

# LENIN

## The Revolutionary Phrase



PROGRESS Publishers



*W. H. Wood (Kenny)*

*Workers of All Countries, Unite!*

V. I. LENIN

*The Revolutionary  
Phrase*

**“Left-Communist”  
Mistakes  
on the Brest Peace  
(Articles and Speeches)**



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**В. И. ЛЕНИН**

О РЕВОЛЮЦИОННОЙ ФРАЗЕ

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## *On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace*

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It might be argued that this is no time to deal with history. Certainly, this kind of assertion would be permissible if a particular question from the past were not inseparably and directly connected in practice with the present. The question of the unfortunate peace, the exceptionally harsh peace is, however, such a burning question that it calls for elucidation. I am therefore publishing my theses on this subject that were read at a meeting of about sixty of the leading Petrograd Party functionaries on January 8, 1918.

Here are these theses:

January 7, 1918

### *Theses on the Question of the Immediate Conclusion of a Separate and Annexationist Peace<sup>1</sup>*

1. The position of the Russian revolution at the present moment is such that nearly all the workers and the vast majority of the peasants undoubtedly side with Soviet power and the socialist revolution which it has started. To that extent the socialist revolution in Russia is assured.

2. At the same time, the civil war, provoked by the frantic resistance of the wealthy classes, who realise full well that they are faced with the last and decisive fight for the preservation of private ownership of the land and means of production, has not yet reached its climax. The victory of Soviet power in this war is assured, but some time must inevitably elapse, no little exertion of effort will inevitably be required, a certain period of acute economic dislocation and chaos, which accompany all wars, and civil war in particular, is inevitable, before the resistance of the bourgeoisie is crushed.



3. Furthermore, this resistance, in its less active and non-military forms—sabotage, the hire of declassed elements and agents of the bourgeoisie, who worm their way into the ranks of the socialists in order to ruin their cause, and so on and so forth—has proved so stubborn and capable of assuming such diversified forms, that the fight against it will inevitably require some more time, and, in its main forms, is hardly likely to end until several months have passed. And unless this passive and covert resistance of the bourgeoisie and its supporters is definitely crushed the socialist revolution cannot succeed.

4. Lastly, the organisational problems of the socialist transformation of Russia are so immense and difficult that their solution—in view of the numerous petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers of the socialist proletariat, and of the latter's low cultural level—will also require a fairly long time.

5. All these circumstances taken together are such as to make it perfectly clear that for the success of socialism in Russia a certain amount of time, several months at least, will be necessary, during which the hands of the socialist government must be absolutely free to achieve victory over the bourgeoisie first in our own country and to launch far-reaching mass organisational work on a wide scale.

6. The position of the socialist revolution in Russia must form the basis of any definition of the international tasks of our Soviet power, for the international situation in the fourth year of the war is such that it is quite impossible to predict the probable moment of outbreak of revolution and overthrow of any of the European imperialist governments (including the German). That the socialist revolution in Europe must come, and will come, is beyond doubt. All our hopes for the *final* victory of socialism are founded on this certainty and on this scientific prognosis. Our propaganda activities in general, and the organisation of fraternisation in particular, must be intensified and extended. It would be a mistake, however, to base the tactics of the Russian socialist government on attempts to determine whether or not the European, and especially the German, socialist revolution will take place in the next six months (or some such brief period). Inasmuch as it is quite impossible to determine this, all such attempts, objectively speaking, would be nothing but a blind gamble.

7. The peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk have by now—January 7, 1918—made it perfectly clear that the war party has undoubtedly gained the upper hand in the German Government (which has the other governments of the Quadruple Alliance<sup>2</sup> at its beck and call) and has virtually already presented Russia with an ultimatum (and it is to be expected, most certainly to be expected, that any day now it will be presented formally). The ultimatum is as follows: either the continuation of the war, or a peace with annexations, i.e., peace on condition that we surrender all the territory we have occupied, while the Germans retain *all* the territory they have occupied and impose upon us an indemnity (outwardly disguised as payment for the maintenance of prisoners)—an indemnity of about three thousand million rubles, payable over a number of years.

8. The socialist government of Russia is faced with the question—a question whose solution brooks no delay—of whether to accept this peace with annexations now, or to immediately wage a revolutionary war. In fact, no middle course is possible. No further postponement can now be achieved, for we have *already* done everything possible and impossible to deliberately protract the negotiations.

9. On examining the arguments in favour of an immediate revolutionary war, the first argument we encounter is that a separate peace at this juncture would, objectively speaking, be an agreement with the German imperialists, an “imperialistic deal”, and so forth, and that, consequently, such a peace would mean a complete break with the fundamental principles of proletarian internationalism.

This argument, however, is obviously incorrect. Workers who lose a strike and sign terms for the resumption of work which are unfavourable to them and favourable to the capitalists, do not betray socialism. The only people who betray socialism are those who secure advantages for a section of the workers in exchange for profit to the capitalists; only such agreements are impermissible in principle.

He betrays socialism who calls the war with German imperialism a defensive and just war, but actually receives support from the Anglo-French imperialists, and conceals secret treaties concluded with them from the people. He does not in the least betray socialism who, without concealing anything from the people, and without concluding any

secret treaties with the imperialists, agrees to sign terms of peace which are unfavourable to the weak nation and favourable to the imperialists of one group, if at that moment there is no strength to continue the war.

10. Another argument in favour of immediate war is that, by concluding peace, we objectively become agents of German imperialism, for we afford it the opportunity to release troops from our front, we surrender to it millions of prisoners of war, and so on. But this argument too is manifestly incorrect, for a revolutionary war at the present juncture would, objectively speaking, make us agents of Anglo-French imperialism, by providing it with forces which would promote its aims. The British bluntly offered our Commander-in-Chief Krylenko one hundred rubles per month for every one of our soldiers provided we continued the war. Even if we did not take a single kopek from the Anglo-French, we nevertheless would be helping them, objectively speaking, by diverting part of the German army.

From that point of view, in neither case would we be entirely escaping some sort of imperialist bond, and it is obvious that it is impossible to escape it completely without overthrowing world imperialism. The correct conclusion from this is that the moment a socialist government triumphed in any one country, questions must be decided, not from the point of view of whether this or that imperialism is preferable, but exclusively from the point of view of the conditions which best make for the development and consolidation of the socialist revolution which has already begun.

In other words, the underlying principle of our tactics must not be, which of the two imperialisms it is more profitable to aid at this juncture, but rather, how the socialist revolution can be most firmly and reliably ensured the possibility of consolidating itself, or, at least, of maintaining itself in one country until it is joined by other countries.

11. It is said that the German Social-Democratic opponents of the war have now become "defeatists" and are requesting us not to yield to German imperialism. But we recognised defeatism only in respect of *one's own* imperialist bourgeoisie, and we always discountenanced victory over an alien imperialism, victory attained in formal or actual alliance with a "friendly" imperialism, as a method impermissible in principle and generally wrong.

This argument is therefore only a modification of the previous one. If the German Left Social-Democrats were proposing that we delay concluding a separate peace for a *definite* period, and guaranteed revolutionary action in Germany within this period, the question *might* assume a different aspect for us. Far from saying this, however, the German Lefts formally declare: "Hold out as long as you can, but decide the question from the point of view of the state of affairs in the *Russian* socialist revolution, for we cannot promise you anything positive regarding the German revolution."

12. It is said that in a number of Party statements we actually "promised" a revolutionary war, and that by concluding a separate peace we would be going back on our word.

That is not true. We said that in the era of imperialism a socialist government *had to* "*prepare for and wage*" a revolutionary war\*; we said this in order to combat abstract pacifism and the theory that "defence of the fatherland" must be completely rejected in the era of imperialism, and, lastly, to combat the purely selfish instincts of a part of the soldiers, but we never gave any pledge to start a revolutionary war without considering whether it is possible to wage it at a given moment.

Unquestionably, even at this juncture we must *prepare for* a revolutionary war. We are carrying out this promise, as we have, in general, carried out all our promises that could be carried out at once: we annulled the secret treaties, offered all peoples a fair peace, and several times did our best to drag out peace negotiations so as to give other peoples a chance to join us.

But the question whether it is possible to carry on a revolutionary war *now, immediately*, must be decided exclusively from the point of view of whether material conditions permit it, and of the interests of the socialist revolution which has already begun.

13. Summing up the arguments in favour of an immediate revolutionary war, we have to conclude that such a policy might perhaps answer the human yearning for the beautiful,

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\* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 404.—Ed.

dramatic and striking, but that it would totally disregard the objective balance of class forces and material factors at the present stage of the socialist revolution now under way.

14. There can be no doubt that our army is absolutely in no condition at the present moment, and will not be for the next few weeks (and probably for the next few months), to beat back a German offensive successfully; firstly, owing to the extreme fatigue and exhaustion of the majority of the soldiers, coupled with the incredible chaos in the matter of food supply, replacement of the overfatigued, etc.; secondly, owing to the utter unfitness of the horses and the consequent inevitable ruin of our artillery; and, thirdly, owing to the absolute impossibility of defending the coastline from Riga to Revel, which affords the enemy a very certain chance of seizing the rest of Lifland, and then Estland, and of out-flanking a large part of our forces, and finally, of capturing Petrograd.

15. Further, there is not the slightest doubt that the peasant majority of our army would at the present juncture unreservedly declare in favour of a peace with annexations and not in favour of an immediate revolutionary war; the socialist reorganisation of the army, the merging of the Red Guard detachments with it, and so on, have only just begun.

With the army completely democratised, to carry on war in defiance of the wishes of the majority of the soldiers would be a reckless gamble, while to create a really staunch and ideologically stable socialist workers' and peasants' army will, at the very least, require months and months.

16. The poor peasants in Russia are capable of supporting the socialist revolution led by the working class, but they are not capable of agreeing to fight a serious revolutionary war immediately, at the present juncture. To ignore the objective balance of class forces on this issue would be a fatal error.

17. Consequently, the situation at present with regard to a revolutionary war is as follows:

If the German revolution were to break out and triumph in the coming three or four months, the tactics of an immediate revolutionary war might perhaps not ruin our socialist revolution.

If, however, the German revolution does not occur in the next few months, the course of events, if the war is continued, will inevitably be such that grave defeats will compel Russia to conclude an even more disadvantageous separate peace, a peace, moreover, which would be concluded, not by a socialist government, but by some other (for example, a bloc of the bourgeois Rada<sup>3</sup> and Chernov's<sup>4</sup> followers, or something similar). For the peasant army, which is exhausted to the limit by the war, will after the very first defeats—and very likely within a matter of weeks, and not of months—overthrow the socialist workers' government.

18. This being the state of affairs, it would be absolutely impermissible tactics to stake the fate of the socialist revolution, which has already begun in Russia, merely on the chance that the German revolution may begin in the immediate future, within a matter of weeks. Such tactics would be a reckless gamble. We have no right to take such risks.

19. The German revolution will by no means be made more difficult of accomplishment as far as its objective premises are concerned, if we conclude a separate peace. Probably chauvinist intoxication will weaken it for a time, but Germany's position will remain extremely grave, the war with Britain and America will be a protracted one, and aggressive imperialism will be fully and completely exposed on both sides. A socialist Soviet Republic in Russia will stand as a living example to the peoples of all countries, and the propaganda and revolutionising effect of this example will be immense. There—the bourgeois system and a fully exposed predatory war between two groups of marauders. Here—peace and a socialist Soviet Republic.

20. In concluding a separate peace we free ourselves *as much as is possible at the present moment* from both hostile imperialist groups, we take advantage of their mutual enmity and warfare which hamper concerted action on their part against us, and for a certain period have our hands free to advance and to consolidate the socialist revolution. The reorganisation of Russia on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the nationalisation of the banks and large-scale industry, coupled with *exchange of products* in kind between the towns and the small-peasant consumers' societies, is quite feasible economically, provided we are assured a few months in which to work in peace. And such a reorga-

nisation will render socialism invincible both in Russia and all over the world and, at the same time, will create a solid economic basis for a mighty workers' and peasants' Red Army.

21. A really revolutionary war at this juncture would be a war waged by a socialist republic against the bourgeois countries, with the aim—an aim clearly defined and fully approved by the socialist army—of overthrowing the bourgeoisie in other countries. However, we *obviously* cannot set ourselves this aim at the *present* moment. Objectively, we would be fighting now for the liberation of Poland, Lifland and Courland. But no Marxist, without renouncing the principles of Marxism and of socialism generally, can deny that the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the right of nations to self-determination. Our socialist republic has done all it could, and continues to do all it can to give effect to the right to self-determination of Finland, the Ukraine, etc. But if the concrete situation is such that the existence of the socialist republic is being imperilled at the present moment on account of the violation of the right to self-determination of several nations (Poland, Lifland, Courland, etc.), naturally the preservation of the socialist republic has the higher claim.

Consequently, whoever says, "We cannot sign a humiliating, atrocious, etc., peace, betray Poland, and so forth", does not realise that by concluding peace on the condition that Poland is liberated, he would only be strengthening German imperialism against Britain, Belgium, Serbia and other countries *still further*. Peace on the condition of the liberation of Poland, Lifland and Courland would be a "patriotic" peace *from the point of view of Russia*, but would by no means cease to be a peace *with the annexationists*, with the German imperialists.

January 21, 1918. The following should be added to the above theses:

22. The mass strikes in Austria and Germany, and, subsequently, the formation of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies in Berlin and Vienna, and, lastly, beginning from January 18-20, armed clashes and street fighting in Berlin—all this should be regarded as evidence of the fact that the revolution in Germany has begun.

This fact offers us the opportunity, for the time being, of further delaying and dragging out the peace negotiations.

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*Afterword to the Theses on the Question  
of the Immediate Conclusion  
of a Separate and Annexationist Peace*

■

I read the above Theses to a small private meeting of Party functionaries on January 8, 1918. The discussion on them showed three opinions in the Party on this question—about a half those present spoke in favour of revolutionary war (this was sometimes called the “Moscow” point of view because the Moscow Regional Bureau of our Party adopted it earlier than other organisations); then about a quarter were for Comrade Trotsky who proposed to “declare the cessation of hostilities, demobilise the army, send the soldiers home but refrain from signing a treaty”, and, lastly, about a quarter supported me.

The state of affairs now obtaining in the Party reminds me very strongly of the situation in the summer of 1907 when the overwhelming majority of the Bolsheviks favoured the boycott of the Third Duma<sup>5</sup> and I stood side by side with Dan in favour of participation and was subjected to furious attacks for my opportunism. Objectively, the present issue is a complete analogy; as then, the majority of the Party functionaries, proceeding from the very best revolutionary motives and the best Party traditions, allow themselves to be carried away by a “flash” slogan and *do not grasp the new* socio-economic and political situation, do not take into consideration *the change in the conditions* that demands a speedy and abrupt change in tactics. The essence of my argument, today as then, is to make clear that Marxism demands the consideration of objective conditions and their changes, that the question must be presented concretely as applicable to those conditions, that the most significant change that has occurred is the foundation of the Russian Soviet Republic, and the preservation of the republic that has already begun the socialist revolution is most important to us *and to the international socialist movement*; that at the

moment the slogan of revolutionary war proclaimed by Russia would either be an empty phrase and an unsupported demonstration, or would be tantamount, objectively, to falling into the trap set for us by the imperialists, who wish to *inveigle* us into continuing the *imperialist* war while we are still a weak unit, so that the young Soviet Republic might be *crushed* as cheaply as possible.

"I stand by Lenin's old position," exclaimed one young Muscovite (youth is one of the greatest virtues distinguishing that group of speakers). And that same speaker reproached me for repeating the old arguments of the defencists about the improbability of a revolution in Germany.

The whole trouble is that the Muscovites want to stick to the old *tactical* position, and stubbornly refuse to see the *change* that has taken place, the *new objective* situation that has arisen.

The Muscovites, in their zealous repetition of old slogans, have not even taken into consideration the fact that we Bolsheviks have now all become defencists. Having overthrown the bourgeoisie, having denounced and exposed the secret treaties, having proposed peace to all peoples, actually. . . .\*

Written between January 8  
and 11 (21 and 24), 1918

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pp. 451-52

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\* Here the manuscript breaks off.—Ed.

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*Speeches on War and Peace  
at a Meeting of the C.C.  
of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)  
January 11 (24), 1918<sup>6</sup>*

■  
MINUTES

I

Comrade Lenin speaks first and points out that at the meeting on January 8 (21) three standpoints were brought out on this question, and asks whether the question should be discussed point by point on the theses he put forward, or whether a general discussion should be opened. The second alternative is adopted, and Comrade Lenin has the floor.

He begins by setting forth the three standpoints brought out at the previous meeting 1) signing a separate annexationist peace, 2) waging a revolutionary war, and 3) proclaiming the war ended, demobilising the army, but not signing a peace treaty. At the previous meeting, the first standpoint received 15 votes, the second 32 and the third 16.

Comrade Lenin points out that the Bolsheviks have never renounced defence, but this defence and protection of the fatherland must have a definite, concrete context, which exists at the present time, namely, defence of the Socialist Republic against an extremely strong international imperialism. The question is only one of how we should defend our fatherland, the Socialist Republic. The army is excessively fatigued by the war; the horses are in such a state that in the event of an offensive we shall not be able to move the artillery; the Germans are holding such favourable positions on the islands in the Baltic that if they start an offensive they could take Revel and Petrograd with their bare hands. By continuing the war in such conditions, we shall greatly strengthen German imperialism, peace will have to be concluded just the same, but then the peace will be still worse because it is not we who will be concluding it. The peace we are now forced to conclude is undoubtedly an ignominious one, but if war begins, our government will be swept away and peace will be concluded by a different govern-

ment. At present, we are relying not only on the proletariat but also on the poor peasantry, which will abandon us if the war continues. Drawing out the war is in the interest of French, British and American imperialism, and proof of this, for example, is the offer made at Krylenko's headquarters by the Americans to pay 100 rubles for every Russian soldier. Those who take the standpoint of revolutionary war stress that we shall then be engaged in a civil war with German imperialism, and shall thereby awaken revolution in Germany. But Germany, after all, is still only pregnant with revolution, whereas we have already given birth to a quite healthy infant, the Socialist Republic, which we may kill if we start the war. We are in possession of a circular letter of the German Social-Democrats, there is information about the attitude to us of two trends in the Centre, of which one considers that we have been bought, and that the current events in Brest are a farce, with the actors playing out their parts. This section is attacking us for the armistice. The other section of the Kautskyites says that the personal honesty of the leaders of the Bolsheviks is beyond all doubt, but that the Bolsheviks' behaviour is a psychological riddle. We don't know the opinion of the Left-wing Social-Democrats. The British workers are supporting our efforts for peace. Of course, the peace we conclude will be an ignominious one, but we need a breathing-space in order to carry out social reforms (take transport alone); we need to consolidate ourselves, and this takes time. We need to complete the crushing of the bourgeoisie, but for this we need to have both our hands free. Once we have done this, we shall free both our hands, and then we should be able to carry on a revolutionary war against international imperialism. The echelons of the revolutionary volunteer army which have now been formed are the officers of our future army.

What Comrade Trotsky is proposing—an end to the war, refusal to sign a peace treaty and demobilisation of the army—is an international political demonstration. The only thing we achieve by withdrawing our troops is handing over the Estonian Socialist Republic to the Germans. It is said that by concluding peace we are giving a free hand to the Japanese and Americans, who will immediately occupy Vladivostok. By the time they have even reached Irkutsk, we shall have been able to strengthen our Socialist Republic. By sign-

ing a peace treaty we of course betray self-determined Poland, but we retain the Estonian Socialist Republic and win a chance to consolidate our gains. Of course, we make a turn to the right, which leads through a very dirty stable, but we must do it. If the Germans start an offensive, we shall be forced to sign any peace treaty, and then, of course, it will be worse. An indemnity of three thousand million is not too high a price for saving the Socialist Republic. By signing peace now, we give the broad masses a visual demonstration that the imperialists (of Germany, Britain and France), having taken Riga and Baghdad, are continuing to fight, whereas we are developing, the Socialist Republic is developing.

## 2

Comrade Lenin points out that he is not in agreement on some points with his supporters Stalin and Zinoviev.<sup>7</sup> Of course, there is a mass movement in the West, but the revolution there has not yet begun. But if we were to alter our tactics because of that, we should be traitors to international socialism. He does not agree with Zinoviev that the conclusion of peace will for a time weaken the movement in the West. If we believe that the German movement can develop immediately, in the event of an interruption of the peace negotiations, then we must sacrifice ourselves, for the German revolution will have a force much greater than ours. But the whole point is that the movement there has not yet begun, but over here it already has a newborn and loudly shouting infant, and unless we now say clearly that we agree to peace, we shall perish. It is important for us to hold out until the general socialist revolution gets under way, but this we can only achieve by concluding peace.

## 3

Comrade Lenin motions a vote on the proposition that we drag out the signing of a peace treaty in every possible way.

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in N. Lenin (V. Ulyanov),  
*Collected Works*, Vol. XV;  
Item 3, in *Minutes of  
the R.S.D.L.P. C.C.,  
August 1917-February  
1918*, 1929

*Collected Works*, Vol. 36,  
pp. 467-70

## The Revolutionary Phrase<sup>8</sup>

When I said at a Party meeting that the revolutionary phrase about a revolutionary war might ruin our revolution, I was reproached for the sharpness of my polemics. There are, however, moments, when a question must be raised sharply and things given their proper names, the danger being that otherwise irreparable harm may be done to the Party and the revolution.

Revolutionary phrase-making, more often than not, is a disease from which revolutionary parties suffer at times when they constitute, directly or indirectly, a combination, alliance or intermingling of proletarian and petty-bourgeois elements, and when the course of revolutionary events is marked by big, rapid zigzags. By revolutionary phrase-making we mean the repetition of revolutionary slogans irrespective of objective circumstances at a given turn in events, in the given state of affairs obtaining at the time. The slogans are superb, alluring, intoxicating, but there are no grounds for them; such is the nature of the revolutionary phrase.

Let us examine the groups of arguments, the most important of them at least, in favour of a revolutionary war in Russia today, in January and February 1918, and the comparison of this slogan with objective reality will tell us whether the definition I give is correct.

### 1

Our press has always spoken of the need to prepare for a revolutionary war in the event of the victory of socialism in one country with capitalism still in existence in the neighbouring countries. That is indisputable.

The question is—how have those preparations *actually* been made since our October Revolution?

