

WESTERN CLARION

A Journal of
CURRENT
EVENTS

Official Organ of
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
PHILOSOPHY

No. 913

TWENTIETH YEAR

Twice a Month

VANCOUVER, B. C., APRIL 16, 1924

FIVE CENTS

Lenin's Life and Work

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(Continued from last issue)

PLECHANOV, although he rejected the illusions of the Narodniki with regard to the independent revolutionary role of the peasantry, was unable to concentrate the attention of the Russian working class upon the question of the alliance with the peasantry, of the alliance with that class without whose aid the proletariat will not be able to conquer power, and against whose will it will not be able to realize Socialism. But Lenin proved capable of doing this, and it was here that Lenin, the great independent thinker of the proletariat, became transformed into the political leader of this class. To lead a class struggle means to gain a clear idea of the conditions essential to victory, and never to forget these conditions, either in moments of stupendous victory or in moments of crushing defeat. The attitude taken by Lenin towards the peasant question forms a new factor in the history of the proletarian world movement.

The agrarian question will not play such a concrete part everywhere as it has done in the Russian revolution. In all advanced capitalist countries, the agricultural workers will not play such an important role as in Russia, but the question of winning over the strata which produce the bread will everywhere be decisive for the proletarian revolution. And Lenin held the attention of the international proletariat to this conquest of bread above everything else, in his theory and his practice alike.

But Lenin's attitude towards the agrarian question has still another aspect, one possessing great value for the coming struggle of the international proletariat. The representatives of revolutionary Marxism in Western Europe have thrown away the baby with the bath water. Even though they rejected Lassalle's views on the "one reactionary mass," in actual practice, they have been afraid of an alliance of the proletariat with non-proletarian elements. Lenin, who in the most decisive manner combated the Menshevik policy of an alliance with the liberal city bourgeoisie holding this to be a class not suited to accompany the proletariat to the extent of the overthrow of absolutism, insisted, with indomitable energy on the alliance with the peasantry, with that petty bourgeois class whose interests would be served by the overthrow of Czarism. In the same manner he taught the proletariat of other countries not to judge the question of relations to non-proletarian elements from the abstract standpoint of the concrete estimation of the interests of the class concerned, from the standpoint of the question: along what portion of the historical path can a non-proletarian class, or a section of such a class, accompany us against the enemy? In a pamphlet on the "Infantile Sicknesses of Communism" Lenin represents precisely the winning over of the mass allies—however irresolute these may otherwise be—as one of the main pre-requisites of the struggle of the proletariat for power and of the struggle for the maintenance of power.

Lenin's main teaching, in his capacity of politician preparing for the seizure of power by the proletariat, is his tenet of the importance of a proletarian party. Lenin's disputes with Menshevism in the year 1903, on the role of the party, on the kind of persons who can be members of a proletarian party,

if properly understood, mean an understanding of one of the main levers of Lenin's policy. Lenin taught the proletariat the art of manoeuvring. This was the task which he set the proletariat from the first moment of his historical activity; at the same time he taught the proletariat that it cannot conduct a manoeuvre struggle until it has become united in itself as a manoeuvring subject. If his teaching on the relations to the peasantry and to the liberal bourgeoisie represents a lesson on the manoeuvres of a proletarian party, then his organizational views form a lesson on how the proletariat is to guard against being itself converted into the involuntary object of the manoeuvres of its enemies.

The question raised by Lenin during the disagreements on the first point of the statutes of the social democratic party, is no less important than those questions which invariably played a part in all other political conflicts with Menshevism. On the contrary, it may safely be asserted that the solution of this question on the first point of the statutes has been the pre-requisite for the execution of Lenin's whole political line. The working class of Russia lived under the yoke of Czarism, which did not permit it to create a mighty mass organization. The working class rose in an elementary struggle against despotism, using the weapon of economic and political strikes. The Mensheviks dreamed of the creation of a broad proletarian mass party, but such a party could not have lived under Czarism. In these circumstances, all negotiations for a broad democratic organization signified an empty dabbling with plans, and would in reality have opened the door of the labor party to anyone expressing sympathy with the labor movement, or materially supporting it. This would have meant abandoning the still scattered and feeble workers' party by petty bourgeois influences. Under the conditions created by Czarism, conditions against which broad strata of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia rose in protest, every lawyer, in consequence of the rottenness of European liberalism, claimed to be socialist. The admittance of these people to the workers' party because they recognized its programme and afforded it material support meant the abandonment of the scattered labor movement to the petty bourgeoisie. Lenin, who demanded that no one should be counted a member of the party unless he were working in an illegal proletarian organization, fought for the diminution of the danger of the subordination of the labor movement to the leadership of petty bourgeois intelligence. Anyone who has broken with bourgeois society, and has risked becoming a professional revolutionist by his participation in an illegal proletarian organization, does not perhaps give absolute security of his allegiance to the cause of the proletariat by this action, but still it is a security to a certain extent.

Lenin, in indicating the path to be pursued by the proletariat, basing this on Marxian analysis and on the illegal organizations of the professional revolutionists, created the necessary premises for a centralized revolutionary leadership of the proletarian struggle. Even the best brains of European socialism, even Rosa Luxemburg, who followed the struggle of the Russian proletariat with the closest attention, found Lenin's organizational principles the

expression of tactics of conspiracy, and feared the separation of the Bolshevik organization from the mass struggle of the proletariat. These fears turned out to be unfounded. During the up-grade period, the Mensheviks created a broad organization; but this organization was led by the vacillating and opportunist intelligentsia. Lenin created an organization capable of leading the proletarian struggle during its most difficult moments, capable of defending revolutionary principles even in the years of revolutionary stagnation, and of creating a mass organization in the period of those historical movements which drive the proletariat forward into class warfare.

Lenin never insisted upon doctrinal forms of organization: out of the illegal organization of 1905, embracing only a few thousand comrades, he first transformed the Communist Party into a mass organization, counting tens of thousands of members during the first and second revolutions; and then he transformed it into an organization containing hundreds of thousands, wielding an influence over millions after the October revolution. Forms have changed, but through all these changing forms, Lenin pursued one idea: that the proletariat needs a revolutionary organization to assure its victory. This organization must be united and centralized, for the enemy is ten times more powerful.

After founding a mass party capable of manoeuvring in the face of the enemy, Lenin's first steps were directed towards the preparation of an armed rising for the seizure of power. Even at moments when we were weakest, or when we had been forced back by defeats, he contrived to induce the Party to fight for every inch of ground, for every smallest position, and to devote its energies to even the smallest daily tasks for the gathering together of proletarian forces. But he never forgot for one moment that all this work was being done with one object in view; the preparation for the seizure of power by the proletariat.

There is nothing more instructive for a communist, than to compare the works written by Lenin during the period of the victory of counter-revolution, with those written at the time of the highest flood-tide of the labor movement. When the first revolution was suppressed, Lenin fought energetically against those who refused to recognize the victory of counter-revolution, and who wanted to renounce all the difficult petty work of collecting forces, hoping that the revolutionary powers would speedily arise again; and he combated with equal energy those who lost sight of revolutionary goals and tried to convert the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat into a struggle for peace. During this period of reaction, Lenin studied carefully the lessons learnt in 1905, for the purpose of being able to utilize these properly for the movement when the next uplift came.

A most valuable contribution to this subject is the article published by him in the year 1908, in the newspaper issued by the Polish social democrats, in which he already raised the question of the mechanical preparation for future armed insurrections, in the light of the experience gained during the Moscow rising.

(Continued on page 3)