

V.I. LENIN

THE NATIONAL PRIDE
of the
GREAT RUSSIANS



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WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This translation of V. I. Lenin's *The National Pride of the Great Russians* has been made from the text given in the *Collected Works* of V. I. Lenin, Vol. 21, Fourth Russian Edition, prepared by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (Gospolitizdat, Moscow 1948).

What a lot of talk and argument and shouting there is about nationality, about the fatherland! Liberal and radical Cabinet Ministers in England, a multitude of "advanced" publicists in France (who turn out to be in complete agreement with the reactionary publicists), a host of official, Cadet and progressive (including several Narodnik and "Marxist") scribes in Russia—all in a thousand different keys laud the freedom and independence of their "country," the grandeur of the principle of national independence. It is difficult to distinguish here, where the venal eulogizer of the hangman Nicholas Romanov, or of the torturers of Negroes and the inhabitants of India, ends, and where the ordinary philistine who, owing to stupidity or spinelessness, is swimming "with the stream," begins. Nor is that important. We see a very wide and very deep ideological trend, the roots of which are very firmly connected with the

interests of Messrs. the landlords and capitalists of the Great-Power nations. On the propaganda of ideas advantageous to these classes scores and hundreds of millions are spent every year: by no means a small mill, which takes its waters from all sources, from the convinced chauvinist Menshikov to chauvinists due to opportunism or spinelessness like Plekhanov, Maslov, Rubanovich, Smirnov, Kropotkin and Burtsev.

Let us Great-Russian Social-Democrats also try to define our attitude towards this ideological trend. It would be unseemly for us representatives of a Great-Power nation in the far east of Europe, and a good share of Asia, to forget the enormous significance of the national question—particularly in a country which is justly called the “prison of nations”—at a time when it is precisely in the far east of Europe and in Asia that capitalism is rousing a number of “new” big and small nations to life and consciousness; at a moment when the tsarist monarchy has placed under arms millions of Great Russians and “aliens” for the purpose of “deciding” a number of national questions in the interests of the Council of the United Nobility¹ and of the Guch-

kovs and Krestovnikovs, Dolgorukovs, Kutlers and Rodichevs.

Is the sense of national pride alien to us, Great-Russian, class-conscious proletarians? Of course not! We love our language and our country, we are doing more than anybody to raise *her* toiling masses (i.e., nine-tenths of *her* population) to the level of the conscious life of democrats and Socialists. It pains us more than anybody to see and feel the outrage, oppression and humiliation inflicted on our splendid country by the tsarist hangmen, the nobles and the capitalists. We are proud of the fact that these outrages have roused resistance in our midst, the midst of the Great Russians; that from *this* midst came Radishchev,² the Decembrists³ and the revolutionary commoners of the 'seventies; that the Great-Russian working class in 1905 created a mighty, revolutionary mass party; that at the same time the Great-Russian muzhik began to become a democrat, and began to overthrow the priest and the landlord.

We remember that half a century ago the Great-Russian democrat Chernyshevsky,⁴ devoting his life to the cause of the

revolution, said: "a miserable nation, a nation of slaves, from top to bottom—all slaves." The avowed and unavowed Great-Russian slaves (slaves of the tsarist monarchy) do not like to recall these words. Yet, in our opinion, these were words of genuine love of our country, love saddened by the absence of a revolutionary spirit among the masses of the Great-Russian people. This spirit was absent at that time. There is little of it now; but it exists. We are filled with a sense of national pride because the Great-Russian nation has *also* created a revolutionary class, has *also* proved that it is capable of showing mankind great examples of struggle for freedom and for Socialism, and not only great pogroms, rows of gallows, dungeons, great famines and great servility towards priests, tsars, landlords and capitalists.

We are filled with a sense of national pride, and for that very reason we *particularly* hate *our* slavish past (when the noble landlords led the muzhiks to war in order to crush the freedom of Hungary, Poland, Persia and China), and our slavish present, when these same landlords, backed by the capitalists, are leading us to war in order

to throttle Poland and the Ukraine, in order to crush the democratic movement in Persia and in China, and in order to strengthen the gang of Romanovs, Bobrinskys and Puri-shkeviches who are disgracing our Great-Russian national dignity. A man is not to blame for being born a slave; but a slave who not only shuns the striving for freedom but justifies and embellishes his slavery (for example, calls the throttling of Poland, the Ukraine, etc., "defence of the fatherland" of the Great Russians)—such a slave is a menial and a cad, who inspires legitimate anger, contempt and disgust.

"No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations," said the greatest representatives of consistent democracy of the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels, who became the teachers of the revolutionary proletariat. And we Great-Russian workers, filled with a sense of national pride, want at all costs a free and independent, democratic, republican, proud Great Russia, which shall base its relations with its neighbours on the human principle of equality, and not on the feudal principle of privilege, which is degrading to a great nation. Precisely because we want this, we say: it is impossi-

ble, in the twentieth century, in Europe (even in Far-Eastern Europe), to "defend the fatherland" except by fighting with all revolutionary means the monarchy, the landlords and capitalists of our *own* fatherland, i.e., the *worst* enemies of our country; that Great Russians cannot "defend their fatherland" unless they desire the defeat of tsarism in any war, as being the least evil for nine-tenths of the population of Great Russia; for tsarism is not only oppressing these nine-tenths of the population economically and politically, but is also demoralizing, degrading, dishonouring and prostituting them by teaching it to oppress other nations, teaching it to cover up its shame with the aid of hypocritical, pseudopatriotic phrases.