We have prepared in this way: we had to demobilise the army, we were compelled to, compelled by circumstances so obvious, so weighty and so insurmountable that, far from a "trend" or mood having arisen in the Party against demobilisation, there was not a single voice raised against it. Anyone who wants to *give some thought* to the class causes of such an unusual phenomenon as the demobilisation of the army by the Soviet Socialist Republic before the war with a neighbouring imperialist state is finished will without great difficulty discover these causes in the social composition of a backward country with a small-peasant economy, reduced to extreme economic ruin after three years of war. An army of many millions was demobilised and the creation of a Red Army on *volunteer* lines was begun—such are the facts.

Compare these facts with the talk of a revolutionary war in January and February 1918, and the nature of the revolutionary phrase will be clear to you.

If this "championing" of a revolutionary war by, say, the Petrograd and Moscow organisations had not been an empty phrase we should have had other *facts* between October and January; we should have seen a determined struggle on their part against demobilisation. But there has been nothing of the sort.

We should have seen the Petrograders and Muscovites sending *tens of thousands* of agitators and soldiers to the front and should have received daily reports from there about their struggle against demobilisation, about the successes of their struggle, about the halting of demobilisation.

There has been nothing of the sort.

We should have had hundreds of reports of regiments forming into a Red Army, using terrorism to halt demobilisation, renewing defences and fortifications against a possible offensive by German imperialism.

There has been nothing of the sort. Demobilisation is in full swing. The old army does not exist. The new army is only just being born.

Anyone who does not want to comfort himself with mere words, bombastic declarations and exclamations must see that the "slogan" of revolutionary war in February 1918 is the emptiest of phrases, that it has nothing real, nothing objective behind it. This slogan today *contains* nothing but

sentiment, wishes, indignation and resentment. And a slogan with such a content is called a revolutionary phrase.

Matters as they stand with our own Party and Soviet power as a whole, matters as they stand with the Bolsheviks of Petrograd and Moscow show that *so far* we have not succeeded in getting beyond the first steps in forming a volunteer Red Army. To hide from this unpleasant fact—and fact it is—behind a screen of words and at the same time not only do nothing to halt demobilisation but even *raise no objection* to it, is to be intoxicated with the sound of words.

A typical substantiation of what has been said is, for instance, the fact that in the Central Committee of our Party *the majority* of the most prominent opponents of a separate peace voted *against* a revolutionary war, voted against it both in January and in February.<sup>9</sup> What does that mean? It means that everybody who is not afraid to look truth in the face recognises the impossibility of a revolutionary war.

In such cases the truth is evaded by putting forward, or attempting to put forward, arguments. Let us examine them.

## 2

Argument No. 1. In 1792 France suffered economic ruin to no less an extent, but a revolutionary war cured everything, was an inspiration to everyone, gave rise to enthusiasm and carried everything before it. Only those who do not believe in the revolution, only opportunists could oppose a revolutionary war in our, more profound revolution.

Let us compare this reason, or this argument, with the facts. It is a fact that in France at the end of the eighteenth century the *economic* basis of the new, higher mode of production was *first created*, and then, as a result, as a superstructure, the powerful revolutionary army appeared. France abandoned feudalism before other countries, swept it away *in the course of a few years* of victorious revolution, and led a people who were not fatigued from any war, who had won land and freedom, who had been made stronger by the elimination of feudalism, led them to war against a number of economically and politically backward peoples.

Compare this to contemporary Russia. Incredible fatigue from war. A new economic system, superior to the organised



state capitalism of technically well-equipped Germany, *does not yet exist*. It is only being founded. Our peasants have only a law on the socialisation of the land, but not one single year of free (from the landowner and from the torment of war) work. Our workers have begun to throw the capitalists overboard but have not yet managed to organise production, arrange for the exchange of products, arrange the grain supply and *increase* productivity of labour.

This is what we advanced towards, this is the road we took, but it is obvious that the new and higher economic system *does not yet exist*.

Conquered feudalism, consolidated bourgeois freedom, and a well-fed peasant opposed to feudal countries—such was the economic basis of the “miracles” in the sphere of war in 1792 and 1793.

A country of small peasants, hungry and tormented by war, only just beginning to heal its wounds, opposed to technically and organisationally higher productivity of labour—such is the objective situation at the beginning of 1918.

That is why any reminiscing over 1792, etc., is nothing but a revolutionary phrase. People repeat slogans, words, war cries, but are afraid to analyse objective reality.

### 3

Argument No. 2. Germany “cannot attack”, *her* growing revolution will not allow it.

The Germans “cannot attack” was an argument repeated millions of times in January and at the beginning of February 1918 by opponents of a separate peace. The more cautious of them said that there was a 25 to 33 per cent probability (approximately, of course) of the Germans being unable to attack.

The facts refuted these calculations. The opponents of a separate peace here, too, frequently brush aside facts, fearing their iron logic.

What was the source of this mistake, which real revolutionaries (and not revolutionaries of sentiment) should be able to recognise and analyse?

Was it because we, in general, manoeuvred and agitated *in connection with* the peace negotiations? It was not. We

had to manoeuvre and agitate. But we also had to choose "our own time" for manoeuvres and agitation—while it was still possible to manoeuvre and agitate—and also for calling a halt to all manoeuvres when the issue became acute.

The source of the mistake was that our relations of revolutionary co-operation with the German revolutionary workers were turned into an empty phrase. We helped and are helping the German revolutionary workers in every way we can—fraternisation, agitation, the publication of secret treaties, etc. That was help in deeds, real help.

But the declaration of some of our comrades—"the Germans cannot attack"—was an empty phrase. We have only just been through a revolution in our own country. We all know very well why it was easier for a revolution to *start* in Russia than in Europe. We saw that we could not check the offensive of Russian imperialism in June 1917, although our revolution had not only begun, had not only overthrown the monarchy, but had set up Soviets everywhere. We saw, we knew, we explained to the workers—wars are conducted by governments. To stop a bourgeois war it is necessary to overthrow the bourgeois government.

The declaration "the Germans cannot attack" was, therefore, tantamount to declaring "we know that the German Government will be overthrown *within the next few weeks*". Actually we did not, and could not, know this, and for this reason the declaration was an empty phrase.

It is one thing to be certain that the German revolution is maturing and to do your part towards helping it mature, to serve it as far as possible by *work*, agitation and fraternisation, anything you like, but help the maturing of the revolution by *work*. That is what revolutionary proletarian internationalism means.

It is another thing to declare, directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, that the German revolution is *already mature* (although it obviously is not) and to base your tactics on it. There is not a grain of revolutionism in that, there is nothing in it but phrase-making.

Such is the source of the error contained in the "proud", "striking", "spectacular", "resounding" declaration "the Germans cannot attack".

The assertion that "we are helping the German revolution by resisting German imperialism, and are thus bringing nearer Liebknecht's victory over Wilhelm"<sup>10</sup> is nothing but a variation of the same high-sounding nonsense.

It stands to reason that victory by Liebknecht—which will be possible and inevitable when the German revolution reaches maturity—would deliver us from all international difficulties, including revolutionary war. Liebknecht's victory would deliver us from the consequences of any foolish act of ours. But surely that does not justify foolish acts?

Does any sort of "resistance" to German imperialism help the German revolution? Anyone who cares to think a little, or even to recall the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, will quite easily realise that resistance to reaction helps the revolution only when it is *expedient*. During a half century of the revolutionary movement in Russia we have experienced many cases of resistance to reaction that were not expedient. We Marxists have always been proud that we determined the expediency of any form of struggle by a precise calculation of the mass forces and class relationships. We have said that an insurrection is not always expedient; unless the prerequisites exist among the masses it is a gamble; we have often condemned the most heroic forms of resistance by individuals as inexpedient and harmful from the point of view of the revolution. In 1907, on the basis of bitter experience we rejected resistance to participation in the Third Duma as inexpedient, etc., etc.

To help the German revolution we must either limit ourselves to propaganda, agitation and fraternisation as long as the forces are not strong enough for a firm, serious, decisive blow in an open military or insurrectionary clash, or we must accept that clash, *if we are sure* it will not help the enemy.

It is clear to everyone (except those intoxicated with empty phrases) that to undertake a serious insurrectionary or military clash *knowing* that we have no forces, *knowing* that we have no army, is a gamble that will not help the German workers but will make their struggle more difficult and make matters easier for their enemy and for our enemy.

There is yet another argument that is so childishly ridiculous that I should never have believed it possible if I had not heard it with my own ears.

"Back in October, didn't the opportunists say that we had no forces, no troops, no machine-guns and no equipment, but these things all appeared during the struggle, when the struggle of class against class began. They will also make their appearance in the struggle of the proletariat of Russia against the capitalists of Germany, the German proletariat will come to our help."

As matters stood in October, we had made a precise calculation of the *mass* forces. We not only thought, we *knew* with certainty, from the experience of the *mass* elections to the Soviets, that the overwhelming majority of the workers and soldiers had *already* come over to our side in September and in early October. We knew, even if only from the voting at the Democratic Conference,<sup>11</sup> that the coalition had also lost the support of the peasantry—and that meant that our cause had *already* won.

The following were the *objective* conditions for the October insurrectionary struggle:

1) there was no longer any bludgeon over the heads of the soldiers—it was abolished in February 1917<sup>12</sup> (Germany has not yet reached "her" February);

2) the soldiers, like the workers, had already had enough of the coalition and had finished their conscious, planned, heartfelt *withdrawal* from it.

This, and this alone, determined the *correctness of the slogan* "for an insurrection" *in October* (the slogan would have been incorrect in July, when we did *not* advance it).

The mistake of the opportunists of October<sup>13</sup> was not their "concern" for objective conditions (only children could think it was) but their *incorrect appraisal of facts*—they got hold of trivialities and did not see the *main thing*, that the Soviets had come over from conciliation to us.

To compare an armed clash with Germany (that has not yet experienced "her" February or her "July", to say nothing of October), with a Germany that has a *monarchist*, bourgeois-imperialist government—to compare that with the October insurrectionary struggle against the enemies of the

Soviets, the Soviets that had been maturing since February 1917 and had reached maturity in September and October, is such childishness that it is only a subject for ridicule. Such is the absurdity to which people are led by empty phrases!

## 6

Here is another sort of argument. "But Germany will strangle us economically with a separate peace treaty, she will take away coal and grain and will enslave us."

A very wise argument—we must accept an armed clash, *without an army*, even though that clash is certain to result not only in our enslavement, but also in our strangulation, the seizure of grain without any compensation, putting us in the position of Serbia or Belgium; we have to accept that, because *otherwise* we shall get an unfavourable treaty, Germany will take from us 6,000 or 12,000 million in tribute by instalments, will take grain for machines, etc.

O heroes of the revolutionary phrase! In renouncing the "enslavement" to the imperialists they *modestly* pass over in silence the fact that it is necessary to *defeat* imperialism to be completely delivered from enslavement.

We are accepting an unfavourable treaty and a separate peace knowing that *today* we are not yet ready for a revolutionary war, that we have to bide our time (as we did when we tolerated Kerensky's<sup>14</sup> bondage, tolerated the bondage of our own bourgeoisie from July to October), we must wait until we are stronger. Therefore, *if there is a chance* of obtaining the most unfavourable separate peace, we *absolutely must accept* it in the interests of the socialist revolution, which is *still* weak (since the maturing revolution in Germany has not *yet* come to our help, to the help of the Russians). Only if a separate peace is *absolutely* impossible shall we have to fight immediately—*not because it will be correct tactics, but because we shall have no choice*. If it proves impossible there will be no occasion for a dispute over tactics. There will be nothing but the inevitability of the most furious resistance. But as long as we have a choice we must choose a separate peace and an extremely unfavourable treaty, because that will still be a hundred times better than the position of Belgium.<sup>15</sup>

Month by month we are growing stronger, although we are today still weak. Month by month the international socialist revolution is maturing in Europe, although it is not yet fully mature. Therefore . . . therefore, "revolutionaries" (God save us from them) argue that we must accept battle when German imperialism is *obviously* stronger than we are but is *weakening* month by month (because of the slow but certain maturing of the revolution in Germany).

The "revolutionaries" of sentiment argue magnificently, they argue superbly!

## 7

The last argument, the most specious and most widespread, is that "this obscene peace is a disgrace, it is betrayal of Latvia, Poland, Courland and Lithuania".

Is it any wonder that the Russian *bourgeoisie* (and their hangers-on, the *Novy Luch*, *Dyelo Naroda* and *Novaya Zhizn*<sup>16</sup> gang) are the most zealous in elaborating this allegedly internationalist argument?

No, it is no wonder, for this argument is a trap into which the bourgeoisie are deliberately dragging the Russian Bolsheviks, and into which some of them are falling unwittingly, because of their love of phrases.

Let us examine the argument from the standpoint of theory; which should be put first, the right of nations to self-determination, or socialism?

Socialism should.

Is it permissible, because of a contravention of the right of nations to self-determination, to allow the Soviet Socialist Republic to be devoured, to expose it to the blows of imperialism at a time when imperialism is obviously stronger and the Soviet Republic obviously weaker?

No, it is not permissible—that is *bourgeois* and not socialist politics.

Further, would peace on the condition that Poland, Lithuania and Courland are returned "to us" be *less* disgraceful, be any less an annexationist peace?

From the point of view of the Russian bourgeois, *it would*.

From the point of view of the socialist-internationalist, *it would not*.

Because if German imperialism set Poland free (which at one time some *bourgeois* in Germany desired), it would squeeze Serbia, Belgium, etc., *all the more*.

When the Russian bourgeoisie wail against the "obscene" peace, they are correctly expressing their class interests.

But when some Bolsheviks (suffering from the phrase disease) repeat that argument, it is simply very sad.

Examine the *facts* relating to the behaviour of the Anglo-French bourgeoisie. They are doing everything they can to drag us into the war against Germany now, they are offering us millions of blessings, boots, potatoes, shells, locomotives (on credit . . . that is not "enslavement", don't fear that! It is "only" credit!). They want us to fight against Germany *now*.

It is obvious why they should want this; they want it because, in the first place, we should engage part of the German forces. And secondly, because Soviet power might collapse most easily from an untimely armed clash with German imperialism.

The Anglo-French bourgeoisie are setting a trap for us: please be kind enough to go and fight *now*, our gain will be magnificent. The Germans will plunder you, will "do well" in the East, will agree to cheaper terms in the West, and furthermore, Soviet power will be swept away. . . . Please do fight, Bolshevik "allies", we shall help you!

And the "Left" (God save us from them) Bolsheviks are walking into the trap by reciting the most revolutionary phrases. . . .

Oh yes, one of the manifestations of the traces of the petty-bourgeois spirit is surrender to revolutionary phrases. This is an old story that is perennially new. . . .

## 8

In the summer of 1907 our Party also experienced an attack of the revolutionary phrase that was, in some respects, analogous.

St. Petersburg and Moscow, nearly all the Bolsheviks were in favour of boycotting the Third Duma; they were guided by "sentiment" instead of an objective analysis and walked into a trap.

The disease has recurred.

The times are more difficult. The issue is a million times more important. To fall ill at such a time is to risk ruining the revolution.

We must fight against the revolutionary phrase, we have to fight it, we absolutely must fight it, so that at some future time people will not say of us the bitter truth that "a revolutionary phrase about revolutionary war ruined the revolution".

*Pravda* No. 31, February 21, 1918  
Signed: *Karpov*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 19-29



## The Itch<sup>17</sup>

The itch is a painful disease. And when people are seized by the itch of revolutionary phrase-making the mere sight of this disease causes intolerable suffering.

Truths that are simple, clear, comprehensible, obvious and apparently indisputable to all who belong to the working people are distorted by those suffering from the above-mentioned kind of itch. Often this distortion arises from the best, the noblest and loftiest impulses, "merely" owing to a failure to digest well-known theoretical truths or a childishly crude, schoolboyishly slavish repetition of them irrelevantly (people don't know "what's what"). But the itch does not cease to be harmful on that account.

What, for example, could be more conclusive and clear than the following truth: a government that gave Soviet power, land, workers' control and *peace* to a people tortured by three years of predatory war would be invincible? Peace is the chief thing. If, after *conscientious* efforts to obtain a general and just peace, it turned out in actual fact that it was impossible to obtain this *at the present time*, every peasant would understand that one would have to adopt not a general peace, but a separate and unjust peace. Every peasant, even the most ignorant and illiterate, would understand this and *appreciate* a government that gave him even such a peace.

Bolsheviks must have been stricken by the vile itch of phrase-making to forget this and evoke the peasants' most legitimate dissatisfaction with them when this itch has led to a new war being launched by predatory Germany against overtired Russia! The ludicrous and pitiful "theoretical" trivialities and sophistries under which this itch is disguised I have pointed out in an article entitled "The Revo-

lutionary Phrase" (*Pravda*, February 21[8]).\* I would not be recalling this if the same itch had not cropped up today (what a catching disease!) in a new place.

To explain how this has happened, I shall cite first of all a little example, quite simply and clearly, without any "theory"—if the itch claims to be "theory" it is intolerable—and without erudite words or anything that the masses cannot understand.

Let us suppose Kalyayev,<sup>18</sup> in order to kill a tyrant and monster, acquires a revolver from an absolute villain, a scoundrel and robber, by promising him bread, money and vodka for the service rendered.

Can one condemn Kalyayev for his "deal with a robber" for the sake of obtaining a deadly weapon? Every sensible person will answer "no". If there is nowhere else for Kalyayev to get a revolver, and if his intention is really an honourable one (the killing of a tyrant, not killing for plunder), then he should not be reproached but commended for acquiring a revolver in this way.

But if a robber, in order to commit murder for the sake of plunder, acquires a revolver from another robber in return for money, vodka or bread, can one compare (not to speak of identifying) *such* a "deal with a robber" with the deal made by Kalyayev?

No, everyone who is not out of his mind or infected by the itch will agree that one cannot. Any peasant who saw an "intellectual" disavowing such an obvious truth by means of phrase-making would say: you, sir, ought not to be managing the state but should join the company of wordy buffoons or should simply put yourself in a steam bath and get rid of the itch.

If Kerensky, a representative of the ruling class of the bourgeoisie, i.e., the exploiters, makes a deal with the Anglo-French exploiters to get arms and potatoes from them and at the same time conceals from the people the treaties which promise (if successful) to give one robber Armenia, Galicia and Constantinople, and another robber Baghdad, Syria and so forth, is it difficult to understand that this deal is a predatory, swindling, vile deal on the part of Kerensky and his friends?

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\* See pp. 21-31.—*Ed.*

No, this is not difficult to understand. Any peasant, even the most ignorant and illiterate, will understand it.

But if a representative of the exploited, oppressed class, after this class has overthrown the exploiters, and published and annulled all the secret and annexationist treaties, is subjected to a bandit attack by the imperialists of Germany, can he be condemned for making a "deal" with the Anglo-French robbers, for obtaining arms and potatoes from them in return for money or timber, etc.? Can one find such a deal dishonourable, disgraceful, dirty?

No, one cannot. Every sensible man will understand this and will ridicule as silly fools those who with a "lordly" and learned mien undertake to prove that "the masses will not understand" the difference between the robber war of the imperialist Kerensky (and his dishonourable deals with robbers for a division of jointly stolen spoils) and the *Kalyayev* deal of the Bolshevik Government with the Anglo-French robbers in order to get arms and potatoes to repel the German robber.

Every sensible man will say: to obtain weapons by purchase from a robber for the purpose of robbery is disgusting and villainous, but to buy weapons from the same robber for the purpose of a just war against an aggressor is something quite legitimate. Only mincing young ladies and affected youths who have "read books" and derived nothing but affectation from them can see something "dirty" in it. Apart from people of that category only those who have contracted the itch can fall into such an "error".

But will the German worker understand the difference between Kerensky's purchase of weapons from the Anglo-French robbers for the purpose of annexing Constantinople from the Turks, Galicia from the Austrians and Eastern Prussia from the Germans—and the Bolsheviks' purchase of weapons from the same robbers for the purpose of repelling Wilhelm when he has moved troops against socialist Russia which proposed an honourable and just peace to all, against Russia which has declared an end to the war?

It must be supposed that the German worker will "understand" this, firstly because he is intelligent and educated, and secondly because he is used to a neat and cultured life, and suffers neither from the Russian itch in general,

nor from the itch of revolutionary phrase-making in particular.

Is there a difference between killing for the purpose of robbery and the killing of an aggressor?

Is there a difference between a war of two groups of plunderers for a division of spoils and a just war for liberation from the attack of a plunderer against a people that has overthrown the plunderers?

Does not the appraisal whether I act well or badly in acquiring weapons from a robber depend on the end and object of these weapons? On their use for a war that is base and dishonourable or for one that is just and honourable?

Ugh! The itch is a nasty disease. And hard is the occupation of a man who has to give a steam bath to those infected with it. . . .

P.S. The North Americans in their war of liberation against England at the end of the eighteenth century got help from Spain and France, who were her competitors and just as much colonial robbers as England. It is said that there were "Left Bolsheviks" to be found who contemplated writing a "learned work" on the "dirty deal" of these Americans. . . .

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## Peace or War?

The Germans' reply, as the reader sees, sets us peace terms still more onerous than those of Brest-Litovsk. Nevertheless, I am absolutely convinced that only complete intoxication by revolutionary phrase-making can impel some people to refuse to sign these terms. It was precisely on that account that, by articles in *Pravda* (signed *Karpov*) on "The Revolutionary Phrase" and on "The Itch",\* I began a relentless struggle against revolutionary phrase-making, which I saw and see now as the greatest menace to our Party (and, consequently, to the revolution as well). On many occasions in history revolutionary parties which were strictly carrying out revolutionary slogans became infected with revolutionary phrase-making and perished as a result.

Hitherto I have been trying to persuade the Party to fight against revolutionary phrase-making. Now I must do this publicly. For—alas!—my very worst suppositions have proved justified.

On January 8, 1918, at a meeting of about 60 of the chief Party workers of Petrograd I read out my "Theses on the Question of the Immediate Conclusion of a Separate and Annexationist Peace" (17 theses, which will be published tomorrow). In these theses (paragraph 13) I declared war against revolutionary phrase-making, doing so in the mildest and most comradely fashion (I now profoundly condemn this mildness of mine). I said that the policy of refusing the proposed peace "might perhaps answer the human yearning for the beautiful, dramatic and striking, but that it would totally disregard the objective balance of class forces and material factors at the present stage of the socialist revolution now under way".\*\*

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\* See pp. 21-31, 32-35.—*Ed.*

\*\* See pp. 11-12.—*Ed.*

In the 17th thesis I wrote that if we refuse to sign the proposed peace, "very heavy defeats will compel Russia to conclude a still more unfavourable separate peace".

