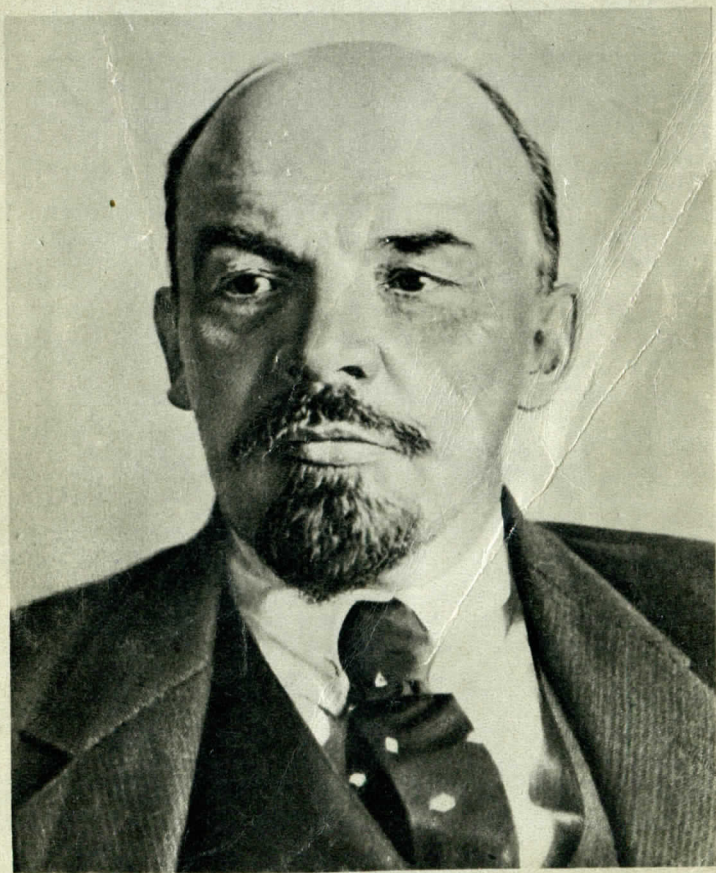


Lenin

MAY DAY

**MAY DAY ACTION BY THE
REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT**



Workers of All Countries, Unite!

V. I. Lenin

May Day
May Day Action by the
Revolutionary Proletariat



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
Moscow • 1968

Publishers' Note

The translations are taken from the English edition of V. I. Lenin's *Collected Works* prepared by Progress Publishers, Moscow.

Corrections have been made in accordance with the Fifth Russian edition of the *Collected Works*.

First printing 1955
Second revised edition 1968

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CONTENTS

	Page
May Day	5
The First of May	9
The Slogans of the All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. in January 1912 and the May Day Movement	13
May Day Action by the Revolutionary Proletariat	19
Notes	29

MAY DAY

Comrade workers! May Day is coming, the day when the workers of all lands celebrate their awakening to a class-conscious life, their solidarity in the struggle against all coercion and oppression of man by man, the struggle to free the toiling millions from hunger, poverty, and humiliation. Two worlds stand facing each other in this great struggle: the world of capital and the world of labour, the world of exploitation and slavery and the world of brotherhood and freedom.

On one side stand the handful of rich blood-suckers. They have seized the factories and mills, the tools and machinery, have turned millions of acres of land and mountains of money into their private property. They have made the government and the army their servants, faithful watchdogs of the wealth they have amassed.

On the other side stand the millions of the disinherited. They are forced to beg the moneybags for permission to work for them. By their labour they create all wealth; yet all their lives long they have to struggle for a crust of bread, beg for work as for charity, sap their strength and health by back-breaking toil, and starve in hovels in the villages or in the cellars and garrets of the big cities.

But now these disinherited toilers have declared war on the moneybags and exploiters. The workers of all lands are fighting to free labour from wage slavery, from poverty and want. They are fighting for a system of society where the wealth created by the common labour will go to benefit, not a handful of rich men, but all those who work. They want to make the land and the factories, mills, and machines

the common property of all toilers. They want to do away with the division into rich and poor, want the fruits of labour to go to the labourers themselves, and all the achievements of the human mind, all improvements in ways of working, to improve the lot of the man who works, and not serve as a means of oppressing him.

The great struggle of labour against capital has cost the workers of all countries immense sacrifices. They have shed rivers of blood in behalf of their right to a better life and real freedom. Those who fight for the workers' cause are subjected by the governments to untold persecution. But in spite of all persecution the solidarity of the workers of the world is growing and gaining in strength. The workers are uniting more and more closely in socialist parties, the supporters of those parties are mounting into millions and are advancing steadily, step by step, towards complete victory over the class of capitalist exploiters.

The Russian proletariat, too, has awakened to a new life. It too has joined this great struggle. Gone are the days when our worker slaved submissively, seeing no escape from his state of bondage, no glimmer of light in his bitter life. Socialism has shown him the way out, and thousands upon thousands of fighters have thronged to the red banner, as to a guiding star. Strikes have shown the workers the power of unity, have taught them to fight back, have shown how formidable to capital organised labour can be. The workers have seen that it is off their labour that the capitalists and the government live and get fat. The workers have been fired with the spirit of united struggle, with the aspiration for freedom and for socialism. The workers have realised what a dark and evil force the tsarist autocracy is. The workers need freedom for their struggle, but the tsarist government binds them hand and foot. The workers need freedom of assembly, freedom to organise, freedom for newspapers and books, but the tsarist government crushes, with knout, prison and bayonet, every striving for freedom. The cry "Down with the autocracy!" has swept through the length and breadth of Russia, it has been sounded more and more often in the streets, at great mass meetings of the workers. Last summer tens of thousands of workers throughout the South of Russia rose up to fight for a better life, for freedom from police tyranny. The bourgeoisie and govern-

ment trembled at the sight of the formidable army of workers, which at one stroke brought to a standstill the entire industrial life of huge cities. Dozens of fighters for the workers' cause fell beneath the bullets of the troops that tsarism sent against the internal enemy.

