising the capitalist tendency towards impoverishment, but also the proletarian counter tendency, and in this, in the class struggle, they recognised the great factor which would uplift proletariat, and give it the capacity which it needs if it is not merely to grasp political power by the luck of an accident, but is to be in a position to make itself master of that power, and to use it.

The proletarian class struggle, as a struggle of the masses, presupposes democracy. If not absolute and pure democracy, yet so much of democracy as is necessary to organise masses, and give them uniform enlightenment. This cannot be adequately done by secret methods. A few fly sheets cannot be a substitute for an extensive daily Press. Masses cannot be organised secretly, and, above all, a secret organisation cannot be a democratic one. It always leads to the dictatorship of a single man, or of a small knot of leaders. The ordinary members can only become instruments for carrying out orders. Such a method may be rendered necessary for an oppressed class in the absence of democracy, but it would not promote the self-government and independence of the masses. Rather would it further the Messiah-consciousness of leaders, and their dictatorial habits.

The same Weitling, who gave such prominence to the function of a Messiah, spoke most contemptuously of democracy.

Communists are still pretty undecided about the choice of their form of government. A large part of those in France incline to a dictatorship, because they well know that the sovereignty of the people, as understood by republicans and politicians, is not suited for the period of transition from the old to a completely new organisation. Owen, the chief of the English Communists, would have the performance of specified duties allotted to men according to age, and the chief leaders of a government would be the oldest members of it. All Socialists with the exception of the followers of Fourier, to whom all forms of government are the same, are agreed that the form of government which is called the sovereignty of the people is a very unsuitable, and even dangerous, sheet anchor for the young principle of Communism about to be realised.

Weitling goes further. He will have nothing of democracy, even in a Socialist community.

If the idea of the sovereignty of the people is to be applied, all must rule. This can never be the case, and it is, therefore, not the sovereignty of the people, but the chance sovereignty of some of the people.

Weitling wanted the greatest geniuses to govern. They would be selected in a competition by scientific assemblies.

I have quoted Weitling in detail in order to show that the contempt for democracy, which is now recommended to us as the highest wisdom, is quite an old conception, and corresponds to a primitive stage in the working-class movement. At the same time that Weitling poured scorn on Universal Suffrage and freedom of the Press, the workers of England were fighting for these rights, and Marx and Engels ranged themselves by their side.

Since then the working classes of the whole of Europe, in numerous – often bloody – struggles, have conquered one instalment of democracy after the other, and by their endeavours to win, maintain and extend democracy, and by constantly making use of each instalment for organisation, for propaganda, and for resting social reforms, have they grown in maturity from year to year, and from the lowest have become the highest placed section of the masses of the people.

Has the proletariat already attained the maturity which Socialism postulates? And are the other conditions now in existence? These questions are to-day much disputed, the answers given being by some as decisively in the affirmative as by others in the negative. Both answers seem to me rather over hasty. Ripeness for Socialism is not a condition which lends itself to statistical calculation before the proof can be put to the test. In any case, it is wrong, as so often happens in discussing this question, to put the material pre-requisites of Socialism too much in the foreground. No doubt, without a certain development of the large industry no Socialism is possible, but when it is asserted that Socialism would only become practicable when capitalism is no more in a position to expand, all proof of this is lacking. It is correct to say that Socialism would be the more easily realisable the more developed the large industry is, and therefore the more compact the productive forces are which must be socially organised.

Yet this is only relevant to the problem, when it is considered from the standpoint of a particular State. The simplification of the problem in this form is, however, counteracted by the fact that the

growth of the large industry is accompanied by an expansion of its markets, the progress of the division of labour and of international communications, and therewith the constant widening and increasing complication of the problem of the social organisation of production. There is, indeed, no reason for believing that the organisation of the largest part of production for social ends, by the State, Municipalities, and Co-operative Societies, is not already possible in modern industrial States, with their banking facilities and their machinery for the conduct of businesses.

The decisive factor is no longer the material, but the personal one. Is the proletariat strong and intelligent enough to take in hand the regulation of society, that is, does it possess the power and the capacity to transfer democracy from politics to economics? This cannot be foretold with certainty. The factor in question is one which is in different stages of development in different countries, and it fluctuates considerably at various times in the same country. Adequate strength - and capacity are relative conceptions. The same measure of strength may be insufficient to-day, when the opponents are strong, but to-morrow quite adequate, when they have suffered a moral, economic or military collapse.

The same measure of capacity might be quite inadequate to-day should power be attained in a highly complicated situation, and yet to-morrow it could be equal to all demands made on it, if meanwhile conditions have simplified and become stabler.

In every case only practice can show if the proletariat is already sufficiently mature for Socialism. We can only say the following for certain. The proletariat grows always in numbers, strength and intelligence, it is ever approaching the climax of its development.

It is not definite enough to say that the latter phase will be reached when the proletariat forms the majority of the people, and when the majority announce their adhesion to Socialism. On the other hand, it may be confidently said that a people is not yet ripe for Socialism so long as the majority of the masses are hostile to Socialism, and will have nothing of it.

So here again democracy not only matures the proletariat the soonest, but gives the quickest indications of this process.

## **Chapter IV**

### **The Effects of Democracy**

The modern State is a rigidly centralised organism, an organisation comprising the greatest power within modern society, and influencing in the most effective way the fate of each individual, as is especially obvious in time of war.

The State is to-day what the family and community used to be for the individual. If communities were in their way democratically organised, the power of the State, on the contrary, including the bureaucracy and the army, looms over the people, even gaining such strength that at times it acquires an ascendancy over the classes which are socially and economically dominant, thus constituting itself an absolute government. Yet this latter condition is nowhere lasting. The absolute rule of bureaucracy leads to its ossification and its absorption into endless time-wasting formulae, and that just at the time when industrial capitalism is developing, when the revolutionary

methods of production which arise from it subject all economic and social conditions to constant change, and impart a quicker movement to industrial life, thus requiring the speediest political adjustments.

The absolute rule of bureaucracy, therefore, leads to arbitrariness and stultification, but a system of production like capitalism, in which each producer is dependent upon numerous others needs for its prosperity the security and legality of social relations. The absolute State gets into conflict with the productive forces, and becomes a fetter on them. It is, then, urgently necessary for the executive to be subjected to public criticism, for free organisations of citizens to counterbalance the power of the State, for self-government in municipalities and provinces to be established, for the power of law-making to be taken from the bureaucracy, and put under the control of a central assembly, freely chosen by the people, that is a Parliament. The control of the Government is the most important duty of Parliament, and in this it can be replaced by no other institution. It is conceivable, though hardly practicable, for the lawmaking power to be taken from the bureaucracy, and entrusted to various committees of experts, which would draft the laws and submit them to the people for their decision. The activities of the executive can only be supervised by another central body, and not by an unorganised and formless mass of people.

The attempts to overcome the absolute power of the State, as here described, are made by all classes in a modern State, with the exception of those which may share in its power, that is all except bureaucrats, court nobles, the State Church, as well as the great bankers who do a lucrative business with the State.

Before the united pressure of the other classes, which may include the landed gentry, the lower clergy, the industrial capitalists, the absolute regime must give way. In a greater or lesser degree it must concede freedom of the Press, of public meeting, of organisation, and a Parliament. All the States of Europe have successfully passed through this development.

Every class will, however, endeavour to shape the new form of the State in a manner corresponding to its particular interests. This attempt is especially manifested in the struggle over the character of the Parliament, that is in the fight for the franchise. The watchword of the lower classes, of the people, is Universal Suffrage. Not only the wage-earner, but the small peasant and the petty bourgeoisie have an interest in the franchise.

Everywhere and under all circumstances these classes form the great majority of the population. Whether the proletariat is the predominant class amongst these depends on the extent of the economic development, although this factor does not determine whether the proletariat comprises the majority of the population. The exploiters are always a small minority of the population.

In the long run no modern State can withstand the pressure of these classes, and anything short of general suffrage in our society to-day would be an absurdity. In capitalist society, with its constantly changing conditions, the classes cannot be stereotyped in fixed grooves. All social conditions are in a state of flux. A franchise based on status is consequently excluded. A class which is not organised as such is a formless fluctuating mass, whose exact boundaries it is quite impossible to mark. A class is an economic entity, not a legal one. Class-membership is always changing. Many handworkers who, under the regime of small industry, think they are possessors, feel like proletarians under large industry, and are really proletarians even when for purposes of

statistics they are included with the possessing classes and independent producers. There is also no franchise based on the census which would secure to the possessing classes a lasting monopoly of Parliament. It would be upset by every depreciation in money values. Finally, a franchise based on education would be even more futile, in view of the progress of culture amongst the masses. Thus various factors combine to render general suffrage the only solution in the society of to-day, and bring the question more and more to the front. Above all, it is the only rational solution from the standpoint of the proletariat as the lowest class of the population. The most effective weapon of the proletariat is its numerical strength. It cannot emancipate itself until it has become the largest class of the population, and until capitalist society is so far developed that the small peasants and the petty bourgeoisie no longer overweight the proletariat.

The proletariat has also an interest in the fact that the suffrage should not only be universal and equal, but also non-discriminatory, so that men and women, or wage earners and capitalists, do not vote in separate sections. Such a method would not only involve the danger that particular sections, who belong to the proletariat in reality, but are not wage earners in form, would be separated from it, but it would also have the still worse result of narrowing the outlook of the proletariat. For its great historical mission consists in the fact that the collective interests of society fall into line with its permanent class interests, which are not always the same thing as special sectional interests. It is a symptom of the maturity of the proletariat when its class consciousness is raised to the highest point by its grasp of large social relations and ends. This understanding is only made completely clear by scientific Socialism, not only by theoretical teaching, but by the habit of regarding things as a whole instead of looking at special interests which are furthered and extended by engaging in political action. Confining the outlook to trade interests narrows the mind, and this is one of the drawbacks to mere Trade Unionism. Herein lies the superiority of the organisation of the Social Democratic Party, and also the superiority of a nondiscriminatory, as compared with a franchise which divides the electors into categories.

In the struggle for the political rights referred to modern democracy arises, and the proletariat matures. At the same time a new factor appears, viz., the protection of minorities, the opposition in the State. Democracy signifies rule of majority, but not less the protection of minorities.

The absolute rule of bureaucracy strives to obtain for itself permanency. The forcible suppression of all opposition is its guiding principle. Almost everywhere it must do this to prevent its power being forcibly broken. It is otherwise with democracy, which means the rule of majorities. But majorities change. In a democracy no regime can be adapted to long duration.

Even the relative strength of classes is not a fixed quantity, at least in the capitalist era. But the strength of parties changes even quicker than the strength of classes, and it is parties which aspire to power in a democracy.

It must not here be forgotten, what so often happens, that the abstract simplification of theory, although necessary to a clear understanding of realities is only true in the last resort, and between it and actualities there are many intervening factors. A class can rule, but not govern, for a class is a formless mass, while only an organisation can govern. It is the political parties which govern in a democracy. A party is, however, not synonymous with a class, although it may, in the first place, represent a class interest. One and the same class interest can be represented in very different ways, by various tactical methods. According to their variety, the representatives of the same class

interests are divided into different parties. Above all, the deciding factor is the position in relation to other classes and parties. Only seldom does a class dispose of so much power that it can govern the State by itself. If a class attains power, and finds that it cannot keep it by its own strength, it seeks for allies. If such allies are forthcoming, various opinions and standpoints prevail amongst the representatives of the dominant class interests.

In this way, during the eighteenth century Whigs and Tories represented the same landed interest, but one party endeavoured to further it by affiance with the bourgeoisie of the towns at the expense of the Throne and its resources, while the other party conceived the Monarchy to be its strongest support. Similarly to-day in England and also elsewhere, Liberals and Conservatives represent the same capitalist interests. But the one thinks they will be best served by an alliance with the landed class, and forcible suppression of the working classes, while the other fears dire consequences from this policy, and strives to conciliate the working classes by small concessions at the expense of the landed class.

As with the socially and economically ruling classes and their parties, so it is with the aspiring class and its parties.

Parties and classes are therefore not necessarily coterminous. A class can split up into various parties, and a party may consist of members of various classes. A class may still remain the rulers, while changes occur in the governing party, if the majority of the ruling class considers the methods of the existing governing party unsuitable, and that of its opponents to be more appropriate.

Government by parties in a democracy changes more rapidly than the rule of classes. Under these circumstances, no party is certain of retaining power, and must always count on the possibility of being in the minority, but by virtue of the nature of the State no party need remain in a minority for ever.

These conditions account for the growing practice of protecting minorities in a democracy. The deeper the roots which a democracy has struck, and the longer it has lasted and influenced political customs, the more effective is the minority, and the more successfully it can oppose the pretensions of any party which seeks to remain in power at all costs.

What significance the protection of minorities has for the early stages of the Socialist Party, which everywhere started as a small minority, and how much it has helped the proletariat to mature, is clear. In the ranks of the Socialist Party the protection of minorities is very important. Every new doctrine, be it of a theoretical or a tactical nature, is represented in the first place by minorities. If these are forcibly suppressed, instead of being discussed, the majority is spared much trouble and inconvenience. Much unnecessary labour might be saved – a doctrine does not mean progress because it is new and championed by a minority. Most of what arises as new thought has already been discussed long before, and recognised as untenable, either by practice or by refutation.

Ignorance is always bringing out old wares as if they were something new. Other new ideas may be original, but put in a perverted shape. Although only a few of the new ideas and doctrines may spell real progress, yet progress is only possible through new ideas, which at the outset are put forward by minorities. The suppression of the new ideas of minorities in the Party would only

cause harm to the proletarian class struggle, and an obstacle to the development of the proletariat. The world is always bringing us against new problems, which are not to be solved by the existing methods.

Tedious as it may be to sift the wheat from the chaff, this is an unavoidable task if our movement is not to stagnate, and is to rise to the height of the tasks before it. And what is needful for a party is also needful for the State. Protection of minorities is an indispensable condition for democratic development, and no less important than the rule of the majority.

Another characteristic of democracy is here brought in view, which is the form it gives to the class struggle.

In 1893 and in 1900 I have already discussed this matter, and give below some quotations from my writings:

Freedom of combination and of the Press and universal suffrage (under circumstances, even conscription) are not only weapons which are secured to the proletariat in the modern State by the revolutionary struggle of the bourgeoisie, but these institutions throw on the relative strength of parties and classes, and on the mental energy which vitalises them a light which is absent in the time of Absolutism. At that time the ruling, as well as the revolutionary, classes were fighting in the dark. As every expression of opposition was rendered impossible, neither the Government nor the Revolutionists were aware of their strength. Each of the two sides was thus exposed to the danger of over-estimating its strength, so long as it refrained from measuring itself in a struggle with the opponent, and of under-estimating its strength the moment it suffered a single defeat, and then threw its arms away.