Things have turned out still worse, for our army, which is retreating and demobilising, is refusing to fight at all.

Under such conditions, only unrestrained phrase-making is capable of pushing Russia into war at the present time and I personally, of course, would not remain for a second either in the government or in the Central Committee of our Party if the policy of phrase-making were to gain the upper hand.

The bitter truth has now revealed itself with such terrible clarity that it is impossible not to see it. The entire bourgeoisie in Russia is rejoicing and gloating over the arrival of the Germans. Only those who are blind or intoxicated by phrases can close their eyes to the fact that the policy of a revolutionary war (*without an army...*) brings grist to the mill of our bourgeoisie. In Dvinsk, Russian officers are already going about wearing their shoulder-straps.

In Rezhitsa, the bourgeoisie exultantly welcomed the Germans. In Petrograd, on Nevsky Prospekt, and in bourgeois newspapers (*Rech, Dyelo Naroda, Novy Luch*, etc.), they are licking their lips with delight at the impending overthrow of Soviet power by the Germans.

Let everyone know: he who is against an immediate, even though extremely onerous peace, is endangering Soviet power.

We are compelled to endure an onerous peace. It will not halt the revolution in Germany and in Europe. We shall set about preparing a revolutionary army, not by phrases and exclamations (after the manner of those who since January 7 have done nothing even to halt our fleeing troops), *but by organisational work*, by deeds, by the creation of a proper, powerful army of the whole people.

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■  
*Speeches at a Meeting of the C.C.  
of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)  
February 23, 1918<sup>19</sup>*  
■

MINUTES

1

Comrade Lenin believes that the policy of revolutionary phrases is at an end. If this policy is continued, he will resign both from the government and from the Central Committee. An army is needed for a revolutionary war, and it does not exist. That means the terms must be accepted.

2

*Comrade Lenin.* Some have reproached me for coming out with an ultimatum. I put it as a last resort. It is a mockery for our Central Committee members to talk of an international civil war. There is a civil war in Russia, but not in Germany. Our agitation remains. We are agitating not by words, but by the revolution. That too remains. Stalin is wrong when he says that we need not sign. These terms must be signed. If you don't sign them, you will sign the Soviet power's death warrant within three weeks. These terms do not infringe on the Soviet power. I have not the slightest hesitation. I put the ultimatum not in order to withdraw it. I don't want revolutionary phrases. The German revolution has not yet matured. This will take months. The terms must be accepted. If there is another ultimatum later, it will be in a new situation.

3

*Comrade Lenin.* I also consider it essential to prepare for a revolutionary war. The treaty can be interpreted, and we shall interpret it. The demobilisation there is in a purely

military sense. Before the war, we also had an army. A revolutionary war needs serious preparation. I do not doubt for a second that the masses stand for peace.

4

Lenin proposes the following for voting: (1) Are the German proposals to be accepted immediately? (2) Is a revolutionary war to be prepared for immediately? (3) Is a poll of Soviet electors in Petrograd and Moscow to be taken immediately?

5

Comrade Lomov asks whether Vladimir Ilyich allows of silent or open agitation against signing the peace.

Comrade Lenin replies in the affirmative.

In view of the statement by several members of the C.C. that they are resigning all their responsible Soviet and Party posts, Y. M. Sverdlov proposes that members of the C.C. remain at their posts until the Congress, and carry on their agitation within the Party.

Comrade Lenin is in favour of discussing the question raised by Sverdlov as, first, there are three days to go before the signing and, second, twelve days for ratification. Consequently, it will be possible to canvass the Party and, if it comes out against signing, ratification will not follow; but as time is short today, he suggests postponing the question until tomorrow.

7

Comrade Stalin asks whether resignation from their posts does not in effect mean withdrawal from the Party.

Comrade Lenin points out that resignation from the C.C. does not mean withdrawal from the Party.



Comrade Lenin suggests that the comrades should leave the sessions during the voting and should not sign any documents, so as not to bear any responsibility, but should not give up their work in the Council.

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pp. 479-81

## Where Is the Mistake?

The outstanding and most responsible opponents of the conclusion of a separate peace on the Brest terms have set out the essence of their arguments in the following form:

||| ".....  
||| .....  
||| .....,,

Here are advanced the most concentrated, the most important arguments, set out almost in the form of a resolution. For convenience in analysing the arguments, we have numbered each proposition separately.

When one examines these arguments, the authors' main error immediately strikes the eye. They do not say a word about the concrete conditions of a revolutionary war at the present moment. The chief and fundamental consideration for the supporters of peace, namely, that it is impossible for us to fight *at the present time*, is altogether evaded. In reply—in reply, say, to my theses,\* well known to the authors since January 8—they put forward exclusively *general* considerations, abstractions, which inevitably turn into empty phrases. For every general historical statement applied to a particular case without a special analysis of the conditions of that particular case becomes an empty phrase.

Take the first proposition. Its whole "point" is a reproach, an exclamation, a declamation, an effort to "shame" the opponent, an appeal to sentiment. See what bad people you are, they say: the imperialists are attacking you, "proclaiming" as their aim the suppression of the proletarian revolution, and you reply by agreeing to conclude peace! But our argument, as the authors are aware, is that by rejecting an onerous peace we *actually make it easier* for the

\* See pp. 7-15.—Ed.

enemy to suppress the proletarian revolution. And this conclusion of ours is reinforced (for example, in my theses) by a number of very concrete indications about the state of the army, its class composition, etc. The authors have avoided everything concrete and the result they arrive at is an empty phrase. For if the enemy are "proclaiming" that their aim is to suppress the revolution, then he is a bad revolutionary who by choosing an admittedly impossible form of resistance helps to achieve a transition from the "proclamation" to the *realisation* of the enemy's aims.

Second argument: "reproaches" are being intensified. You, they say, agree to peace at the first onslaught of the enemy. . . . Do the authors seriously suppose that this can be convincing for those who ever since January, long before the "onslaught", analysed the relationship of forces and the concrete conditions of the war at that time? Is it not phrase-making if "reproach" is regarded as argument against analysis??

Agreeing to peace under the present conditions, we are told, "is a surrender of the foremost contingent of the international proletariat to the international bourgeoisie".

Again an empty phrase. General truths are inflated in such a way that they become untrue and are turned into declamation. The German bourgeoisie is not "international", for the Anglo-French capitalists *welcome* our refusal to conclude peace. "*Surrender*", generally speaking, is a bad thing, but this praiseworthy truth does not decide every individual proposition, for refusal to fight under obviously unfavourable conditions can also be called surrender, but *such* surrender is obligatory for a serious revolutionary. Agreeing to enter the Third Duma, the concluding of peace with Stolypin,<sup>20</sup> as the "Left" declamationists called it at that time, was also, generally speaking, a surrender.

We are the foremost contingent in the sense of the revolutionary beginning, that is indisputable, but in order to be the foremost contingent in the sense of a military clash with the forces of foremost imperialism, that. . . .\*

Written February 23 or 24, 1918

First published in 1929  
in *Lenin Miscellany XI*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 48-50

\* Here the manuscript breaks off.—Ed.

■  
*Report at the Meeting  
of the All-Russia C.E.C.  
February 24, 1918*<sup>21</sup>  
■

Comrades, the terms put to us by the representatives of German imperialism are unprecedentedly severe, immeasurably oppressive, predatory terms. The German imperialists, taking advantage of the weakness of Russia, have their knee on our chest. Not to conceal from you the bitter truth of which I am deeply convinced, the situation being what it is, I must tell you that we have no other way out than to subscribe to these terms. And that any other proposal means to incur, either voluntarily or involuntarily, still worse evils and further (if one can speak here of degrees) complete subjection of the Soviet Republic, its enslavement to German imperialism, or it is a pitiful attempt at using words to evade a terrible, immeasurably cruel, but undeniable reality. Comrades, you all know very well, and many of you know it from personal experience, that the burden Russia had to bear in the imperialist war was for indisputable reasons that everyone can understand more terrible and severe than that endured by other countries. You know, therefore, that our army was martyred and tortured by the war as was no other, that all the slanders cast at us by the bourgeois press and the parties which supported it, or which were hostile to the Soviet government, alleging that the Bolsheviks were demoralising the troops, are nonsense. I shall remind you once again of the proclamation which Krylenko, while still an ensign under Kerensky, distributed to the troops when he left for Petrograd, and which was reprinted in *Pravda*, and in which he said: we do not urge upon you any kind of mutiny, we urge upon you organised political actions; strive to be as organised as possible. Such was the propaganda of one of the most ardent representatives of the Bolsheviks, one who was most closely connected

with the army. Everything that could be done to hold together this unprecedentedly, immeasurably fatigued army, and to make it stronger, was done. And if we see now, though I have entirely refrained, during the last month, for example, from setting out my view, which could seem pessimistic, if we have seen that, as regards the army during the past month, we have said all that could be said, and done all that could be done, to ease the situation, reality has shown us that after three years of war our army is altogether unable and unwilling to fight. That is the basic cause, simple, obvious, and in the highest degree bitter and painful, but absolutely clear, why, living side by side with an imperialist plunderer, we are compelled to sign peace terms when he puts his knee on our chest. That is why I say, fully conscious of the responsibility I bear, and repeat that no single member of the Soviet government has the right to evade this responsibility. Of course, it is pleasant and easy to tell the workers, peasants and soldiers, as it has been pleasant and easy to observe, how the revolution has gone forward after the October uprising, but when we have to acknowledge the bitter, painful, undeniable truth—the impossibility of a revolutionary war—it is impermissible now to evade this responsibility and we must shoulder it frankly. I consider myself obliged, I consider it essential to fulfil my duty and state plainly how things are, and therefore I am convinced that the class of toilers of Russia, who know what war is, what it has cost the working people and the degree of exhaustion to which it has led them, that—I do not doubt it for a moment—they along with us recognise the unprecedented severity, grossness and vileness of these peace terms and nevertheless approve our conduct. They will say: you undertook to propose the terms of an immediate and just peace, you should have utilised every possibility of delaying peace in order to see whether other countries would join in, whether the European proletariat, without whose help we cannot achieve a lasting socialist victory, would come to our aid. We did everything possible to protract the negotiations, we did even more than was possible; what we did was that after the Brest negotiations we declared the state of war at an end, confident as many of us were that the situation in Germany would not allow her to make a brutal and savage attack on Russia.

This time we have had to endure a heavy defeat, and we have to be able to look the defeat straight in the face. Yes, hitherto the revolution has proceeded along an ascending line from victory to victory; now it has suffered a heavy defeat. The German working-class movement, which began so rapidly, has been interrupted for a time. We know that its main causes have not been abolished, and that they will grow and will inevitably extend because the excruciating war is being drawn out, because the bestiality of imperialism is being exposed ever more fully and obviously, and is opening the eyes of masses of people who might seem to be most remote from politics or incapable of understanding socialist policy. That is why this desperate, tragic situation has arisen, which compels us to accept peace now and will compel the masses of the working people to say: yes, they acted correctly, they did all they could to propose a just peace, they had to submit to a most oppressive and unfortunate peace because the country had no other way out. Their situation is such that they are forced to wage a life-and-death struggle against the Soviet Republic; if they are unable now to continue their intention of advancing against Petrograd and Moscow it is only because they are tied up in a bloody and predatory war with Britain, and because there is an internal crisis as well. When it is pointed out to me that the German imperialists may present us with still worse conditions tomorrow or the day after, I say that we must be prepared for that; naturally, living side by side with bestial plunderers, the Soviet Republic must expect to be attacked. If at present we cannot reply by war it is because the forces are lacking, because war can be waged only together with the people. If the successes of the revolution cause many comrades to say the opposite, that is not a mass phenomenon, it does not express the will and opinion of the real masses. If you go to the class of real toilers, to the workers and peasants, you will hear only one answer, that we are quite unable to wage war, we lack the physical strength, we are choked in blood, as one of the soldiers put it. These masses will understand us and approve of our concluding this forced and unprecedentedly onerous peace. It may be that the respite needed for an upswing of the masses will take no little time, but those who had to live through the long years of revolutionary battles in the pe-

riod of the upswing of the revolution and the period when the revolution fell into decline, when revolutionary calls to the masses obtained no response from them, know that all the same the revolution always arose afresh. Therefore we say: yes, at present the masses are not in a state to wage war, at present every representative of the Soviet government is obliged to tell the people to its face the whole bitter truth. The time of unheard-of hardship and of three years of war and of the desperate disruption left by tsarism will pass away, and the people will recover its strength and find itself capable of resistance. At present the oppressor confronts us; it is best, of course, to answer oppression by a revolutionary war, by an uprising, but, unfortunately, history has shown that it is not always possible to answer oppression by an uprising. But to refrain from an uprising does not mean refraining from the revolution. Do not succumb to the provocation coming from the bourgeois newspapers, the enemies of Soviet power. Indeed, they have nothing except talk about "an obscene peace" and cries of "shame!" about this peace, but in fact this bourgeoisie greets the German conquerors with delight. They say: "Now, at last, the Germans will come and restore order," that is what they want and so they bait us with cries of "an obscene peace, a shameful peace". They want the Soviet government to give battle, an unheard-of battle, knowing that we lack strength, and they are dragging us into complete enslavement to the German imperialists in order to do a deal with the German gendarmes but they express only their own class interests, because they know that the Soviet government is growing stronger. These voices, these cries against peace, are in my view the best proof of the fact that those who reject this peace have not only been consoling themselves with unjustified illusions but have succumbed to provocation. No, we must look the disastrous truth squarely in the face: before us is the oppressor with his knee on our chest, and we shall fight with all the means of revolutionary struggle. At present, however, we are in a desperately difficult situation, our ally cannot hasten to our aid, the international proletariat cannot come just now, but it will come. This revolutionary movement, which at present has no possibility of offering armed resistance to the

enemy, is rising and it will offer resistance later, but offer it it will. (*Applause.*)

A brief report of this speech was published on February 25, 1918 in *Pravda* No. 35

First published in full in 1926 in N. Lenin (V. Ulyanov), *Collected Works*, Vol. XX, Part II

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 43-47



■  
*From An Unfortunate Peace*  
■

It is incredibly, unprecedentedly hard to sign an unfortunate, immeasurably severe, infinitely humiliating peace when the strong has the weak by the throat. But it is impermissible to give way to despair, impermissible to forget that history has examples of still greater humiliations, still more unfortunate, onerous peace terms. Yet even so, the peoples crushed by bestially cruel conquerors were able to recover and rise again.

Napoleon I crushed and humiliated Prussia immeasurably more heavily than Wilhelm is now crushing and humiliating Russia.<sup>22</sup> For a number of years Napoleon I was completely victorious on the continent; his victory over Prussia was much more decisive than Wilhelm's victory over Russia. Yet after a few years Prussia recovered and in a war of liberation, not without the aid of robber states that waged against Napoleon by no means a war of liberation but an imperialist war, threw off the Napoleonic yoke.

Napoleon's imperialist wars continued for many years, took up a whole epoch and exhibited an extremely complex network of imperialist\* relationships interwoven with national liberation movements. And as a result, through all this epoch, unusually rich in wars and tragedies (tragedies of whole peoples), history went forward from feudalism to "free" capitalism.

History is now advancing still more swiftly, the tragedies of whole nations that are being crushed or have been crushed by imperialist war are immeasurably more terrible. The interweaving of imperialist and national liberation trends,

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\* I call here imperialism the plunder of foreign countries in general and an imperialist war the war of plunderers for the division of such booty.

movements and aspirations is also in evidence, with the immense difference that the national liberation movements are immeasurably weaker and the imperialist ones immeasurably stronger. But history goes steadily forward, and in the depths of all the advanced countries there is maturing—despite everything—the socialist revolution, a revolution infinitely deeper, closer to the people and more powerful than the previous bourgeois revolution.

Hence, again and yet again: of all things the most impermissible is despair. The peace terms are intolerably severe. Nevertheless history will come into its own; to our aid will come—even if not so quickly as we should like—the steadily maturing socialist revolution in other countries.

The plunderer has besieged us, oppressed and humiliated us—we are capable of enduring all these burdens. We are not alone in the world. We have friends, supporters, very loyal helpers. They are late—owing to a number of conditions independent of their will—but they will come.

Let us work to organise, organise and yet again organise! The future, in spite of all trials, is ours.

*Pravda* No. 34,  
February 24, 1918

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 51-52

■

*Position of the C.C.  
of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks)  
on the Question of the Separate  
and Annexationist Peace*

■

Dear Comrades,

The Organising Bureau of the Central Committee considers it essential to submit to you an explanation of the motives that led the Central Committee to agree to the peace terms proposed by the German Government. The Organising Bureau is addressing this explanation to you, comrades, in order that all Party members should be thoroughly informed of the point of view of the Central Committee which, in the period between Congresses, represents the entire Party. The Organising Bureau considers it essential to state that the Central Committee was not unanimous on the question of signing the peace terms. Since the decision has been made, however, it must be supported by the whole Party. A Party Congress is due in a few days, and only then will it be possible to decide the question of the extent to which the Central Committee rightly expressed the actual position of the whole Party. Until the Congress, all Party members, in pursuance of their duty to the Party and for the sake of the maintenance of unity in our Party ranks, will carry out the decisions of their central leading body, the Central Committee of the Party.

The absolute necessity of signing, at the given moment (February 24, 1918), an annexationist and unbelievably harsh peace treaty with Germany is due primarily to the fact that we have no army and cannot defend ourselves.

Everybody knows why since October 25, 1917, since the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry, we have all become defencists, we are all for the defence of the fatherland.

From the point of view of defending the fatherland, it is impermissible for us to allow ourselves to be drawn into

an armed conflict when we have no army and the enemy is armed to the teeth and excellently prepared.

The Soviet Socialist Republic cannot wage a war when the obviously overwhelming majority of the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers who elect deputies to the Soviets are against the war. It would be a rash gamble. It will be a different thing if an end is put to this war, excessively harsh though the terms of peace may be, and German imperialism again decides to start an aggressive war against Russia. Then the majority of the Soviets will most certainly be in favour of war.

To wage war today would amount objectively to falling for the provocation of the Russian bourgeoisie. They know full well that at the moment Russia is defenceless and would be crushed by even insignificant German forces, which would have only to cut the main railway lines to starve Petrograd and Moscow into surrendering. The bourgeoisie want war, because they want the overthrow of Soviet power and an agreement with the German bourgeoisie. The jubilation of the bourgeoisie when the German troops arrived in Dvinsk and Rezhitsa, Venden and Gapsal, Minsk and Drissa confirms this as clearly as can be.

Defence of revolutionary war at the present moment is nothing but an empty revolutionary phrase. It is impossible for a ruined peasant country to wage a modern war against advanced imperialism without an army and without the most serious economic preparation. It is beyond all doubt that German imperialism must be resisted, for it will crush us and hold us prisoner. It would, however, be empty talk to demand resistance specifically by means of armed uprising, especially now, when *such* resistance is obviously hopeless for us, and obviously to the advantage of the German and Russian bourgeoisie.

It is equally empty talk to argue in favour of revolutionary war at this moment on the grounds of support for the international socialist movement. If we make it easier for German imperialism to crush the Soviet Republic by our untimely acceptance of battle, we shall harm and not help the German and international working-class movement and the cause of socialism. We must help only the revolutionary internationalists in all countries by all-round, persistent and systematic work; but to undertake the gamble of launch-

ing an armed uprising, when it would obviously be a gamble, is unworthy of a Marxist.

If Liebknecht is victorious in two or three weeks (which is possible) he will, of course, get us out of all difficulties. It would, however, be simply foolish and would be turning the great slogan of the solidarity of the working people of all countries into sheer mockery if we were to assure the people that Liebknecht will certainly and unavoidably score victory within the next few weeks. Indeed, by arguing in this way we should be turning the great slogan "We bank on the world revolution" into an empty phrase.

Objectively the situation is similar to that of the summer of 1907. Then, it was the Russian monarchist Stolypin who crushed us and held us prisoner; today it is the German imperialist. Then, the slogan of an immediate insurrection, which, unfortunately, was supported by the entire Socialist-Revolutionary Party,<sup>23</sup> proved to be an empty phrase. Today, at this very moment, the slogan of revolutionary war is obviously an empty phrase that attracts the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, who repeat the arguments of the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries. We are the prisoners of German imperialism and we have ahead of us a long and difficult struggle to overthrow that ringleader of world imperialism; this struggle is undoubtedly the last decisive struggle for socialism, but to begin that struggle at the present moment with an armed uprising against the leader of imperialism would be a gamble that no Marxist would ever undertake.

The systematic, unrelenting, all-round building up of the country's defence potential, self-discipline everywhere, the use of grievous defeat to improve discipline in all spheres of life for the purpose of the country's economic progress and the consolidation of Soviet power—that is the task of the day, that is the way to prepare a revolutionary war in deed and not merely in word.

In conclusion, the Organising Bureau considers it essential to state that, since the offensive of German imperialism has not yet been halted, all members of the Party must organise a concerted opposition to it. If it is impossible to sign a peace treaty, even the harshest, and gain time to prepare for new battles, our Party must emphasise the need to exert every effort for all-out resistance.

If we can gain time, gain even a brief respite for organisational work, we must do our best to get it. If we are granted no deferment our Party must call on the masses to fight, to engage in the most energetic self-defence. We are confident that all Party members will do their duty by the Party, by the working class of their country, by the people and the proletariat. By preserving Soviet power we are rendering the best, the most powerful support to the proletariat of all countries in their incredibly hard struggle against their own bourgeoisie. Today the cause of socialism could suffer no heavier blow than the collapse of Soviet power in Russia.

With comradely greetings,

*Organising Bureau of the Central Committee  
of the R.S.D.L.P. (Bolsheviks)*

Written on February 24, 1918

Published on February 26, 1918  
in *Pravda* No. 35

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 58-61

## *A Painful But Necessary Lesson*

The week from February 18 to 24, 1918, has been one that will be remembered as a great turning-point in the history of the Russian—and the international—revolution.

On February 27, 1917, the Russian proletariat, jointly with part of the peasantry who had been aroused by the course the war was taking, and also with the bourgeoisie, overthrew the monarchy. On April 21, 1917, the proletariat overthrew the absolute rule of the imperialist bourgeoisie and shifted power into the hands of the petty-bourgeois advocates of compromise with the bourgeoisie. On July 3, the urban proletariat gave the compromisers' government a severe shock by its spontaneous demonstration. On October 25, it overthrew that government and established the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry.