But there is no force that can vanquish this internal enemy, for the ruling classes and the government only live by its labour. There is no force on earth that could break the millions of workers, who are growing more and more class-conscious, more and more united and organised. Every defeat the workers sustain brings new fighters into the ranks, it awakens broader masses to new life and makes them prepare for fresh struggles.

And the events Russia is now passing through are such that this awakening of the worker masses is bound to be even more rapid and widespread, and we must strain every nerve to unite the ranks of the proletariat and prepare it for even more determined struggle. The war is making even the most backward sections of the proletariat take an interest in political affairs and problems. The war is showing up ever more clearly and vividly the utter rottenness of the autocratic order, the utter criminality of the police and court gang that is ruling Russia. Our people are perishing from want and starvation at home—yet they have been dragged into a ruinous and senseless war for alien territories lying thousands of miles away and inhabited by foreign races. Our people are ground down in political slavery—yet they have been dragged into a war for the enslavement of other peoples. Our people demand a change of political order at home—but it is sought to divert their attention by the thunder of guns at the other end of the world. But the tsarist government has gone too far in its gamble, in its criminal squandering of the nation's wealth and young manhood, sent to die on the shores of the Pacific. Every war puts a strain on the people, and the difficult war against cultured and free Japan is a frightful strain upon Russia. And this strain comes at a time when the structure of police despotism has already begun to totter under the blows of the awakening proletariat. The war is laying bare all the weak spots of the government, the war is tearing off all false disguises, the war is revealing all the inner rottenness; the war is making the preposterousness of the tsarist autocracy

obvious to all and is showing everyone the death-agony of the old Russia, the Russia where the people are disfranchised, ignorant and cowed, the Russia that is still in serf bondage to the police government.

The old Russia is dying. A free Russia is coming to take its place. The dark forces that guarded the tsarist autocracy are going under. But only the class-conscious and organised proletariat can deal them their death-blow. Only the class-conscious and organised proletariat can win real, not sham, freedom for the people. Only the class-conscious and organised proletariat can thwart every attempt to deceive the people, to curtail their rights, to make them a mere tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

Comrade workers! Let us then prepare with redoubled energy for the decisive battle that is at hand! Let the ranks of the Social-Democrat proletarians close ever firmer! Let their word spread ever farther afield! Let campaigning for the workers' demands be carried on ever more boldly! Let the celebration of May Day win thousands of new fighters to our cause and swell our forces in the great struggle for the freedom of all the people, for the liberation of all who toil from the yoke of capital!

Long live the eight-hour day!

Long live international revolutionary Social-Democracy!

Down with the criminal and plundering tsarist autocracy!

Written on April 2 (15), 1904
Published, with alterations, in leaf-
let form in April 1904

Collected Works,
Vol. 7, pp. 199-202

RUSSIAN SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

Workers of All Countries, Unite!

THE FIRST OF MAY ¹

Comrade workers! The great holiday of the workers of all the world is coming. On the First of May they celebrate their awakening to light and knowledge, their association in one fraternal union for the struggle against all oppression, against all tyranny, against all exploitation, for a socialist system of society. All who work, who feed the rich and the nobility by their labour, who spend their lives in back-breaking toil for scanty wages, who never enjoy the fruits of their own labour, who live like beasts of burden amidst the luxury and splendour of our civilisation—all stretch out their hands to fight for the emancipation and happiness of the workers. Down with enmity between workers of different nationalities or different creeds! This enmity can only benefit the plunderers and tyrants, who live by the ignorance and disunion of the proletariat. Jews and Christians, Armenians and Tatars, Poles and Russians, Finns and Swedes, Letts and Germans—all, all of them march together under the one common banner of socialism. All workers are brothers, and their solid union is the only guarantee of the well-being and happiness of all working and oppressed mankind. On the First of May this union of the workers of all countries, international Social-Democracy, reviews its forces and gathers its strength for a further unremitting and unswerving struggle for freedom, equality, and fraternity.

Comrades! We stand now in Russia on the eve of great events. We are engaged in the last desperate fight with the autocratic tsarist government, we must carry this fight on to its victorious end. See what calamities this government of brutes and tyrants, of venal courtiers and hangers-on of

capital, has brought upon the entire Russian people! The tsarist government has plunged the Russian people into an insane war against Japan. Hundreds of thousands of young lives have been torn away from the people to perish in the Far East. Words cannot describe all the calamities that this war brings upon us. And what is the war for? For Manchuria, which our predatory tsarist government has seized from China! Russian blood is being shed and our country ruined for the sake of foreign territory. Life is becoming harder and harder for the workers and peasants; the capitalists and officials keep tightening the noose round their necks, while the tsarist government is sending the people out to plunder foreign territory. Bungling tsarist generals and venal officials have led to the destruction of the Russian fleet, squandered hundreds and thousands of millions of the nation's wealth, and lost entire armies, but the war still goes on, claiming further sacrifices. The people are being ruined, industry and trade are coming to a standstill, and famine and cholera are imminent; but the autocratic government in its blind madness follows the old path; it is ready to ruin Russia if only it can save a handful of brutes and tyrants; it is launching another war besides the one with Japan—war against the entire Russian people.

Never before has Russia experienced such an awakening from her slumber, from her oppression and enslavement, as she is experiencing today. All classes of society are stirring, from the workers and peasants to the landlords and capitalists, and voices of protest have been raised everywhere, in St. Petersburg and the Caucasus, in Poland and Siberia. Everywhere the people demand an end to the war; they demand the establishment of a free people's rule, the convocation of deputies of all citizens without exception in a Constituent Assembly to institute a people's government and save the nation from the abyss into which the tsarist government is pushing it. Workers of St. Petersburg, about two hundred thousand strong, went to the tsar on Sunday, the Ninth of January, with the priest Georgi Gapon in order to submit these demands of the people. The tsar received the workers as enemies. He shot down thousands of unarmed workers in the streets of St. Petersburg. The struggle is now on all over Russia. Workers are on strike, demanding freedom and a better life. Blood is being spilt in Riga and in

Poland, on the Volga and in the South. Everywhere the peasants are rising. The struggle for freedom is becoming the struggle of the entire people.