This is really one of the chief reasons why, in the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie, so many institutions collapsed at one blow, and so many governments were overthrown at a single stroke, and it also explains all the vicissitudes of revolution and counter-revolution.

It is quite different to-day, at least in countries which possess some measure of democratic government. These democratic institutions have been called the safety valve of society. It is quite false to say that the proletariat in a democracy ceases to be revolutionary, that it is contented with giving public expression to its indignation and its sufferings, and renounces the idea of social and political revolution. Democracy cannot remove the class antagonisms of capitalist society, nor prevent the overthrow of that society, which is their inevitable outcome. But if it cannot prevent the Revolution, it can avoid many reckless and premature attempts at revolution, and render many revolutionary movements unnecessary. It gives a clear indication of the relative strength of classes and parties; it does not do away with their antagonism, nor does it avoid the ultimate outcome of their struggle, but it serves to prevent the rising classes from attempting tasks to which they are not equal, and it also restrains the ruling classes from refusing concessions when they no longer have the strength to maintain such refusal. The direction of evolution is not thereby altered, but the pace is made more even and steady. The coming to the front of the proletariat in a State with some

measure of democratic government will not be marked by such a striking victory as attended the bourgeoisie in their revolutionary period, nor will it be exposed to a violent overthrow.

Since the rise of the modern Social Democratic working-class movement in the sixties, the European proletariat has only suffered one great defeat, in the Paris Commune of 1871. At the time France was still suffering from the consequences of the Empire, which had withheld real democratic institutions from the people, the French proletariat had only attained to the slightest degree of class-consciousness, and the revolt was provoked.

The proletarian-democratic method of conducting the struggle may seem to be a slower affair than the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie; it is certainly less dramatic and striking, but it also exacts a smaller measure of sacrifice. This may be quite indifferent to the finely endowed literary people who find in Socialism an interesting pastime, but not to those who really carry on the fight.

This so-called peaceful method of the class struggle, which is confined to non-militant methods, Parliamentarism, strikes, demonstrations, the Press, and similar means of pressure, will retain its importance in every country according to the effectiveness of the democratic institutions which prevail there, the degree of political and economic enlightenment, and the self-mastery of the people.

On these grounds, I anticipate that the social revolution of the proletariat will assume quite other forms than that of the bourgeoisie, and that it will be possible to carry it out by peaceful economic, legal and moral means, instead of by physical force, in all places where democracy has been established.

The above is my opinion to-day.

Of course, every institution has its bad side, and disadvantages can be discovered in democracy.

Where the proletariat is without rights, it can develop no mass organisation, and normally cannot promote mass action; there it is only possible for a handful of reckless fighters to offer lasting opposition to the governing regime. But this elite is daily confronted with the necessity of bringing the entire system to an end. Undistracted by the small demands of daily politics, the mind is concentrated on the largest problems, and learns constantly to keep in view the entire political and social relations.

Only a small section of the proletariat takes part in the fight, but it cherishes keen theoretical interest, and is inspired by the great aims.

Quite differently does democracy affect the proletariat, when it has only a few hours a day at its disposal under present-day conditions. Democracy develops mass organisations involving immense administrative work; it calls on the citizen to discuss and solve numerous questions of the day, often of the most trivial kind. The whole of the free time of the proletariat is more and more taken up with petty details, and its attention occupied by passing events. The mind is contracted

within a narrow circle. Ignorance and even contempt of theory, opportunism in place of broad principles, tend to get the upper hand. Marx and Engels praised the theoretical mind of the German working class, in contrast with the workers of Western Europe and America. They would to-day find the same theoretical interest amongst the Russian workers, in comparison with the Germans.

Nevertheless, everywhere the class-conscious proletariat and their representatives fight for the realisation of democracy, and many of them have shed their life's blood for it.

They know that without democracy nothing can be done. The stimulating results of the struggle with a despotism are confined to a handful, and do not touch the masses. On the other hand, the degenerating influence of democracy on the proletariat need not be exaggerated. Often is it the consequence of the lack of leisure from which the proletariat suffers, not of democracy itself.

It were indeed extraordinary if the possession of freedom necessarily made men more narrow and trivial than its absence. The more democracy tends to shorten the working day, the greater the sum of leisure at the disposal of the proletariat, the more it is enabled to combine devotion to large problems with attention to necessary detail. And the impulse thereto is not lacking. For whatever democracy may be able to accomplish it cannot resolve the antagonisms inherent in a capitalist system of production, so long as it refrains from altering this system. On the contrary, the antagonisms in capitalist society become more acute and tend to provoke bigger conflicts, in this way forcing great problems on the attention of the proletariat, and taking its mind off routine and detail work.

Under democracy this moral elevation is no longer confined to a handful, but is shared in by the whole of the people, who are at the same time gradually accustomed to self-government by the daily performance of routine work.

Again, under democracy, the proletariat does not always think and talk of revolution, as under despotism. It may for years, and even decades, be immersed in detail work, but everywhere situations must arise which will kindle in it revolutionary thought and aspirations.

When the people are roused to action under a democracy, there is less danger than under despotism that they have been prematurely provoked, or will waste their energy in futile efforts. When victory is achieved, it will not be lost, but successfully maintained. And that is better in the end than the mere nervous excitement of a fresh revolutionary drama.

## **Chapter V**

### **Dictatorship**

Democracy is the essential basis for building up a Socialist system of production. Only under the influence of democracy does the proletariat attain that maturity which it needs to be able to bring about Socialism, and democracy supplies the surest means for testing its maturity. Between these two stages, the preparation for Socialism and its realisation, which both require democracy, there is the transition state when the proletariat has conquered political power, but has not yet brought about Socialism in an economic sense. In this intervening period it is said that democracy is not only unnecessary, but harmful.

This idea is not new. We have already seen it to be Weitling's. But it is supposed to be supported by Karl Marx. In his letter criticising the Gotha party programme, written in May, 1875, it is stated: "Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. This requires a political transition stage, which can be nothing else than the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

Marx had unfortunately omitted to specify more exactly what he conceived this dictatorship to be. Taken literally, the word signifies the suspension of democracy. But taken literally It also means the sovereignty of a single person, who is bound by no laws. A sovereignty which, is distinguished from a despotism by being regarded as a passing phase, required by the circumstances of the moment, and not a permanent institution of the State.

The expression "Dictatorship of the Proletariat", that is the dictatorship not of a single person, but of a class, excludes the inference that Marx thought of dictatorship in the literal sense.

He speaks in the passage above quoted not of a form of government, but of a condition which must everywhere arise when the "proletariat has conquered political power. That he was not thinking of a form of government is shown by his opinion that in England and America the transition might be carried out peacefully. Of course, Democracy does not guarantee a peaceful transition. But this is certainly not possible without Democracy.

However, to find out what Marx thought about the dictatorship of the proletariat, we need not have recourse to speculation. If in 1875 Marx did not explain in detail what he understood by the dictatorship of the proletariat, it might well have been because he had expressed himself on this matter a few years before, in his study of the Civil War in France. In that work, he wrote: "The Commune was essentially a government of the working class, the result of the struggle of the producing class against the appropriating class, the political form under which the freedom of labour could be attained being at length revealed."

Thus the Paris Commune was, as Engels expressly declared in his introduction to the third edition of Marx's book, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat".

It was, however, at the same time not the suspension of democracy, but was founded on its most thoroughgoing use, on the basis of universal suffrage. The power of the Government was subjected to universal suffrage.

The Commune was composed of town councillors, chosen by general suffrage in the various departments of Paris.

Universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business.

Marx constantly speaks here of the general suffrage of the whole people, and not of the votes of a specially privileged class. The dictatorship of the proletariat was for him a condition which necessarily arose in a real democracy, because of the overwhelming numbers of the proletariat.

Marx must not, therefore, be cited by those who support dictatorship in preference to democracy. Of course, this does not prove it to be wrong. Only, it must be demonstrated on other grounds.

In the examination of this question, dictatorship as a condition must not be confused with dictatorship as a form of government, which alone is a subject of dispute in our ranks. Dictatorship as a form of government means disarming the opposition, by taking from them the franchise, and liberty of the Press and combination. The question is whether the victorious proletariat needs to employ these measures, and whether Socialism is only or most easily realisable with their aid.

It must next be noted that when we speak of dictatorship as a form of government, we cannot mean the dictatorship of a class. For, as already remarked, a class can only rule, not govern. If by dictatorship we do not merely signify a state of sovereignty, but a form of government, then dictatorship comes to mean that of a single person, or of an organisation, not of the proletariat, but of a proletarian party. The problem is then complicated so soon as the proletariat itself is divided into various parties. The dictatorship of one of these parties is then no longer in any sense the dictatorship of the proletariat, but a dictatorship of one part of the proletariat over the other. The situation becomes still more complicated if the Socialist Parties are divided according to their relations to non-proletarian elements, and if perchance one party attains to power by an alliance of town proletarians and peasants, then the dictatorship becomes not merely a dictatorship of proletarians over proletarians, but of proletarian and. peasants over proletarians. The dictatorship of the proletariat thus assumes a very peculiar form.

What are the grounds for thinking that the sovereignty of the proletariat must necessarily take a form which is incompatible with democracy?

Now it may be taken for granted that as a nil. the proletariat will only attain to power when it represents the majority of the population, or, at least, has the latter behind it. Next to its economic indispensability, the weapon of the proletariat in its political struggles is its huge numbers. It may only expect to carry the day against the resources of the ruling classes where it has the masses behind it. This was the opinion of Marx and Engels, and therefore they wrote in the Communist Manifesto: "All previous movements were movements of minorities, and in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of that majority."

This was true also of the Paris Commune. The first act of the new revolutionary regime was an appeal to the electors. The ballot, taken under conditions of the greatest freedom, gave strong majorities for the Commune in all districts of Paris. Sixty-five revolutionaries were chosen, against 21 of the Opposition, of whom 15 were distinct reactionaries, and six Radical Republicans of the Gambetta school. Among the 65 revolutionaries all the existing phases of French Socialism were represented. However such they fought against each other, no one exercised a dictatorship over the others.

A government so strongly supported by the masses has not the least occasion to interfere with democracy. It cannot dispense with the use of force when this is employed to suppress democracy. Force can only be met by force. But a government which knows that the masses are behind it would only use force to protect democracy, and not to subvert it. It would be committing suicide to

cast aside such a strong support as universal suffrage, which is a powerful source of moral authority.

The subversion of democracy by dictatorship can therefore only be a matter for consideration in exceptional cases, when an extraordinary combination of favourable circumstances enables a proletarian party to take to itself political power, while the majority of the people are either not on its side, or are even against it.

Amongst a people who have been trained in politics for decades, and have run into party moulds, such a chance victory is hardly possible. It is only likely in very backward conditions. If in such a case universal suffrage goes against the Socialist Government, is the latter now to do what we have hitherto demanded of every government, viz., to bow to the will of the people, and to resume its struggle for the power of the State with confidence, on the basis of democracy, or is it to subvert democracy in order to hold on to power?

How can a dictatorship remain at the helm against the will of the majority of the people?  
Two ways suggest themselves, that of Jesuitism or that of Bonapartism.

We have already referred to the Jesuit State in Paraguay. The means by which the Jesuits there maintained their authority was their enormous mental superiority to the natives organised by them, who without them were helpless.

Can a Socialist Party acquire such a superiority in a European State? This is quite out of the question. No doubt the proletariat, in the course of the class struggle, raises its mental stature until it is higher than that of other workers, such as peasants, but not without the latter acquiring a political interest and understanding at the same time. The chasm between these various classes is by no means an unbridgable one.

Alongside of the classes of hand workers grows a section of intellectuals, which tends to become more numerous and increasingly necessary for the productive system. Their vocation calls for the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise and development of intelligence.

This section occupies a middle place between the proletariat and the capitalist class. It is not directly interested in capitalism, but is nevertheless mistrustful of the proletariat, so long as it does not consider the latter to be capable of taking its fate into its own hands. Even such members of the cultured classes as most warmly espouse the cause of the freedom of the proletariat stand aloof from the Labour movement in the early stages of the class struggle. They only change their attitude when the proletariat shows increasing capacity in its struggles. The confidence in the proletariat, which is thus inspired in intellectuals who enter the Socialist movement, is not to be confused with the trust which, since August 4, 1914, the Liberal and Centre Parties, and even the Government of Germany, have placed in the Governmental Socialists.

The first kind of confidence is bred by the conviction that the proletariat has acquired the strength and capacity to free itself. The second sort of confidence comes with the conviction that the Socialists in question no longer take the proletariat's fight for freedom seriously.

Without the help, or in opposition to the intellectuals, Socialist production cannot be instituted. In circumstances where the majority of the population mistrust the proletarian party, or stand aloof from it, this attitude would be shared by the bulk of the intellectuals. In that case, a victorious proletarian party would not only be without great intellectual superiority to the rest of the people, but would even be inferior to its opponents in this regard, although its outlook in general social matters might be a much higher one.

The method of Paraguay is therefore not practicable in Europe. There remains to be considered the method adopted by Napoleon the First on Brumaire 18, 1799, and his nephew, the third Napoleon, on December 2, 1862. This consists in governing by the aid of the superiority of a centralised organisation to the unorganised masses of the people, and the superiority of military power, arising from the fact that the armed forces of the Government is opposed to a people who are defenceless or tired of the armed struggle.

Can a Socialist system of production be built up on this foundation? This means the organisation of production by society, and requires economic self-government throughout the whole mass of the people. State organisation of production by a bureaucracy, or by the dictatorship of a single section of the people, does not mean Socialism. Socialism presupposes that broad masses of the people have been accustomed to organisation, that numerous economic and political organisations exist, and can develop in perfect freedom. The Socialist organisation of Labour is not an affair of barracks.

A dictatorship of a minority which grants to the people the fullest freedom of organisation undermines its own power by so doing. Should it seek, on the other hand, to maintain its authority by restricting this freedom, it impedes development towards Socialism, instead of furthering it.

A minority dictatorship always finds its most powerful support in an obedient army, but the more it substitutes this for majority support, the more it drives the opposition to seek a remedy by an appeal to the bayonet, instead of an appeal to that vote which is denied them. Civil war becomes the method of adjusting political and social antagonisms.

Where complete political and social apathy or dejection does not prevail, the minority dictatorship is always threatened by armed attack, or constant guerilla warfare, which easily develops into a protracted armed rising of great masses, to cope with which all the military power of the dictatorship is needed.

The dictatorship is then involved in civil war, and lives in constant danger of being overthrown.