This victory had to be defended in civil war. It took about three months, beginning with the victory over Kerensky near Gatchina, continued in the victories over the bourgeoisie, the officer cadets<sup>24</sup> and part of the counter-revolutionary Cossacks in Moscow, Irkutsk, Orenburg and Kiev, and ending with the victory over Kaledin, Kornilov and Alexeyev at Rostov-on-Don.

The fire of proletarian insurrection flared up in Finland, and the conflagration spread to Rumania.

Victories on the home front were achieved with relative ease since the enemy did not possess any material or organisational advantage, and, furthermore, did not have any sound economic basis or any support among the masses. The ease with which these victories were gained was bound to turn the heads of many leaders. Their attitude has been: "We'll have a walkover."

They have disregarded the widespread disintegration of the army, which is rapidly demobilising itself and abandoning the front. They have become intoxicated with revolutionary phrases. They have applied them to the struggle against world imperialism. They have mistaken Russia's temporary "freedom" from imperialist pressure for something normal, although actually that "freedom" was due only to an interruption in the war between the German and Anglo-French plunderers. They have mistaken the mass strikes that are beginning in Austria and Germany for a revolution that is supposed to have delivered us from any serious danger from German imperialism. Instead of serious, effective, sustained work to aid the German revolution, which is coming to birth in a particularly difficult and painful manner, we have had people waving their arms—"what can those German imperialists do—with Liebknecht on our side we'll kick them out in no time!"

The week from February 18 to February 24, 1918, from the capture of Dvinsk to the capture of Pskov (later recaptured), the week of imperialist Germany's military offensive against the Soviet Socialist Republic, has been a bitter, distressing, and painful lesson, but it has been a necessary, useful and beneficial one. How highly instructive it has been to compare the two groups of telegraphic and telephonic communications that have reached the central government in the past week! On the one hand there has been the unrestrained flood of "resolution-type" revolutionary phrases—one might call them Steinberg phrases, if one recalls a chef-d'oeuvre in that style, the speech of the "Left" (hm ... hm) Socialist-Revolutionary Steinberg at the Saturday meeting of the Central Executive Committee. On the other hand there have been the painful and humiliating reports of regiments refusing to retain their positions, of refusal to defend even the Narva Line, and of disobedience to the order to destroy everything in the event of a retreat, not to mention the running away, the chaos, ineptitude, helplessness and slovenliness.

A bitter, distressing, painful but necessary, useful and beneficial lesson!

The thoughtful, class-conscious worker will draw three conclusions from this historic lesson—on our attitude to the defence of the fatherland, its defence potential and to



socialist revolutionary war; on the conditions under which we may come into collision with world imperialism; on the correct presentation of the question of our attitude to the world socialist movement.

We are and have been defencists since October 25, 1917, we champion the defence of the fatherland ever since that day. That is because we have shown *by deeds* that we have broken away from imperialism. We have denounced and published the filthy, bloodstained treaties of the imperialist plotters. We have overthrown *our own* bourgeoisie. We have given freedom to the peoples *we* formerly oppressed. We have given land to the people and introduced workers' control. We are in favour of defending the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic.

And because we are in favour of defending the fatherland we demand *a serious* attitude towards the country's defence potential and preparedness for war. We declare a ruthless war against revolutionary phrases about revolutionary war. There must be a lengthy, serious preparation for it, beginning with economic progress, the restoration of the railways (for without them modern warfare is an empty phrase) and with the establishment of the strictest revolutionary discipline and self-discipline everywhere.

From the point of view of the defence of the fatherland it would be a crime to enter into an armed conflict with an infinitely superior and well-prepared enemy when we obviously have no army. From the point of view of the defence of the fatherland we have to conclude the most harsh, oppressive, brutal, disgraceful peace—not in order to “capitulate” to imperialism but in order to learn and prepare to fight against imperialism in a serious and effective manner.

The past week has raised the Russian revolution to an immeasurably higher level of historical development. In the course of it history has progressed, has ascended several steps at once.

Until now we have been faced with miserable, despicable (from the standpoint of world imperialism) enemies, an idiot called Romanov,<sup>25</sup> Kerensky the boaster, gangs of officer cadets and bourgeois. Now there has arisen against us the giant of world imperialism, a splendidly organised

and technically well-equipped, civilised giant. That giant *must* be fought. And one must *know how* to fight him. A peasant country that has been subjected to unparalleled devastation by three years of war and that has begun the socialist revolution, must avoid armed conflicts—must avoid them while it is still possible, even at the cost of huge sacrifices—in order to be able to do something worth while before the “last, decisive battle” begins.

That battle will begin only when the socialist revolution breaks out in the leading imperialist countries. That revolution is undoubtedly maturing and growing stronger month by month, week by week. That growing strength *must* be helped. And we have to *know how* to help it. It would harm and not help that growing strength if we were to give up the neighbouring Soviet Socialist Republic to destruction at a moment when it obviously has no army.

We must not turn into an empty phrase the great slogan “We bank on the victory of socialism in Europe”. It is a true slogan if we have in mind the long and difficult path to the full victory of socialism. It is an indisputable philosophic-historical truth in respect of the entire “era of the socialist revolution”. But any abstract truth becomes an empty phrase if it is applied to *any* concrete situation. It is indisputable that “every strike conceals the hydra of the social revolution”. But it is nonsense to think that we can stride directly from a strike to the revolution. If we “bank on the victory of socialism in Europe” in the sense that we guarantee to the people that the European revolution will break out and is certain to be victorious within the next few weeks, certainly before the Germans have time to reach Petrograd, Moscow or Kiev, before they have time to “finish off” our railway transport, we shall be acting not as serious internationalist revolutionaries, but as adventurers.

If Liebknecht is victorious over the bourgeoisie in two or three weeks (it is not impossible), he will get us out of all difficulties. That is beyond doubt. If, however, we determine our tactics for today in the struggle against the imperialism of today in the hope that Liebknecht will probably be victorious within the next few weeks, we shall deserve nothing but ridicule. We shall be turning the great-

est revolutionary slogans of the present day into an empty revolutionary phrase.

Worker comrades, learn from the painful but useful lessons of the revolution! Prepare seriously, vigorously and unwaveringly to defend the fatherland, to defend the Soviet Socialist Republic!

*Pravda* (evening edition) No. 35,  
February 25, 1918  
Signed: *Lenin*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 62-66

## Strange and Monstrous

The Moscow Regional Bureau of our Party, in a resolution adopted on February 24, 1918, has expressed lack of confidence in the Central Committee, refused to obey those of its decisions "that will be connected with the implementation of the terms of the peace treaty with Austria and Germany", and, in an "explanatory note" to the resolution, declared that it "considers a split in the Party in the very near future hardly avoidable".\*

There is nothing monstrous, nor even strange in all this. It is quite natural that comrades who sharply disagree with the Central Committee over the question of a separate peace should sharply condemn the Central Committee and express their conviction that a split is inevitable. All that is the most legitimate right of Party members, which is quite understandable.

But here is what is strange and monstrous. An "explanatory note" is appended to the resolution. Here it is in full:

"The Moscow Regional Bureau considers a split in the Party in the very near future hardly avoidable, and it sets itself the aim of helping to unite all consistent revolutionary Communists who equally oppose both the advocates of the conclusion of a separate peace and all moderate opportunists in the Party. *In the interests of the world revolution, we consider it expedient to accept the possibility of losing Soviet power, which is now becoming purely formal.* We maintain as

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\* Here is the full text of the resolution: "Having discussed the activities of the Central Committee, the Moscow Regional Bureau of the R.S.D.L.P. expresses lack of confidence in the Central Committee in view of its political line and composition, and will at the first opportunity insist that a new Central Committee be elected. Furthermore, the Moscow Regional Bureau does not consider itself bound to obey unreservedly those decisions of the Central Committee that will be connected with the implementation of the terms of the peace treaty with Austria and Germany." The resolution was adopted unanimously.

before that our primary task is to spread the ideas of the socialist revolution to all other countries and resolutely to promote the workers' dictatorship, ruthlessly to suppress bourgeois counter-revolution in Russia."

It is the words we have stressed in this passage which are—strange and monstrous.

It is in these words that the crux of the matter lies.

These words reduce to an absurdity the whole line put forward by the authors of the resolution. These words expose the root of their error with exceptional clarity.

"In the interests of the world revolution it is expedient to accept the possibility of losing Soviet power..." That is strange, for there is not even any connection between the premises and the conclusion. "In the interests of the world revolution it is expedient to accept the *military defeat* of Soviet power"—such a proposition might be right or wrong, but it could not be called strange. That is the first thing.

Second thing: Soviet power "is now becoming purely formal". Now this is not only strange but downright monstrous. Obviously, the authors have got themselves thoroughly entangled. We shall have to disentangle them.

As regards the first question, the authors' idea evidently is that it would be expedient in the interests of the world revolution to accept the possibility of defeat in war, which would lead to the loss of Soviet power, in other words, to the triumph of the bourgeoisie in Russia. By voicing this idea the authors indirectly admit the truth of what I said in the theses (on January 8, 1918, published in *Pravda* on February 24, 1918),\* namely, that refusal to accept the peace terms presented by Germany would lead to Russia's defeat and the overthrow of Soviet power.

And so, *la raison finit toujours par avoir raison*—the truth always triumphs! My "extremist" opponents, the Muscovites who threaten a split, have been obliged—just because they have got to the point of talking openly of a split—to be equally explicit about their *real* reasons, the reasons which people who confine themselves to general phrase-making about revolutionary war prefer to pass over in silence. The very essence of my theses and arguments (as

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\* See pp. 7-15.—Ed.

anyone who cares to read attentively my theses of January 7, 1918, may see) is that we must accept this extremely harsh peace *now*, at once, while at the same time seriously *preparing* for a revolutionary war (and accept it, moreover, precisely *in the interest* of such serious preparations). Those who confined themselves to general phrase-making about a revolutionary war ignored or failed to notice, or did not want to notice, the very essence of my arguments. And now it is my "extremist" opponents, the Muscovites, whom I have to thank from the bottom of my heart for having broken the "conspiracy of silence" over the *essence* of my arguments. The Muscovites have been the *first* to reply to them.

And what is their reply?

Their reply is an *admission of the correctness* of my *concrete* argument. Yes, the Muscovites have admitted, we shall certainly be defeated if we fight the Germans now.\* Yes, this defeat would certainly lead to the fall of Soviet power.

Again and again I thank my "extremist" opponents, the Muscovites, from the bottom of my heart for having broken the "conspiracy of silence" against the essence of my arguments, i.e., against my *concrete* statement as to what the conditions of war would be, if we were to accept it at once, and for having fearlessly admitted the correctness of my concrete statement.

Further, on what grounds are my arguments, the substantial correctness of which the Muscovites have been compelled to admit, rejected?

On the grounds that in the interests of the world revolution *we must* accept the loss of Soviet power.

Why should the interests of the world revolution demand it? This is the crux of the matter; this is the very essence of the reasoning of those who would like to defeat

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\* As to the counter-argument, that to avoid fighting was anyway impossible, the reply has been given by the facts: On January 8 my theses were read; by January 15 we *might* have had peace. A respite would have been certainly assured (and for us even the briefest respite would have been of gigantic significance, both materially and morally, for the *Germans* would have had to declare a *new* war), if ... if it had not been for revolutionary phrase-making.

my arguments. And it is on this, the most important, fundamental and vital point, that not a word is said, either in the resolution or in the explanatory note. The authors of the resolution found time and space to speak of what is universally known and indisputable—of “ruthlessly suppressing bourgeois counter-revolution in Russia” (using the methods and means of a policy which would lead to the loss of Soviet power?), and of opposing all moderate opportunists in the Party—but of that which is really disputable and which concerns the very essence of the position of the opponents of peace—not a word!

Strange. Extremely strange. Did the authors of the resolution keep silent about this because they felt that on this point they were particularly weak? To have plainly stated *why* (this is demanded by the interests of the world revolution) would most likely have meant exposing themselves. . . .

However that may be, we have to *seek out* the arguments which *may* have guided the authors of the resolution.

Perhaps the authors believe that the interests of the world revolution forbid making any peace at all with imperialists? This opinion was expressed by some of the opponents of peace at one of the Petrograd meetings, but only an insignificant minority of those who objected to a separate peace supported it. It is clear that this opinion would lead to a denial of the expediency of the Brest negotiations and to a rejection of peace, “even” if accompanied by the return of Poland, Latvia and Courland. The incorrectness of this view (which was rejected, for example, by a majority of the Petrograd opponents of peace) is as clear as day. A socialist republic surrounded by imperialist powers could not, from this point of view, conclude any economic treaties, and could not exist at all, without flying to the moon.

Perhaps the authors believe that the interests of the world revolution require that it should be *given a push*, and that such a push can be given only by war, never by peace, which might give the people the impression that imperialism was being “legitimised”? Such a “theory” would be completely at variance with Marxism, for Marxism has always been opposed to “pushing” revolutions, which develop with the growing acuteness of the class antagonisms that engender revolutions. Such a theory would be tanta-

mount to the view that armed uprising is a form of struggle which is obligatory always and under all conditions. Actually, however, the interests of the world revolution demand that Soviet power, having overthrown the bourgeoisie in our country, should *help* that revolution, but that it should choose a *form* of help which is commensurate with its own strength. To help the socialist revolution on an international scale by accepting the possibility of defeat of that revolution in *one's own* country is a view that does not follow even from the "pushing" theory.

Perhaps the authors of the resolution believe that revolution has already begun in Germany and has already reached the stage of an open, nation-wide civil war, that we must therefore devote our strength to helping the German workers, and must perish ourselves ("losing Soviet power") to *save* a German revolution which has already started its decisive fight and is being hard pressed? According to this theory, we, while perishing ourselves, would be diverting part of the forces of German counter-revolution, thereby saving the German revolution.

It is quite conceivable that, given these premises, it would not only be "expedient" (as the authors of the resolution put it) but a downright *duty* to accept the possibility of defeat and the possibility of the loss of Soviet power. But obviously these premises do not exist. The German revolution is ripening, but it has obviously not reached the stage of an explosion in Germany, of civil war in Germany. By "accepting the possibility of losing Soviet power", we certainly would not be helping the German revolution to reach maturity, but *would be hindering* it. We would be helping German reaction, playing into its hands, hampering the socialist movement in Germany and frightening away from socialism large masses of German proletarians and semi-proletarians who have not yet come over to socialism and would be scared by the defeat of Soviet Russia, just as the British workers were scared by the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871.<sup>26</sup>

Twist and turn them how you will, but you can find no logic in the authors' contentions. There are no sensible arguments to support the view that "in the interests of the world revolution it is expedient to accept the possibility of losing Soviet power".



“Soviet power is now becoming purely formal”—this, as we see, is the monstrous view the authors of the Moscow resolution have come to proclaim.

Since the German imperialists are going to make us pay indemnities and forbid us to carry on propaganda and agitation against Germany, Soviet power loses all significance and “becomes purely formal”—this is probably the line of “reasoning” of the authors of the resolution. We say “probably”, for the authors offer nothing clear and specific in support of their thesis.

Profound and hopeless pessimism and complete despair—such is the sum and substance of the “theory” that the significance of Soviet power is purely formal, and that tactics which will risk the possible loss of Soviet power are permissible. Since there is no salvation anyway, then let even Soviet power perish—such is the sentiment that dictated this monstrous resolution. The allegedly “economic” arguments in which such ideas are sometimes clothed reveal the same hopeless pessimism: what sort of Soviet Republic is it—the implication is—when not just tribute, but tribute on such a scale can be exacted from it?

Nothing but despair: we shall perish anyhow!

It is a quite understandable mood in the extremely desperate situation in which Russia finds herself. But it is not “understandable” among conscious revolutionaries. The typical thing about it is that here we have the views of the Muscovites reduced to absurdity. The Frenchmen of 1793 would never have said that their gains—the republic and democracy—were becoming purely formal and that they would have to accept the possibility of losing the republic. They were not filled with despair, but with faith in victory. To call for a revolutionary war, and at the same time to talk in an official resolution of “accepting the possibility of losing Soviet power”, is to expose oneself completely.

Early in the nineteenth century, at the time of the Napoleonic wars, Prussia and a number of other countries suffered incomparably and immeasurably greater hardships and burdens of defeat, conquest, humiliation and oppression on the part of the conqueror than Russia is suffering in 1918. Yet the best men of Prussia, when Napoleon’s military jackboots trampled upon them a hundred times more heavily than we can be trampled upon now, did not despair,

and did not say that their national political institutions were "purely formal". They did not give up, did not succumb to the feeling: "We shall perish anyhow." They signed peace treaties infinitely more drastic, brutal, humiliating and oppressive than the Brest Treaty, and then knew how to bide their time; they staunchly bore the conqueror's yoke, fought again, fell under the conqueror's yoke again, again signed the vilest of vile peace treaties, and again rose, and *in the end liberated themselves* (not without exploiting the dissensions among the stronger competing conquerors).

Why shouldn't this be repeated in our history?

Why should we give way to despair and write resolutions—which, by heavens, are more disgraceful than the most disgraceful peace—saying that "Soviet power is becoming purely formal"?

Why shouldn't the most crushing military defeats in the struggle against the giants of modern imperialism steel the national character in Russia, too, strengthen self-discipline, put an end to the bragging and phrase-making, teach fortitude and bring the people round to the correct tactics of the Prussians when they were crushed by Napoleon—the tactics of signing the most humiliating of peace treaties when you haven't an army, then mustering your forces and rising again and again?

Why should we give way to despair at the first peace treaty, incredibly harsh though it be, when other nations were able staunchly to bear even bitterer misfortunes?

Is it the staunchness of the proletarian who knows that one must submit when strength is lacking, and is then nevertheless able to rise again and again at any price and to build up strength under *all* circumstances, that corresponds to these tactics of despair, or, rather, the spinelessness of the petty bourgeois, who in our country, in the shape of the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, has beaten the record for phrase-making about a revolutionary war?

No, dear Moscow "extremist" comrades, every day of trial will drive away from you those very workers who are the most class-conscious and the staunchest. Soviet power, they will say, is not *becoming*, and will not *become*, purely formal; and not only now, when the conqueror is in Pskov and is making us pay a ten-thousand-million-ruble tribute in grain, ore and money, but even if he gets as far as Nizhni-

Novgorod and Rostov-on-Don and makes us pay a tribute of twenty thousand million rubles.

Never will any foreign conquest render a popular political institution "purely formal" (and Soviet power is *not* only a political institution far and away superior to anything known to history). On the contrary, alien conquest will only strengthen popular sympathy for Soviet power, provided—provided it does not indulge in reckless follies.

And to refuse to conclude even the vilest peace when you have no army would be a reckless gamble, for which the people would be justified in condemning the government that refused to do so.

Immensely more harsh and humiliating peace treaties than the Brest Treaty have been signed before in history (we gave some instances above) without discrediting the regime or turning it into a formality; they ruined neither the regime nor the people, but rather steeled the people, *taught* them the stern and difficult science of building up an effective army even in the most desperate conditions and under the heel of the conqueror.

Russia is making for a new and genuine patriotic war, a war for the preservation and consolidation of Soviet power. It is possible that another epoch will—like the epoch of the Napoleonic wars—be an epoch of liberation *wars* (not one war, but wars) imposed by aggressors upon Soviet Russia. That is possible.

And, therefore, more humiliating than any harsh or even extremely harsh peace, rendered imperative owing to the lack of an army—more humiliating than any humiliating peace is humiliating despair. We shall not perish even from a dozen obnoxious peace treaties if we take revolt and war *seriously*. No conquerors can destroy us if we do not destroy ourselves by despair and phrase-making.

*Pravda* Nos. 37 and 38,  
February 28 and March 1, 1918  
Signed: *N. Lenin*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 68-75

## A Serious Lesson and a Serious Responsibility

Our pseudo-Lefts, who yesterday brought out their own paper, the *Kommunist* (Communist of the pre-Marxian era, one should add), are trying to dodge the lesson and lessons of history, are trying to dodge responsibility.

But they are dodging in vain. They will not succeed in dodging it.

The dodgers are trying their hardest, are filling countless newspaper columns, are sweating and straining, are not sparing "even", as they put it, printer's ink to represent the "breathing-space" "theory" as an unfounded and unsound "theory".

Alas, their efforts are powerless to refute the facts. Facts are stubborn things, as the English proverb rightly says. It is a fact that from March 3, when at 1 p.m. the Germans ceased hostilities, to March 5, at 7 p.m., when I am writing these lines, we have had a breathing-space, and we have *already* made use of these two days for the *businesslike* (as expressed in deeds, not phrase-making) defence of the socialist fatherland. This is a fact which will become more evident to the masses every day. It is a fact that at a moment when the army at the front, being in no condition to fight, is fleeing in panic, abandoning its guns and not even stopping to blow up bridges, the defence of the fatherland and the *raising* of its defence capacity lie not in babbling about a revolutionary war (to babble in the face of this panic-stricken flight of the army—not *one* detachment of which was *stopped* by the advocates of revolutionary war—is downright shameful), but in retreating in good order, so as to save the remnants of the army, taking advantage of every day's respite for this purpose.

Facts are stubborn things.

Our pseudo-Lefts, in their efforts to dodge the facts, the lessons to be derived from them and the question of re-

sponsibility, are endeavouring to *conceal* from their readers the recent, quite fresh and historically important past, and to *gloss it over* by references to the distant and unimportant past. For example, K. Radek in his article recalls that he wrote about the necessity of helping the army to hold out in December (December, mind you!), in a "memorandum to the Council of People's Commissars". I have not had the opportunity to read this memorandum and I ask myself: why does not Karl Radek print it *in full*? Why does he not explain clearly and frankly what exactly he meant then by a "compromise peace"? Why does he not recall the more recent past, when he wrote in *Pravda* about his illusion (the worst of all illusions) that peace could be concluded with the German imperialists on condition of the restoration of Poland?

Why?

Because the pseudo-Lefts are compelled to gloss over facts which reveal *their*, the "Lefts'", responsibility for sowing illusions which actually *helped* the German imperialists and *hindered* the growth and development of the revolution in Germany.

N. Bukharin is now even attempting to deny the fact that he and his friends asserted that it was impossible for the Germans to attack. But very, very many people know that it is a fact, that Bukharin and his friends did assert this, and that by sowing such an illusion they *helped* German imperialism and *hindered* the growth of the German revolution, which has now been weakened by the fact that the Great-Russian Soviet Republic, during the panic-stricken flight of the peasant army, has been deprived of thousands upon thousands of guns and of wealth to the value of hundreds upon hundreds of millions. I had predicted this definitely and clearly in my theses of January 7. If N. Bukharin is now compelled to eat his words, so much the worse for him. All who remember that Bukharin and his friends said that it was impossible for the Germans to attack will only shrug their shoulders now that N. Bukharin is compelled to eat his own words.

