

Lenin's Life and Work

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(Continued from last issue)

A subsequent result of this preparatory work was his book: "State and Revolution." As early as the year 1916 he spoke of the idea of the state Commune, which we at first understood no better than the Russian comrades understood Lenin's famous April theses after the February revolution. Every one of us had read Marx's book on the Paris Commune several times. But we had not observed precisely the new idea in it, the idea of the "State Commune," and it cost Lenin much effort to make his standpoint clear to us. It is highly characteristic of him as a tactician that the experience gained in 1905 caused him, even at this time, to draw our attention to the possible role to be played by councils as organs of the state commune. But at the moment of the February revolutions, Lenin, being in receipt of only very vague reports on the real situation in Russia, and being applied to for directions from comrades Piatakov and Kolontay, who had gone to Russia, replied as follows: "No confidence in the provisional government. The constitutional assembly—a farce. We must get the Petrograd and Moscow municipal Dumas into our hands." In struggling for the state commune, Lenin sought the aid of organs closely connected with the daily life of the masses, without concerning himself to any great extent as to the names of these organs. One result of his program work at this time is his attitude towards the question of the right of self-determination of the peoples. Up to the war, Lenin had dealt with this question from the Russian aspect, as a means towards the emancipation of the Russian proletariat from the influence of Great Russian chauvinism, and as a means towards winning the confidence of the masses of the non-Russian peoples of Russia, in whom he hoped to find allies in the struggle against Czarism.

During the war he approached the question from the international aspect. The pamphlet issued by Rosa Luxemburg on the bankruptcy of German Social Democracy, in which she entirely disputed the possibility of wars of national emancipation during the epoch of imperialism, induced Lenin to take up the question of the right of self-determination of the peoples again. With an unexampled tactical elasticity he showed us—though he most decisively rejected the idea of the so-called defence of native country in the limited West European states—that though the period of national wars is over in Western Europe, this is not yet the case in South Western Europe, nor in the case of the national minorities in Russia and the colonies in Asia. Lenin had not occupied himself concretely with the study of the colonial movement; many of us were much better informed than he on these questions, and with the utmost sincerity he endeavored to gather the concrete material which he required, from books and from conversation. But then he turned this material against us, and in the question of the right of self-determination of the peoples he combatted the attitude adopted by Kautsky, for whom this slogan was an instrument of pacifism, a solution of the Alsace-Lorraine problem. The severe criticism which he levelled against my theses in the question of the right of self-determination of the peoples, was followed up by the demonstration of the importance of this question, which contains the blasting force of dynamite against imperialism. The cunning centrist philosophers of the Hilferding type attempted to prove to the European proletariat that Lenin raised the colonial and national question, at the second congress of the Comintern, in the interests of the Russian state. But already at that time, when Lenin was still living in Switzerland as an exiled and persecuted emigre, he was carrying on an inexorable struggle in regard to this question against Gorter, Pannekoek, Bucharin, Piatakov, and myself. For him this question had the same significance as the winning over of the peasantry on an interna-

tional scale as an ally for the world proletariat. The international proletariat cannot be victorious without allying itself with the revolution of the young enslaved peoples of the East and of the colonies. This Lenin taught us as early as the year 1916.

From the very beginning of the February Revolution, it was Lenin's endeavour to destroy the bloc with the centrists, to liquidate the Zimmerwald Union. He was of the opinion that the Russian revolution, which raised the question of revolution in all the countries taking part in the war, would give to us communists the forces of the masses, and would drive the irresolute elements of the centre into the camp of the traitors. He did not allow us to sign the manifesto issued by the Zimmerwald commission on the Russian revolution, for he saw that this meant confusing the Russian workers by the common signature with Martov, and would interfere with the struggle against Tscheidze and the Mensheviks. The rupture did not take place in 1917, as we were attempting to use the aid of the Zimmerwald bureau for the purpose of inducing the Independent Socialists in Germany to take up the fight against German imperialism; at this time the Spartacus Union had not yet separated from the Independents. After the seizure of power in October 1917 the Zimmerwald Union practically expired. The struggle of the Russian working class actually proved to be the most effectual means of awakening the proletariats of all other countries. The whole of the year 1918 was occupied by the preliminary work for the congress at which the Communist International was founded.