To the building up of a Socialist society there is no greater obstacle than internal war. In the present state of extensive geographical division of labour, the big industries are everywhere closely dependent on the security of communications no less than on the security of contract. External war would shake the Socialist society to its foundations, even if the enemy did not penetrate into the country. Russian Socialists of all sections in the present Revolution are right in urging the necessity of peace for the rebuilding of society.

Yet civil war is far more harmful to a Socialist society than external war, as civil war is fought out in the land itself, and wastes and paralyses as much as a foreign invasion.

In the struggles of States it is usually only a question of an accession or loss of power on the part of one or the other government, and not a matter of their very existence. After the war the various belligerent governments and peoples seek to live in peace, if not in amity.

The parties in a civil war are quite differently related to each other. They do not carry on the war to wrest some concessions from the opponents, and then to live with them in peace. And a civil war is also different from democracy, under which minorities are so protected that any party which finds itself in this position, and is obliged to renounce hopes of being the Government, need not relinquish political activity. Every party which is reduced to a minority always retains the right to strive to become the majority, and thereby take over the Government.

In a civil war each party fights for its existence, and the vanquished is menaced with complete destruction. The consciousness of this fact accounts for civil wars being so terrible. A minority which only retains control by military power is inclined to crush its opponents by the bloodiest means, and to decimate them in reckless slaughter, when it is threatened by a revolt, and succeeds in repressing it. June, 1848, in Paris, and the bloody May week of 1871 have shown this with terrible distinctness.

Chronic civil war, or its alternative under a dictatorship, the apathy and lethargy of the masses, would render the organisation of a Socialist system of production as good as impossible. And yet the dictatorship of the minority, which either produces civil war or apathy, is to be the sovereign means for effecting the transition from Capitalism to Socialism!

Many people confuse civil war with the social revolution, considering this to be its form, and are therefore prepared to excuse the acts of force inevitable in a civil war. This has always been the case in revolutions, they say, and ever will be.

We Social Democrats are decidedly not of the opinion that that which has been must always be. Such ideas of the revolution are formed on the examples of previous bourgeois revolutions. The proletarian revolution will be accomplished under quite different conditions from these.

The bourgeois revolutions broke out in States in which a despotism, supported by an army separated from the people, suppressed all free movements, in which freedom of the Press, of public meeting, of organisation, and general suffrage did not exist, and in which there was no real representation of the people. There the struggle against the Government necessarily took the form of a civil war. The proletariat of to-day will, as regards Western Europe at least, attain to power in States in which a certain measure of democracy, if not "pure" democracy, has been deeply rooted for decades, and also in which the military are not so cut off from the people as formerly. It remains to be seen how the conquest of political power by the proletariat is achieved under these conditions, where it represents the majority of the people. In no case need we anticipate that in Western Europe the course of the great French Revolution will be repeated. If present-day Russia exhibits so much likeness to the France of 1793, that only shows how near it stands to the stage of bourgeois revolution.

The social revolution, the political revolution, and civil war must be distinguished from each other.

The social revolution is a profound transformation of the entire social structure brought about by the establishment of a new method of production. It is a protracted process, which may be spread over decades, and no definite boundaries can be drawn for its conclusion. It will be the more successful, according to the peaceful nature of the forms under which it is consummated. Civil and foreign wars are its deadly foes. As a rule a social revolution is brought about by a political revolution, through a sudden alteration in the relative strength of classes in the State, whereby a class hitherto excluded from the political power possesses itself of the machinery of government. The political revolution is a sudden act, which is rapidly concluded. Its forms depend on the constitution of the State in which it is accomplished. The more democracy rules, not merely formally, but actually anchored in the strength of the working classes, the greater is the likelihood that the political revolution will be a peaceful one. Contrariwise, the more the system which has hitherto prevailed has been without the support of a majority of the people, and has represented a minority which kept control by military force, the greater is the likelihood that the political revolution will take the form of a civil war.

Yet, even in the last case, the supporters of the social revolution have a pressing interest in seeing that the civil war is only a transitory episode which quickly terminates, that it is made to serve the sole end of introducing and setting up democracy, to whose pace the social revolution should be adapted. In other words, the social revolution must not, for the time being, be carried out farther than the majority of the people are inclined to go, because beyond this the Social Revolution, desirable as it may seem to far-seeing individuals, would not find the necessary conditions for establishing itself permanently.

But did not the Reign of Terror of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie of Paris, that is the dictatorship of a Minority, in the great French Revolution, bring with it enormous consequences of the highest historical significance?

Of course. But of what kind were they? That dictatorship was a child of the war which the allied Monarchs of Europe had waged against Revolutionary France. To have victoriously beaten off this attack was the historical achievement of the Reign of Terror. Thereby is again proved distinctly the old truth, that dictatorship is better able to wage war than democracy. It proves in no way that dictatorship is the method of the proletariat to carry through social transformations to its own liking, and to keep control of political power.

In energy the Reign of Terror of 1793 cannot be surpassed. Yet the proletariat of Paris did not succeed, by this means, in retaining power. The dictatorship was a method by means of which the various fractions belonging to proletarian and petty bourgeois politics fought amongst themselves, and, finally, it was the means of making an end of all proletarian and petty bourgeois politics.

The dictatorship of the lower classes opens the way for the dictatorship of the sword.

Should it be said, after the example of the bourgeois revolutions, that the Revolution is synonymous with civil war and dictatorship, then the consequences must also be recognised, and it must be added the Revolution would necessarily end in the rule of a Cromwell or a Napoleon.

This is, however, by no means the necessary upshot of a proletarian revolution where the proletariat forms the majority of the nation, which is democratically organised, and only in such cases do the conditions for Socialist production exist.

By the dictatorship of the proletariat we are unable to understand anything else than its rule on the basis of democracy.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Constituent Assembly and Soviet**

The contrast between democracy and dictatorship has just acquired an important significance in the Russian Revolution. The Socialists of Russia were from the first divided. They comprised Social Revolutionaries and Marxists. The Social Revolutionaries were, in the first place, the representatives of the peasantry, which in Russia, in contrast to all the rest of Europe, were still a revolutionary factor, and therefore could march with the Socialist proletariat. Against the Social Revolutionaries were the Marxists, the representatives of the industrial proletariat. These divided into two sections, the Mensheviks, who held that only a bourgeois revolution was possible in the existing economic conditions in Russia, unless the revolution coincided with a European Socialist revolution, and the Bolsheviks, who always believed in the omnipotence of will and force, and now, without considering the backwardness of Russia, are trying to shape the Revolution on Socialist lines.

In the course of the Revolution the contrast became more acute. The Mensheviks considered it to be their task to take part in a Provisional Coalition Government until the duly constituted National Assembly had formed a definite government. The Bolsheviks endeavoured, even before the meeting of the National Assembly, to overthrow this Provisional Government, and replace it by government of their party. An additional ground of opposition came with the question of peace. The Mensheviks wanted immediate peace as much as the Bolsheviks, both wanted it on the basis of Zimmerwald – no annexations or indemnities. Both sections had been represented at Zimmerwald, and the Mensheviks had been in the majority there. But the Mensheviks wanted a general peace, and all belligerents to adopt the watchword – no annexations or indemnities. So long as this was not achieved, the Russian army should keep their arms in readiness. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, demanded immediate peace at any price, and were ready, if necessary, to conclude a separate peace, and they sought to enforce their views by increasing the already great disorganisation of the army.

They were supported by the war weariness of great masses in the army and among the people, as well as by the apparent inactivity of the Provisional Government, which, however, accomplished far more political and social reform than any other bourgeois government in the same period, although it did not do as much as would be expected of a revolutionary government. The elections for the Constituent Assembly could not be so rapidly completed as was desired. It was first necessary to renew the old official machinery, and to create democratic town and country representation. Enormous difficulties were met with in the compilation of voters' lists in the giant Empire, whose census took place in 1897. So the elections to the Constituent Assembly were constantly postponed.

Above all, peace was no nearer. Wherever the guilt for this may rest, the statesmen of the Entente did not understand how necessary it was for themselves at that time to pronounce in favour of no annexations or indemnities. They pursued a policy which made the Entente appear to the Russian people the obstacle to peace, and with them their Allies the Provisional Government. This was the reason why some of the Mensheviks, the Internationalists, demanded separation from the Entente, and went in opposition to the Provisional Government. Yet they did not go so far as the Bolsheviks. Under these circumstances, the Bolsheviks gained ground at the expense of the Mensheviks and the Provisional Government which they succeeded in overthrowing in November, 1917. Their propaganda zeal proved to be so great that they were able to draw a part of the Social Revolutionaries to their side. The left Social Revolutionaries henceforth marched with the Bolsheviks, into whose Government they entered, while the right and also the centre remained on the side of the Mensheviks.

The Bolsheviks drew their strength from the great expectations which they raised. If they were to retain this strength, they had to fulfil these expectations. Was that possible?

The Bolshevik Revolution was based on the supposition that it would be the starting point of a general European Revolution, and that the bold initiative of Russia would summon the proletariat of all Europe to rise.

On these suppositions, it was of no moment what form was taken by the Russian separate peace, what humiliations and burdens it placed on the Russian people, and what interpretations it gave to the principle of the self-determination of peoples. And it was also a matter of indifference whether Russia was capable of defence or not. According to this theory, the European Revolution formed the best defence of the Russian Revolution, for it would bring to the peoples in territory hitherto Russian real and complete self-determination.

The Revolution which would bring about Socialism in Europe would also be the means of removing the obstacles to the carrying through of Socialism in Russia which are created by the economic backwardness of that country.

This was all very logically thought out, and quite well founded, provided the supposition was granted, that the Russian Revolution must inevitably unchain the European Revolution. But what if this did not happen?

The supposition has not yet been realised. And now the proletariat of Europe is blamed for leaving the Russian Revolution in the lurch, and betraying it. This is a complaint against unknown people, for who can be made responsible for the inactivity of the European proletariat.

It is an old Marxist saying that revolutions cannot be made, but arise out of conditions. The conditions of Western Europe are, however, so different from those of Russia that a revolution there would not necessarily provoke one here.

When the Revolution of 1848 broke out in France, it immediately spread over that part of Europe lying east of it. It, however, halted at the Russian boundaries, and when the Revolution was unchained in Russia in 1905, it provoked strong suffrage movements in the countries to the west, although nothing that could be described as a revolution.

But the Bolsheviks must not be too much blamed for expecting a European Revolution. Other Socialists did the same, and we are certainly approaching conditions which will sharply accentuate the class struggle, and which may have many surprises in store. And if the Bolsheviks have up till now been in error in expecting a Revolution, have not Bebel, Marx, and Engels cherished a like delusion? This is not to be denied.

But the latter have never had in mind a revolution at a specific time, and never elaborated their tactics in such wise that the existence of the party and the progress of the class struggle was made to be dependent on the outbreak of the Revolution, so that the proletariat was confronted with the dilemma: revolution or bankruptcy.

like all politicians they too have erred in their expectations. But such errors have never set them on a false track, and led them into a cul-de-sac.

Our Bolshevik comrades have staked all on the card of the general European Revolution. As this card has not turned up, they were forced into a course which brought them up against insoluble problems. They had to defend Russia without an army against powerful and implacable enemies. They had to establish a regime of well-being for all in a state of general dislocation and impoverishment. The less the material and intellectual conditions existed for all that they aspired to, the more they felt obliged to replace what was lacking by the exercise of naked power, by dictatorship. They had to do this all the more the greater the opposition to them amongst the masses became. So it became inevitable that they should put dictatorship in the place of democracy.

If the Bolsheviks were deceived in their expectations that they only needed to become the Government, in order to unchain the European Revolution, they were not less so in the anticipation that they had, only to grasp the helm of State, and the majority of the population would joyously range themselves behind them. As the Opposition under the conditions due to Russia's situation, they had indeed developed great propaganda strength, as we have already noted. At the beginning of the Revolution only a small handful, they became so strong eventually as to seize the power of the State. But had they the masses of the population behind them? This should have been revealed by the Constituent Assembly, which the Bolsheviks, like other revolutionaries, had demanded, and for a period even violently demanded; the Constituent Assembly, to be chosen by universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage.

Immediately after the capture of the Government by the Bolsheviks, the new regime was confirmed by the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, albeit in opposition to a strong minority, which left the Congress protesting. But even the majority did not yet repudiate the idea of the Constituent Assembly.

The resolution confirming the Soviet Government began with the words: "Pending the calling together of the Constituent Assembly, a Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government is to be formed, which is to be called the Council of People's Commissaries."

The Constituent Assembly then is recognised here as taking precedence of the Council of People's Commissaries. On November 3 the Government dissolved the Town Council of Petrograd on the

ground that it was in conflict with the outlook of the people, as manifested by the Revolution of November 7, and by “the elections to the Constituent Assembly”. The new members were proclaimed on the basis of the existing general franchise. Soon, however, a defect was discovered in the elections to the Constituent Assembly.

On December 7, the All-Russian Executive Committee of Soviets published a resolution, in which it was stated: “However the electoral arrangements of a body composed of elected representatives may be devised, these can only be considered to be truly democratic and really to represent the will of the people, when the right of recalling their members by the electors is recognised and exercised. This principle of real democracy applies to all representative bodies and also to the Constituent Assembly. The Congress of the Councils of Workmen’s, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Delegates, who are chosen on equal grounds, has the right to issue writs for a new election in the case of town and parish councils, and other representative bodies, not excluding the Constituent Assembly. On the demand of more than half of the electors of the circumscription in question the Council must order a new election.”

The demand that the majority of the voters may at any time recall a deputy, who is no longer in agreement with their views, is entirely in accordance with the principles of democracy. But it is not clear, from this standpoint, why the Soviets should take the step of ordering new elections. However, at that time this represented the widest interference with the Constituent Assembly that had been made. Neither the establishment of the Assembly, nor the elections were touched.

But it was becoming ever clearer that the elections had not given the Bolsheviks the majority. Therefore, the Pravda of December 26, 1917, published a number of propositions relating to the Constituent Assembly, which Lenin had drawn up, and the Central Committee had accepted. One of them declared that the elections had taken place shortly after the victory of the Bolsheviks, but before the Social Revolutionaries had yet divided. The left and the right Social Revolutionaries had therefore had a common list of candidates. Consequently, the elections gave no clear indication of the real voice of the masses.

Whoever entertained this view, in face of the above-mentioned proposition of December 7, was committed to the conclusion that new elections should be ordered to the Assembly in districts which had chosen social revolutionaries. To what other end had this resolution been drawn up? Yet on December 26 it was already forgotten. And suddenly quite another song was heard in the other proposition of Lenin, with which we are here concerned. After he had shown us that the Assembly just elected was not suitable, because it did not express the real voice of the whole people, he declared that any assembly elected by the masses by general suffrage was not suitable: “The Soviet Republic represents not only a higher form of democratic institutions (in comparison with the bourgeois republic and the Constituent Assembly as its consummation) it is also the sole form which renders possible the least painful transition to Socialism.”