And for the benefit of those who do not remember them, of those who did not hear them, let us refer to a document which is a little more valuable, interesting and instructive *now* than what K. Radek wrote in December. This docu-

ment, which unfortunately is being concealed by the "Lefts" from their readers, is the record (1) of the vote on January 21, 1918, at the meeting of the Central Committee of our Party with the present "Left" opposition, and (2) of the vote in the Central Committee on February 17, 1918.

On January 21, 1918, on the question of whether to break off negotiations with the Germans immediately, Stukov alone (of the contributors to the pseudo-Left *Kommunist*) voted *in favour*. All the rest voted against.

On the question of whether it was *permissible* to sign an annexationist treaty if the Germans should break off negotiations or present an ultimatum, only Obolensky (When will "his" theses be published? Why is the *Kommunist* silent about them?) and Stukov voted *against*. All the rest voted *in favour*.

On the question of whether in this event the proposed peace should be concluded, only Obolensky and Stukov voted *against*. The rest of the "Lefts" *abstained!!* That is a fact.

On February 17, 1918, when the question was put: who is in favour of a revolutionary war?—Bukharin and Lomov "refused to vote on the question as put". None voted *in favour*. That is a fact!

On the question of whether to "refrain from resuming peace negotiations until the German attack becomes sufficiently (*sic!*) evident and its influence upon the German working-class movement becomes clear", Bukharin, Lomov and Uritsky, of the present contributors to the "Left" paper, voted *in favour*.

On the question, "Should we conclude peace if a German offensive becomes a fact and a revolutionary upsurge fails to eventuate in Germany and Austria?"—Lomov, Bukharin and Uritsky *abstained*.

Facts are stubborn things. And the facts show that Bukharin denied the possibility of a German offensive and sowed illusions by which he *actually*, against his own wishes, *helped* the German imperialists and *hindered* the growth of the German revolution. That indeed is the essence of revolutionary phrase-making. You strive for one thing and achieve the opposite.

N. Bukharin rebukes me for not giving a concrete analysis of the terms of the present peace. But it should not be

difficult to understand that from the point of my argument and of the essence of the matter there was not, nor is there now, any necessity for that. It was enough to show that we are facing only one real—not imagined—dilemma: either to accept *such* terms as would afford us a breathing-space for a few days at least, or the position of Belgium and Serbia. And this Bukharin did not refute, even in the eyes of Petrograd. That his colleague, M. N. Pokrovsky, admitted.

And if the new terms are worse, more onerous and humiliating than the bad, onerous and humiliating Brest terms, it is *our pseudo-Lefts*, Bukharin, Lomov, Uritsky and Co., who *are to blame for this* happening to the Great-Russian Soviet Republic. This is a historical fact, as is proved by the voting referred to above. It is a fact you cannot escape, wriggle as you will. You were *offered* the Brest terms, and you replied by blustering and swaggering, which *led* to worse terms. That is a fact. And you cannot absolve yourselves of the responsibility for it.

In my theses of January 7, 1918, it was predicted with the utmost clarity that in view of the state of our army (which could not be changed by phrase-making "*against*" the tired peasant masses), Russia *would have* to conclude a *worse* separate peace if she did not accept the Brest peace.

The "Lefts" fell into a trap set by the Russian bourgeoisie, who *had* to embroil us in the *worst* kind of war we could possibly become embroiled in.

That these Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, in declaring for war *now*, have obviously parted company with the peasantry, is a fact. And this fact attests to the *frivolity* of the policy of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, just as the seemingly "revolutionary" policy of all the Socialist-Revolutionaries in the summer of 1907 was frivolous.

That the more class-conscious and advanced workers are quickly shaking off the fumes of revolutionary phrase-making is shown by the example of Petrograd and Moscow. In Petrograd the best of the workers' districts—Vyborg and Vasilyevsky Island—have already sobered up. The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies is not in favour of war *now*; they have realised that it is necessary to *prepare* for it, and are preparing for it. In Moscow, at the Bolshe-

vik city conference on March 3 and 4, 1918, the opponents of revolutionary phrase-making won the day.

To what monstrous lengths of self-deception our "Lefts" have gone is evident from one sentence in Pokrovsky's article, which says: "If we are to fight, we must fight *now*" (Pokrovsky's italics), "while" (listen to this!) "the Russian army, including the newly-formed units, has still not been demobilised."

But everybody who does not shut his eyes to the facts knows that the greatest *hindrance* to resisting the Germans in February 1918, whether in Great Russia, the Ukraine, or Finland, was *our undemobilised army*. That is a fact. For it could not help fleeing in panic, carrying the Red Army detachments along with it.

Anyone who wants to benefit by the lessons of history, and not to hide from the responsibility they impose, or shut his eyes to them, let him recall at least the wars of Napoleon I against Germany.

Many a time did Prussia and Germany conclude with the conqueror peace treaties *ten times* more onerous and humiliating (than ours), even to the extent of accepting a foreign police, even to the extent of undertaking to furnish troops to help Napoleon I in his campaigns of conquest. Napoleon I in his treaties with Prussia harassed and dismembered Germany ten times worse than Hindenburg<sup>27</sup> and Wilhelm have pinned us down now. Yet there were people in Prussia who did not bluster, but signed ultra-"disgraceful" peace treaties, signed them because they had no army, signed terms ten times more oppressive and humiliating, and then *in spite of everything* rose up in revolt and to wage war. That happened not once, but many times. History, knows of several such peace treaties and wars. Of several cases of respite. Of several new declarations of war by the conqueror. Of several cases of an alliance between an *oppressed* nation and an oppressing nation, which was a rival of the conqueror and no less a conqueror itself (be it noted by the advocates of a "revolutionary war" *without* accepting aid from imperialists!).

Such was the course of history.

So it was. So it will be. We have entered an epoch of a *succession* of wars. We are moving towards a new, *patriotic* war. We will arrive at that war in the midst of a ripening



socialist revolution. And while on that difficult road the Russian proletariat and the Russian revolution will be able to cure themselves of blustering and revolutionary phrase-making, will know how to accept even the most onerous peace treaties, and then rise again.

We have signed a *Tilsit Peace*. We shall attain our victory and our liberation, just as the Germans after the Peace of Tilsit of 1807 attained their liberation from Napoleon in 1813 and 1814. The interval between our Tilsit Peace and our liberation will probably be shorter, for history is moving faster.

Down with blustering! On with the improvement of discipline and organisation in all earnest!

Written on March 5, 1918

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Signed: *N. Lenin*

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■  
*Seventh, Extraordinary, Congress  
of the R.C.P.(B.)  
March 6-8, 1918*  
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*Political Report  
of the Central Committee  
March 7*

A political report might consist of an enumeration of measures taken by the Central Committee; but the essential thing at the present moment is not a report of this kind, but *a review of our revolution as a whole*; that is the only thing that can provide a truly Marxist substantiation of all our decisions. We must examine the whole preceding course of development of the revolution and ascertain why the course of its further development has changed. There have been turning-points in our revolution that will have enormous significance for the world revolution. One such turning-point was *the October Revolution*.

The first successes of the February Revolution were due to the fact that the proletariat was followed, not only by the masses of the rural population, but also by the bourgeoisie. Hence, the easy victory over tsarism, something we had failed to achieve in 1905. The spontaneous formation of Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the February Revolution was a repetition of the experience of 1905—we had to proclaim the principle of Soviet power. The masses learned the tasks of the revolution from their own experience of the struggle. The events of April 20-21 were a peculiar combination of demonstrations and of something in the nature of armed uprising. This was enough to cause the fall of the bourgeois government. Then began the long period of the collaboration policy, which stemmed from the very nature of the petty-bourgeois government that had come to power. The July events could not then establish the dictatorship of the proletariat—the masses were still not prepared for

it. That was why not one of the responsible organisations called upon them to establish it. But as a reconnoitring operation in the enemy's camp, the July events were of enormous significance. The Kornilov revolt<sup>28</sup> and the subsequent events served as practical lessons and made possible the October victory. The mistake committed by those who even in October wished to divide power<sup>29</sup> was their failure to connect the October victory with the July days, with the offensive, with the Kornilov revolt, etc., etc., events which caused the millions of the common people to realise that Soviet power had become inevitable. Then followed our triumphal march throughout Russia, accompanied by a universal desire for peace. We know that we cannot achieve peace by a unilateral withdrawal from the war. We pointed to this as far back as the April Conference.\* In the period from April to October, the soldiers clearly realised that the policy of collaboration was prolonging the war and was leading to the savage, senseless attempts of the imperialists to start an offensive and to get still more entangled in a war that would last for years. That was the reason why it was necessary at all costs to adopt an active policy of peace as quickly as possible, why it was necessary for the Soviets to take power into their own hands, and abolish landed proprietorship. You know that the latter was upheld not only by Kerensky but also by Avksentyev, who even went so far as to order the arrest of the members of the Land Committees. The policy we adopted, the slogan of "Power to the Soviets", which we instilled into the minds of the majority of the people, enabled us, in October, to achieve victory very easily in St. Petersburg, and transformed the last months of the Russian revolution into one continuous triumphal march.

Civil war became a fact. The transformation of the imperialist war into civil war, which we had predicted at the beginning of the revolution, and even at the beginning of the war, and which considerable sections of socialist circles treated sceptically and even with ridicule, actually took place on October 25, 1917, in one of the largest and most backward of the belligerent countries. In this civil war the overwhelming majority of the population proved to be on

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\* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, pp. 263-64, 272.—Ed.

our side, and that is why victory was achieved with such extraordinary ease.

The troops who abandoned the front carried with them wherever they went the maximum of revolutionary determination to put an end to collaboration; and the collaborationist elements, the whiteguards and the landowners' sons found themselves without support among the population. The war against them gradually turned into a victorious triumphal march of the revolution as the masses of the people and the military units that were sent against us came over to the side of the Bolsheviks. We saw this in Petrograd, on the Gatchina front, where the Cossacks, whom Kerensky and Krasnov tried to lead against the Red capital, wavered; we saw this later in Moscow, in Orenburg and in the Ukraine. A wave of civil war swept over the whole of Russia, and everywhere we achieved victory with extraordinary ease precisely because the fruit had ripened, because the masses had already gone through the experience of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Our slogan "All Power to the Soviets", which the masses had tested in practice by long historical experience, had become part of their flesh and blood.

That is why the Russian revolution was a continuous triumphal march in the first months after October 25, 1917. As a result of this the difficulties which the socialist revolution immediately encountered, and could not but encounter, were forgotten, were pushed into the background. One of the fundamental differences between bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution is that for the bourgeois revolution, which arises out of feudalism, the new economic organisations are gradually created in the womb of the old order, gradually changing all the aspects of feudal society. The bourgeois revolution faced only one task—to sweep away, to cast aside, to destroy all the fetters of the preceding social order. By fulfilling this task every bourgeois revolution fulfils all that is required of it; it accelerates the growth of capitalism.

The socialist revolution is in an altogether different position. The more backward the country which, owing to the zigzags of history, has proved to be the one to start the socialist revolution, the more difficult is it for that country to pass from the old capitalist relations to socialist relations.

New incredibly difficult tasks, organisational tasks, are added to the tasks of destruction. Had not the popular creative spirit of the Russian revolution, which had gone through the great experience of the year 1905, given rise to the Soviets as early as February 1917, they could not under any circumstances have assumed power in October, because success depended entirely upon the existence of available organisational forms of a movement embracing millions. The Soviets were the available form, and that is why in the political sphere the future held out to us those brilliant successes, the continuous triumphal march, that we had; for the new form of political power was already available, and all we had to do was to pass a few decrees, and transform the power of the Soviets from the embryonic state in which it existed in the first months of the revolution into the legally recognised form which had become established in the Russian state—i.e., into the Russian Soviet Republic. The Republic was born at one stroke; it was born so easily because in February 1917 the masses had created the Soviets even before any party had managed to proclaim this slogan. It was the great creative spirit of the people, which had passed through the bitter experience of 1905 and had been made wise by it, that gave rise to this form of proletarian power. The task of achieving victory over the internal enemy was an extremely easy one. The task of creating the political power was an extremely easy one because the masses had created the skeleton, the basis of this power. The Republic of Soviets was born at one stroke. But two exceedingly difficult problems still remained, the solution of which could not possibly be the triumphal march we experienced in the first months of our revolution—we did not doubt, we could not doubt, that the socialist revolution would be later confronted with enormously difficult tasks.

First, there was the problem of internal organisation, which confronts every socialist revolution. The difference between a socialist revolution and a bourgeois revolution is that in the latter case there are ready-made forms of capitalist relationships; Soviet power—the proletarian power—does not inherit such ready-made relationships, if we leave out of account the most developed forms of capitalism, which, strictly speaking, extended to but a small top layer of industry and hardly touched agriculture. The organisa-

tion of accounting, the control of large enterprises, the transformation of the whole of the state economic mechanism into a single huge machine, into an economic organism that will work in such a way as to enable hundreds of millions of people to be guided by a single plan—such was the enormous organisational problem that rested on our shoulders. Under the present conditions of labour this problem could not possibly be solved by the “hurrah” methods by which we were able to solve the problems of the Civil War. The very nature of the task prevented a solution by these methods. We achieved easy victories over the Kaledin revolt and created the Soviet Republic in face of a resistance that was not even worth serious consideration; the course of events was predetermined by the whole of the preceding objective development, so that all we had to do was say the last word and change the signboard, i.e., take down the sign “The Soviet exists as a trade union organisation”, and put up instead the sign “The Soviet is the sole form of state power”; the situation, however, was altogether different in regard to organisational problems. In this field we encountered enormous difficulties. It immediately became clear to everyone who cared to ponder over the tasks of our revolution that only by the hard and long path of self-discipline would it be possible to overcome the disintegration that the war had caused in capitalist society, that only by extraordinarily hard, long and persistent effort could we cope with this disintegration and defeat those elements aggravating it, elements which regarded the revolution as a means of discarding old fetters and getting as much out of it for themselves as they possibly could. The emergence of a large number of such elements was inevitable in a small-peasant country at a time of incredible economic chaos, and the fight against these elements that is ahead of us, that we have only just started, will be a hundred times more difficult, it will be a fight which promises no spectacular opportunities. We are only in the first stage of this fight. Severe trials await us. The objective situation precludes any idea of limiting ourselves to a triumphal march with flying banners such as we had in fighting against Kaledin. Anyone who attempted to apply these methods of struggle to the organisational tasks that confront the revolution would only prove his bankruptcy

as a politician, as a socialist, as an active worker in the socialist revolution.

The same thing awaited some of our young comrades who were carried away by the initial triumphal march of the revolution, when it came up against the second enormous difficulty—the international question. The reason we achieved such an easy victory over Kerensky's gangs, the reason we so easily set up our government and without the slightest difficulty passed decrees on the socialisation of the land and on workers' control, the reason we achieved all this so easily was a fortunate combination of circumstances that protected us for a short time from international imperialism. International imperialism, with the entire might of its capital, with its highly organised war machine, which is a real force, a real stronghold of international capital, could not, under any circumstances, under any conditions, live side by side with the Soviet Republic, both because of its objective position and because of the economic interests of the capitalist class embodied in it, because of commercial connections, of international financial relations. In this sphere a conflict is inevitable. This is the greatest difficulty of the Russian revolution, its greatest historical problem—the need to solve international problems, the need to evoke a world revolution, to effect the transition from our strictly national revolution to the world revolution. This problem confronts us in all its incredible difficulty. I repeat, very many of our young friends who regard themselves as Lefts have begun to forget the most important thing: why in the course of the weeks and months of the enormous triumph after October we were able so easily to pass from victory to victory. And yet this was due only to a special combination of international circumstances that temporarily shielded us from imperialism. Imperialism had other things to bother about besides us. And it seemed to us that we, too, had other things to bother about besides imperialism. Individual imperialists had no time to bother with us, solely because the whole of the great social, political and military might of modern world imperialism was split by internecine war into two groups. The imperialist plunderers involved in this struggle had gone to such incredible lengths, were locked in mortal combat to such a degree, that neither of the groups was able to concentrate any effective forces

against the Russian revolution. These were the circumstances in which we found ourselves in October. It is paradoxical but true that our revolution broke out at so fortunate a moment, when unprecedented disasters involving the destruction of millions of human beings had overtaken most of the imperialist countries, when the unprecedented calamities attending the war had exhausted the nations, when in the fourth year of the war the belligerent countries had reached an impasse, a parting of the ways, when the question arose objectively—could nations reduced to such a state continue fighting? It was only because our revolution broke out at so fortunate a moment as this, when neither of the two gigantic groups of plunderers was in a position immediately either to hurl itself at the other, or to unite with the other against us; our revolution could (and did) take advantage only of a situation such as this in international political and economic relations to accomplish its brilliant triumphal march in European Russia, spread to Finland and begin to win the Caucasus and Rumania. This alone explains the appearance of Party functionaries, intellectual supermen, in the leading circles of our Party who allowed themselves to be carried away by this triumphal march and who said we could cope with international imperialism; over there, there will also be a triumphal march, over there, there will be no real difficulties. This was at variance with the objective position of the Russian revolution which had merely taken advantage of the setback of international imperialism; the engine that was supposed to bear down on us with the force of a railway train bearing down on a wheelbarrow and smashing it to splinters, was temporarily stalled—and the engine was stalled because the two groups of predators had clashed. Here and there the revolutionary movement was growing, but in all the imperialist countries without exception it was still mainly in the initial stage. Its rate of development was entirely different from ours. Anyone who has given careful thought to the economic prerequisites of the socialist revolution in Europe must be clear on the point that in Europe it will be immeasurably more difficult to start, whereas it was immeasurably more easy for us to start; but it will be more difficult for us to continue the revolution than it will be over there. This objective situation caused us to experience an extraordinarily



sharp and difficult turn in history. From the continuous triumphal march on our internal front, against our counter-revolution, against the enemies of Soviet power in October, November and December, we had to pass to a collision with real international imperialism, in its real hostility towards us. From the period of the triumphal march we had to pass to a period in which we were in an extraordinarily difficult and painful situation, one which certainly could not be brushed aside with words, with brilliant slogans—however pleasant that would have been—because in our disorganised country we had to deal with incredibly weary masses, who had reached a state in which they could not possibly go on fighting, who were so shattered by three years of agonising war that they were absolutely useless from the military point of view. Even before the October Revolution we saw representatives of the masses of the soldiers, not members of the Bolshevik Party, who did not hesitate to tell the bourgeoisie the truth that the Russian army would not fight. This state of the army has brought about a gigantic crisis. A small-peasant country, disorganised by war, reduced by it to an incredible state, has been placed in an extremely difficult position. We have no army, but we have to go on living side by side with a predator who is armed to the teeth, a predator who still remains and will continue to remain a plunderer and is not, of course, affected by agitation in favour of peace without annexations and indemnities. A tame, domestic animal has been lying side by side with a tiger and trying to persuade the latter to conclude a peace without annexations and indemnities, although the only way such a peace could be attained was by attacking the tiger. The top layer of our Party—intellectuals and some of the workers' organisations—has been trying in the main to brush this prospect aside with phrases and such excuses as "that is not the way it should be". This peace was too incredible a prospect for them to believe that we, who up to now had marched in open battle with colours flying and had stormed the enemy's positions with "hurrahs", could yield and accept these humiliating terms. Never! We are exceedingly proud revolutionaries, we declare above all: "The Germans cannot attack."

This was the first argument with which these people consoled themselves. History has now placed us in an extraor-

dinarily difficult position; in the midst of organisational work of unparalleled difficulty we shall have to experience a number of painful defeats. Regarded from the world-historical point of view, there would doubtlessly be no hope of the ultimate victory of our revolution if it were to remain alone, if there were no revolutionary movements in other countries. When the Bolshevik Party tackled the job alone, it did so in the firm conviction that the revolution was maturing in all countries and that in the end—but not at the very beginning—no matter what difficulties we experienced, no matter what defeats were in store for us, the world socialist revolution would come—because it is coming; would mature—because it is maturing and will reach full maturity. I repeat, our salvation from all these difficulties is an all-Europe revolution. Taking this truth, this absolutely abstract truth, as our starting-point, and being guided by it, we must see to it that it does not in time become a mere phrase, because every abstract truth, if it is accepted without analysis, becomes a mere phrase. If you say that every strike conceals the hydra of revolution, and he who fails to understand this is no socialist, you are right. Yes, the socialist revolution looms behind every strike. But if you say that every single strike is an immediate step towards the socialist revolution, you will be uttering perfectly empty phrases. We have heard these phrases “every blessed time in the same place” and have got so sick and tired of them that the workers have rejected these anarchist phrases, because undoubtedly, clear as it is that behind every strike there looms the hydra of socialist revolution, it is equally clear that the assertion that every strike can develop into revolution is utter nonsense. Just as it is indisputable that all the difficulties in our revolution will be overcome only when the world socialist revolution matures—and it is maturing now everywhere—it is absolutely absurd to declare that we must conceal every real difficulty of our revolution today and say: “I bank on the international socialist movement—I can commit any piece of folly I please.” “Liebknecht will help us out, because he is going to win, anyhow.” He will create such an excellent organisation, he will plan everything beforehand so well that we shall be able to take ready-made forms in the same way as we took the ready-made Marxist doctrine from

Western Europe—and maybe that is why it triumphed in our country in a few months, whereas it has been taking decades to triumph in Western Europe. Thus it would have been reckless gambling to apply the old method of solving the problem of the struggle by a triumphal march to the new historical period which has set in, and which has confronted us, not with feeble Kerensky and Kornilov, but with an international predator—the imperialism of Germany, where the revolution has been maturing but has obviously not yet reached maturity. The assertion that the enemy would not dare attack the revolution was such a gamble. The situation at the time of the Brest negotiations was not yet such as to compel us to accept any peace terms. The objective alignment of forces was such that a respite would not have been enough. It took the Brest negotiations to show that the Germans would attack, that German society was not so pregnant with revolution that it could give birth to it at once; and we cannot blame the German imperialists for not having prepared that outbreak by their conduct, or, as our young friends who regard themselves as Lefts say, for not having created a situation in which the Germans could not attack. When we tell them that we have no army, that we were compelled to demobilise—we were compelled to do so, although we never forgot that a tiger was lying beside our tame, domestic animal—they refuse to understand. Although we were compelled to demobilise we did not for a moment forget that it was impossible to end the war unilaterally by issuing an order to stick the bayonets in the ground.