This congress, which took place in March 1919—at the time when the fighting began against Denikin and Koltshak—brought nothing fundamentally new. Its basis was the ideological work accomplished by the Bolsheviks in the Zimmerwald Left during the war years just passed through. The resolution passed by this congress, the manifesto, and above all Lenin's theses on dictatorship and democracy, formed the bases for the future work of the Communist International. At the time of the October revolution, many of those who read the decrees on peace, and on the land enactments, were of the opinion that these documents would share the fate of those proclamations which are never executed. When the Russian revolution was passing through its most critical moments, when tidings were received that Koltshak had advanced to the Volga, when news came that the young Red Army had been defeated in the south—at this critical juncture the decisions of the First Congress of the Communist International were issued, and there were many comrades, not only in Western Europe, but also among us members of the Russian Communist Party, at that time working illegally in the West, who asked if these documents were not the legacy of the Russian revolution, bequeathed in an hour of deadly danger. The Executive of the Communist International, cut off at that time from the West European labour movement by the wall of the blockade, was able to exercise but little practical influence upon our actions, could help the West European workers but little. The latter made their way forward by themselves, learned to solve their problems independently, and it was not until the year 1920, after the victory of the Red Army over Denikin and Koltshak, that the daily mass work of the Communist International began. And here Lenin at once undertook the leadership of the international labour movement as its practical leader, as the good spirit hastening to the aid of the young communist movement, helping it to consider its first steps, and to find its path onwards.

Lenin drew up three important documents for the Second Congress of the Communist International. Delegates arriving from every part of the world found a translation of Lenin's pamphlet: "Radicalism, the Infantile Disease of Communism" awaiting

them. Lenin's work on "State and Revolution" was already known to them, as a torch lighting them to their goal, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The pamphlet on radicalism shed light on the path of those young communist parties which believed that they could spring at the enemy's throat without delay, that the revolutionary wave would bear them directly to their goal. The young communist parties, rejecting every compromise in their revolutionary zeal, were taught by Lenin to consider the lessons won by the experiences of the Russian revolution. He showed them that the first premise towards the dictatorship of the proletariat is the winning over of the majority of the working class. He showed them that the winning over of the majority of the working class requires the utilization of all those means granted to the advanced workers by the same bourgeois democracy which they are about to overthrow. He showed them that the road to the barricade leads even through Parliament, we must preach the idea of communism to the working masses, even from this rubbish heap. He pointed out to them the mass organizations of the workers, the trade unions, which have to be rescued from the hands of the yellow leaders by unwearying efforts. He showed them that a revolutionary minority cannot renounce all compromise, if such compromise can facilitate the winning over of the majority. It is difficult to concentrate into a few words the contents of this incomparable work of our great leader. But it may be safely asserted that even now nine tenths of the leaders of the Communist International have not entirely made the contents of this pamphlet their own.

This little brochure contains in a concentrated form the quintessence of the whole philosophy of Bolshevism, its strategy and tactics, and many years will pass, years of victory and defeat, until we can maintain that these ideas of Lenin have really passed into the flesh and blood of the leaders of the Communist International. The more we read this pamphlet, the greater the wealth of ideas we find in it, the finer the shades of thought. It suffices when I say that after I had been applying the united front tactics for two years, I discovered last year for the first time that these tactics are already contained in the pamphlet, though this never entered my mind when I made my first diffident utilization of these tactics in January 1921, in my well-known "open letter" to the Social Democratic parties and trade unions. The inexhaustible source of instruction afforded by this treatise on the war of the proletariat, or contained between its lines, will be of no less importance for our strategy than Clausewitz's book on military strategy is for the tactics of war. The difficulty in the application of Lenin's teaching lies in the fact that it is impossible to learn the strategy of the proletariat by means of propaganda, by means of comparison with the struggle of the Russian proletariat. The daily experiences of the Communist Parties in the different countries shows us that the main questions invariably arise in quite different forms, and that every Communist Party must be capable of independent thought if it is to rise to the level of the revolutionary strategy of our greatest revolutionary leader.

The second document submitted by Lenin to the Second Congress consisted of his first draft of the conditions of admission to the Comintern. These theses have been much derided. Many protests have been raised against them. But when we read them through and when we ask ourselves what parties belonging to the Communist International have hitherto learnt to fulfil only one tenth of these conditions, then we began to realize their political significance. Lenin's book on "State and Revolution" shows us the goal on the road to this goal; his pamphlet on radicalism shows the whole of the thorny path leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat; and theses of Lenin's deal with the question of what

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