The tsarist government has gone mad. It wants to borrow money to carry on the war, but no one will trust it with a loan any longer. It promises to convene representatives of the people, but actually everything remains unchanged; the persecutions do not cease, the lawlessness of the officials proceeds as before; there are no free public meetings, no freely circulated people's newspapers; the prisons in which fighters for the working-class cause are languishing have not been thrown open. The tsarist government is trying to set one people against another. It has brought about a massacre in Baku by maligning the Armenians among the Tatars; now it is preparing a fresh massacre aimed at the Jews by fanning hatred against them among the ignorant people.

Comrade workers! We will tolerate no longer such outrageous treatment of the Russian people. We will rise to defend freedom, we will strike back at all who try to deflect the wrath of the people from the real enemy. We will rise up in arms to overthrow the tsarist government and win freedom for the entire people. To arms, workers and peasants! Hold secret meetings, form fighting squads, get whatever weapons you can, send trusted men to consult with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party! Let this year's First of May be for us the celebration of the people's uprising, let us prepare for it and await the signal for the decisive attack on the tyrant. Down with the tsarist government! We will overthrow it and set up a provisional revolutionary government to convene a Constituent Assembly of the people. Let people's deputies be elected by universal, direct, and equal vote, through secret ballot. Let all fighters for freedom be released from prison or brought back from exile. Let public meetings be held openly and people's newspapers be printed without surveillance by the accursed officials. Let all the people arm, let a rifle be given to every worker, so that the people themselves, not a handful of plunderers, may decide their own destiny. Let free peasants' committees be set up in the countryside to overthrow the serf-owning landlord power, to free the people from the hateful oppression of the officials, to restore to the peasants the land that has been taken away from them.

This is what the Social-Democrats want, this is what they call upon you to fight for, arms in hand: for complete freedom, for the democratic republic, for the eight-hour day, for peasants' committees. Prepare then for the great battle, comrade workers, stop work in the factories and mills on the First of May, or take up arms according to the advice of the committees of the Social-Democratic Labour Party. The hour of the insurrection has not yet struck, but it is not far off now. The workers of the world are now looking with bated breath to the heroic Russian proletariat which has offered incalculable sacrifices to the cause of freedom. The St. Petersburg workers proclaimed on the famed Ninth of January: Freedom or death! Workers of all Russia, we will repeat that great battle-cry, we will not shrink from any sacrifices: through the uprising we will win freedom; through freedom, socialism!

Long live the First of May, long live international revolutionary Social-Democracy!

Long live the freedom of the workers and peasants, long live the democratic republic! Down with the tsarist autocracy!

1905

*Bureau of Committees of the Majority
Editorial Board of "Uperyod"*

Written prior to April 12 (25), 1905

Published in 1905
as a separate leaflet

Collected Works,
Vol. 8, pp. 348-51

THE SLOGANS OF THE ALL-RUSSIA CONFERENCE OF THE R.S.D.L.P. IN JANUARY 1912 AND THE MAY DAY MOVEMENT

Elsewhere in this issue, the reader will find the full text of a leaflet printed and circulated by the St. Petersburg workers before the May Day action that will from now on be famous. That leaflet is very much worth dwelling on, for it is a most important document in the history of the working-class movement in Russia and in the history of our Party.

The leaflet reflects *a certain* state of disorganisation of the Social-Democratic Party in the capital, for the appeal is signed, not by the St. Petersburg Committee, but by individual Social-Democratic groups and even a group of worker Socialist-Revolutionaries. In most parts of Russia, the state of our Party is such that its directing committees and centres are constantly being arrested, and constantly re-establish themselves thanks to the existence of all kinds of factory, trade union, sub-district and district Social-Democratic groups—the very same “nuclei” that have always roused the hatred of the liberals and liquidators.² In the latest issue of the magazine published by those gentlemen (*Nasha Zarya*, 1912, No. 4), the reader can see again and again how Mr. V. Levitsky, writing with impotent rage and vomiting abuse, hisses against the “rebirth of the Party through an artificial revival of politically dead nuclei”.

What makes the leaflet under review all the more typical and noteworthy is the fact that, owing to the arrest of the St. Petersburg Committee, it was the *nuclei* that had to appear on the scene, nuclei deprived by the will of the police of the “directing centre” so hateful to the liquidators.

Owing to this fact, which every revolutionary will find sad, the *independent* life of the nuclei came into the open. The nuclei had in all haste to rally their forces, establish contacts, and restore the "*underground*" in the face of fierce persecution by the police, who positively raged before May Day. The groups, representatives, etc., whose names appear under the leaflet, all constitute that very *underground* that is hateful to the liberals and the liquidators. While the same liquidationist leader, Mr. Levitsky, speaking on behalf of *Nasha Zarya* and *Zhivoye Dyelo*, of course assailed, foaming at the mouth, the "*cult of the underground*" (see p. 33 of the above-mentioned issue), we had, in the shape of the St. Petersburg leaflet, a precise and complete document revealing to us the existence of that underground, its vitality, the *content* of its work, and its significance.

The St. Petersburg Committee has been wiped out through the arrests, so now we shall see just what the underground nuclei are like in themselves, what they are doing or can do, what ideas they have actually made their own or evolved in their midst, and not merely borrowed from the supreme Party body, what ideas really enjoy the workers' sympathy.