It is only a pity that this knowledge was arrived at after one had been left a minority in the Constituent Assembly. Conflict with the Assembly was now inevitable. It ended with a victory for the Soviets, whose dictatorship as a permanent form of government in Russia was proclaimed.

## Chapter VII

### The Soviet Republic

The Soviet organisation was a product of the Russian Revolution of 1905. At that time the proletariat engaged in mass action, for which it required a form of mass organisation. The secret organisation of the Social Democrats, as also of the Social Revolutionaries, only comprised hundreds of members who influenced some thousands of Workers. Political and industrial mass organisations could not be formed under the Absolutism of the Czar. The only mass organisations of the workers which existed when the Revolution came were those which had been brought into existence by the capitalists themselves and related to single trades. These now became mass organisations for the struggle of the proletariat. Each trade was now transformed from a place where material production was carried on into a place of political propaganda and action. The workers of each trade came together and chose delegates, who united to form a council of delegates, or a Soviet. It was the Mensheviks who gave the impulse to this most significant movement. Thus a form of proletarian organisation was created, which became the most comprehensive of all because it included all wage earners. It has made powerful action possible, and left a deep impression in the consciousness of the worker. When the second Revolution broke out in March, 1917, the Soviet organisation again came to the fore, and this time upon a firmer basis, corresponding with the development undergone by the proletariat since the first Revolution. The Soviets of 1905 were local organisations confined to single towns. Those of 1917 were not only more numerous, but closely knit together. Single Soviets were affiliated to a greater body, which in its turn was part of an organisation comprehending the whole Empire, its organ being the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and a permanent Central Executive Committee.

Already the Soviet organisation can look back on a great and glorious history. A more important period lies before it, and not in Russia alone. Everywhere it is apparent that the usual methods of the political and economic struggle of the proletariat are not sufficient to cope with the enormous strength at the disposal of finance capital in the economic and political spheres.

These methods need not be abandoned, as they are essential for ordinary conditions, but at times they are confronted with tasks to which they are not equal, and success is only likely with a combination of all the economic and political power of the proletariat.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 brought the idea of the mass strike to a head in the German Social Democracy. This fact was recognised by the 1905 Congress. That of 1906 endeavoured to allay the sensibilities and fears of the Trade Union officials. On the question of the mass strike, it resolved that when the executive should consider the necessity for the political mass strike to exist it should get into touch with the General Commission of the Trade Unions, and concert all measures necessary to secure successful action.

After all our experience with the mass strike, we know to-day that this resolution was fundamentally wrong. For one reason because a mass strike is likely to be all the more successful by breaking out unexpectedly in a particular situation, with spontaneous suddenness. Its organisation by party and Trade Union machinery would make necessary such preparations as would lead to its frustration.

We, therefore, understand why the Trade Union bureaucracy tends to oppose all spontaneous action on a large scale. Trade Unions are absolutely necessary. The proletariat is the stronger the greater the number of its members, and the larger the financial resources of its Trade Unions. Widespread and permanent organisations, with many ramifications, are not possible without a machinery for permanent administration, that is a bureaucracy. The Trade Union bureaucracy is as essential as the Trade Union itself. It has its faults like Parliamentarism and Democracy, but is as indispensable as these for the emancipation of the proletariat.

This is not, however, to say that all its pretensions must be recognised. It should be restricted to its first function, in performing which it cannot be replaced; that is the administration of Trade Union funds, the extension of organisation. and the giving advice to the workers in their struggles. But it is unsuitable for leading that powerful mass strike which tends to become the characteristic of the times.

By virtue of their experience and knowledge, Trade Union officials and Parliamentarians may here successfully assist, but the initiative tends to fall into the hands of Workshop Committees. In various countries outside Russia, such as in England, these institutions (shop stewards) have played a big part in mass struggles, side by side with ordinary Trade Unionism.

The Soviet organisation is, therefore, one of the most important phenomena of our time. It promises to acquire an outstanding significance in the great decisive struggles between Capital and Labour which are before us.

Can we ask even more than this of the Soviets? The Bolsheviks, who, together with the left-wing Social Revolutionaries, obtained a majority in the Russian Workers' Councils after the November Revolution of 1917, after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, proceeded to make an organ of government of the Soviets, which' hitherto had been the fighting organisation of a class. They did away with the democratic institutions which had been conquered by the Russian people in. the March Revolution. Quite properly the Bolsheviks ceased to call themselves Social Democrats, and described themselves as Communists.

Indeed, they did not repudiate democracy entirely. In his speech of April 28, Lenin described the Soviet organisation as a higher type of democracy, a complete break with its "bourgeois distortion". Entire freedom was now secured to the proletariat and the poor peasant.

Hitherto democracy had connoted equal political rights for all citizens. The sections privileged by law had always possessed freedom of movement. But one does not call that democracy.

The Soviet Republic is to be the organ of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the only means, as Lenin expresses it, whereby the most painless transition to Socialism is made possible. This is to be done by depriving of political rights all those who are not represented in the Soviets.

Why should this step make less painful the transition to Socialism than would be the case with universal suffrage? Obviously, because the capitalists are in this way excluded from the making of laws.

Now there are two alternatives. Suppose the capitalists and their supporters are an insignificant handful. How could they then prevent the transition to Socialism under universal suffrage? On the contrary, universal suffrage would reveal them as an insignificant minority, and consequently they would the sooner resign themselves to their fate than if the franchise were so shaped that no- one could say with certainty which party had behind it a majority of the people. In reality, however, the capitalists cannot be deprived of rights. What is a capitalist in a legal sense? A possessor.

Even in a country so highly developed economically as Germany, where the proletariat is so numerous, the establishment of a Soviet Republic would disfranchise great masses of the people. In 1907, the number of men, with their families, belonging to occupations which comprised the three great groups of agriculture, industry and trade, that is, wage-earners and salaried persons, amounted to something over 35,000,000, as against 17,000,000 belonging to other sections. A party could therefore very well have the majority of wage-earners behind it and yet form a minority of the population. On the other hand, when the workers vote together, they need not fear the united votes of their opponents. By obliging them to fight their common foes, universal suffrage causes them to close up their ranks sooner than if the political struggle were confined to the Soviets, from which the opponents are excluded, and in which the political struggle of a Socialist party takes the form of attacking another Socialist Party. Instead of class-consciousness, sectarian fanaticism is thereby induced.

Now for the other alternative. Suppose the capitalists and their supporters are not a small minority, but a great mass which is well able, in a Parliament elected on the basis of universal suffrage, to constitute a respectable opposition?

What purpose would be served by reducing this opposition to silence in the governing body? The capitalists themselves are everywhere only a small section. But in comparison with the Socialists, their supporters may be very numerous. It should not be thought that only personal interest or payment would induce people to enter the lists for capitalism. Except Socialism, capitalism is today the only possible method of production on a large scale.

Who holds Socialism to be impossible, must, if he thinks in a modern sense at all, be for capitalism, even if he be not interested therein. Even of those backward sections, who are opposed to capitalism, many take their stand on the basis of private property in the means of production, and therefore on the basis on which capitalism grows. In a backward country, therefore, the number of those in the population who directly or indirectly would protect capitalism may be very large. Their opposition would not be lessened if they were deprived of political rights. They would all the more energetically oppose the measures of the new tyrannical regime. By universal suffrage in a real democracy all classes and interests are represented in the governing body according to their strength. Every section and party may exercise the fullest criticism upon each Bill, show up all its weaknesses, and also make known the strength of the opposition which exists amongst the people. In the Soviet all hostile criticism is excluded, and the weaknesses of laws do not come so easily to light. The opposition which they arouse amongst the population is not learned in the first instance.

Only afterwards, when the law is promulgated, do criticism and opposition manifest themselves. Instead of during the debates, the weaknesses of laws come to light when they are put into operation. Even the Soviet Government has already, in the case of very important laws, been

obliged, by supplements and lax administration; to let in by the backdoor elements that it solemnly threw out of the front door.

That, as compared with general suffrage, vote by occupation has a tendency to narrow the outlook of the electors, we have already shown. That by this means the transition to Socialism is rendered painless is very much in doubt.

Not less doubtful is the dictatorship of the proletariat under the Soviet regime. Dictatorship, certainly. But of the proletariat?

In the economic structure of Russia the Soviets could only attain the position of rulers in 1917 by not confining themselves to the industrial proletariat of the towns, as in 1905. This time the soldiers and peasants were also organised in Soviets. With the disbanding of the army the soldiers have lost their numerical importance. The small army raised by the People's Commissaries was more useful to them, from the point of view of bayonets than of votes. Nevertheless, the votes of the Red Army have played a considerable part. In some Soviets, for example, at the latest elections in Petrograd the major portion of the mandates were reserved to its members. Of much more importance, however, were the votes of the peasants, who comprise the great majority of the Russian people. What is represented to us as the dictatorship of the proletariat, if it were logically carried out and a class were able to exercise directly the dictatorship which is only possible for a party, would turn out to be the dictatorship of the peasants. It would therefore appear that the least painful transition to Socialism is effected when it is carried out by the peasants. Although the peasants form the majority in the Soviet organisations, these do not include the whole of the proletariat.

At first it was not clear who might organise in Soviets, and which Soviets might affiliate to the general organisation. It was thought by various people that every trade organisation might form a Soviet, and be regarded as such.

On May 28, 1918, the Leipziger Volkszeitung published an article entitled the Soviet Republic, which obviously came from Bolshevik sources. It was there stated:

The Soviet representation is superior to democratic representation. It concedes to all citizens full and equal rights, and all classes in the land enjoy the full possibility of securing representation in the Soviets, exactly corresponding to their strength and special social importance. To this end they must be independently organised, not in parties, as hitherto, on the lines of democracy, but in special classes or trade organisations.

Legien and his friends may be very contented with this subordination of the Social Democratic Party to the Trade Unions, as well as the reactionaries who want to substitute a class vote for general suffrage. The champion of proletarian dictatorship continues:

The bourgeoisie as such have hitherto not been represented in the Soviets, because on the one hand, they have boycotted them, and on the other, are not disposed to be organised on the proletarian scheme, but not because they have been excluded.

Are they really not so disposed? Has our Bolshevik friend ever belonged to an employers' association, and does he think that the capitalist isolated under general suffrage is really more dangerous than an employers' association in a Soviet?

But we are about to learn wherein consists the superiority of the Soviet organisation over general suffrage: "It can obviously adopt the attitude of excluding any bourgeois organisation from the Soviets."

In other words, the Soviet organisation has the advantage over general suffrage of being more arbitrary. It can exclude all organisations which it considers obnoxious. It "concedes full and equal rights to citizens", but "obviously" they must only be exercised to the liking of the Soviet Government.

Meanwhile, it has been discovered that this does not work. The last All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which terminated on July 12, 1918, drafted a constitution of the Russian Soviet Republic. This lays it down that not all the inhabitants of the Russian Empire, but only specified categories have the right to elect deputies to the Soviets. All those may vote "who procure their sustenance by useful or productive work". What is "useful and productive work"? This is a very elastic term. Not less elastic is the definition of those who are excluded from the franchise. They include any who employ wage labourers for profit. A home worker or small master, with an apprentice, may live and feel quite like a proletarian, but he has no vote. Even more proletarians may become disfranchised by the definition which aims at depriving private traders and middle men of the vote. The worker who loses his work, and endeavours to get a living by opening a small shop, or selling newspapers, loses his vote.

Another clause excludes from the franchise everyone who has unearned income, for example, dividends on capital, profits of a business, rent of property. How big the unearned income must be which carries with it loss of the vote is not stated. Does it include the possession of a savings bank-book? Quite a number of workers, especially in the small towns, own a little house, and, to keep themselves above water, let lodgings. Does this bring them into the category of people with unearned income. Not long since there was a strike at the Obuchovist Factory, "this hotbed of the Revolution," as Trotsky styled it in 1909 (*Russia in the Revolution*, page 83). I asked a Bolshevik comrade how he explained this protest against the Soviet Government.

"That is very simple," he said, "the workers there are all capitalists who own a little house."

One sees how little it takes, according to the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, to be labelled a capitalist, and to lose the vote.

The elasticity of the definition of the franchise, which opens the door to the greatest arbitrariness, is due to the subject of this definition, and not to its framers. A juridical definition of the proletariat, which shall be distinct and precise, is not to be had.

I have not found a reference to the appointment of a specific authority which shall verify each person's vote, compile voting lists, and carry out the election, either by secret ballot or a show of hands. Clause 70 determines: "The exact procedure of election will be decided by the local Soviets, in accordance with instructions from the All-Russian Central Committee."

In a speech of April 28, 1918, Lenin mentioned the following in connection with the Socialist character of the Soviets: (1) The voters are the working and exploited masses, only the bourgeoisie being excluded; (2) All bureaucratic formality and restriction cease. The masses themselves decide the procedure and the date of the elections.

It seems, then, that any body of electors may order the electoral procedure according to their whims. This would give the greatest scope for arbitrary action, and make it possible to get rid of any inconvenient element of opposition within the proletariat itself.

It need only be remarked in passing that the election to the regional Soviet is an indirect one, which in any case makes easy the influencing of elections to the detriment of the opposition.

However, this has not prevented the opposition from coming to expression in the Soviets.

The “least painful transition” to Socialism obviously requires the silencing of all opposition and criticism. So on June 14, 1918, the All-Russian Central Committee passed this resolution:

The representatives of the Social Revolutionary Party (the right wing and the centre) are excluded, and at the same time all Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’, Peasants’ and Cossacks’ Deputies are recommended to expel from their midst all representatives of this fraction.

This measure was not directed against particular persons, who had committed some punishable acts. Anyone offending in this way against the existing order would at once be imprisoned, and there would be no need to exclude him. There is no word in the constitution of the Soviet Republic respecting the immunity of deputies. Not particular persons (but particular parties) were thereby excluded from the Soviets. This means in practice nothing less than that all proletarians, who take their stand on the ground of party, lose their votes. Their votes are no longer counted. For this no specific clause exists. Clause 23 of the Constitution of the Soviet Republic determines: “In the interests of the working class as a whole the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic may withdraw rights from any persons or groups who misuse them to the detriment of the Socialist Revolution.”

This declared the whole opposition to be outlaws. For every Government, even a revolutionary one, discovers that the opposition misuse their rights. Yet even this was not sufficient to ensure the painless transition to Socialism.

Scarcely had the Bolsheviks got rid of the opposition of the Mensheviks and the Centre and Right Wing of the Social Revolutionaries within the Soviets, when the great fight broke out between them and the left Social Revolutionaries, with whom they had formed the government. The greater part of these were now driven out of the Soviets.