Generally speaking, how is it that not a single trend, not a single tendency, not a single organisation in our Party opposed this demobilisation? Had we gone mad? Not in the least. Officers, not Bolsheviks, had stated even before October that the army could not fight, that it could not be kept at the front even for a few weeks longer. After October this became obvious to everybody who was willing to recognise the facts, willing to see the unpleasant, bitter reality and not hide, or pull his cap over his eyes, and make shift with proud phrases. We have no army, we cannot hold it. The best thing we can do is to demobilise it as quickly as possible. This is the sick part of the organism, which has suffered incredible torture, has been ravaged by the priva-

tions of a war into which it entered technically unprepared, and from which it has emerged in such a state that it succumbs to panic at every attack. We cannot blame these people who have experienced incredible suffering. In hundreds of resolutions, even in the first period of the Russian revolution, the soldiers have said quite frankly: "We are drowning in blood, we cannot go on fighting." One could have delayed the end of the war artificially, one could have committed the frauds Kerensky committed, one could have postponed the end for a few weeks, but objective reality broke its own road. This is the sick part of the Russian state organism which can no longer bear the burden of the war. The quicker we demobilise the army, the sooner it will become absorbed by those parts that are not so sick and the sooner will the country be prepared for new severe trials. That is what we felt when we unanimously, without the slightest protest, adopted the decision—which was absurd from the point of view of foreign events—to demobilise the army. It was the proper step to take. We said that it was a frivolous illusion to believe that we could hold the army. The sooner we demobilised the army, the sooner would the social organism as a whole recover. That is why the revolutionary phrase, "The Germans cannot attack", from which the other phrase ("We can declare the state of war terminated. Neither war nor the signing of peace.") derived, was such a profound mistake, such a bitter over-estimation of events. But suppose the Germans do attack? "No, they cannot attack." But have you the right to risk the world revolution? What about the concrete question of whether you may not prove to be accomplices of German imperialism when that moment comes? But we, who since October 1917 have all become defencists, who have recognised the principle of defence of the fatherland, we all know that we have broken with imperialism, not merely in word but in deed; we have destroyed the secret treaties,<sup>30</sup> vanquished the bourgeoisie in our own country and proposed an open and honest peace so that all the nations may see what our intentions really are. How could people who seriously uphold the position of defending the Soviet Republic agree to this gamble, which has already produced results? And this is a fact, because the severe crisis which our Party is now experiencing, owing to the formation of

a "Left" opposition within it, is one of the gravest crises the Russian revolution has experienced.

This crisis will be overcome. Under no circumstances will it break the neck of our Party, or of our revolution, although at the present moment it has come very near to doing so, there was a possibility of it. The guarantee that we shall not break our neck on this question is this: instead of applying the old method of settling factional differences, the old method of issuing an enormous quantity of literature, of having many discussions and plenty of splits, instead of this old method, events have provided our people with a new method of learning things. This method is to put everything to the test of facts, events, the lessons of world history. You said that the Germans could not attack. The logic of your tactics was that we could declare the state of war to be terminated. History has taught you a lesson, it has shattered this illusion. Yes, the German revolution is growing, but not in the way we should like it, not as fast as Russian intellectuals would have it, not at the rate our history developed in October—when we entered any town we liked, proclaimed Soviet power, and within a few days nine-tenths of the workers came over to our side. The German revolution has the misfortune of not moving so fast. What do you think? Must we reckon with the revolution, or must the revolution reckon with us? You wanted the revolution to reckon with you. But history has taught you a lesson. It is a lesson, because it is the absolute truth that without a German revolution we are doomed—perhaps not in Petrograd, not in Moscow, but in Vladivostok, in more remote places to which perhaps we shall have to retreat, and the distance to which is perhaps greater than the distance from Petrograd to Moscow. At all events, under all conceivable circumstances, if the German revolution does not come, we are doomed. Nevertheless, this does not in the least shake our conviction that we must be able to bear the most difficult position without blustering.

The revolution will not come as quickly as we expected. History has proved this, and we must be able to take this as a fact, to reckon with the fact that the world socialist revolution cannot begin so easily in the advanced countries as the revolution began in Russia—in the land of Nicholas and Rasputin,<sup>31</sup> the land in which an enormous part of

the population was absolutely indifferent as to what peoples were living in the outlying regions, or what was happening there. In such a country it was quite easy to start a revolution, as easy as lifting a feather.

But to start without preparation a revolution in a country in which capitalism is developed and has given democratic culture and organisation to everybody, down to the last man—to do so would be wrong, absurd. There we are only just approaching the painful period of the beginning of socialist revolutions. This is a fact. We do not know, no one knows, perhaps—it is quite possible—it will triumph within a few weeks, even within a few days, but we cannot stake everything on that. We must be prepared for extraordinary difficulties, for extraordinarily severe defeats, which are inevitable because the revolution in Europe has not yet begun, although it may begin tomorrow; and when it does begin, then, of course, we shall not be tortured by doubts, there will be no question about a revolutionary war, but just one continuous triumphal march. That is to come, it will inevitably be so, but it is not so yet. This is the simple fact that history has taught us, with which it has hit us very painfully—and it is said a man who has been thrashed is worth two who haven't. That is why I think that now history has given us a very painful thrashing, because of our hope that the Germans could not attack and that we could get everything by shouting "hurrah!", this lesson, with the help of our Soviet organisations, will be very quickly brought home to the masses all over Soviet Russia. They are all up and doing, gathering, preparing for the Congress, passing resolutions, thinking over what has happened. What is taking place at the present time does not resemble the old pre-revolutionary controversies, which remained within narrow Party circles; now all decisions are submitted for discussion to the masses, who demand that they be tested by experience, by deeds, who never allow themselves to be carried away by frivolous speeches, and never allow themselves to be diverted from the path prescribed by the objective progress of events. Of course, an intellectual, or a Left Bolshevik, can try to talk his way out of difficulties. He can try to talk his way out of such facts as the absence of an army and the failure of the revolution to begin in Germany. The millions-strong masses—and politics begin

where millions of men and women are; where there are not thousands, but millions, that is where serious politics begin—the masses know what the army is like, they have seen soldiers returning from the front. They know—that is, if you take, not individual persons, but real masses—that we cannot fight, that every man at the front has endured everything imaginable. The masses have realised the truth that if we have no army, and a predator is lying beside us, we shall have to sign a most harsh, humiliating peace treaty. That is inevitable until the birth of the revolution, until you cure your army, until you allow the men to return home. Until then the patient will not recover. And we shall not be able to cope with the German predator by shouting “hurrah!”; we shall not be able to throw him off as easily as we threw off Kerensky and Kornilov. This is the lesson the masses have learned without the excuses that certain of those who desire to evade bitter reality have tried to present them with.

At first a continuous triumphal march in October and November—then, suddenly, in the space of a few weeks, the Russian revolution is defeated by the German predator; the Russian revolution is prepared to accept the terms of a predatory treaty. Yes, the turns taken by history are very painful. All such turns affect us painfully. When, in 1907, we signed the incredibly shameful internal treaty with Stolypin, when we were compelled to pass through the pigsty of the Stolypin Duma and assumed obligations by signing scraps of monarchist paper,<sup>32</sup> we experienced what we are experiencing now but on a smaller scale. At that time, people who were among the finest in the vanguard of the revolution said (and they too had not the slightest doubt that they were right), “We are proud revolutionaries, we believe in the Russian revolution, we will never enter legal Stolypin institutions.” Yes, you will, we said. The life of the masses, history, are stronger than your protestations. If you won’t go, we said, history will compel you to. These were very Left people and after the first turn in history nothing remained of them as a group but smoke. Just as we proved able to remain revolutionaries, proved able to work under terrible conditions and emerge from them, so shall we emerge now because it is not our whim, it is objective inevitability that has arisen in an utterly ruined

country, because in spite of our desires the European revolution dared to be late, and in spite of our desires German imperialism dared to attack.

Here one must know how to retreat. We cannot hide the incredibly bitter, deplorable reality from ourselves with empty phrases; we must say: God grant that we retreat in what is half-way good order. We cannot retreat in good order, but God grant that our retreat is half-way good order, that we gain a little time in which the sick part of our organism can be absorbed at least to some extent. On the whole the organism is sound, it will overcome its sickness. But you cannot expect it to overcome it all at once, instantaneously; you cannot stop an army in flight. When I said to one of our young friends, a would-be Left, "Comrade, go to the front, see what is going on in the army," he took offence at this proposal. He said, "They want to banish us so as to prevent our agitating here for the great principles of a revolutionary war." In making this proposal I really had no intention whatever of banishing factional enemies; I merely suggested that they go and see for themselves that the army had begun to run away in an unprecedented manner. We knew that even before this, even before this we could not close our eyes to the fact that the disintegration of the army had gone on to such an unheard-of extent that our guns were being sold to the Germans for a song. We knew this, just as we know that the army cannot be held back, and the argument that the Germans would not attack was a great gamble. If the European revolution is late in coming, gravest defeats await us because we have no army, because we lack organisation, because, at the moment, these are two problems we cannot solve. If you are unable to adapt yourself, if you are not inclined to crawl on your belly in the mud, you are not a revolutionary but a chatterbox; and I propose this, not because I like it, but because we have no other road, because history has not been kind enough to bring the revolution to maturity everywhere simultaneously.

The way things are turning out is that the civil war has begun as an attempt at a clash with imperialism, and this has shown that imperialism is rotten to the core, and that proletarian elements are rising in every army. Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is a very



good fairy-tale, a very beautiful fairy-tale—I quite understand children liking beautiful fairy-tales. But I ask, is it proper for a serious revolutionary to believe in fairy-tales? There is an element of reality in every fairy-tale. If you told children fairy-tales in which the cock and the cat did not converse in human language they would not be interested. In the same way, if you tell the people that civil war will break out in Germany and also guarantee that instead of a clash with imperialism we shall have a field revolution on a world-wide scale,<sup>33</sup> the people will say you are deceiving them. In doing this you will be overcoming the difficulties with which history has confronted us only in your own minds, by your own wishes. It will be a good thing if the German proletariat is able to take action. But have you measured it, have you discovered an instrument that will show that the German revolution will break out on such-and-such a day? No, you do not know that, and neither do we. You are staking everything on this card. If the revolution breaks out, everything is saved. Of course! But if it does not turn out as we desire, if it does not achieve victory tomorrow—what then? Then the masses will say to you, you acted like gamblers—you staked everything on a fortunate turn of events that did not take place, you proved unfitted for the situation that actually arose instead of the world revolution, which will inevitably come, but which has not yet reached maturity.

A period has set in of severe defeats, inflicted by imperialism, which is armed to the teeth, upon a country which has demobilised its army, which had to demobilise. What I predicted has come to pass; instead of the Brest peace we have a much more humiliating peace, and the blame for this rests upon those who refused to accept the former peace. We knew that through the fault of the army we were concluding peace with imperialism. We sat at the table beside Hoffmann<sup>34</sup> and not Liebknecht—and in doing so we assisted the German revolution. But now you are assisting German imperialism, because you have surrendered wealth valued at millions in guns and shells; and anybody who had seen the state—the incredible state—of the army could have predicted this. Everyone of integrity who came from the front said that had the Germans made the slightest attack we should have perished inevitably and absolutely.

We should have fallen prey to the enemy within a few days.

Having been taught this lesson, we shall overcome our split, our crisis, however severe the disease may be, because an immeasurably more reliable ally will come to our assistance—the world revolution. When the ratification of this Peace of Tilsit,<sup>35</sup> this unbelievable peace, more humiliating and predatory than the Brest peace, is spoken of, I say: certainly, yes. We must do this because we look at things from the point of view of the masses. Any attempt to apply the tactics applied internally in one country between October and November—the triumphant period of the revolution—to apply them with the aid of our imagination to the progress of events in the world revolution, is doomed to failure. When it is said that the respite is a fantasy, when a newspaper called *Kommunist*—from the word “Commune”, I suppose—when this paper fills column after column with attempts to refute the respite theory, I say that I have lived through quite a lot of factional conflicts and splits and so I have a great deal of experience; and I must say that it is clear to me that this disease will not be cured by the old method of factional Party splits because events will cure it more quickly. Life is marching forward very quickly. In this respect it is magnificent. History is driving its locomotive so fast that before the editors of *Kommunist* bring out their next issue the majority of the workers in Petrograd will have begun to be disappointed in its ideas, because events are proving that the respite is a fact. We are now signing a peace treaty, we have a respite, we are taking advantage of it the better to defend our fatherland—because had we been at war we should have had an army fleeing in panic which would have had to be stopped, and which our comrades cannot and could not stop, because war is more powerful than sermons, more powerful than ten thousand arguments. Since they did not understand the objective situation they could not hold back the army, and cannot do so. This sick army infected the whole organism, and another unparalleled defeat was inflicted upon us. German imperialism struck another blow at the revolution, a severe blow, because we allowed ourselves to face the blows of imperialism without machine-guns. Meanwhile, we shall take advantage of this breathing-space to persuade the

people to unite and fight, to say to the Russian workers and peasants: "Organise self-discipline, strict discipline, otherwise you will have to remain lying under the German jackboot as you are lying now, as you will inevitably have to lie until the people learn to fight and to create an army capable, not of running away but of bearing untold suffering." It is inevitable, because the German revolution has not yet begun, and we cannot guarantee that it will come tomorrow.

That is why the respite theory, which is totally rejected in the flood of articles in *Kommunist*, is advanced by reality. Everyone can see that the respite is a fact, that everyone is taking advantage of it. We believed that we would lose Petrograd in a few days when the advancing German troops were only a few days' march away, and when our best sailors and the Putilov workers,<sup>36</sup> notwithstanding all their great enthusiasm, remained alone, when incredible chaos and panic broke out, which compelled our troops to flee all the way to Gatchina, and when we had cases of positions being recaptured that had never been lost—by a telegraph operator, arriving at the station, taking his place at the key and wiring, "No Germans in sight. We have occupied the station." A few hours later I received a telephone communication from the Commissariat of Railways informing me, "We have occupied the next station. We are approaching Yamburg. No Germans in sight. Telegraph operator at his post." That is the kind of thing we had. This is the real history of the eleven days' war.<sup>37</sup> It was described to us by sailors and Putilov workers, who ought to be brought to the Congress of Soviets. Let them tell the truth. It is a frightfully bitter, disappointing, painful and humiliating truth, but it is a hundred times more useful, it can be understood by the Russian people.

One may dream about the field revolution on a world-wide scale, for it will come. Everything will come in due time; but for the time being, set to work to establish self-discipline, subordination before all else, so that we can have exemplary order, so that the workers for at least one hour in twenty-four may train to fight. This is a little more difficult than relating beautiful fairy-tales. This is what we can do today; in this way you will help the German revolution, the world revolution. We do not know how many days the

respite will last, but we have got it. We must demobilise the army as quickly as possible, because it is a sick organ; meanwhile, we will assist the Finnish revolution.

Yes, of course, we are violating the treaty; we have violated it thirty or forty times. Only children can fail to understand that in an epoch like the present, when a long painful period of emancipation is setting in, which has only just created and raised the Soviet power three stages in its development—only children can fail to understand that in this case there must be a long, circumspect struggle. The shameful peace treaty is rousing protest, but when comrades from *Kommunist* talk about war they appeal to sentiment and forget that the people are clenching their fists with rage, are “seeing red”. What do they say? “A class-conscious revolutionary will never live through this, will never submit to such a disgrace.” Their newspaper bears the title *Kommunist*, but it should bear the title *Szlachcic*\* because it looks at things from the point of view of the *szlachcic* who, dying in a beautiful pose, sword in hand, said: “Peace is disgraceful, war is honourable.” They argue from the point of view of the *szlachcic*; I argue from the point of view of the peasant.

If I accept peace when the army is in flight, and must be in flight if it is not to lose thousands of men, I accept it in order to prevent things from getting worse. Is the treaty really shameful? Why, every sober-minded peasant and worker will say I am right, because they understand that peace is a means of gathering forces. History knows—I have referred to it more than once—the case of the liberation of the Germans from Napoleon after the Peace of Tilsit. I deliberately called the peace a Peace of Tilsit although we did not undertake to do what had been stipulated in that treaty, we did not undertake to provide troops to assist the victor to conquer other nations—things like that have happened in history, and will happen to us if we continue to place our hopes in the field revolution on a world-wide scale. Take care that history does not impose upon you this form of military slavery as well. And before the socialist revolution is victorious in all countries the Soviet Republic may be

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\* *Szlachcic*—a Polish nobleman.—Ed.

reduced to slavery. At Tilsit, Napoleon compelled the Germans to accept incredibly disgraceful peace terms. That peace had to be signed several times. The Hoffmann of those days—Napoleon—time and again caught the Germans violating the peace treaty, and the present Hoffmann will catch us at it. Only we shall take care that he does not catch us soon.

The last war has been a bitter, painful, but serious lesson for the Russian people. It has taught them to organise, to become disciplined, to obey, to establish a discipline that will be exemplary. Learn discipline from the Germans; for, if we do not, we, as a people, are doomed, we shall live in eternal slavery.

This way, and no other, has been the way of history. History tells us that peace is a respite for war, war is a means of obtaining a somewhat better or somewhat worse peace. At Brest the relation of forces corresponded to a peace imposed upon the one who has been defeated, but it was not a humiliating peace. The relation of forces at Pskov corresponded to a disgraceful, more humiliating peace; and in Petrograd and Moscow, at the next stage, a peace four times more humiliating will be dictated to us. We do not say that the Soviet power is only a form, as our young Moscow friends\* have said, we do not say that the content can be sacrificed for this or that revolutionary principle. We do say, let the Russian people understand that they must become disciplined and organised, and then they will be able to withstand all the Tilsit peace treaties. The whole history of wars of liberation shows that when these wars involved large masses liberation came quickly. We say, since history marches forward in this way, we shall have to abandon peace for war, and this may happen within the next few days. Everyone must be prepared. I have not the slightest shadow of doubt that the Germans are preparing near Narva, if it is true that it has not been taken, as all the newspapers say; if not in Narva, then near Narva, if not in Pskov, then near Pskov, the Germans are grouping their regular army, making ready their railways, to capture Petrograd at the next jump. And this beast can jump very well. He has proved that. He will

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\* See pp. 59-66.—*Ed.*

jump again. There is not a shadow of doubt about that. That is why we must be prepared, we must not brag, but must be able to take advantage of even a single day of respite, because we can take advantage of even one day's respite to evacuate Petrograd, the capture of which will cause unprecedented suffering to hundreds of thousands of our proletarians. I say again that I am ready to sign, and that I consider it my duty to sign, a treaty twenty times, a hundred times more humiliating, in order to gain at least a few days in which to evacuate Petrograd, because by that I will alleviate the sufferings of the workers, who otherwise may fall under the yoke of the Germans; by that I facilitate the removal from Petrograd of all the materials, gunpowder, etc., which we need; because I am a defencist, because I stand for the preparation of an army, even in the most remote rear, where our present, demobilised, sick army is being healed.

We do not know how long the respite will last—we will try to take advantage of the situation. Perhaps the respite will last longer, perhaps it will last only a few days. Anything may happen, no one knows, or can know, because all the major powers are bound, restricted, compelled to fight on several fronts. Hoffmann's behaviour is determined first by the need to smash the Soviet Republic; secondly, by the fact that he has to wage war on a number of fronts, and thirdly, by the fact that the revolution in Germany is maturing, is growing, and Hoffmann knows this. He cannot, as some assert, take Petrograd and Moscow this very minute. But he may do so tomorrow, that is quite possible. I repeat that at a moment when the army is obviously sick, when we are taking advantage of every opportunity, come what may, to get at least one day's respite, we say that every serious revolutionary who is linked with the masses and who knows what war is, what the masses are, must discipline the masses, must heal them, must try to arouse them for a new war—every such revolutionary will admit that we are right, will admit that any disgraceful peace is proper, because it is in the interests of the proletarian revolution and the regeneration of Russia, because it will help to get rid of the sick organ. As every sensible man understands, by signing this peace treaty we do not put a stop to our workers' revolution; everyone understands that by concluding peace with the

Germans we do not stop rendering military aid; we are sending arms to the Finns, but not military units, which turn out to be unfit.

Perhaps we will accept war; perhaps tomorrow we will surrender even Moscow and then go over to the offensive; we will move our army against the enemy's army if the necessary turn in the mood of the people takes place. This turn is developing and perhaps much time is required, but it will come, when the great mass of the people will not say what they are saying now. I am compelled to accept the harshest peace terms because I cannot say to myself that this time has arrived. When the time of regeneration arrives everyone will realise it, will see that the Russian is no fool; he sees, he will understand that for the time being we must refrain, that this slogan must be carried through—and this is the main task of our Party Congress and of the Congress of Soviets.

We must learn to work in a new way. That is immensely more difficult, but it is by no means hopeless. It will not break Soviet power if we do not break it ourselves by utterly senseless adventurism. The time will come when the people will say, we will not permit ourselves to be tortured any longer. But this will take place only if we do not agree to this adventure but prove able to work under harsh conditions and under the unprecedentedly humiliating treaty we signed the other day, because a war, or a peace treaty, cannot solve such a historical crisis. Because of their monarchic organisation the German people were fettered in 1807, when after several humiliating peace treaties, which were transformed into respites to be followed by new humiliations and new infringements, they signed the Peace of Tilsit. The Soviet organisation of the people makes our task easier.

We should have but one slogan—to learn the art of war properly and put the railways in order. To wage a socialist revolutionary war without railways would be rank treachery. We must produce order and we must produce all the energy and all the strength that will produce the best that is in the revolution.