The leaflet shows what the nuclei are doing: they are carrying on the work of the St. Petersburg Committee, which for the time being is shattered (to the delight of all the diverse enemies of the underground). They continue preparing for May Day. They hastily re-establish the contacts between *different* underground Social-Democratic groups. They enlist worker Socialist-Revolutionaries too, for they are well aware of the importance of uniting the proletariat round a living revolutionary cause. They rally these different Social-Democratic groups, and even a "group of worker Socialist-Revolutionaries", round *specific* slogans of the struggle. And this is when the real *character* of the movement, the real *sentiment* of the proletariat, the real *strength* of the R.S.D.L.P. and of its *January* All-Russia Conference,³ stands out.

As a result of the arrests, there happens to be no hierarchic body able to decree the advancing of particular slogans. Hence the proletarian masses, the worker Social-Democrats and even some of the Socialist-Revolutionaries can be united *only* by slogans that are really indisputable for the masses, only by slogans that derive their strength not from a "decree from

above" (as demagogues and liquidators put it), but from the *conviction* of the revolutionary workers themselves.

And what do we find?

We find that, *after* the St. Petersburg Committee had been shattered, at a time when its immediate restoration was impossible, and when one group of workers influenced another group solely by ideological, and not by organisational means, *the slogans adopted were those of the All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. which was convened in January 1912* and which evokes a positively mad, savage hatred on the part of the liberals, the liquidators, Lieber, Trotsky and Co.!

"Let our slogans be," the St. Petersburg workers wrote in their leaflet, "a constituent assembly, an eight-hour working day, the confiscation of the landed estates." And further on the leaflet launches the call: "Down with the tsarist government! Down with the autocratic Constitution of June 3!⁴ Long live the democratic republic! Long live socialism!"

We see from this instructive document that *all* the slogans put forward by the Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. have been adopted by the St. Petersburg proletariat and have set their seal on the first steps of the new Russian revolution. All kinds of slanderers and detractors of the January Conference may carry on their dirty business as much as they like. The revolutionary proletariat of St. Petersburg has answered them. The work started long before the last Conference by revolutionary Social-Democrats, calling on the proletariat to assume the role of leader of the *people's* revolution, has borne fruit despite all police persecution, despite the reckless pre-May Day arrests and hounding of revolutionaries, despite the torrent of lies and abuse from the liberal and liquidationist press.

Hundreds of thousands of St. Petersburg proletarians, followed by workers throughout Russia, resorted to strikes and street demonstrations not as one of the separate classes of bourgeois society, not with "their own" merely economic slogans, but as the leader raising aloft the banner of the revolution *for* the whole people, *on behalf of* the whole people, and *with the aim of* awakening and drawing into the struggle *all* the classes who need freedom and are capable of striving for it.

The revolutionary movement of the proletariat in Russia has risen to a higher level. Whereas in 1905 it began with

mass strikes and Gaponiads, in 1912, despite the fact that the police has smashed our Party organisations, the movement is beginning with mass strikes and the *raising of the republican banner!* The separate "nuclei" and disconnected "groups" of workers did their duty under the most difficult and trying conditions. The proletariat set up its own "May Day committees" and went into action with a *revolutionary* platform worthy of the class which is destined to free mankind from wage slavery.

The May Day movement also shows what meaning some words about "unity" have and how the workers unite *in reality*. Rubanovich, a spokesman for the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, writes in *Budushcheye*, Burtsev's Paris newspaper, that "we must point out the following noteworthy feature of this May Day action: at the preparatory meetings, St. Petersburg workers refused to recognise the division existing among the various socialist groups; . . . the prevailing tendency was towards agreement". The leaflet we have reprinted clearly shows what *fact* prompted such an inference. The fact is that the Social-Democratic nuclei, which had lost their guiding centre, re-established contact with all the various groups by winning over workers regardless of the views they held and *advocating to them all* their Party slogans. And precisely because these Party slogans are correct, because they are in keeping with the proletariat's revolutionary tasks and comprise the tasks of a revolution of the whole people, they were accepted by *all* workers.

Unity materialised because the January Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. gave up the idle game of bringing about agreement among small groups abroad, gave up the idle wooing of the liquidators of the revolutionary party, and put forward clear and precise fighting slogans *at the right time*. The proletariat's unity for revolutionary action was achieved not by compromising between the proletarian (Social-Democratic) and the non-proletarian (Socialist-Revolutionary) parties, not by seeking agreement with the liquidators who have broken away from the Social-Democratic Party, but by rallying the workers of Russian Social-Democratic organisations and by these workers making a correct appraisal of the tasks of the moment.

A good lesson for those who, succumbing to the idle chatter of the liberals of the Bund and the Trotskyes from Vien-

na, are still capable of believing in "unity"—with the liquidators. The vaunted "Organising Commission" of Lieber, Trotsky and the liquidators cried out from the house-tops about "unity", but in fact it could not, and did not, supply a *single* slogan actually uniting the revolutionary struggle of the workers. The liquidators supplied *their own*, non-revolutionary slogans, slogans of a liberal labour policy, but the movement disregarded them. That is what lies at the bottom of the Trotskyist fables about "unity"!

Swearing and vowing that he was "unifying", and cursing the Conference as hard as he could, Trotsky assured good souls in Vienna on April 23 (May 6) that "the struggle for freedom of association is the *basis*" (!!) of the Lena events⁵ and of their repercussions, that "this demand is, and will be, the *central* [!!] issue of the revolutionary mobilisation of the proletariat". Scarcely a week had passed when these pitiful phrases of the yes-man of the liquidators were swept away like so much dust—by the "representatives of all the organised workers of St. Petersburg", "the Social-Democratic Obyedineniye group", "the central Social-Democratic city group", "the group of worker Socialist-Revolutionaries", "the group of worker Social-Democrats" and "the representatives of May Day committees".

The Social-Democratic proletariat of St. Petersburg has realised that a new revolutionary struggle must be started, not for the sake of one right, even though it should be the most essential, the most important for the working class, but for the sake of *the freedom of the whole people*.