So within the proletariat itself the circle of those who participate in political rights, upon whom the Bolshevik regime rests, becomes ever smaller. Starting out with the idea of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat the Bolshevik regime was bound to become the dictatorship of a

party within the proletariat. Yet it might be for a long time the dictatorship of the majority of the proletariat over the minority. To-day even that has become doubtful.

Nevertheless, every regime, even a dictatorship, is under the necessity of appearing to be the expression of the needs of the majority, not merely of the proletariat, but of the whole people. Even the Bolsheviks cannot escape from this.

The Populaire of Paris, on July 6, 1918, reported an interview which Longuet had with Litvinoff, the London Bolshevik Ambassador. Among other things Longuet remarked:

You know, citizen Litvinoff, that even the comrades in the West, who have the strongest sympathy for your movement, are pained by the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. I had already told you this on my own account, when I last saw you in January. Do you not think that, in order to meet the attacks that are made on you, you ought at any rate to hold new elections?

To which Litvinoff replied:

This is not possible at the moment in view of the present situation. Democracy expressed in the form of the Soviets – a more precise expression of the will of the masses – is the sole form of representation suitable to Russia at the present time. Besides those who protested against the last Soviet elections, which were disastrous for them, would also oppose elections for a new Assembly, in which we should certainly have the majority.

If Comrade Litvinoff and his friends are so sure of this, why do not they take steps to hold such elections. If these were held in the fullest freedom, and gave a Bolshevik majority, the existing Government would gain a far stronger moral basis at home and abroad than ever it can win as a Soviet Government on the present methods of election and administration. Above all, Socialist critics, would lose every ground of objection, and the whole International of the fighting proletariat would stand behind them with unanimity and with full force.

Why renounce this enormous advantage if one is so sure of a majority? Because general suffrage is not suitable to Russia at the present time, and only the Soviet organisation meets its requirements? But how can this assertion be proved? It is indeed understandable when one remembers that every Government likes to identify itself with the country, and to declare that what does not suit it is also not suitable for the country.

One thing can certainly be granted. The present situation is not favourable to the suggestion of elections to a Constituent Assembly. At the time when the elections to the first Assembly were prepared and completed a certain amount of peace still prevailed in the interior. To-day all Russia is torn by civil war. Does, however, this record of nine months of the Soviet Republic furnish the proof that the Soviet organisation is the most suitable to Russia, and the one which least painfully effects the transition to Socialism?

## Chapter VIII The Object Lesson

The pernicious features of the method of dictatorship here discussed must now be contrasted with more favourable aspects. It furnishes a striking object lesson, and even if it cannot last it is able to accomplish many things to the advantage of the proletariat, which cannot be lost.

Let us look closely at the object lesson. This argument obviously rests on the following consideration: Under democracy, by virtue of which the majority of the people rule, Socialism can only be brought about when a majority in its favour is gained. A long and tedious way. We reach our goal far quicker if an energetic minority which knows its aims, seizes hold of the power of the State, and use it for passing Socialist measures. Its success would at once compel conviction, and the majority, which hitherto had opposed, would quickly rally to Socialism.

This sounds very plausible, and sounded so in the mouth of old Weitling. It has only the one defect that it assumes that which has to be proved. The opponents of the method of dictatorship contest the assumption that Socialist production can be brought about by a minority without the co-operation of the great mass of the people. If the attempt fails, it certainly is an object lesson, but in the wrong sense, not by attracting, but by frightening.

People who are influenced by such an object lesson, and not by examining and verifying social relations, thoughtless worshippers of mere success, would, in the case of the attempt failing, not inquire from what causes it did not succeed. They would not seek for the explanation in the unfavourable or unripe conditions, but in Socialism itself, and would conclude that Socialism is realisable under no circumstances.

It is apparent that the object lesson has a very dangerous side.  
How has it been represented to us?

We may popularly express the essentials of Socialism in the words: Freedom and bread for all. This is what the masses expect from it, and why they rally to it. Freedom is not less important than bread. Even well-to-do and rich classes have fought for their freedom, and not seldom have made the biggest sacrifices for their convictions in blood and treasure. The need for freedom, for self-determination, is as natural as the need for food.

Hitherto Social Democracy did represent to the masses of the people the object lesson of being the most tireless champion of the freedom of all who were oppressed, not merely the wage-earner, but also of women, persecuted religions and races, the Jews, Negroes and Chinese. By this object lesson it has won adherents quite outside the circle of wage-earners.

Now, so soon as Social Democracy attains to power, this object lesson is to be replaced by one of an opposite character. The first step consists in the suspension of universal suffrage and of liberty of the Press, the disenfranchisement of large masses of the people, for this must always take place if dictatorship is substituted for democracy. In order to break the political influence of the upper ten thousand, it is not necessary to exclude them from the franchise. They exercise this influence not by their personal votes. As regards small shopkeepers, home workers, peasants who are well off and in moderate condition, the greater part of the intellectuals, so soon as the dictatorship

deprives them of their rights, they are changed at once into enemies of Socialism by this kind of object lesson, so far as they are not inimical from the beginning. Thus all those who adhere to Socialism on the ground that it fights for the freedom of all would become enemies of the proletarian dictatorship.

This method will win nobody who is not already a Socialist. It can only increase the enemies of Socialism.

But we saw that Socialism not only promised freedom, but also bread. This ought to reconcile those whom the Communist dictatorship robbed of freedom.

They are not the best of the masses who are consoled in their loss of freedom with bread and pleasure. But without doubt material well-being will lead many to Communism who regard it sceptically, or who are by it deprived of their rights. Only this prosperity must really come, and that quickly, not as a promise for the future, if the object lesson is to be effective.

How is this prosperity to be attained? The necessity for dictatorship pre-supposes that a minority of the population have possessed themselves of the power of the State. A minority composed of those who possess nothing. The greatest weapon of the proletariat is, however, its numbers, and in normal times it can only progress on these lines, conquering the political power only when it forms the majority. As a minority it can only achieve power by the combination of extraordinary circumstances, by a catastrophe which causes the collapse of a regime, and leaves the State helpless and impoverished.

Under such circumstances, Socialism, that is general well-being within modern civilisation, would only be possible through a powerful development of the productive forces. Which capitalism brings into existence, and with the aid of the enormous riches which it creates and concentrates in the hands of the capitalist class. A State which by a foolish policy or by unsuccessful war has dissipated these riches, is by its nature condemned to be an unfavourable starting point for the rapid diffusion of prosperity in all classes.

If, as the heir of the bankrupt State, not a democratic but a dictatorial regime enters into power, it even renders the position worse, as civil war is its necessary consequence. What might still be left in the shape of material resources is wasted by anarchy.

In fine, the uninterrupted progress of production is essential for the prosperity of all. The destruction of capitalism is not Socialism. Where capitalist production cannot be transformed at once into Socialist production, it must go on as before, otherwise the process of production will be interrupted, and that hardship for the masses will ensue which the modern proletariat so much fears in the shape of general unemployment.

In those places where, under the new conditions, capitalist production has been rendered impossible, Socialist production will only be able to replace it if the proletariat has acquired experience in self-government, in trade unions, and on town councils, and has participated in the making of laws and the control of government, and if numerous intellectuals are prepared to assist with their services the new methods.

In a country which is so little developed economically that the proletariat only forms a minority, such maturity of the proletariat is not to be expected.

It may therefore be taken for granted that in all places where the proletariat can only maintain itself in power by a dictatorship, instead of by democracy, the difficulties with which Socialism is confronted are so great that it would seem to be out of the question that dictatorship could rapidly bring about prosperity for all, and in this manner reconcile to the reign of force the masses of the people who are thereby deprived of political rights.

As a matter of fact, we see that the Soviet Republic, after nine months of existence, instead of diffusing general prosperity, is obliged to explain how the general poverty arises.

We have lying before us: Theses respecting the Socialist Revolution and the tasks of the proletariat during its dictatorship in Russia, which emanates from the Bolshevist side. A passage deals with "the difficulties of the position".

Paragraph 28 reads as follows: "28. The proletariat has carried out positive organic work under the greatest difficulties. The internal difficulties are: The wearing out and enormous exhaustion of the social resources and even their dissolution in consequence of the war, the policy of the capitalist class before the October revolution (their calculated policy of disorganisation, in order after the 'Anarchy', to create a bourgeois dictatorship), the general sabotage of the bourgeoisie and the intellectuals after the October revolution; the permanent counter-revolutionary revolts of the ex-officers, generals and bourgeois, with arms or without; lack of technical skill and experience on the part of the working-class itself (italicised in original), lack of organising experience; the existence of large masses of the petty bourgeoisie, which are an unorganised class, par excellence, etc."

This is all very true. But it does not indicate anything else than that the conditions are not ripe. And does it not strikingly show that an object lesson on the lines of Socialism is, under these conditions in present-day Russia, not to be thought of? It is a famous object lesson which makes it necessary for theoretical arguments to be set out why that which is to be shown is not possible at the moment. Will it convert those who have hitherto opposed Socialism, and who are only to be convinced by its practical success?

Of course, a new regime will come up against unexpected difficulties. It is wrong to lay the blame for them on this regime, as a matter of course, and to be discouraged by them without closer examination of the circumstances. But if one is to persevere, in spite of these difficulties, then it is necessary to win beforehand a strong conviction of the justice and necessity of this regime. Only then will confusion be avoided. Success worshippers are always uncertain Cantonists.

So we are driven back upon democracy, which obliges us to strive to enlighten and convince the masses by intensive propaganda before we can reach the point of bringing Socialism about. We must here again repudiate the method of dictatorship, which substitutes compulsory object lessons for conviction.

This is not to say that object lessons may avail nothing in the realisation of Socialism. On the contrary, they can and will play a great part in this, but not through the medium of dictatorship.

The various States of the world are at very different stages of economic and political development. The more a State is capitalistic on the one side and democratic on the other, the nearer it is to Socialism. The more its capitalist industry is developed, the higher is its productive power, the greater its riches, the more socially organised its labour, the more numerous its proletariat; and the more democratic a State is, the better trained and organised is its proletariat. Democracy may sometimes repress its revolutionary thought, but it is the indispensable means for the proletariat to attain that ripeness which it needs for the conquest of political power, and the bringing about of the social revolution. In no country is a conflict between the proletariat and the ruling classes absent, but the more a country is progressive in capitalism Mid democracy, the greater is the prospect of the proletariat, in such a conflict, of not merely gaining a passing victory, but also of maintaining it.

Where a proletariat, under such conditions, gains control of the State, it will discover sufficient material and intellectual resources to permit it at once to give the economic development a Socialist direction, and immediately to increase the general well-being.

This will then furnish a genuine object lesson to countries which are economically and politically backward. The mass of their proletariat will not unanimously demand measures on the same lines and also all other sections of the poorer classes, as well as numerous intellectuals, will demand that the State should take the same road to general prosperity. Thus, by the example of the progressive countries, the Cause of Socialism will become irresistible in countries which to-day are not so advanced as to allow their proletariat of its own strength to conquer the power of the State, and put Socialism into operation.

And we need not place this period in the distant future. In a number of industrial States the material and moral prerequisites for Socialism appear already to exist in sufficient measure. The question of the political dominion of the proletariat is merely a question of power alone, above all of the determination of the proletariat to engage in resolute class struggle. But Russia, is not one of these leading industrial States. What is being enacted there now is, in fact, the last of bourgeois, and not the first of Socialist revolutions. This shows itself ever more distinctly. Its present Revolution could only assume a Socialist character if it coincided with Socialist Revolutions in Western Europe.

That by an object lesson of this kind in the more highly-developed nations, the pace of social development may be accelerated, was already recognised by Marx in the preface to the first edition of Capital:

One nation can and should learn from others. And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement - it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs.

In spite of their numerous calls on Marx, our Bolshevik friends seem to have quite forgotten this passage, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which they preach and practise, is nothing but a grandiose attempt to clear by bold leaps or remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of normal development. They think that it is the least painful method for the delivery of Socialism, for "shortening and lessening its birth-pangs". But if we are to continue in

metaphor, then their practice reminds us more of a pregnant woman, who performs the most foolish exercises in order to shorten the period of gestation, which makes her impatient, and thereby causes a premature birth.

The result of such proceedings is, as a rule, a child incapable of life.

Marx speaks here of the object lesson which one nation may afford another. Socialism is, however, concerned with yet another kind of object lesson, viz., that which a highly-developed industry may furnish to an industry which is backward.

To be sure, capitalist competition everywhere tends to displace old-fashioned industrial methods, but under capitalist conditions this is so painful a process that those threatened by its operation strive to avert it by all means. The Socialist method of production would therefore find in existence a number of processes which are technically obsolete; for example, in agriculture, where large-scale production has made little progress, and in places is even receding.

Socialist production can only develop on the basis of the large industry. Socialist agriculture would have to consist solely in the socialisation of what large-scale production already exists. If good results are thereby obtained, which is to be expected, provided the social labour of freely-organised men is substituted for wage labour, (which only produces very inadequate results in agriculture) the conditions of the workers in the large Socialist industry will be seen to be more favourable than those of the small peasants, and it may then be anticipated with certainty that the latter will voluntarily pass over to the new productive methods, when society furnishes them with the necessary means. But not before. In agriculture the way for Socialism is not prepared by Capitalism in any adequate measure. And it is quite hopeless to try to convince peasant proprietors of the theoretical superiority of Socialism. Only the object lesson of the socialisation of peasant agriculture can help. This, however, presupposes a certain extension of large-scale agriculture. The object lesson will be the quicker and more effective according to the degree of development of large-scale industry in the country.

The policy of the petty bourgeois democrats, which has been taken up by Social Democrats of the David school, and in some respects made more extreme, that is, the destruction of any large-scale agriculture and its partition into small-scale industry, is sharply opposed to Socialism as applied to agriculture, and therefore to Socialism as applied to society generally.

The most striking feature of the present Russian Revolution is its working out on the lines of Eduard David. He, and not Lenin, has given the Revolution its peculiar direction in this respect. That is the Socialist instruction which it imparts. It testifies, in fact, to its bourgeois character.

## **Chapter IX**

### **The Legacy of the Dictatorship**

#### **(a) Agriculture**

Dictatorship is not only going to furnish the best object lesson for Socialist propaganda, but will also hasten progress towards Socialism, by its actions, in the event of its not maintaining itself and

collapsing before the goal has been reached. Its supporters expect that it will leave behind much that cannot be set on one side, and that it has cleared out of the way much that cannot be again established.

This conception, too, like so many others, is based on the observation of the great French Revolution, the bourgeois revolution, under the influence of which remain those who stigmatise as “bourgeois”, and reject, all that does not suit them, and for whom democracy is only a bourgeois prejudice.

