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Economics and Politics During the Period of Transition

By Lenin.

The Great Step.

THE RUSSIAN workers have been liberated at last from the age-long exploitation and oppression of land-owners and capitalists. This step forward to real freedom and equality, a step both for swiftness and magnitude, unique in the world's history, is ignored by the partisans of capitalism. Amongst these are the small bourgeois democrats who talk of liberty and equality in the same sense of bourgeois Parliamentary democracy, which they wrongly declare to be democracy in general, or, as Kautsky says, "pure democracy."

The workers who appreciate the importance of real equality and freedom, the freedom from the domination of landowners and capitalists because they have suffered under it, stand firm for the Soviet Power.

In a country of peasants those who benefited most and at once by the dictatorship of the proletariat were the peasants in general. Under the rule of the landowners and capitalists the Russian peasant was hungry. Never in the whole course of Russian history has the peasant been able to work for himself. He went hungry, while he delivered hundreds of millions poods (*) of corn to the capitalists for our towns and for export abroad. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat the peasant worked for himself for the first time, and fed better than the town dweller. For the first time the peasant beheld real, actual freedom: freedom to eat his own produce, freedom from hunger, it is already known that equality in the division of land has been established on a maximalist basis—in the majority of cases the peasants divide the land according to the number of persons to be fed.

Socialism Entails the Abolition of Classes.

In order to abolish social classes one must first overthrow the landowners and capitalists. We have accomplished this part of the task, but that is only a part, and not the most difficult part of our stupendous labor. In order to abolish classes one must, in the second place, abolish the difference between the worker and the peasant, and one must make all the people—workers. This cannot be done in a hurry. It is a much harder task than the first, and will, consequently, take much longer to accomplish.

It is a task which cannot be solved by the overthrow of any one class. It can only be solved by a constructive remodelling of the entire social economy, by a transition from an individual, a small, private trading economy, to a social economy on a large scale. Such a transition must necessarily be a lengthy process, and it would only be retarded and hampered by hasty and imprudent administrative and legislative measures. This transition can only be accelerated by helping the peasant to remodel the entire system.

In order to accomplish the second and more difficult task, the proletariat, having conquered the bourgeoisie, must unswervingly pursue the following line of policy with regard to the peasantry: the proletariat must distinguish between the working peasant and the peasant owner, the peasant trader and the peasant speculator. The be-all and end-all of Socialism lies in this distinction.

It is therefore not surprising that those who render lip service to Socialism, but act like small-

bourgeois democrats, fail to understand this essential of Socialism.

To arrive at the above-mentioned distinction is by no means easy, because, in real life, all the characteristics of the "peasant," no matter how various and contradictory they be, form one big whole. Nevertheless, the distinctions are there. They are the inevitable outcome of the conditions of peasant economy and peasant life. The working peasant has been oppressed for centuries by the landowners, the capitalists, the traders, the speculators and the capitalist States, including the most democratic republics. The working peasant has nurtured within himself hatred and enmity towards these age-long oppressors and exploiters, and these lessons, taught by life itself, compel the peasant to seek an alliance with the workers against the capitalist, the speculator and the trader. At the same time, the entire economic structure, which makes the peasant dependent on goods received from outside, tends to turn him (not always, but in the majority of cases) into a trader and speculator.

The peasant, who in 1918-19 provided the hungry town workers with 40 million poods (*) of corn at the fixed Government price, by handing it over to the State organizations, is a true working peasant and a comrade of the Socialist worker. He is the latter's most reliable ally, and his brother in the fight against the capitalist yoke. On the other hand, the peasant who sold surreptitiously 40 million poods of corn at a price ten times higher than the Government price, who took advantage of the needs and the hunger of the town worker, who cheated the State, and increased or created everywhere fraud, robbery and scoundrelly transactions, is a peasant profiteer, an ally of the capitalists, a class enemy of the worker and an exploiter.

Well Fed.

"You are the destroyers of liberty, equality, democracy"—is the cry raised from all sides against us. Our detractors point to the inequality, as between the worker and the peasant, in our constitution, to the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, to the forcible requisitions of surplus corn. Our answer to these accusations is that no other State in the whole world has done so much for the removal of the real inequalities and of the real lack of freedom which for centuries had been the lot of the working peasant. We do not and will never recognize equality with the peasant speculator. We do not recognize the equality of the exploiter with the exploited, of the hungry with the well-fed, and the "freedom" of the former to rob the latter. And we shall deal with those highly-educated people who do not want to understand this difference, as if they were White Guards, even if they call themselves Democrats, Socialists, Internationalists, Kautskys, Cehernovs and Martov.

Proletarian Dictatorship Will End Social Classes.

Socialism is the abolition of classes. The dictatorship of the proletariat has done its utmost to bring about this abolition, but it is impossible to do away with the class system all at once. Thus the classes have remained, and will remain, all through the period of proletarian dictatorship. When classes have finally disappeared, there will be no need for dictatorship, but they will never disappear without

the dictatorship of the working-class.

The classes have remained, but each one of them has taken a different aspect during the period of proletarian dictatorship; a change has also taken place in their mutual relations. The class struggle does not disappear under proletarian dictatorship, it only takes a different form.

Under capitalism the proletariat has always been the oppressed class—the class which was denied ownership of the means of production, which alone was directly and completely opposed to the bourgeoisie. Therefore it was the only class capable of remaining revolutionary right through the struggle. Having overthrown the bourgeoisie, and having conquered political power, the proletariat has become the governing class. The State Power is in its hands; it controls the socialized means of production, it guides the vacillating intermediate elements and classes, it crushes the power of resistance of the exploiters. All these are special tasks of the class struggle, tasks which, formerly, the proletariat did not and could not undertake.

The Exploiters are Overthrown But Not Destroyed

The class of exploiters, landowners and capitalists has not disappeared, and could not disappear at once under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The exploiters are overthrown, but not destroyed. They retain the basis of international capitalism, of which they are part and parcel. They still possess some means of production, as well as money and extensive social connection. Their power of resistance has increased a hundred, nay, a thousandfold by the very fact of their defeat. Their ability in State, military, and economic administration, affords them a great superiority, so that their importance is considerably out of proportion to their numerical strength, as compared with the whole population.

The class struggle of the overthrown exploiters against the victorious vanguard of the exploited, the proletariat, has become more intense. This is only a natural development of the revolution which the "heroes" of the Second International are vainly endeavoring to deny, by substituting reformist illusions for the hard facts of revolution.

Finally, the peasantry, and the entire small bourgeoisie are occupying, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, a medium, or interim, position. On the one hand, they represent a considerable (and in backward Russia), an enormous mass of workers united by the desire, common to all workers, to free themselves from the domination of landowners and capitalists. On the other hand, they consist of small proprietors and traders in towns and villages. Such an economic situation must inevitably produce indecision and waverings in the relations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. As the struggle of the bourgeoisie becomes intensified, all social relations undergo a great radical change, the ingrained conservatism of the peasants and small bourgeoisie is bound to lead to indecision and to sudden and spasmodic changes in the adherence of these elements to either one side or the other.

The proletariat must endeavor to influence and guide these vacillating social elements, steady and spurring on the waverers and backsliders.

We have only to take into consideration all the

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