The Social-Democratic proletariat of St. Petersburg has realised that it must generalise its demands, and not break them up into parts, that the republic includes freedom of association, and not vice versa, that it is necessary to strike at the centre, to attack the source of evil, to destroy the whole system, the whole regime, of the Russia of the tsar and the Black Hundreds.⁶

The Social-Democratic proletariat of St. Petersburg has realised that it is ridiculous and absurd to claim freedom of association *from* Nicholas Romanov, *from* the Black-Hundred Duma, that it is ridiculous and absurd to presume that Russia's present political system, our "autocratic Constitution of June 3", is *compatible with* freedom of association, that in a country where there is a general and indiscriminate lack

of rights, where arbitrary rule and provocation by the authorities reign supreme, and where there is no "freedom" even for simply helping tens of millions of starving people—it is only liberal chatterers and liberal labour politicians that can put freedom of association as "the central issue of revolutionary mobilisation".

The Social-Democratic proletariat of St. Petersburg has realised that and unfurled the *republican* banner, demanding an eight-hour day and confiscation of the landed estates as the only guarantee of the truly democratic character of the revolution.

Sotsial-Demokrat No. 27,
June 4 (17), 1912

Collected Works,
Vol. 18, pp. 110-15

MAY DAY ACTION BY THE REVOLUTIONARY PROLETARIAT

A year has passed since the Lena events and the first, decisive upsurge in the revolutionary working-class movement since the June Third coup. The tsar's Black Hundreds and the landowners, the mob of officials and the bourgeoisie have celebrated the 300th anniversary of plunder, Tatar incursions, and the disgracing of Russia by the Romanovs. The Fourth Duma has convened and begun its "work", though it has no faith in that work and has quite lost its former counter-revolutionary vigour. Confusion and tedium have beset liberal society, which is listlessly making appeals *for reforms* while admitting the impracticability of anything even approximating reform.

And now comes a May Day action by Russia's working class, who first held a rehearsal in Riga, then went into resolute action in St. Petersburg on May 1 (O.S.); this action has rent the dim and dreary atmosphere like a thunder-bolt. The tasks of the approaching revolution have come to the fore again in all their grandeur, and the forces of the advanced class leading it stand out in bold relief before hundreds of old revolutionaries, whom persecution by hangmen and desertion by friends have not defeated or broken, and before millions of people of the new generation of democrats and socialists.

Weeks before May Day, the government appeared to have lost its wits, while the gentlemen who own factories behaved as if they had never had any wits at all. The arrests and searches seemed to have turned all the workers' districts in the capital upside down. The provinces did not lag be-

hind the centre. The harassed factory owners called conferences and adopted contradictory slogans, now threatening the workers with punishment and lock-outs, now making concessions in advance and consenting to stop work, now inciting the government to commit atrocities, now reproaching the government and calling on it to include May Day in the number of official holidays.

But even though the gendarmes showed the utmost zeal, even though they "purged" the industrial suburbs, even though they made arrests right and left according to their latest "lists of suspects", it was no use. The workers laughed at the impotent rage of the tsar's gang and the capitalist class and derided the governor's menacing and pitiful "announcements"; they wrote satirical verses and circulated them by hand or passed them on by word of mouth; they produced, as if from nowhere, fresh batches of small, poorly printed "leaflets", short and plain, but very instructive, calling for strikes and demonstrations, and reminding the people of the old, uncurtailed, revolutionary slogans of the Social-Democrats,⁷ who in 1905 led the first onslaught of the masses against the autocracy and against monarchy.

A hundred thousand on strike on May Day, said the government press the next day. Bourgeois newspapers, using the first telegraphed information, reported a hundred and twenty-five thousand (*Kievskaya Mysl*). A correspondent of the central organ of the German Social-Democrats wired from St. Petersburg that it was a hundred and fifty thousand. And the day after the whole bourgeois press quoted a figure of 200,000-220,000. Actually the number of strikers reached 250,000!

But, apart from the number of May Day strikers, much more impressive—and much more significant—were the revolutionary street demonstrations held by the workers. Everywhere in and around the capital crowds of workers singing revolutionary songs, calling loudly for revolution and carrying red flags fought for several hours against police and security forces frantically mobilised by the government. And those workers made the keenest of the tsar's henchmen feel that the struggle was in earnest, that the police were not faced with a handful of individuals engaged in a trivial Slavophil affair,⁸ that it was actually the masses of the capital's working class who had risen.

This was a really brilliant, open demonstration of the proletariat's revolutionary aspirations, of its revolutionary forces steeled and reinforced by new generations, of revolutionary appeals to the people and the peoples of Russia. Last year the government and the manufacturers were able to take comfort from the fact that the Lena explosion could not have been foreseen, that they could not have made immediate preparations to combat its consequences; this time, however, the monarchy had displayed acute foresight, there had been ample time for preparation and the "measures" taken were most "vigorous"; the result was that the tsarist monarchy revealed its complete *impotence* when faced with a revolutionary awakening of the proletarian masses.

Indeed, one year of strike struggle since Lena has shown, despite the pitiful outcries of the liberals and their yes-men against the "craze for striking", against "syndicalist" strikes, against combining economic with political strikes and vice versa—this year has shown what a great and irreplaceable weapon for agitation among the masses, for rousing them, for drawing them into the struggle the Social-Democratic proletariat had forged for itself in the revolutionary epoch. The revolutionary mass-scale strike allowed the enemy neither rest nor respite. It also hit the enemy's purse, and in full view of the whole world it trampled into the mud the political prestige of the allegedly "strong" tsarist government. It enabled more and more sections of the workers to regain at least a small part of what had been achieved in 1905 and drew fresh sections of the working people, even the most backward, into the struggle. It did not exhaust the capacity of the workers, it was frequently demonstrative action of short duration, and at the same time it paved the way for further, still more impressive and more revolutionary open action by the masses in the shape of street demonstrations.