The observation is correct, but the conclusions to be drawn are other than those of the supporters of dictatorship. The latter may be able to achieve more radical things than democracy, but what accompanies it is not always what the dictators want. However high the dictatorship may be raised above all other powers in the State, it is always dependent upon one of them: that is the material foundations of society. These conditions, and not the will of the dictators, decide what the final consequences of the dictatorship will be.

The strongest driving force of the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution was the proletariat and the semi-proletarian classes of Paris. What they desired was the equalisation of all property, the destruction of large properties. This they succeeded in doing in various ways. But they destroyed only more thoroughly than has happened in other parts of Europe the vestiges of feudalism, and thereby more effectively opened the way for the coming of the new capitalist large property, which shot up like a fungus immediately after the downfall of the Reign of Terror. That, and in nowise economic equality, was the legacy of that dictatorship of the equalitarians.

In order to understand what the economic legacy of the present dictatorship of the Soviets will be, we must not only take account of their intentions, desires and measures, but of the economic structure of the Empire. It is decisive.

This examination may appear to many as tedious pedantry, incompatible with the revolutionary fire which burned in a Marx. No one can say with certainty what Marx would have thought and done in the present situation. But it is certain that this tedious pedantry is the only procedure which is compatible with historical materialism, the foundation of which is one of the indisputable merits of Marx. A man who believed that in a question of knowledge mere enthusiasm was to be accounted higher than experience would have been pushed on one side by Marx as an empty phrasemonger.

The economic foundation of present-day Russia is still agriculture, and even small peasant agriculture. By it live four-fifths, perhaps even five-sixths of its inhabitants. In the year 1913 the town population of Russia (excluding Finland) was computed at 24 millions, and those living by the land were 147 millions. The overwhelming majority of the latter are peasants. The Revolution has altered nothing in these conditions. During the past year they have even been strengthened. Numerous workers have returned to the land. In the towns hunger has been more devastating than amongst the peasants.

Until the Revolution the peasants lived under a semi-feudal yoke. Serf age had indeed been abolished by the Reform of 1861, and the peasant formally made a free man. But this was not the work of a revolution, but the work of a patriarchal absolutism, which in a fatherly spirit provided

that the big landowners should lose nothing by the Reform, but should rather gain. The peasant had to pay for his freedom with the loss of a part of the land which, prior to the Reform, he had used, and had to pay dear for the land which would be granted to him. The average size of a peasant's holding was certainly larger than in Western Europe. Before the Revolution the peasants' holdings of less than five hectares in Russia comprised only 10.6 per cent. of the total, whereas in France 71.4 per cent. of the holdings were five hectares and less, and in Germany 76.5 per cent. But Russian agriculture is so backward through the ignorance of the peasants, primitive appliances, lack of cattle and manure, that it produces far less than in Western Europe. In France 70.5 pud of wheat (1 pud = 16.38 kilogrammes) is raised from every hectare, in Germany 77 pud, but in Russia only 28.2 pud. (Massloff: The Russian Agrarian Question)

The peasant was therefore soon after his emancipation in a worse material position than before. He became impoverished, and his industry did not progress, but rather declined. To avoid starvation, he was obliged to rent plots of land from the large land-owners, or, where these were themselves engaged in large-scale agriculture, to work for wages. Mostly, he was obliged to obtain an advance for the work he was to do, which brought him into a state of indebtedness that was often more oppressive and hopeless than his former serfdom. This state of affairs was not improved by the peasant taking his produce to the markets, whether home or foreign. This put money in his pocket, and made it possible for him to save, which could, however, only be done at the cost of the peasant's sustenance. Formerly, he had consumed the greater part of his produce himself, because he had no other outlet. Now that he found an outlet, he sold as much as possible, and kept as little as possible back. So every year of failure became a year of hunger. So far as the peasant could save money, he did not spend it to improve his methods, but to obtain more land.

In the period between 1863 and 1892, agricultural land in European Russia was

	Million Roubles	
	Bought	Sold
By nobles	821	1,459
By merchants	318	135
By peasants	335	93

The land of the nobles decreased, and that of the peasants increased as compared with the bourgeoisie of the towns. But the land population increased more rapidly still, and so on the average there was a decrease in the area belonging to each peasant, although the total holdings of the peasants slightly increased. At the same time, under the influence of money transactions, aided by the legislature, the village communism, which from time to time had been instrumental in equalising the land holdings of individual peasants, disappeared more and more. Individuals were prosperous, but the others were the more impoverished. Both, however, prosperous and poor peasants, looked ever more greedily to the great land-owners, from whom they expected their salvation. They longed for the overthrow of landed property, and became a revolutionary class. Their longing found expression and form through the revolutionary intellectuals of the towns. The Socialists of Russia were agreed that a revolution in the ownership of land was as essential for Russia as the overthrow of the Czarist absolutism. But the Socialists were divided into two

sections. The one believed that primitive village communism would enable the peasants, and with them all Russia, to attain to Socialism at one bound, although it may be a Socialism of their own. This shade of opinion found various expressions, the chief being the Social Revolutionaries. The Marxists opposed them on the ground that Russia, as little as other countries, “could clear by leaps or remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of normal development”, that the coming Revolution could only clear away the vestiges of Feudalism, and accelerate the capitalist development, on the basis of which would grow up a proletariat trained by the newly-won democracy, which, then, being on the same level as the proletariat of Western Europe, would be able to achieve Socialism at the same time as the latter.

All Socialists without distinction were agreed in supporting the peasants in their endeavours to remove the vestiges of Feudalism. This was distinctly brought to the mind of the peasant in the Revolution of 1905. From then onwards the co-operation of peasants and Socialists, namely, through the means of the Social Revolutionaries, assumed a closer character. Thus after the Revolution of 1917 the organisation of the Soviets arose as not merely a proletarian, but also a peasant institution.

The Revolution made possession of large estates untenable. This became obvious at once. It was inevitable that they should be transferred to the peasant population, although there was by no means agreement as to the methods of carrying this out. Various solutions were conceivable. From the Socialist standpoint, the most rational would have been to transform the large estates into State property, and have them worked on a co-operative basis by the peasants, who had hitherto been engaged on them as wage-earners. However, this solution presupposed an agricultural class which Russia did not possess. Another solution would have been for the big landed estates to become State property, and to be divided into small parcels to be rented to the peasants who needed land. Even that would have been a partial realisation of Socialism. But the small peasant holders strove where they could to obtain full private property in their means of production. This character they have hitherto displayed everywhere, and the Russian peasant, in spite of the tradition of village communism, is no exception. The breaking up of landed estates and their partition- that was his programme, and he was strong enough to carry it out. No one could hinder him. In the interests of the peasants themselves, it would have been nevertheless very desirable that the partition should be systematically carried out, and the land given to those who needed it the most, and could also use it. There was only one authority which could have effected such a systematic partition, and that was the Constituent Assembly, as representing the collective will of the nation, of whom the great majority were peasants.

But this was too long to wait. The peasants began everywhere to help themselves, which caused many valuable productive implements to be destroyed. The Soviet Organisation then removed from the purview of the Constituent Assembly the settlement of the Agrarian question, and left it to the peasants of every commune to seize the big estates, and proceed with their partition according to their whim. One of the first resolutions of the Soviet Government ordered that

- (1) Private property in land is forthwith abolished, without compensation.
- (2) The property of the landlords, together with the appurtenances, cloisters, and church property, with all live-stock and chattels, and other belongings, pending the decision of

the land question by the Constituent Assembly, shall be placed at the disposal of the Local Committees and the Councils of Peasants' Deputies.

The reference to the Constituent Assembly remained a dead letter. In practice the peasants of the localities took what they wanted of the estates.

This necessarily excluded any equalisation between rich localities, containing many substantial peasants, and poor neighbourhoods containing none but small peasants. Within the individual communes no record was made of those who obtained the land. Where the rich peasants dominated, either by their numbers or their influence, they obtained the lion share of the big estates. No general statistics regarding the partition of the land were compiled, but it was frequently stated that, as a rule, the big peasants came away with most of the land that was partitioned.

It is certain that the Soviet Republic has not solved the Agrarian question on the lines of an equitable division of the land. At the beginning the peasant Soviets constituted an organisation of the peasants alone. To-day it is announced that the Soviets represent the organisation of the proletariat and the poor peasants. The well-to-do have lost their right of voting in the Soviets. The poor peasant is here recognised as the colossal and permanent product of the Socialist agrarian reform of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This peasant is very likely in the minority in many villages, otherwise there was no object in protecting him by disfranchising the prosperous and medium peasants. But in any case he still forms a very considerable fraction of the Russian peasantry.

By this partition of property the Soviet Republic sought to appease the peasants. It would have been dangerous for it to interfere even slightly with peasant private property.

To be sure it encroached on the relations between rich and poor peasants, but not by a fresh partition of the land. To remedy the lack of food in the towns detachments of armed workers were sent into the villages, to take away from the rich peasants their surplus food. Part of this was assigned to the population of the towns, and part to the poor peasants. These were indeed only temporary measures of urgency, confined to certain areas, the environs of the large towns. To carry them out thoroughly the armed force of the towns would have been quite inadequate. In no case could such measures have sufficed to effect an equalisation between the rich and poor on the land, even if regularly repeated year by year. And in the last resort they might prove an effective means completely to ruin agriculture.

If private production were carried on, and its produce calculated in such wise that the producer would have taken from him everything over what was necessary for his needs, he would produce only the indispensable minimum. This is one of the reasons for the decay of agriculture in many of the countries living under Oriental despotism, in which the tax collector takes from the peasant the surplus above that which is indispensable. A similar fate is likely to overtake Russia. Socialism will effect an adjustment between economic differences by the socialisation of the means and methods of production, thus making society the owner of the products. By this means it is able to increase production to the maximum, and distribute the produce in accordance with social requirements and justice.

On the other hand, to allow private property in the means of production, and private production itself to continue, and then regularly to confiscate the surplus, leads to the ruin of production, whether it be done in the interests of an Oriental despotism or of a proletarian dictatorship. Of course in cases where such proceedings may be thought desirable as a temporary measure of urgency, this may not happen, as it may sometimes be necessary to do this. It is the reverse with the present expropriation of the well-to-do peasants. This does not alter in the least the structure of Russian society, it only introduces a new cause of unrest, and carries civil war into the domain of production, the continuance of which is so pressing a need for the Government's peace and security. Moreover, if the dictatorship of the Soviets had the will and the strength to undertake a fresh partition of the land, and to do this equitably, it would not help the peasants much, as under the present primitive methods the cultivated land in Russia would not suffice to give enough land to each peasant to raise him out of poverty.

As Massloff rightly says in the book already quoted from: "An attempt to put agriculture on the basis of equality would wily be realised as a state of general poverty. To try to make all rich, while maintaining private property in the means of production is a vulgar Utopia of the petty bourgeoisie. If this kind of equality is not realisable, there is, on the other hand, in many countries, an equality of poverty already existing, and any extension of such a state of affairs can inspire no one. Whatever additions may be made to peasant property, there will always be too little land to permit all peasant be agriculture to prosperous. The endeavour to bring the life of the peasant into the orbit of the petty bourgeois ideal, economic equality of small property, is not only Utopian, but also reactionary."

With the present numbers of the population, and the existing area of cultivation, a general raising of the social standard of the Russian peasant, cannot be accomplished by any method of partitioning the land. It can only be achieved when higher productive forms prevail, which require a general improvement in the education of the agricultural population, and a larger supply of cattle, implements, machinery, and artificial manure to be at their disposal, all of which conditions can only be introduced with difficulty and patience where small agriculture is the rule.

If the conditions necessary for intensive capitalist agriculture have only been slightly developed in Russia, and have even suffered a temporary set-back through the revolution, it is clear that the conditions for Socialist agriculture do not exist there, as they can only arise on the basis of large-scale agriculture with highly- developed technical appliances. Large-scale production can only be made to pay by technical appliances, the application of science, the most complete equipment of machinery, and the use of up-to-date methods, accompanied by a considerable division of labour. Therefore, new methods of production can only be introduced and become permanent in places where advantages can be derived, either in the form of an increased product or in that of the saving of labour. In view of the primitive appliances and the ignorance of the small Russian peasants, it is hopeless to introduce large-scale agriculture. To be sure, in Bolshevist circles, mention is made from time to time of the introduction of Socialist agriculture, after the big estates have been broken up and divided amongst the peasants. We have already referred to the theses respecting the Russian Revolution and the tasks of the proletariat during its dictatorship in Russia. No. 24 of these reads: "The complete expropriation of the land owners must be now mentioned. Land was decreed to exist for the general good. Additional tasks are the following: organisation of agriculture by the State, collective working of the former big estates, association of the small holdings into larger unities, with collective self-government (so-called agricultural communes)."

This which was said to be the task is, unfortunately, not yet fulfilled. Collective agriculture is, for the time being, in Russia condemned to remain on paper. Nowhere, and at no time, are small peasants persuaded, on the ground of theory, to go in for collective production. The Peasants' Associations include all possible branches of economy, and not merely the fundamental one of cultivating the land. Small scale agriculture necessarily creates everywhere the endeavour to separate single plots of land from one another, and is favourable to private property in land. Thus it has happened in Europe and America, and the process repeats itself throughout the world. Is the Russian peasant such an exceptional phenomenon as to be exempt from the operation of this general law? Whoever considers him as an ordinary man and compares him with the peasants of the rest of the world will declare it to be an illusion that a Socialist economy can be built up on the basis of present Russian agriculture.

The Revolution has only achieved in Russia what it effected in France in 1789 and what its aftermath achieved in Germany. By the removal of the remains of feudalism it has given stronger and more definite expression to private property than the latter had formerly. It has now made of the peasants, who were formerly interested in the overthrow of private property in land, that is, the big estates, the most energetic defenders of the newly-created private property in land. It has strengthened private property in the means of production and in the produce, which are conditions from which capitalist production will constantly arise, although it may be disturbed or even destroyed for a time.

Even the poor peasants are not thinking of giving up the principle of private property in land. Not by collective production do they seek to improve their lot, but by increasing their own share of land, that is, their own private property. That thirst for land, which always characterises the peasant, has now, after the destruction of the big estates, made of him the strongest defender of private property. The peasant has shown himself to be such in all countries where feudalism has been overcome, and therefore he is fostered and pampered by the ruling classes as their most trustworthy defender.

This will be the most certain and lasting result of the present dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasants in Russia.

The interest of the peasant in the revolution therefore dwindles so soon as his new private property is secured. He will rise against any power which would re-establish at his cost the old, large land-owners, but he has no interest in going beyond this. With his interest in the revolution will disappear his interest in his erstwhile allies, the town proletariat.