We may be told that apart from tsarism, and under its wing, another historical force has arisen and become strong, Great-Russian capitalism, which is performing progressive work by economically centralizing and uniting vast regions. This objection, however, does not excuse, on the contrary, it still more strongly accuses our Socialist-chauvinists, who should be called tsarist-Purishkevich Socialists (just as

Marx called the Lassalleans, Royal-Prussian Socialists). Let us assume that history will decide the question in favour of Great-Russian imperialist capitalism, and against the hundred and one small nations. This is not impossible, for the whole history of capital is a history of violence and plunder, blood and mud. We are not in favour of preserving small nations at all costs; *other conditions being equal*, we are absolutely in favour of centralization and are opposed to the philistine ideal of federal relationships. Even in the case we have assumed, however, firstly, it is not our business, not the business of democrats (let alone of Socialists) to help Romanov-Bobrinsky-Purishkevich to throttle the Ukraine, etc. Bismarck, in his own, Junker, way, performed a progressive historical task; but he would be a fine "Marxist," indeed, who, on these grounds, thought of justifying socialist support for Bismarck! Moreover, Bismarck facilitated economic development by uniting the scattered Germans who were oppressed by other nations. The economic prosperity and rapid development of Great Russia, however, requires that the country be liberated from the violence the Great

Russians perpetrate against other nations —our admirers of the truly Russian near-Bismarcks forget this difference.

Secondly, if history decides the question in favour of Great-Russian imperialist capitalism, it follows that all the greater will be the *socialist* role of the Great-Russian proletariat as the principal driving force of the Communist revolution to which capitalism gives rise. And the proletarian revolution requires the prolonged education of the workers in the spirit of the *completest* national equality and fraternity. Hence, from the point of view of the interests of precisely the Great-Russian proletariat, the prolonged education of the masses is required so that they may most resolutely, consistently, boldly and in a revolutionary manner champion complete equality and the right of self-determination for all the nations oppressed by the Great Russians. The interests (not in the Slavish sense) of the national pride of the Great Russians coincide with the *socialist* interests of the Great-Russian (and all other) proletarians. Our model will always be Marx, who, having lived in England for decades, became half English and demanded the freedom and na-

tional independence of Ireland in the interests of the socialist movement of the English workers.

In the latter case that we have assumed, our home-grown Socialist-chauvinists, Plekhanov, etc., etc., will not only prove to be traitors to their country, free and democratic Great Russia, but also traitors to the proletarian brotherhood of all the nations of Russia, i.e., to the cause of Socialism.

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NOTES

- ¹ *The Council of the United Nobility*—a counter-revolutionary landlord organization, formed in May 1906, which greatly influenced the policy of the tsarist government. Lenin called it "the council of the united serfowners." p. 6
- ² *A. N. Radishchev* (1749-1802)—Russian author and revolutionary. In his famous work *A Journey From St. Petersburg to Moscow* he was the first openly to attack the serf system in tsarist Russia. For this, by command of Catherine II, he was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to ten years' exile in Siberia. He was released from exile by amnesty, but threatened with further persecution by the tsarist government he committed suicide. Lenin regarded Radishchev as one of the outstanding progressive leaders of the Russian people. p. 7
- ³ *Decembrists*—revolutionaries belonging to the nobility who in December 1825 organized a revolt against autocracy and serfdom. p. 7

- 4 N. G. Chernyshevsky (1828-1889)—an outstanding revolutionary democrat and great Russian scientist and critic. Editor of the magazine *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) in which, as Lenin wrote in his article "The Peasant Reform," he, "across the obstacles and barriers of the censorship, carried the idea of a peasant revolution, the idea of a mass struggle for the overthrow of all the old authorities." In a revolutionary appeal entitled "To the Gentry's Peasants," which he wrote after the Manifesto on the "emancipation" of the serfs was promulgated (1861), Chernyshevsky called upon the peasant masses to rise in revolt against the tsar and the landlords. Marx called Chernyshevsky a great scientist and critic who in masterly fashion exposed the bankruptcy of bourgeois political economy. Lenin wrote that "Chernyshevsky is the only really great Russian writer from the fifties until 1888 who was able to keep on the level of an integral philosophical materialism.... But Chernyshevsky did not succeed in rising, or, rather, owing to the backwardness of Russian life, was unable to rise to the level of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels" (*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*). In 1862, Chernyshevsky was arrested by order of the tsarist government and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude and lifelong exile in Siberia. This persecution did not, however, break Chernyshevsky's spirit. He continued resolutely to fight the autocracy to the end of his days. p. 7

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