During the last year, no country in the world has seen so many people on strike for political ends as Russia, or such perseverance, such variety, such vigour in strikes. This circumstance alone shows to the full the pettiness, the contemptible stupidity of those liberal and liquidationist sages who tried to "adjust" the tactics of the Russian workers in 1912-13, using the yardstick of "European" constitutional periods,

periods that were mainly devoted to the preparatory work of bringing socialist education and enlightenment to the masses.

The colossal superiority of the Russian strikes over those in the European countries, the most advanced countries, demonstrates, not the special qualities or special abilities of Russia's workers, but the *special* conditions in present-day Russia, the existence of a revolutionary situation, the growth of a directly revolutionary crisis. When the moment of a similar growth of revolution approaches in Europe (there it will be a socialist and not a bourgeois-democratic revolution, as in our country), the proletariat of the most developed capitalist countries will launch far more vigorous revolutionary strikes, demonstrations, and armed struggle against the defenders of wage-slavery.

This year's May Day strike, like the series of strikes in Russia during the last eighteen months, was revolutionary in character as distinguished not only from the usual economic strikes but from demonstration strikes and from political strikes demanding constitutional reforms, like, for instance, the last Belgian strike.⁹ Those who are in bondage to a liberal world outlook and no longer able to consider things from the revolutionary standpoint, cannot possibly understand this distinctive character of the Russian strikes, a character that is due entirely to the revolutionary state of Russia. The epoch of counter-revolution and of free play for renegade sentiment has left behind it too many people of this kind even among those who would like to be called Social-Democrats.

Russia is experiencing a revolutionary situation because the oppression of the vast majority of the population—not only of the proletariat but of nine-tenths of the small producers, particularly the peasants—has intensified to the maximum, and this intensified oppression, starvation, poverty, lack of rights, humiliation of the people is, furthermore, glaringly inconsistent with the state of Russia's productive forces, inconsistent with the level of the class-consciousness and the demands of the masses roused by the year 1905, and inconsistent with the state of affairs in all neighbouring—not only European but Asian—countries.

But that is not all. Oppression alone, no matter how great, does not always give rise to a revolutionary situation in a

country. In most cases it is not enough for revolution that *the lower classes should not want* to live in the old way. It is also necessary that *the upper classes should be unable* to rule and govern in the old way. This is what we see in Russia today. A political crisis is maturing before our very eyes. The bourgeoisie has done *everything* in its power to back counter-revolution and ensure "peaceful development" on this counter-revolutionary basis. The bourgeoisie gave hangmen and feudal lords as much money as they wanted, the bourgeoisie reviled the revolution and renounced it, the bourgeoisie licked the boots of Purishkevich and the knout of Markov the Second and became their lackey, the bourgeoisie evolved theories based on "European" arguments, theories that revile the Revolution of 1905 as an "intellectualist" revolution and describe it as wicked, criminal, treasonous, and so on and so forth.

And yet, despite all this sacrificing of its purse, its honour and its conscience, the bourgeoisie—from the Cadets to the Octobrists¹⁰—*itself* admits that the autocracy and landowners *were unable* to ensure "peaceful development", were unable to provide the basic conditions for "law" and "order", without which a capitalist country cannot, in the twentieth century, live side by side with Germany and the new China.

A nation-wide political crisis is in evidence in Russia, a crisis which affects the very *foundation* of the state system and not just parts of it, which affects the *foundation* of the edifice and not an outbuilding, not merely one of its storeys. No matter how many glib phrases our liberals and liquidators trot out to the effect that "we have, thank God, a constitution" and that political *reforms* are on the order of the day (only very limited people do not see the close connection between these two propositions), no matter how much of this reformist verbiage is poured out, the fact remains that not a single liquidator or liberal can point to any reformist way out of the situation.

The condition of the mass of the population in Russia, the aggravation of their position owing to the new agrarian policy¹¹ (to which the feudal landowners had to snatch at as their last means of salvation), the international situation, and the nature of the general political crisis that has taken shape in our country—such is the sum total of the objective

conditions making Russia's situation a revolutionary one because of the impossibility of carrying out the tasks of a bourgeois revolution by following the present course and by the means available to the government and the exploiting classes.

Such is the social, economic, and political situation, such is the class relationship in Russia that has given rise to a specific type of strike impossible in modern Europe, from which all sorts of renegades would like to borrow the example, not of yesterday's bourgeois revolutions (through which shine gleams of tomorrow's proletarian revolution), but of today's "constitutional" situation. Neither the oppression of the lower classes nor a crisis among the upper classes can cause a revolution; they can only cause the decay of a country, unless that country has a revolutionary class capable of transforming the passive state of oppression into an active state of revolt and insurrection.

The role of a truly advanced class, a class really able to rouse the masses to revolution, really capable of saving Russia from decay, is played by the industrial proletariat. This is the task it fulfils by means of its revolutionary strikes. These strikes, which the liberals hate and the liquidators cannot understand, are (as the February resolution of the R.S.D.L.P. puts it) "one of the most effective means of overcoming the apathy, despair, and disunion of the agricultural proletariat and the peasantry, ... and *drawing them* into the most concerted, simultaneous, and extensive *revolutionary actions*".*

The working class draws into revolutionary action the masses of the working and exploited people, who are deprived of basic rights and driven to despair. The working class teaches them revolutionary struggle, trains them for revolutionary action, and explains to them where to find the way out and how to attain salvation. The working class teaches them, not merely by words, but by deeds, by example, and the example is provided not by the adventures of solitary heroes but by *mass* revolutionary action combining political and economic demands.

How plain, how clear, how close these thoughts are to every honest worker who grasps even the rudiments of the

theory of socialism and democracy! And how alien they are to those traitors to socialism and betrayers of democracy from among the intelligentsia, who revile or deride the "underground" in liquidationist newspapers, assuring naïve simpletons that they are "also Social-Democrats".