The less the peasant produces for his own need and the more he produces for the market, and is obliged to rely upon his money income, so much the greater becomes his interest in high prices for his produce. This becomes his dominating interest after feudalism has been abolished. This does not, however, bring him into antagonism to the large land-owners, whose interests are the same as his, and who become his allies, but it brings him into opposition to the non-agricultural and town population, above all, to the workers, who must spend a larger portion of their incomes upon food than the bourgeoisie, and consequently have the greatest interest in lowering the prices of the necessities of life.

So long as feudalism exists, the peasant and the lower classes in the towns make the best allies. This was shown in their struggles from the time of the German Peasants' War of 1525 to the time of the French Revolution of 1789. As soon as the bourgeois revolution was accomplished, the peasants commenced to go over to the camp which is opposed to the town proletariat. Not only the prosperous peasants are to be found there with the big land-owners, but also the small peasants, even in democratic republics like Switzerland. The small peasants do not go over to this side all at once, but gradually, according as the traditions of feudalism become fainter, and production for the market replaces production for their own need. Even in our own ranks the idea has been cherished, which Marx also referred to in his writings on the Civil War in France, that the peasants in the coming proletarian revolution would march with the proletariat like they did in the bourgeois revolutions. Even yet the Governmental Socialists are looking for an Agrarian programme which will instil in the peasants an interest in the proletarian class struggle: but, in practice, growing opposition is everywhere revealed between the proletariat and the peasants. Only those dwellers in the country have the same interest as the town proletariat, who are themselves proletarians, that is, who do not live by the sale of their produce, but by the sale of their labour power, by wage labour.

The victory of the proletariat depends upon the extension of wage labour in the country, which is a protracted process, a process which is slowly accomplished by the increase of large-scale agriculture, but more quickly promoted by the removal of industries to the country. At the same time, the proletarian victory depends upon the town and industrial population increasing more rapidly than the country and agricultural population. The latter is a process that goes rapidly forward. In most industrial States the country population suffers not only a relative, but an absolute decrease. In the German Empire the country population comprised 26.2 millions out of 41 millions, in 1871, that is, 64.4 per cent. of the population. In 1910 it was 25.8 out of 65 millions, or 40 per cent. The agricultural population is smaller still than the country population. When the first occupation census was taken in 1882, the agricultural population was still 19.2 out of 45.2 millions, or 42.5 per cent. of the total population. In 1907 it was only 17.7 out of 61.7 millions, or 28.7 per cent. Of these 17.7 millions only 11.6 millions were independent producers, 5.6 millions being wage-earners and the rest officials. The peasant population, therefore, only amounts to one-sixth of the total population of the German Empire. On the other hand, already in 1907, the proletariat, with about 34 millions, comprised more than half of the population. Since then, it has certainly grown still more, and is not far off the point of becoming two-thirds of the population.

The conditions in Russia are of quite another character. We have already shown how overwhelming is the preponderance of the peasants. Their co-operation with the proletariat has made possible the victory of the revolution, but it also testifies to the bourgeois character of the revolution. The more it is completed and strengthened in this sense, that is, the more secure the newly-created peasant property is made, the more will the pound be prepared, on the one side for capitalist agriculture, and on the other for a growing opposition between the peasant and proletariat. The economic tendencies working in this direction are all-powerful in present day Russia, and the most forcible dictatorship would not avail to counteract them. Rather will it strengthen them in the shape of a dictatorship of the peasants.

## **(b) Industry**

The industry of Russia is a different thing from its agriculture. Russian industry exhibits many primitive forms, but the capitalist portion of it, just because of its recent growth, shows its most modern and highly-developed form. And the Russian industrial working class, by the side of numerous illiterates, who come from the country and are still limited by the narrow conceptions of the village, contains not a few members who have absorbed all the modern culture that is now available to the proletariat, who are filled with the same interest in theory which Marx praised in the German workers half a century ago, and are distinguished by that thirst for knowledge which is so often stifled amongst the workers of Western Europe by the petty details inherent in democratic conditions.

Could not a Socialist system of production be constructed on this foundation?

This is only conceivable if Socialism means that the workers in single factories and mines should appropriate these themselves, in order to administer each one separately.

Even as I write (August 5), a speech of Lenin's in Moscow, on August 2, is just to hand, which reports him as saying, "The workers retain possession of the factories and the peasants will not give back the land to the landlords."

The saying "The factories to the workers and the land to the peasants" was recently not a social democratic, but an anarchist-syndicalist demand. Social democracy demanded that the factories and land should belong to society. The individual peasant can, in case of need, work his property without any connection with other producers. The modern factory, on the other hand, stands in a network of social connections, and its isolation is inconceivable. It is not enough for the workers to take over a factory, even if they are sufficiently intelligent and trained to direct it properly. A factory cannot run for a single day without supplies from other industries, raw material, coal, and auxiliary products of all kinds, and without the regular sale of its products. If raw material and the mines and transport services fail, then the factory fails as well. Its operation on Socialist lines presupposes the creation of a network of social production. Only when society can do this, is Socialist production possible.

Social democracy does not demand the transference of factories to their workers, but strives for social production, that is, production for the needs of society in place of commodity production, and this is only possible through the social ownership of the means of production. Even the Bolsheviks have declared for the nationalisation of factories, not their transference to the hands of the workers. The latter would only mean a change to a new form of capitalism, as experience has shown in the numerous cases of co-operative production. The new owners would defend their property, as giving them a privileged position, against labourers seeking work, whose numbers must constantly be recruited through the insufficient share of land falling to the peasantry.

A permanent conquest of capitalism is not possible by giving over the factories to the workers engaged in them, but only by transferring the means of production to the possession of society, that is, the whole body of consumers, for whose need production is carried on. Thus they become State property, or, in the case of local means of production, belong to the commune, and eventually also to associations of consumers.

This has even been attempted in Russia to-day. How far it has been carried out is not yet disclosed. This side of the Soviet Republic is, in any case, of the greatest interest for us, but, unfortunately, we are still completely in the dark. There is, indeed, no lack of decrees, but trustworthy information concerning the operation of the decrees is absent. Socialist production is impossible without comprehensive, detailed, reliable statistics, which give early information. Hitherto, the Soviet Republic has not been able to obtain these. What we learn about its economic effects is highly contradictory and is not susceptible of any verification. This is again one of the results of the dictatorship and the suppression of democracy. Where freedom of the Press and speech is lacking, there can be no central and representative body, in which all classes and parties are represented, and can express themselves, and the actual dictatorship is exposed to the temptation of only allowing to be published the information which suits it. Whether or not the dictators take advantage of this possibility, no reliance is placed on their information. This does not silence criticism, which merely seeks underground channels. It is spread by word of mouth almost as quickly as a public announcement, but without the restraint of publicity. Rumour knows no bounds. Thus, we are overwhelmed from left to right with information which is contradictory, and we are obliged to maintain an attitude of distrust towards it all.

What results have been forthcoming from the Socialist endeavours of the Soviet Government cannot, therefore, yet be estimated, not even approximately. Is it possible for it to accomplish something in this respect, which will not again be lost, but will become permanent, in the event of the Soviet Government not being able to retain its power?

That it has radically destroyed capitalism can be accepted by no one. It can certainly destroy much capitalist property, and transform many capitalists into proletarians, but this is not equivalent to the establishment of a Socialist system of production. So far as it does not succeed in doing this, capitalism will again arise, and must arise. Probably it will reappear very quickly and bring a change in the personnel of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the place of the former capitalists, now become proletarians, will enter proletarians or intellectuals become capitalists. These people will always skim off the cream, and will remain on the side of the Government which is last on the field, and brings order out of chaos.

The Soviet Government has already been constrained to make various compromises with capital. On April 28, 1918, Lenin admitted in his before-quoted speech (reported in the News Service of the International Socialist Commission) that the expropriation of capital had proceeded too quickly: "If we are to expropriate at this pace, we shall be certain to suffer a defeat. The organisation of production under proletarian control is notoriously very much behind the expropriation of the big masses of capital."

But everything depends upon this organisation. There is nothing easier for a dictator than to expropriate. But to create a huge organism of social labour, and set it in motion, a Decree and the Red Guard will not suffice.

Even more than Russian capital, German capital will cause the Soviet Republic to recoil and recognise its claims. How far the capital of the Entente will again penetrate into Russia is still questionable. To all appearance, the dictatorship of the proletariat has only destroyed Russian capital in order to make room for German and American capital.

However this may be, it is reasonable to anticipate that the nationalisation of many branches of industry, for which the Soviet Government has paved the way, will persist, even if the Soviet Republic should be destroyed, and, after the destruction of the big estates, this will constitute the most considerable permanent achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This is all the more probable, as it is part of a movement which is going on in all modern States, even if they are capitalist. The needs of the war were responsible for it – we remember the nationalisation of the American railways – and the needs of peace will ensure its continuance.

Everywhere we must be prepared for fiscal monopoly.

But this shows that nationalisation is not yet Socialism. Whether it is so or not depends on the character of the State.

Now the Russian State is a peasant State. It is so to-day more than ever, for the peasant has now learned to make his own power felt. In Russia he is as little as elsewhere in a position to exercise his power directly in the State, as his conditions of life do not fit him for this. But he will no longer suffer the rule of any power which does not champion his interest, even if it be that of the town proletariat.

Like peasant commodity production, the State industries will also have to produce for the market, not for the State's own needs. Their most considerable market – the home one – will comprise the peasants.

Even as much as he is interested in high prices for agricultural produce, which he sells, is the peasant interested in low prices for industrial products, which he buys. As against private enterprise, it is a matter of indifference to him how these low prices come to pass, whether at the expense of labour or of profit. He has no interest in high profits for private industrial capital.

It is, however, otherwise with State industry. The higher the profits of this, the lower is the amount of revenue to be provided by taxes, which, in a peasant State, must be chiefly borne by the peasants. The peasant is accordingly as much interested in high profits for State industry as he is in low prices for its products: this means lower wages for labour.

Thus we see here another source of antagonism between peasant and industrial worker, an antagonism which will become the more marked the greater the extension which State industry undergoes.

This antagonism, and not Socialism, will be the real legacy of the Russian Revolution.

It would, nevertheless, be false to ascribe the responsibility for this to Bolshevism. Much of what they are reproached with is the necessary consequence of the conditions which confronted them, and would have disclosed itself quite as certainly under any other regime. Yet it is of the essence of dictatorship that it intensifies all existing antagonisms and raises them to their highest point.

The famine has not been created by the dictatorship, but by the mismanagement of Czarism and the war. But the fact that agriculture and the transport services have so slightly recovered in the half year following peace is the result of the civil war, which, under the dictatorship, is the only form of opposition, and is inevitable when the masses cherish lively political interest.

Again, the demobilisation of the army was a process which the Bolsheviks found going on. Yet they have prided themselves on accelerating it to the utmost, and thereby were obliged to conclude a peace which is no longer a source of satisfaction to them.

In the same way, the breaking up of the big estates among the peasants was a proceeding which had already started before the Bolsheviks seized the political power, and which, owing to the overwhelming numbers of the peasants, nobody could have hindered. Yet the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly has contributed to it, in that the last trace of social influence on the assignment of the expropriated big estates has been lost, and the partition has been left to the naked arbitrariness of the interests on the spot.

Finally, the appearance of the antagonism between peasant and industrial worker is also a phenomenon which could not be avoided, and which necessarily arises out of the prevailing economic conditions. Yet even here the Bolshevik rule has forced the growth of conditions which have sharpened and deepened the antagonism. With the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the demobilisation of the Army the two factors disappeared which could have furnished Russia with the quickest protection against the breaking up and partition of the land. Precisely the richest agricultural tracts of former Russia are now detached from it. If they so remain, then Russia will cease, especially if Siberia also separates, to be altogether a corn or food exporting country. The prices of the agricultural produce of Russia will then be determined only by the home, and not by the foreign market.

Now this is the condition in which, under commodity production, the opposition between peasant and industrial worker most quickly develops. In countries which largely export agricultural produce, the opposition between industry and agriculture takes the form of an antagonism of States rather than of classes, the form of an antagonism between an industrial State and an agricultural State. Russia, in particular, has now, through the peace of Brest-Litovsk, ceased to be an agricultural exporting State, and has shaped in such a way as to promote the most rapid and bitter economic struggle between peasants and industrial workers.

In any case, this struggle cannot be avoided. So much the more important is it for a far-seeing policy to give such a form to the conditions in which this struggle must be carried on as to make possible to the proletariat the best development of its strength. To lay these foundations, not only as against capital, but also as against agriculture – this was, during the Revolution, the most important task of the representatives of the Russian proletariat. Nothing else than the secure establishment of democracy could have done this.

This task of the proletarian struggle for freedom, which is not less important than the institution of social production, is, in contrast to the latter, practicable in an agrarian State.

The peasants, like all sections of the working class, demand democracy. They may find themselves very well off in a democratic republic, as is shown in Switzerland and the United States. But the

political interests of the peasant seldom extend beyond the confines of his village, in contrast with the industrial proletarian, whose emancipation requires him to dominate the whole machinery of the State, which can be no local act. The peasant can also become enthusiastic for an emperor, who protects his property and fosters his interest, as he did in the case of Napoleon the First. The Russian peasant would oppose any return of the Czarist regime, which in his eyes was connected with the return of the old, deadly-hated landlords. But a dictator, who secured him in his property, and allowed him to devote all his attention to the cultivation of his fields and the sale of their produce, such a dictator might under circumstances be as welcome to him as the Republic. For this Dictator the way has been prepared by the suspension of Democracy, and the proclamation of the dictatorship of a class, which is in reality the dictatorship of a party, and, as Lenin himself has stated, can become the dictatorship of a single person. In his speech of April 28 he said:

The closer we approach the complete suppression of the bourgeoisie, the more dangerous the factor of petty bourgeois anarchism will be for us. The struggle against it can only be carried on by force. If we are no anarchists, we must recognise the necessity of a State, that is a forcible transition from Capitalism to Socialism. The kind of force will be determined by the degree of the development of the revolutionary class concerned, as well as by special circumstances, such as reactionary war and the form taken by the opposition of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Therefore no essential contradiction can exist between the Soviet, that is, the Socialist democracy, and the exercise of dictatorial power by a single person.

In the long run nothing can be more dangerous to the Russian Proletariat than to familiarise the peasant with the idea that dictatorship, the disfranchising of all opponents, the suspension of the suffrage, and of freedom of the Press and of organisation as regards every antagonistic class, is the form of government which best corresponds to the interests of the working classes. What will then become of the town workers if they come into conflict with the enormous mass of the Russian peasants and a dictator who is recognised by them?

And what will become of the workers when their own dictatorship collapses? The alternative to the dictatorship of a party is its destruction. Dictatorship impels the party which is in possession of power to maintain it by all means, whether fair or foul, because its fall means its complete ruin.