Grasp even an hour's respite if it is given you, in order to maintain contact with the remote rear and there create new armies. Abandon illusions for which real events have punished you and will punish you more severely in the

future. An epoch of most grievous defeats is ahead of us, it is with us now, we must be able to reckon with it, we must be prepared for persistent work in conditions of illegality, in conditions of downright slavery to the Germans; it is no use painting it in bright colours, it is a real Peace of Tilsit. If we are able to act in this way, then, in spite of defeats, we shall be able to say with absolute certainty—victory will be ours. (*Applause.*)

Brief newspaper report  
published in *Pravda* No. 45,  
March 9 (February 24), 1918

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 87-109



*Reply to the Debate on the Political Report  
of the Central Committee  
March 8*

Comrades, let me begin with some relatively minor remarks, let me begin from the end. At the end of his speech Comrade Bukharin went so far as to compare us to Petlyura.<sup>38</sup> If he thinks that is so, how can he remain with us in the same party? Isn't it just empty talk? If things were really as he said, we should not, of course, be members of the same party. The fact that we are together shows that we are ninety per cent in agreement with Bukharin. It is true he added a few revolutionary phrases about our wanting to betray the Ukraine. I am sure it is not worth while talking about such obvious nonsense. I shall return to Comrade Ryazanov, and here I want to say that in the same way as an exception that occurs once in ten years proves the rule, so has Comrade Ryazanov chanced to say a serious word. (*Applause.*) He said that Lenin was surrendering space to gain time. That is almost philosophical reasoning. This time it happened that we heard from Comrade Ryazanov a serious phrase—true it is only a phrase—which fully expresses the case; to gain time I want to surrender space to the actual victor. That and that alone is the whole point at issue. All else is mere talk—the need for a revolutionary war, rousing the peasantry, etc. When Comrade Bukharin pictures things as though there could not be two opinions as to whether war is possible and says—“ask any soldier” (I wrote down his actual words) —since he puts the question this way and wants to ask any soldier, I'll answer him. “Any soldier” turned out to be a French officer that I had a talk with.<sup>39</sup> That French officer looked at me, with anger in his eyes, of course—had I not sold Russia to the Germans?—and said: “I am a royalist, I am also a champion of the monarchy in France, a champion of the defeat of Germany, so don't think I support Soviet power—who would, if he was a royalist?—but I favour your signing the Brest Treaty because it's neces-

sary." That's "asking any soldier" for you. Any soldier would say what I have said—we had to sign the Brest Treaty. If it now emerges from Bukharin's speech that our differences have greatly diminished, it is only because his supporters have concealed the chief point on which we differ.

Now that Bukharin is thundering against us for having demoralised the masses, he is perfectly correct, except that it is himself and not us that he is attacking. Who caused this mess in the Central Committee?—You, Comrade Bukharin. (*Laughter.*) No matter how much you shout "No", the truth will out; we are here in our own comradely family, we are at our own Congress, we have nothing to hide, the truth must be told. And the truth is that there were three trends in the Central Committee. On February 17 Lomov and Bukharin did not vote. I have asked for the record of the voting to be reproduced and copies made so that every Party member who wishes to do so can go into the secretariat and see how people voted—the historic voting of January 21, which shows that they wavered and we did not, not in the least; we said, "Let us accept the Brest peace—you'll get nothing better—so as to prepare for a revolutionary war". Now we have gained five days in which to evacuate Petrograd. Now the manifesto signed by Krylenko and Podvoisky<sup>40</sup> has been published; they were not among the Lefts, and Bukharin insulted them by saying that Krylenko had been "dragged in", as though we had invented what Krylenko reported. We agree in full with what they said; that is how matters stand, for it was these army men who gave proof of what I had said; and you dismiss the matter by saying the Germans won't attack. How can this situation be compared with October, when the question of equipment did not arise? If you want to take facts into consideration, then consider this one—that the disagreement arose over the statement that we cannot start a war that is obviously to our disadvantage. When Comrade Bukharin began his concluding speech with the thunderous question "Is war possible in the near future?" he greatly surprised me. I answer without hesitation—yes, it is possible, but today we must accept peace. There is no contradiction in this.

After these brief remarks I shall give detailed answers to previous speakers. As far as Radek is concerned I must make an exception. But there was another speech, that of

Comrade Uritsky. What was there in that speech apart from Canossa,<sup>41</sup> "treachery", "retreated", "adapted"? What is all this about? Haven't you borrowed your criticism from a Left Socialist-Revolutionary newspaper? Comrade Bubnov read us a statement submitted to the Central Committee by those of its members who consider themselves very Left-wing and who gave us a striking example of a demonstration before the eyes of the whole world—"the behaviour of the Central Committee strikes a blow at the international proletariat". Is that anything but an empty phrase? "Demonstrate weakness before the eyes of the whole world!" How are we demonstrating? By proposing peace? Because our army has run away? Have we not proved that to begin war with Germany at this moment, and not to accept the Brest peace, would mean showing the world that our army is sick and does not want to give battle? Bubnov's statement was quite empty when he asserted that the wavering was entirely of our making—it was due to our army's being sick. Sooner or later, there had to be a respite. If we had had the correct strategy we should have had a month's breathing-space, but since your strategy was incorrect we have only five days—even that is good. The history of war shows that even days are sometimes enough to halt a panic-stricken army. Anyone who does not accept, does not conclude this devilish peace now, is a man of empty phrases and not a strategist. That is the pity of it. When Central Committee members write to me about "demonstrations of weakness", "treachery", they are writing the most damaging, empty, childish phrases. We demonstrated our weakness by attempting to fight at a time when the demonstration should not have been made, when an offensive against us was inevitable. As for the peasants of Pskov, we shall bring them to the Congress of Soviets to relate how the Germans treat people, so that they can change the mood of the soldier in panic-stricken flight and he will begin to recover from his panic and say, "This is certainly not the war the Bolsheviks promised to put an end to, this is a new war the Germans are waging against Soviet power." Then recovery will come. But you raise a question that cannot be answered. Nobody knows how long the respite will last.

Now I must say something about Comrade Trotsky's position. There are two aspects to his activities; when he

began the negotiations at Brest and made splendid use of them for agitation, we all agreed with Comrade Trotsky. He has quoted part of a conversation with me, but I must add that it was agreed between us that we would hold out until the Germans presented an ultimatum, and then we would give way. The Germans deceived us—they stole five days out of seven from us.<sup>42</sup> Trotsky's tactics were correct as long as they were aimed at delaying matters; they became incorrect when it was announced that the state of war had been terminated but peace had not been concluded. I proposed quite definitely that peace be concluded. We could not have got anything better than the Brest peace. It is now clear to everybody that we would have had a month's respite and that we would not have lost anything. Since history has swept that away it is not worth recalling, but it is funny to hear Bukharin say, "Events will show that we were right." I was right because I wrote about it back in 1915—"We must prepare to wage war, it is inevitable, it is coming, it will come."<sup>\*</sup> But we had to accept peace and not try vain blustering. And because war is coming, it was all the more necessary to accept peace, and now we are at least making easier the evacuation of Petrograd—we have made it easier. That is a fact. And when Comrade Trotsky makes fresh demands, "Promise not to conclude peace with Vinnichenko",<sup>43</sup> I say that under no circumstances will I take that obligation upon myself. If the Congress accepts this obligation, neither I, nor those who agree with me, will accept responsibility for it. It would mean tying our hands again with a formal decision instead of following a clear line of manoeuvre—retreat when possible, and at times attack. In war you must never tie yourself down with formal decisions. It is ridiculous not to know the history of war, not to know that a treaty is a means of gathering strength—I have already mentioned Prussian history. There are some people who are just like children, they think that if we have signed a treaty we have sold ourselves to Satan and have gone to hell. That is simply ridiculous when it is quite obvious from the history of war that the conclusion of a treaty after defeat is a means of gathering strength. There have been cases in history of one war following immediately

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\* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 404.—Ed.

after another, we have all forgotten that, we see that the old war is turning into. . . \* If you like, you can bind yourselves for ever with formal decisions and then hand over all the responsible posts to the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. We shall not accept responsibility for it. There is not the least desire for a split here. I am sure that events will teach you—March 12 is not far away, and you will obtain plenty of material.<sup>44</sup>

Comrade Trotsky says that it will be treachery in the full sense of the word. I maintain that that is an absolutely wrong point of view.\*\* To demonstrate this concretely, I will give you an example: two men are walking together and are attacked by ten men, one fights and the other runs away—that is treachery; but suppose we have two armies of a hundred thousand each and there are five armies against them; one army is surrounded by two hundred thousand, and the other must go to its aid; knowing that the other three hundred thousand of the enemy are ambushed to trap it, should the second army go to the aid of the first? It should not. That is not treachery, that is not cowardice; a simple increase in numbers has changed all concepts, any soldier knows this; it is no longer a personal concept. By acting in this way I preserve my army; let the other army be captured, I shall be able to renew mine, I have allies, I shall wait till the allies arrive. That is the only way to argue; when military arguments are mixed up with others, you get nothing but empty phrases. That is not the way to conduct politics.

We have done everything that could be done. By signing the treaty we have saved Petrograd, even if only for a few days. (The secretaries and stenographers should not think of putting that on record.) The treaty requires us to withdraw our troops from Finland, troops that are clearly no good, but we are not forbidden to take arms into Finland. If Petrograd had fallen a few days ago, the city would have been in a panic and we should not have been able to take anything away; but in those five days we have helped our Finnish

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\* Several words are missing in the verbatim report.—*Ed.*

\*\* In the secretary's record the passage beginning with the words: "...is a means of gathering strength..." reads as follows: "...is for gathering strength. History has created hundreds of all sorts of treaties. Then give official posts to Trotsky and others..."—*Ed.*

comrades—how much I shall not say, they know it themselves.

The statement that we have betrayed Finland is just a childish phrase. We helped the Finns precisely by retreating before the Germans in good time. Russia will never perish just because Petrograd falls, Comrade Bukharin is a thousand times right in that, but if we manoeuvre in Bukharin's way we may ruin a good revolution. (*Laughter.*)

We have not betrayed either Finland or the Ukraine. No class-conscious worker would accuse us of this. We are helping as best we can. We have not taken one good man away from our army and shall not do so. You say that Hoffmann will catch us—of course he may, I do not doubt it, but how many days it will take him, he does not know and nobody knows. Furthermore, your arguments about his catching us are arguments about the political alignment of forces, of which I shall speak later.

Now that I have explained why I am absolutely unable to accept Trotsky's proposal—you cannot conduct politics in that way—I must say that Radek has given us an example of how far the comrades at our Congress have departed from empty phrases such as Uritsky still sticks to. I certainly cannot accuse him of empty phrases in that speech. He said, "There is not a shadow of treachery, not a shadow of disgrace, because it is clear that you retreated in the face of overpowering military force." That is an appraisal that destroys Trotsky's position. When Radek said, "We must grit our teeth and prepare our forces," he was right—I agree with that in full—don't bluster, grit your teeth and make preparations.

Grit your teeth, don't bluster and muster your forces. The revolutionary war will come, there is no disagreement on this; the difference of opinion is on the Peace of Tilsit—should we conclude it or not? The worst of it is that we have a sick army, and the Central Committee, therefore, must have a firm line and not differences of opinion or the middle line that Comrade Bukharin also supported. I am not painting the respite in bright colours; nobody knows how long it will last and I don't know. The efforts that are being made to force me to say how long it will last are ridiculous. As long as we hold the main lines we are helping the Ukraine and Finland. We are taking advantage of the respite, manoeuvring and retreating.

The German worker cannot now be told that the Russians are being awkward, for it is now clear that German and Japanese imperialism is attacking—it will be clear to everybody; apart from a desire to strangle the Bolsheviki, the Germans also want to do some strangling in the West, everything is mixed up, and in this war we shall have to and must be able to manoeuvre.

With regard to Comrade Bukharin's speech, I must say that when he runs short of arguments he puts forward something in the Uritsky manner and says, "The treaty disgraces us." Here no arguments are needed; if we have been disgraced we should collect our papers and run, but, although we have been "disgraced", I do not think our position has been shaken. Comrade Bukharin attempted to analyse the class basis of our position, but instead of doing so told us an anecdote about a deceased Moscow economist. When you discovered some connection between our tactics and food speculation—this was really ridiculous—you forgot that the attitude of the class as a whole, the class, and not the food speculators, shows that the Russian bourgeoisie and their hangers-on—the *Dyelo Naroda* and *Novaya Zhizn* writers—are bending all their efforts to goad us on to war. You do not stress that class fact. To declare war on Germany at the moment would be to fall for the provocation of the Russian bourgeoisie. That is not new because it is the surest—I do not say absolutely certain, because nothing is absolutely certain—the surest way of getting rid of us today. When Comrade Bukharin said that events were on their side, that in the long run we would recognise revolutionary war, he was celebrating an easy victory since we prophesied the inevitability of a revolutionary war in 1915. Our differences were on the following—would the Germans attack or not; that we should have declared the state of war terminated; that in the interests of revolutionary war we should have to retreat, surrendering territory to gain time. Strategy and politics prescribe the most disgusting peace treaty imaginable. Our differences will all disappear once we recognise these tactics.

Brief report published  
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*Nizhegorodsky Listok* No. 54,  
March 19 (6), 1918

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 110-17

*Resolution on the Refusal  
of the "Left Communists" to be Members  
of the Central Committee*

The Congress is of the opinion that a refusal to enter the Central Committee in the situation at present obtaining in the Party is particularly undesirable, since such a refusal is in general impermissible in principle to those who desire the unity of the Party, and would today be a double threat to unity.

The Congress declares that everyone can and should deny his responsibility for any step taken by the Central Committee, if he does not agree with it, by means of a declaration to that effect but not by leaving the Central Committee.

The Congress is firm in the hope that the comrades will, after a consultation with the mass organisations, withdraw their resignation; the Congress will, therefore, carry through elections without taking the statement of resignation into consideration.

Written on March 8, 1918

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
p. 151



■  
**Comment**  
**on the Behaviour of the "Left Communists"**  
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Since the conclusion of the Brest peace, some comrades who call themselves "Left Communists" have formed an "Opposition" in the Party, and in consequence of this their activity is slipping further and further towards a completely disloyal and impermissible violation of Party discipline.

Comrade Bukharin has refused to accept the post of member of the C.C. to which he was appointed by the Party Congress.

Comrades Smirnov, Obolensky and Yakovleva have resigned from their posts as People's Commissars and as business manager of the Supreme Economic Council.

These are absolutely disloyal, uncomradely actions that violate Party discipline, and such behaviour was and remains a *step towards a split* on the part of the above-mentioned comrades. . . .\*

Written between March 8  
and 18, 1918

First published in 1929  
in *Lenin Miscellany XI*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
p. 202

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\* Here the manuscript breaks off.—Ed.

## *The Chief Task of Our Day*

*Thou art wretched, thou art abundant,  
Thou art mighty, thou art impotent*  
—Mother Russia!<sup>45</sup>

Human history these days is making a momentous and most difficult turn, a turn, one might say without the least exaggeration, of immense significance for the emancipation of the world. A turn from war to peace; a turn from a war between plunderers who are sending to the shambles millions of the working and exploited people for the sake of establishing a new system of dividing the spoils looted by the strongest of them, to a war of the oppressed against the oppressors for liberation from the yoke of capital; a turn from an abyss of suffering, anguish, starvation and degradation to the bright future of communist society, universal prosperity and enduring peace. No wonder that at the sharpest points of this sharp turn, when all around the old order is breaking down and collapsing with a terrible grinding crash, and the new order is being born amid indescribable suffering, there are some whose heads grow dizzy, some who are seized by despair, some who seek salvation from the at times too bitter reality in fine-sounding and alluring phrases.

It has been Russia's lot to see most clearly, and experience most keenly and painfully the sharpest of sharp turning-points in history as it swings round from imperialism towards the communist revolution. In the space of a few days we destroyed one of the oldest, most powerful, barbarous and brutal of monarchies. In the space of a few months we passed through a number of stages of collaboration with the bourgeoisie and of shaking off petty-bourgeois illusions, for which other countries have required decades. In the course of a few weeks, having overthrown the bourgeoisie, we crushed its open resistance in civil war. We passed in a victorious triumphal march of Bolshevism from one end of a vast country to the other. We raised the lowest strata of the working people oppressed by tsarism and the

bourgeoisie to liberty and independent life. We established and consolidated a Soviet Republic, a new type of state, which is infinitely superior to, and more democratic than, the best of the bourgeois-parliamentary republics. We established the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the poor peasantry, and began a broadly conceived system of socialist reforms. We awakened the faith of the millions upon millions of workers of all countries in their own strength and kindled the fires of enthusiasm in them. Everywhere we issued the call for a world workers' revolution. We flung a challenge to the imperialist plunderers of all countries.

Then in a few days we were thrown to the ground by an imperialist plunderer, who fell upon the unarmed. He compelled us to sign an incredibly burdensome and humiliating peace—as tribute for having dared to tear ourselves, even for the shortest space of time, from the iron clutches of an imperialist war. The more ominously the shadow of a workers' revolution in his own country rises before the plunderer, the greater his ferocity in crushing and stifling Russia and tearing her to pieces.

We were compelled to sign a "Tilsit" peace. We need no self-deception. We must courageously look the bitter, unadorned truth straight in the face. We must measure fully, to the very bottom, that abyss of defeat, dismemberment, enslavement, and humiliation into which we have now been pushed. The more clearly we understand this, the firmer, the more steeled and tempered will be our will to liberation, our aspiration to rise again from enslavement to independence, and our unbending determination to ensure that at any price Russia ceases to be wretched and impotent and becomes mighty and abundant in the full meaning of these words.

And mighty and abundant she can become, for, after all, we still have sufficient territory and natural wealth left to us to supply each and all, if not with abundant, at least with adequate means of life. Our natural wealth, our manpower and the splendid impetus which the great revolution has given to the creative powers of the people are ample material to build a truly mighty and abundant Russia.

Russia will become mighty and abundant if she abandons all dejection and all phrase-making, if, with clenched

teeth, she musters all her forces and strains every nerve and muscle, if she realises that salvation lies *only* along that road of world socialist revolution upon which we have set out. March forward along that road, undismayed by defeats, lay the firm foundation of socialist society stone by stone, work with might and main to establish discipline and self-discipline, consolidate everywhere organisation, order, efficiency, and the harmonious co-operation of all the forces of the people, introduce comprehensive accounting of and control over production and distribution—such is the way to build up military might and socialist might.

It would be unworthy of a genuine socialist who has suffered grave defeat either to bluster or to give way to despair. It is not true that our position is hopeless and that all that remains for us is to choose between an “inglorious” death (inglorious from the point of view of the *szlachcic*), such as this harsh peace represents, and a “gallant” death in a hopeless fight. It is not true that by signing a “Tilsit” peace we have betrayed our ideals or our friends. We have betrayed nothing and nobody, we have not sanctified or covered up any lie, we have not refused to help a single friend or comrade in misfortune in every way we could and with everything at our disposal. A general who withdraws the remnants of his army into the heart of the country when it has been beaten or is in panic-stricken flight, or who, in extremity, shields this retreat by a harsh and humiliating peace, is not guilty of treachery towards that part of his army which he is powerless to help and which has been cut off by the enemy. Such a general performs his duty by choosing the only way of saving what can still be saved, by refusing to gamble recklessly, by not embellishing the bitter truth for the people, by “surrendering space in order to gain time”, by taking advantage of *any and every* respite, even the briefest, in which to muster his forces and to allow his army to rest or recover, if it is affected by disintegration and demoralisation.

We have signed a “Tilsit” peace. When Napoleon I, in 1807, compelled Prussia to sign the Peace of Tilsit, the conqueror smashed the Germans’ entire army, occupied their capital and all their big cities, brought in his own police, compelled the vanquished to supply him, the conqueror, with auxiliary corps for fresh predatory wars, and partitioned

Germany, concluding alliances with some German states against others. Nevertheless, the German people survived even *such* a peace, proved able to muster their forces, to rise and to win the right to liberty and independence.

To all those who are able and willing to think, the example of the Peace of Tilsit (which was only one of many harsh and humiliating treaties forced upon the Germans at that period) clearly shows how childishy naive is the idea that under all conditions a harsh peace means the bottomless pit of ruin, while war is the path of valour and salvation. Periods of war teach us that peace has not infrequently in history served as a respite and a means of mustering forces for new battles. The Peace of Tilsit was a supreme humiliation for Germany, but at the same time it marked a turn towards a supreme national resurgence. At that time historical conditions were such that this resurgence could be channelled only in the direction of a *bourgeois* state. At that time, more than a hundred years ago, history was made by handfuls of nobles and a sprinkling of bourgeois intellectuals, while the worker and peasant masses were somnolent and dormant. As a result history at that time could only crawl along at a terribly slow pace.

But now capitalism has raised culture in general, and the culture of the masses in particular, to a much higher level. War has shaken up the masses, its untold horrors and suffering have awakened them. War has given history momentum and it is now flying with locomotive speed. History is now being independently made by millions and tens of millions of people. Capitalism has now matured for socialism.

Consequently, if Russia is now passing—as she undeniably is—from a “Tilsit” peace to a national resurgence, to a great patriotic war, the outlet for it is not in the direction of a bourgeois state, but in the direction of a world socialist revolution. Since October 25, 1917, we have been defencists. We are for “defence of the fatherland”; but that patriotic war towards which we are moving is a war for a socialist fatherland, for socialism as a fatherland, for the Soviet Republic as a *contingent* of the world army of socialism.

“Hate the Germans, kill the Germans”—such was, and is, the slogan of common, i.e., bourgeois, patriotism. But we will say “Hate the imperialist plunderers, hate capitalism,

death to capitalism” and at the same time “Learn from the Germans! Remain true to the brotherly alliance with the German workers. They are late in coming to our aid. We shall gain time, we shall live to see them coming, and they *will come*, to our aid.”

Yes, learn from the Germans! History is moving in zig-zags and by roundabout ways. It so happens that it is the Germans who now personify, besides a brutal imperialism, the principle of discipline, organisation, harmonious co-operation on the basis of modern machine industry, and strict accounting and control.

And that is just what we are lacking. That is just what we must learn. That is just what our great revolution needs in order to pass from a triumphant beginning, through a succession of severe trials, to its triumphant goal. That is just what the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic requires in order to cease being wretched and impotent and become mighty and abundant for all time.

March 11, 1918

*Izvestia VTsIK* No. 46,  
March 12, 1918  
Signed: *N. Lenin*

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 159-63

■  
*Fourth, Extraordinary, All-Russia  
Congress of Soviets  
March 14-16, 1918*  
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*Report on Ratification of the Peace Treaty  
March 14*

Comrades, today we have to settle a question that marks a turning-point in the development of the Russian revolution, and not only of the Russian but also of the international revolution, and in order to decide correctly on this very harsh peace which representatives of Soviet power have concluded at Brest-Litovsk, and which Soviet power asks you to approve, or ratify—in order to settle this question correctly it is more than ever necessary for us to get an understanding of the historical meaning of the turning-point we are at, an understanding of the main feature of the development of the revolution up to now and the main reason for the severe defeat and the period of stern trials we have passed through.