The May Day action of the proletariat of St. Petersburg, supported by that of the proletariat of all Russia, clearly showed once again to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear the great historic importance of the revolutionary underground in present-day Russia. The only R.S.D.L.P. Party organisation in St. Petersburg, the St. Petersburg Committee, compelled even the bourgeois press, before the May Day action as well as on the eve of January 9, and on the eve of the Tercentenary of the Romanovs as well as on April 4,¹² to note that St. Petersburg Committee leaflets had appeared again and again in the factories.

Those leaflets cost colossal sacrifices. Sometimes they are quite unattractive in appearance. Some of them, the appeals for demonstration on April 4, for instance, merely announce the hour and place of the demonstration, in six lines evidently set in secret and with extreme haste in different printing shops and in different types. We have people ("also Social-Democrats") who, when alluding to these conditions of "underground" work, snigger maliciously or curl a contemptuous lip and ask: "If the entire Party were limited to the underground, how many members would it have? Two or three hundred?" [See No. 95 (181) of *Luch*, a renegade organ, in its *editorial* defence of Mr. Sedov, who has the sad courage to be an outspoken liquidator. This issue of *Luch* appeared five days before the May Day action, i.e., *at the very time* the underground was preparing the leaflets!]

Messrs. Dan, Potresov and Co., who make these disgraceful statements, must know that there were thousands of proletarians in the Party ranks as early as 1903, and 150 thousand in 1907, that even now thousands and tens of thousands of workers print and circulate *underground* leaflets, as members of *underground* R.S.D.L.P. cells. But the liquidationist gentlemen know that they are protected by Stolypin¹³ "legality" from a legal refutation of their foul lies and their "grimaces", which are fouler still, at the expense of the underground.

* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 457.—Ed.

See to what extent these despicable people have lost touch with the mass working-class movement and with revolutionary work in general! Use even their own yardstick, deliberately falsified to suit the liberals. You may assume for a moment that "two or three hundred" workers in St. Petersburg took part in printing and distributing those underground leaflets.

What is the result? "Two or three hundred" workers, the flower of the St. Petersburg proletariat, people who not only call themselves Social-Democrats but work as Social-Democrats, people who are esteemed and appreciated for it by the *entire* working class of Russia, people who do not prate about a "broad party" but make up in actual fact the only underground Social-Democratic Party existing in Russia, these people print and circulate underground leaflets. The *Luch* liquidators (protected by Stolypin censors) laugh contemptuously at the "two or three hundred", the "underground" and its "exaggerated" importance, etc.

And suddenly, a miracle occurs! In accordance with a decision drawn up by *half a dozen* members of the Executive Commission of the St. Petersburg Committee—a leaflet printed and circulated by "two or three hundred"—*two hundred and fifty thousand* people rise as one man in St. Petersburg.

The leaflets and the revolutionary speeches by workers at meetings and demonstrations do not speak of an "open working-class party", "freedom of association" or reforms of that kind, with the phantoms of which the liberals are fooling the people. They speak of revolution as the only way out. They speak of the republic as the only slogan which, in contrast to liberal lies about reforms, indicates the change needed to ensure freedom, indicates the forces capable of rising consciously to defend it.

The two million inhabitants of St. Petersburg see and hear these appeals for revolution which go to the hearts of all toiling and oppressed sections of the people. All St. Petersburg sees from a real, mass-scale example what is the real way out and what is lying liberal talk about reforms. Thousands of workers' contacts—and hundreds of bourgeois newspapers, which are compelled to report the St. Petersburg mass action at least in snatches—spread throughout Russia the news of the stubborn strike campaign of

the capital's proletariat. Both the mass of the peasantry and the peasants serving in the army hear this news of strikes, of the revolutionary demands of the workers, of their struggle for a republic and for the confiscation of the landed estates for the benefit of the peasants. Slowly but surely, the revolutionary strikes are stirring, rousing, enlightening, and organising the masses of the people *for revolution*.

The "two or three hundred" "underground people" express the interests and needs of *millions and tens of millions*, they tell them the truth about their hopeless position, open their eyes to the necessity of revolutionary struggle, imbue them with faith in it, provide them with the correct slogans, and win these masses away from the influence of the high-sounding and thoroughly spurious, reformist slogans of the bourgeoisie. And "two or three" dozen liquidators from among the intelligentsia, using money collected abroad and among liberal merchants to fool unenlightened workers, are carrying the slogans of that bourgeoisie into the workers' midst.

The May Day strike, like all the revolutionary strikes of 1912-13, has made clear the three political camps into which present-day Russia is divided. The camp of hangmen and feudal lords, of monarchy and the secret police. It has done its utmost in the way of atrocities and is already impotent against the masses of the workers. The camp of the bourgeoisie, all of whom, from the Cadets to the Octobrists, are shouting and moaning, calling for reforms and making fools of themselves by thinking that reforms are possible in Russia. The camp of the revolution, the only camp expressing the interests of the oppressed masses.

All the ideological work, all the political work in this camp is carried out by underground Social-Democrats alone, by those who know how to use every legal opportunity in the spirit of Social-Democracy and who are inseparably bound up with the advanced class, the proletariat. No one can tell beforehand whether this advanced class will succeed in leading the masses all the way to a victorious revolution. But this class is fulfilling its duty—*leading* the masses to that solution—despite all the vacillations and betrayals on the part of the liberals and those who are "also Social-Democrats". All the living and vital elements of Russian socialism and Russian democracy are being educated solely

by the example of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, and under its guidance.

This year's May Day action has shown to the whole world that the Russian proletariat is steadfastly following its revolutionary course, apart from which there is no salvation for a Russia that is suffocating and decaying alive.