With democracy it is quite otherwise. Democracy signifies rule of the majority, and also protection of the minority, because it means equal rights and an equal share in all political rights for everybody, to whatever class or party he may belong. The proletariat everywhere has the greatest interest in democracy. Where the proletariat represents the majority, democracy will be the machinery for its rule. Where it is in the minority, democracy constitutes its most suitable fighting arena in which to assert itself, win concessions, and develop. If a proletariat which is in a minority attains to power, in alliance with another class, through a momentary conjunction of forces, it is most shortsighted "real" politics, that is, politics of the passing moment, to endeavour to perpetuate this position by the suppression of democracy and the rights of minorities in opposition. It would destroy the ground on which alone a firm footing could be retained, after the passing of this phase, for further work and an extended struggle.

It is problematical whether the Russian proletariat has now gained more real and practical acquisitions through the decrees of the Soviet Republic than it would have gained through the

Constituent Assembly, in which Socialists, even if of another colour than those in the Soviets, predominated. But it is certain that if the Soviet Republic collapse many of its achievements are likely to fall along with it.

Had the Constituent Assembly succeeded in strengthening democracy, then, at the same time, all the advantages which the industrial proletariat might have acquired by its agency would have been consolidated. To-day we rest our expectations that the Russian proletariat will not be cheated of all the fruit of the Revolution only on the supposition that the dictatorship will not succeed in stifling democratic consciousness in the Russian people, and that, after all the errors and confusions of the civil war, democracy will finally be triumphant.

Not in dictatorship, but in democracy, lies the future of the Russian proletariat.

## **Chapter X**

### **The New Theory**

We have seen that the method of dictatorship does not promise good results for the proletariat, either from the standpoint of theory or from that of the special Russian conditions; nevertheless, it is understandable only in the light of these conditions.

The fight against Czarism was for a long time a fight against a system of government which had ceased to be based on the conditions prevailing, but was only maintained by naked force, and only by force was to be overthrown. This fact would easily lead to a cult of force even among the revolutionaries, and to over-estimating what could be done by the powers over them, which did not repose on the economic conditions, but on special circumstances. Accordingly, the struggle against Czarism was carried on secretly, and the method of conspiracy created the manners and the habits proper to dictatorship, and not to democracy.

The operation of these factors was, however, crossed by another consequence of the struggle against Absolutism. We have already referred to the fact that, in contradistinction to democracy, which awakens an interest for wider relations and greater objects side by side with its constant preoccupations with momentary ends, Absolutism arouses theoretical interest. There is to-day, however, only one revolutionary theory of society, that of Karl Marx.

This became the theory of Russian Socialism. Now what this theory teaches is that our desires and capabilities are limited by the material conditions, and it shows how powerless is the strongest Will which would rise superior to them. It conflicted sharply with the cult of mere force, and caused the Social Democrats to recognise that definite boundaries were set to their participation in the coming Revolution, which, owing to the economic backwardness of Russia, could only be a bourgeois one.

Then the second Revolution came, and suddenly brought a measure of power to the Socialists which surprised them, for this Revolution led to the complete demobilisation of the Army, which was the strongest support of property and bourgeois order. And at the same time as the physical support collapsed, the moral support of this order went to pieces, neither the Church nor the Intellectuals being able to maintain their pretensions. The rule devolved on the lower classes in the State, the workers and peasants, but the peasants do not form a class which is able itself to govern.

They willingly permitted themselves to be led by a Proletarian Party, which promised them immediate peace, at whatever price, and immediate satisfaction of their land hunger. The masses of the proletariat rallied to the same party, which promised them peace and bread.

Thus the Bolshevik Party gained the strength which enabled it to seize political power. Did this not mean that at length the prerequisite was obtained which Man and Engels had postulated for the coming of Socialism, viz., the conquest of political power by the proletariat? In truth, economic theory discountenanced the idea that Socialist production was realisable at once under the social conditions of Russia, and not less unfavourable to it was the practical confirmation of this theory, that the new regime in no way signified the sole rule of the proletariat, but the rule of a coalition of proletarian and peasant elements, which left each section free to behave as it liked on its own territory. The proletariat put nothing in the way of the peasants as regards the land, and the peasants put no obstacle in the way of the proletariat as regards the factories. None the less, a Socialist Party had become the ruler in a great State, for the first time in the world's history. Certainly a colossal and, for the fighting proletariat, a glorious event.

But for what can a Socialist Party use its power except to bring about Socialism? It must at once proceed to do so, and, without thought or regard, clear out of the way all obstacles which confront it. If democracy thereby comes in conflict with the new regime, which, in spite of the great popularity which it so quickly won, cannot dispose of a majority of the votes in the Empire, then so much the worse for democracy. Then it must be replaced by dictatorship, which is all the easier to accomplish, as the people's freedom is quite a new thing in Russia, and as yet has struck no deep roots amongst the masses of the people. It was now the task of dictatorship to bring about Socialism. This object lesson must not only suffice for the elements in its own country which are still in opposition, but must also compel the proletariat of other capitalist countries to imitation, and provoke them to Revolution.

This was assuredly a train of thought of outstanding boldness and fascinating glamour for every proletarian and every Socialist. What we have struggled for during half a century, what we have so often thought ourselves to be near, what has always again evaded us, is at length going to be accomplished. No wonder that the proletarians of all countries have hailed Bolshevism. The reality of proletarian rule weighs heavier in the scale than theoretical considerations. And that consciousness of victory is still more strengthened by mutual ignorance of the conditions of the neighbour. It is only possible for a few to study foreign countries, and the majority believe that in foreign countries it is at bottom the same as with us, and when this is not believed, very fantastic ideas about foreigners are entertained.

Consequently, we have the convenient conception that everywhere the same Imperialism prevails, and also the conviction of the Russian Socialists that the political revolution is as near to the peoples of Western Europe as it is in Russia, and, on the other hand, the belief that the conditions necessary for Socialism exist in Russia as they do in Western Europe.

What happened, once the Army had been dissolved and the Assembly had been proscribed, was only the consequence of the step that had been taken.

All this is very understandable, if not exactly encouraging. On the other hand, it is not so conceivable why our Bolshevik comrades do not explain their measures on the ground of the

peculiar situation in Russia, and justify them in the light of the pressure of the special circumstances, which, according to their notions, left no choice but dictatorship or abdication. They went beyond this by formulating quite a new theory, on which they based their measures, and for which they claimed universal application.

For us the explanation of this is to be found in one of their characteristics, for which we should have great sympathy, viz., their great interest in theory.

The Bolshevists are Marxists, and have inspired the proletarian sections coming under their influence with great enthusiasm for Marxism. Their dictatorship, however, is in contradiction to the Marxist teaching that no people can overcome the obstacles offered by the successive phases of their development by a jump, or by legal enactment. How is it that they find a Marxist foundation for their proceedings?

They remembered opportunely the expression, “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, which Marx used in a letter written in 1875. In so doing he had, indeed, only intended to describe a political condition, and not a form of government. Now this expression is hastily employed to designate the latter, especially as manifested in the rule of the Soviets.

Now if Marx had somewhere said that under certain circumstances things might come to a dictatorship of the proletariat, he has described this condition as one unavoidable for the transition to Socialism. In fact, as he declared, almost at the same time that in countries like England and America a peaceful transition to Socialism was possible, which would only be on the basis of democracy and not of dictatorship, he has also shown that he did not mean by dictatorship the suspension of democracy. Yet this does not disconcert the champions of dictatorship. As Marx once stated that the dictatorship of the proletariat might be unavoidable, so they announce that the Soviet Constitution, and the disfranchising of its opponents, was recognised by Marx himself as the form of government corresponding to the nature of the proletariat, and indissolubly bound up with its rule. As such it must last as long as the rule of the proletariat itself, and until Socialism is generally accomplished and all class distinctions have disappeared.

In this sense dictatorship does not appear to be a transitory emergency measure, which, so soon as calmer times have set in, will again give place to democracy, but as a condition for the long duration of which we must adapt ourselves.

This interpretation is confirmed by Theses 9 and 10 respecting the Social Revolution, which state:

(9) Hitherto, the necessity of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was taught, without enquiring as to the form it would take. The Russian Socialist Revolution has discovered this form. It is the form of the Soviet Republic as the type of the permanent Dictatorship of the Proletariat and (in Russia) of the poorer classes of peasants. It is therefore necessary to make the following remarks. We are speaking now, not of a passing phenomenon, in the narrower sense of the word, but of a particular form of the State during the whole historical epoch. What needs now to be done is to organise a new form of the State, and this is not to be confused with special measures directed against the bourgeoisie, which are only functions of a special State organisation appropriate to the colossal tasks and struggle.

(10) The proletarian dictatorship accordingly consists, so to speak, in a permanent state of war against the bourgeoisie. It is also quite clear that all those who cry out about the violence of the Communists completely forget what dictatorship really is. The Revolution itself is an act of naked force. The word dictatorship signifies in all languages nothing less than government by force. The class meaning of force is here important, for it furnishes the historical justification of revolutionary force. It is also quite obvious that the more difficult the situation of the Revolution becomes, the sharper the dictatorship must be.

From the above it is also apparent that Dictatorship as a form of government is not only to be a permanent thing, but will also arise in all countries.

If in Russia now the newly-acquired general freedom is put an end to again, this must also happen after the victory of the proletariat in countries where the people's freedom is already deeply rooted, where it has existed for half a century and longer, and where the people have won it and maintained it in frequent bloody revolutions. The new theory asserts this in all earnestness. And stranger still it finds support not only amongst the workers of Russia, who still remember the yoke of the old Czardom, and now rejoice to be able to turn the handle for once, even as apprentices when they become journeymen rejoice when they may give the apprentices who come after them the drubbing they used to receive themselves – no, the new theory finds support even in old democracies like Switzerland.

Yet something stranger still and even less understandable is to come.

A complete democracy is to be found nowhere, and everywhere we have to strive after modifications and improvements. Even in Switzerland there is an agitation for the extension of the legislative powers of the people, for proportional representation and for woman suffrage. In America the power and mode of selection of the highest judges need to be very severely restricted. Far greater are the demands that should be put forward by us in the great bureaucratic and militarist States in the interests of democracy. And in the midst of these struggles, the most extreme fighters raise their heads, and say to the opponents: That which we demand for the protection of minorities, the opposition, we only want so long as we ourselves are the opposition, and in the minority. As soon as we have become the majority, and gained the power of government, our first act will be to abolish as far as you are concerned all that we formerly demanded for ourselves, viz., franchise, freedom of Press and of organisation, etc.

The Theses respecting the Socialist Revolution are quite unequivocal on this point:

(17) The former demands for a democratic republic, and general freedom (that is freedom for the bourgeoisie as well) were quite correct in the epoch that is now passed, the epoch of preparation and gathering of strength. The worker needed freedom for his Press, while the bourgeois Press was noxious to him, but he could not at this time put forward a demand for the suppression of the bourgeois Press. Consequently, the proletariat demanded general freedom, even freedom for reactionary assemblies, for black labour organisations.

(18) Now we are in the period of the direct attack on capital, the direct overthrow and destruction of the imperialist robber State, and the direct suppression of the bourgeoisie.

It is therefore absolutely clear that in the present epoch the principle of defending general freedom (that is also for the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie) is not only superfluous, but directly dangerous.

(19) This also holds good for the Press, and the leading organisations of the social traitors. The latter have been unmasked as the active elements of the counter-revolution. They even attack with weapons the proletarian Government. Supported by former officers and the money bags of the defeated finance capital, they appear on the scene as the most energetic organisations for various conspiracies. The proletariat dictatorship is their deadly enemy. Therefore, they must be dealt with in a corresponding manner.

(20) As regards the working class and the poor peasants, these possess the fullest freedom.

Do they really possess the fullest freedom?

The “Social Traitors” are proletarians and Socialists, too, but they offer opposition, and are therefore to be deprived of rights like the bourgeois opposition. Would we not display the liveliest anger, and fight with all our strength in any case where a bourgeois government endeavoured to employ similar measures against its opposition?

Certainly we should have to do so, but our efforts would only have a laughable result if the bourgeois government could refer to Socialist precepts like the foregoing, and a practice corresponding with them.

How often have we reproached the liberals that they are different in Government from what they are in opposition, and that then they abandon all their democratic pretensions. Now the Liberals are at least sufficiently prudent to refrain from the formal abandonment of any of their democratic demands. They act according to the maxim; one does this, but does not say so.

The authors of the Theses are undeniably more honourable; whether they are wiser may be doubted. What would be thought of the wisdom of the German Social Democrats, if they openly announced that the democracy, for which they fight to-day, would be abandoned the day after victory. That they have perverted their democratic principles to their opposites, or that they have no democratic principles at all; that democracy is merely a ladder for them, up which to climb to governmental omnipotence, a ladder they will no longer need, and will push away, as soon as they have reached the top, that, in a word, they are revolutionary opportunists.

Even for the Russian revolutionaries it is a short-sighted policy of expediency, if they adopt the method of dictatorship, in order to gain power, not to save the jeopardised democracy, but in order to maintain themselves in spite of it. This is quite obvious.

On the other hand, it is less obvious why some German Social Democrats who are not yet in power, who furthermore only at the moment represent a weak opposition, accept this theory. Instead of seeing something which should be generally condemned in the method of dictatorship, and the disfranchising of large sections of the people, which at the most is only defensible as a

product of the exceptional conditions prevailing in Russia, they go out of their way to praise this method. as a condition which the German Social Democracy should also strive to realise.

This assertion is not only thoroughly false, it is in the highest degree destructive. If generally accepted, it would paralyse the propagandist strength of our party to the utmost, for, with the exception of a small handful of sectarian fanatics, the entire German, as also the whole proletariat of the world, is attached to the principle of general democracy. The proletariat would angrily repudiate every thought of beginning its rule with a new privileged class, and a new disfranchised class. It would repudiate every suggestion of coupling its demand for general rights for the whole people with a mental reservation, and in reality only strive for privileges for itself. And not less would it repudiate the comic insinuation of solemnly declaring now that its demand for democracy is a mere deceit.

Dictatorship as a form of government in Russia is as understandable as the former anarchism of Bakunin. But to understand it does not mean that we should recognise it; we must reject the former as decisively as the latter. The dictatorship does not reveal itself as a resource of a Socialist Party to secure itself in the sovereignty which has been gained in opposition to the majority of the people, but only as means of grappling with tasks which are beyond its strength, and the solution of which exhausts and wears it; in doing which it only too easily compromises the ideas of Socialism itself, the progress of which it impedes rather than assists.

Happily, the failure of the dictatorship is not synonymous with a collapse of the Revolution. It would be so only if the Bolshevist dictatorship was the mere prelude to a bourgeois dictatorship. The essential achievements of the Revolution will be saved, if dictatorship is opportunely replaced by democracy.

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