Sotsial-Demokrat No. 31,
June 15 (28), 1913

Collected Works,
Vol. 19, pp. 218-27

NOTES

¹ "The First of May" was written by Lenin in Geneva and published in leaflet form over the signature of the Bureau of Majority Committees and the Editorial Board of *Vperyod*. It was reprinted by a number of local Social-Democratic committees. p. 9

² *Liquidators*—followers of liquidationism, an opportunist trend which arose among Menshevik Social-Democrats after the defeat of the 1905-07 revolution. Liquidators demanded abolition of the underground revolutionary party of the working class. They called upon the workers to discontinue the revolutionary struggle against tsarism, sought to convene a non-party "labour congress" and set up a "broad workers' party" which would reject revolutionary slogans and confine itself to legal activities. Lenin and other Bolsheviks tirelessly exposed the liquidators as betrayers of the cause of the revolution. Liquidationism had few followers among the working masses. The Prague Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. held in January 1912 expelled the liquidators from the Party. p. 13

³ The Sixth (Prague) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. was held in Prague in January 1912. It was attended by representatives of more than twenty local Party organisations and in fact fulfilled the function of a Party congress. It defined the Party policy in the conditions of an upsurge of the revolutionary movement and pointed out that the following main slogans should be put forward in the forthcoming Duma elections: the demand for a democratic republic, an eight-hour working day and the confiscation of all landed estates. The Conference restored the illegal revolutionary party of the working class as an all-Russia organisation and elected the Central Committee. The Conference expelled Menshevik liquidators and other opportunists from the Party and put an end once and for all to the formal unity of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks within one party. p. 14

⁴ The June 3 coup d'état took place on June 3, 1907. On this day the government disbanded the Second Duma and amended the electoral law. The new law considerably increased the representation of landowners, industrialists and merchants in the Duma and drastically reduced the already small number of workers' and peasants' repre-

sentatives. The law disfranchised a large part of the population of the Asian part of Russia and halved the representation from Poland and the Caucasus. The Third Duma which was elected under the new law met in November 1907 and was reactionary in the extreme.

The June 3 coup d'état was followed by a period of Stolypin reaction also known as the June Third regime. p. 15

⁵ This refers to the shooting of workers by the tsarist troops in the Lena goldfields in Siberia in April 1912. p. 17

⁶ *Black Hundreds*—monarchist gangs organised by the tsarist police to fight the revolutionary movement. They killed revolutionaries, attacked progressive intellectuals and provoked anti-Jewish pogroms. p. 17

⁷ This refers to the revolutionary slogans put forward by the Bolsheviks during the 1905-07 revolution, which called for the overthrow of tsarism, the establishment of a democratic republic, the introduction of an eight-hour working day and the confiscation of the landed estates. p. 20

⁸ This refers to the Slavophil demonstrations organised by the reactionary nationalist elements in St. Petersburg on March 17, 18 and 24, 1913 to mark the Serbo-Bulgarian victories over the Turks during the First Balkan War. Reactionaries strove to utilise the national liberation struggle of the Balkan peoples in the interests of the predatory dominant-nation policy of Russian tsarism in the Near East. p. 20

⁹ The general strike in Belgium was held from April 14 to 24, 1913. The Belgian proletariat put forward the demand for a revision of the Constitution and universal and equal franchise. Between four and five hundred thousand workers out of a total of one million went on strike. *Pravda* regularly published items on the strike and on the Russian workers' donations to the strike fund. p. 22

¹⁰ *Cadets* (Constitutional-Democratic Party)—the leading party of the imperialist bourgeoisie in Russia which was set up in October 1905. Cadets called themselves a party of "people's freedom", but in fact they strove for a compromise with the autocracy and wanted to preserve tsarism in the form of a constitutional monarchy. During the First World War they demanded the continuation of the "war to a victorious conclusion". After the February revolution, as a result of a deal with the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders in the Petrograd Soviet the Cadets seized a leading position in the bourgeois Provisional Government and pursued anti-popular counter-revolutionary policies. After the Great October Socialist Revolution the Cadets became the agents and the servitors of foreign imperialists, and organised the internal counter-revolutionary forces. Lenin called the Cadet Party an all-Russia headquarters of the counter-revolution.

Octobrists (The Union of October Seventeenth)—a counter-revolutionary party of big business and industrial bourgeoisie and landowners who ran their economy on capitalist lines. It was founded in November 1905. While recognising the Manifesto of October 17 in

words, the Octobrists actually unreservedly supported the home and foreign policy of the tsarist government. Their leaders were the important industrialist Guchkov and the owner of huge estates Rodzyanko. p. 23

¹¹ This refers to the agrarian policy of the tsarist government. On November 9 (22), 1906, Stolypin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, promulgated the land reform on the formation of farmsteads. Stolypin's land reform was advantageous to the rich peasants (kulaks) and completely ruined the rural poor. It was aimed at creating a firm mainstay for tsarist rule in the countryside in the form of the kulaks. p. 23

¹² This refers to the Ninth of January, 1905. See p. 10 of this booklet. The Tercentenary of the Romanovs was celebrated by the tsarist government in 1913.

On April 4, 1913, the St. Petersburg workers marked the first anniversary of the shooting of the workers by the tsarist troops in the Lena goldfields by a one-day strike in which over 85,000 people took part. p. 25

¹³ *Stolypin, Pyotr Arkadyevich*—extreme reactionary and Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1906 to 1911. He organised the suppression of the first Russian revolution of 1905-07 and gave his name to a period of severe political reaction that set in immediately afterwards. p. 25

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send your comments to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, U.S.S.R.

7-69
25

В. И. ЛЕНИН

ПЕРВОЕ МАЯ.

МАЕВКА РЕВОЛЮЦИОННОГО ПРОЛЕТАРИАТА

На английском языке

PROGRESSIVE BOOKS
12, UPPER DUKE ST.
LIVERPOOL, 1.