It seems to me that the chief source of disagreement among the Soviet parties<sup>46</sup> on this question is that some people too easily give way to a feeling of just and legitimate indignation over the defeat of the Soviet Republic by imperialism, too easily give way at times to despair instead of considering the historical conditions of the revolution as they developed up to the time of the present peace, and as they appear to us since the peace; instead of doing that they try to answer questions of the tactics of the revolution on the basis of their immediate feelings. The entire history of revolutions, however, teaches us that when we have to do with a mass movement or with the class struggle, especially one like that at present developing not only throughout a single country, albeit a tremendous country, but also involving all international relations—in such a case we must base our tactics first and foremost on an appraisal of the objective situation, we must examine analytically the course of the revolution

up to this moment and the reason it has taken a turn so menacing and so sharp, and so much to our disadvantage.

If we examine the development of our revolution from that point of view we see clearly that it has so far passed through a period of relative and largely imaginary self-dependence, and of being temporarily independent of international relations. The path travelled by our revolution from the end of February 1917 to February 11 of this year, when the German offensive began, was, by and large, a path of easy and rapid successes. If we study the development of that revolution on an international scale, from the standpoint of the Russian revolution alone, we shall see that we have passed through three periods in the past year. The first period is that in which the working class of Russia, together with all advanced, class-conscious and active peasants, supported not only by the petty bourgeoisie but also by the big bourgeoisie, swept away the monarchy in a few days. This astounding success is to be explained by the fact that on the one hand, the Russian people had acquired a big reserve of revolutionary fighting potential from the experience of 1905, while on the other hand, Russia, an extremely backward country, had suffered more than any other from the war and had, at an especially early date, reached a stage when it was absolutely impossible to continue the war under the old regime.

This short tempestuous success when a new organisation was created—the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies—was followed by the long months of the period of transition of our revolution, the period in which the government of the bourgeoisie, immediately undermined by the Soviets, was kept going and strengthened by the petty-bourgeois compromising parties, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who supported it. It was a government that supported the imperialist war and the imperialist secret treaties, fed the working class on promises, did literally nothing, and preserved the state of economic ruin. The Soviets mustered their forces in this period, a period that for us, for the Russian revolution, was a long one; it was a long period for the Russian revolution but it was a short one from the international point of view, because in most of the leading countries the period of overcoming petty-bourgeois illusions, of compromise by various parties, groups and trends



had been taking not months but long decades. The span of time, from April 20 to the moment Kerensky renewed the imperialist war in June (he had the secret imperialist treaty in his pocket), was decisive. This second period included our July defeat and the Kornilov revolt, and only through the experience of the mass struggle, only when the working-class and peasant masses had realised from their own experience and not from sermons that petty-bourgeois compromise was all in vain—only then, after long political development, after long preparations and changes in the moods and views of party groups, was the ground made ready for the October Revolution; only then did the Russian revolution enter the third period of its initial stage, a stage of isolation, or temporary separation, from the world revolution.

This third, or October, period, the period of organisation, was the most difficult; at the same time it was a period of the biggest and most rapid triumphs. After October, our revolution—the revolution that placed power in the hands of the revolutionary proletariat, established its dictatorship and obtained for it the support of the vast majority of the proletariat and the poor peasantry—after October our revolution made a victorious, triumphal advance. Throughout Russia civil war began in the form of resistance by the exploiters, the landowners and bourgeoisie, supported by part of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Civil war broke out, and in that war the forces of the enemies of Soviet power, the forces of the enemies of the working and exploited masses, proved to be insignificant; the civil war was one continuous triumph for Soviet power because its opponents, the exploiters, the landowners and bourgeoisie, had neither political nor economic support, and their attacks collapsed. The struggle against them was not so much a military operation as agitation; section after section, mass after mass, down to the working Cossacks, abandoned the exploiters who were trying to lead them away from Soviet power.

This period of the victorious, triumphal advance of the dictatorship of the proletariat and Soviet power, when great masses of the working and exploited people of Russia were drawn to the side of Soviet power definitely and irrevocably—this period constituted the final and highest point of development of the Russian revolution, which had been

progressing all this time, apparently, independently of world imperialism. That was the reason why a country which was extremely backward and was the most prepared for the revolution by the experience of 1905 was able to promote one class after another to power rapidly, easily and systematically, getting rid of various political alignments until at last that political structure was reached which was the last word, not only in the Russian revolution, but also in the West-European workers' revolutions, for Soviet power has been consolidated in Russia and has won the absolute sympathy of the working and exploited people because it has destroyed the old state apparatus that was an instrument of oppression and has laid the foundation of a state of a new and higher form of which the Paris Commune was the prototype. The Commune destroyed the old state machine and replaced it by the armed force of the masses themselves, replaced bourgeois parliamentary democracy by the democracy of the working people, which excluded the exploiters and systematically suppressed their resistance.

That is what the Russian revolution did in this period and that is why a small vanguard of the Russian revolution is under the impression that this rapid triumphal advance can be expected to continue in further victory. That is precisely their mistake because the period when the Russian revolution was developing, passing state power in Russia from one class to another and getting rid of class compromise within the bounds of Russia alone—this period was able to exist historically only because the predatory giants of world imperialism were temporarily halted in their advance against Soviet power. A revolution that overthrew the monarchy in a few days, exhausted all possibilities of compromise with the bourgeoisie in a few months and overcame all the resistance by the bourgeoisie in a civil war of a few weeks, this revolution, the revolution of a socialist republic, could live side by side with the imperialist powers, among the international plunderers, the wild beasts of international imperialism, only so long as the bourgeoisie, locked in mortal struggle with each other, were paralysed in their offensive against Russia.

And then began the period that we feel so keenly and see before our eyes, the period of disastrous defeats and severe trials for the Russian revolution, the period in which

the swift, direct and open offensive against the enemies of the revolution is over while in its place we are experiencing disastrous defeats and have to retreat before forces that are immeasurably greater than ours, before the forces of international imperialism and finance capital, before the military might that the entire bourgeoisie with its modern weapons and its organisation has mustered against us in the interests of plunder, oppression and the strangling of small nations; we had to think of bringing our forces up to their level; we had to face a task of tremendous difficulty, that of direct combat with enemies that differed from Romanov and Kerensky who could not be taken seriously; we had to meet the forces of the international imperialist bourgeoisie, all its military might, we had to stand face to face with the world plunderers. In view of the delay in getting help from the international socialist proletariat we naturally had to take upon ourselves a conflict with these forces and we suffered a disastrous defeat.

And this epoch is one of disastrous defeats, an epoch of retreat, an epoch in which we must save at least a small part of our position by retreating before imperialism, by awaiting the time when there will be changes in the world situation in general, when the forces of the European proletariat arrive, the forces that exist and are maturing but which have not been able to deal with their enemy as easily as we did with ours; it would be a very great illusion, a very great mistake, to forget that it was easy for the Russian revolution to begin but difficult for it to take further steps. This was inevitable because we had to begin with the most backward and most rotten political system. The European revolution will have to begin against the bourgeoisie, against a much more serious enemy and under immeasurably more difficult conditions. It will be much more difficult for the European revolution to begin. We see that it is immeasurably more difficult to make the first breach in the system that is holding back the revolution. It will be much easier for the European revolution to advance to the second and third stages. Things cannot be different with the alignment of forces of the revolutionary and reactionary classes that at present obtains in the world. This is the main turn in events that is always overlooked by people who view the present situation, the extremely serious position of the revolution,

from the standpoint of their own feelings and their indignation, and not from the historical standpoint. Historical experience teaches us that always, in all revolutions, at a time when a revolution takes an abrupt turn from swift victory to severe defeats, there comes a period of pseudo-revolutionary phrase-making that invariably causes the greatest damage to the development of the revolution. And so, comrades, we shall be able to appraise our tactics correctly only when we set out to consider the turn in events that has hurled us back from swift, easy and complete victories to grave defeats. This is an extremely difficult and extremely serious question arising out of the present turning-point in the development of the revolution, the turn from easy victories within the country to exceptionally heavy defeats without; it is also a turning-point in the entire world revolution, a turn from the period of propaganda and agitation on the part of the Russian revolution, with imperialism biding its time, to the offensive of imperialism against Soviet power, and this turn puts a particularly difficult and acute question before the international movement in Western Europe. If we are not to ignore this historical aspect of the situation we must try to understand how Russia's basic interests in the question of the present harsh, or obscene, as it is called, peace took shape.

When arguing against those who refused to see the need to accept that peace, I have often come up against the statement that the idea of concluding the peace expresses only the interests of the exhausted peasant masses, the declassed soldiers, and so on and so forth. Whenever I hear such statements, whenever I hear such things referred to, I am always amazed that the class aspect of national development is forgotten by comrades—people who limit themselves exclusively to seeking explanations. As though the Party of the proletariat on taking power had not counted on the alliance of the proletariat and the semi-proletariat, i.e., the poor peasantry (i.e., the majority of the peasantry of Russia), had not known that only such an alliance would be able to hand the government of Russia over to the revolutionary power of the Soviets, the power of the majority, the real majority of the people, and that without this alliance it would be senseless to make any attempt to establish power, especially at difficult turning-points in history! As though

we could now abandon this verity that was accepted by all of us and confine ourselves to a contemptuous reference to the exhausted state of the peasantry and the declassed soldiers! With regard to the exhausted state of the peasantry and the declassed soldiers we must say that the country will offer resistance, and that the poor peasants will be able to offer resistance only in so far as those poor peasants are capable of directing their forces to the struggle.

When we were about to take power in October it was obvious that events were inevitably leading up to it, that the turn towards Bolshevism in the Soviets indicated a turn throughout the country, and that the Bolsheviks must inevitably take power. When we, realising this, took power in October, we said to ourselves and to all the people, very clearly and unequivocally, that it was a transfer of power to the proletariat and the poor peasantry, that the proletariat knew the peasantry would support it—you know yourselves in what—in its active struggle for peace and its readiness to continue the fight against big finance capital. In this we are making no mistake, and nobody who sticks to the concept of class forces and class alignments can get away from the indisputable truth that we cannot ask a country of small peasants, a country that has given much for the European and world revolution, to carry on the struggle in a difficult situation, a most difficult situation, when help from the West-European proletariat has undoubtedly been delayed, although there is no doubt that it is coming to us, as the facts, the strikes, etc., show. That is why I say that such references to the exhaustion of the peasant masses, etc., are made by people who simply have no arguments, who are absolutely helpless when they seek such arguments, and who are quite unable to grasp class relations as a whole, in their entirety, the relations of the revolution of the proletariat and of the peasant masses; it is only when, at every sharp turn in history, we appraise the class relations as a whole, the relations of all classes, and do not select individual examples and individual cases, that we feel ourselves firmly supported by an analysis of probable facts. I realise full well that the Russian bourgeoisie are today urging us on towards a revolutionary war when it is absolutely impossible for us to have such a war. This is essential to the class interests of the bourgeoisie.

When they shout about an obscene peace and do not say a word about who brought the army to its present state, I realise quite well that it is the bourgeoisie together with the *Dyelo Naroda* people, the Tsereteli and Chernov Men-sheviks and their yes-men (*applause*)—I know quite well that it is the bourgeoisie who are bawling for a revolutionary war. Their class interests demand it, their anxiety to see Soviet power make a false move demands it. It is not surprising that this comes from people who, on the one hand, fill the pages of their newspapers with counter-revolutionary scribbling.... (*Voices*: "They've all been suppressed!") Unfortunately, not yet all of them, but we will close them all down. (*Applause*.) I should like to see the proletariat that would allow the counter-revolutionaries, those who support the bourgeoisie and collaborate with them, to continue using the monopoly of wealth to drug the people with their bourgeois opium. There is no such proletariat. (*Applause*.)

I realise, of course, that nothing but shouts, howls and screams about an obscene peace comes from those publications, I realise full well that the people who favour this revolutionary war—from the Constitutional-Democrats<sup>47</sup> to the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries—are those who meet the Germans as they advance and say triumphantly, here come the Germans, and then allow their officers, again wearing their badges of rank, to strut about in the places that have been occupied by the German imperialist invaders. Oh no, I am not a bit surprised at these bourgeois, these collaborators, preaching a revolutionary war. They want Soviet power to be caught in a trap. They have shown their hand, these bourgeois and collaborators. We have seen them and can still see live specimens, we know that in the Ukraine there are Ukrainian Kerenskys, Ukrainian Chernovs and Ukrainian Tseretelis—there they are, the Vinnichenkos. Those gentlemen, the Ukrainian Kerenskys, Chernovs and Tseretelis, concealed from the people the peace they concluded with the German imperialists, and today they are trying to overthrow Soviet power in the Ukraine with the help of German bayonets. That is what those bourgeois and those collaborators and their accomplices have done. That is what they have done, those Ukrainian bourgeois and collaborators, whose example you have before your very eyes; they concealed and are still concealing their secret treaties from

the people, they are attacking Soviet power with the aid of German bayonets. That is what the Russian bourgeoisie want, that is where the bourgeois yes-men are trying to push Soviet power, wittingly or unwittingly; they know that under no circumstances can Soviet power undertake an imperialist war against the might of imperialism at the present moment. That is why it is only in this international situation, in this general class situation, that we can understand the full depth of the mistake of those who, like the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, have allowed themselves to be carried away by a theory that is common to the history of all revolutions at moments of difficulty, a theory that is half desperation and half empty phrases; according to this theory, instead of taking a sober view of reality and appraising the tasks of the revolution in respect of the internal and external enemy from the standpoint of class forces, you are asked to settle a serious and very grave problem only under the impact of your feelings, merely from the standpoint of feelings. The peace is incredibly harsh and shameful. In my statements and speeches I have had occasion to liken it to the Peace of Tilsit that the conqueror Napoleon forced on the Prussian and German peoples after a series of heavy defeats. Yes, the peace is a grave defeat and is humiliating to Soviet power, but if you, proceeding from this, and limiting yourselves to it, appeal to feelings and arouse discontent in an attempt to settle a gigantic historical problem, you will get into that ridiculous and pitiful situation into which the Socialist-Revolutionary Party once got itself, when in 1907, in a situation that was somewhat similar in certain respects, that party also appealed to the feelings of revolutionaries, when, after our revolution had suffered heavy defeats in 1906 and 1907, Stolypin presented us with the laws on the Third Duma—shameful and extremely difficult conditions of work in one of the rottenest of representative institutions—when our Party, after brief internal wavering (the wavering on the question was greater than it is today), decided the question in this way: we have no right to give way to feelings; no matter how great our indignation and dissatisfaction with the shameful Third Duma, we have to recognise that it was not chance but the historical necessity of a developing class struggle which lacked the strength to continue but

which could muster that strength even in the shameful conditions that have been imposed. We proved to be right. Those who tried to attract people by revolutionary phrases, by appeals to justice (since they were expressing feelings that were trebly legitimate)—those people were given a lesson that will not be forgotten by any revolutionary capable of thought and possessing ideas.

Revolutions do not go smoothly enough to ensure rapid and easy progress. There has never been any great revolution, even on a national scale, that did not experience a hard period of defeat, and the attitude of a revolutionary towards the serious question of mass movements, of developing revolutions, must not be one of declaring the peace obscene and humiliating and then saying he cannot reconcile himself to it; it is not sufficient to quote agitational phrases, to shower reproaches on us because of the peace—that is the known ABC of the revolution, the experience of all revolutions. Our experience since 1905—and if we are rich in anything, if there is any reason why the Russian working class and poor peasantry have taken upon themselves the most difficult and honourable task of beginning the world socialist revolution, it is because the Russian people have been able, owing to specific historical conditions, to make two great revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century—we have to learn from the experience of those revolutions, we have to learn to understand that only by studying the changes in the class connections between one country and another is it possible to prove definitely that we are in no condition to accept battle at the moment; we have to take this into consideration and say to ourselves, whatever respite we may obtain, no matter how unstable, no matter how brief, harsh and humiliating the peace may be, it is better than war, because it gives the masses a breathing-space, because it provides us with an opportunity to correct what the bourgeoisie have done, the bourgeoisie that are shouting wherever they have an opportunity to shout, especially under the protection of the Germans in the occupied regions. (*Applause.*)

The bourgeoisie are shouting that the Bolsheviks are responsible for the disintegration of the army, that there is no army and the Bolsheviks are to blame for it; but let us look at the past, comrades, let us look, firstly, at the



development of our revolution. Do you not know that desertion and the disintegration of our army began long before the revolution, in 1916, and that everybody who has seen the army will have to admit that? And what did our bourgeoisie do to prevent it? Is it not clear that the only chance for salvation from the imperialists at that time was in their hands, that a chance presented itself in March and April, when Soviet organisations could have taken power by a simple motion of the hand against the bourgeoisie. And if the Soviets had then taken power, if the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, together with the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, instead of helping Kerensky deceive the people, conceal the secret treaties and lead the army to an offensive—if they had then come to the aid of the army, had supplied it with munitions and rations and had compelled the bourgeoisie to help the fatherland—not the fatherland of the hucksters, not the fatherland of treaties that help to slaughter the people (*applause*)—and had themselves participated; if the Soviets had forced the bourgeoisie to help the fatherland of the workers and all working people, and had helped the ragged, barefoot and hungry army, then, perhaps, we should have had a period of ten months, long enough to rest the army and gain unanimous support for it, so that without the army having moved one step from the front a general, democratic peace could have been proposed, the secret treaties could have been torn up and the line held without retreating a single step. There would then have been a chance of peace, which the workers and peasants would have willingly supported and approved. That would have been the tactics of the defence of the fatherland, not the fatherland of the Romanovs, Kerenskys, or Chernovs, a fatherland with secret treaties, a fatherland of the treacherous bourgeoisie—not that fatherland but the fatherland of the working people. That is who is responsible for having made the transition from war to revolution and from the Russian revolution to world socialism a period of severe trials. That is why such proposals as a revolutionary war sound like empty phrases, when we know that we have no army, when we know that it would have been impossible to hold the army, and people with a knowledge of the situation could not help seeing that our decree on demobilisation was not an invention but the result of obvious necessity,

because it would have been impossible to hold the army. The army could not have been held. That officer, not a Bolshevik, was right who, before the October Revolution, said that the army could not and would not fight. This is what has come of months of bargaining with the bourgeoisie and of all the speeches about the need to continue the war; no matter what noble sentiments on the part of many revolutionaries, or of few revolutionaries, may have dictated them, they proved to be empty revolutionary phrases that played into the hands of international imperialism so that it could plunder as much again and more, just as it has been doing since our tactical or diplomatic error, since the time we did not sign the Brest Treaty. When we told those who opposed concluding peace that if we had a respite of any length they would realise that the recuperation of the army and the interests of the working people were more important than anything else, and that peace should have been concluded for this reason—they maintained that there could be no respite.

But our revolution differs from all previous revolutions in having aroused among the masses a desire to build and create, and the working people in the most out-of-the-way villages, people humiliated, downtrodden and oppressed by tsars, landowners, and bourgeoisie, have been aroused; this is a period of the revolution that is only now being accomplished, now that the rural revolution is under way, the revolution that is building a new way of life. And for the sake of this respite, no matter how brief and how small it may be, it was our duty to sign the treaty, since we place the interests of the working people above the interests of the bourgeois warriors who rattle their sabres and call on us to fight. That is what the revolution teaches. The revolution teaches that when we make diplomatic mistakes, when we assume that the German workers will come to our aid tomorrow, when we hope that Liebknecht will be victorious immediately (and we know that one way or another Liebknecht will win, that is inevitable in the development of the working-class movement [*applause*]), it means that, when used unthinkingly, the revolutionary slogans of the difficult socialist movement turn into empty phrases. There is not a single representative of the working people, there is not a single honest worker who would refuse to

make the greatest sacrifice to help the socialist movement of Germany, because during all this time at the front he has learned to distinguish between the German imperialists and the soldiers tormented by German discipline, most of whom are in sympathy with us. That is why I say that the Russian revolution has corrected our mistake in practice, has corrected it by giving us the respite. It is very probable that it will be an extremely brief one, but we have the chance of at least a brief respite in which the army, worn out and hungry as it is, will become conscious of the fact that it has been given an opportunity to recuperate. It is clear to us that the period of the old imperialist wars is over and we are threatened with the further horrors of an outbreak of fresh wars, but there have been such periods of war in many historical epochs, and they have always become most fierce towards the end. This must be understood, not only at meetings in Petrograd and Moscow; it must be understood by the many tens of millions in the countryside; and the more enlightened part of the rural population, those returning from the front, those who have experienced the horrors of war, must help them understand it; the huge masses of peasants and workers must become convinced of the necessity for a revolutionary front—they will then say we have acted correctly.

They tell us we have betrayed the Ukraine and Finland—what disgrace! But the situation that has arisen is such that we are cut off from Finland, with whom we concluded an unwritten treaty before the revolution and have now concluded a formal treaty. They say we are surrendering the Ukraine, which Chernov, Kerensky and Tsereteli are going to ruin; they say we are traitors, we have betrayed the Ukraine! I say: Comrades, I've seen enough of the history of revolution not to be embarrassed by the hostile glances and shouts of people who give way to their feelings and are incapable of clear judgement. I will give you a simple example. Suppose that two friends are out walking at night and they are attacked by ten men. If the scoundrels isolate one of them, what is the other to do? He cannot render assistance, and if he runs away is he a traitor?\*

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\* The last sentence seems to have been recorded incorrectly. It should read: "He cannot but render assistance, and if he runs away isn't he a traitor?" (See p. 100.)—*Ed.*

And suppose that it is not a matter of individuals or of spheres in which questions of direct feelings are being settled, but of five armies, each a hundred-thousand strong, that surround an army of two hundred thousand, and that there is another army that should come to the embattled army's assistance. But if that second army knows that it is certain to fall into a trap, it should withdraw; it must withdraw, even if the retreat has to be covered by the conclusion of an obscene, foul peace—curse as much as you like, but it is necessary to conclude the peace. There is no reason for considering the feelings of a duelist who draws his sword and says that he must die because he is being compelled to conclude a humiliating peace. But we all know that, however we may decide, we have no army, and no gestures will save us from the necessity of withdrawing to gain time and enable our army to recuperate; everybody who looks reality in the face and does not deceive himself with revolutionary phrase-making will agree with this. Anyone who faces the facts without blinding himself with phrase-making and arrogance must know this.

If we know this, it is our revolutionary duty to conclude even this harsh, super-harsh and rapacious treaty, for by so doing we shall reach a better position for ourselves and for our allies. Did we actually lose anything by concluding the peace treaty of March 3? Anyone who wants to look at things from the point of view of mass relations, and not from that of the aristocratic duelist, will realise that without an army, or having only the sick remnant of an army, it would be self-deception, it would be the greatest deception of the people, to accept battle and call it a revolutionary war. It is our duty to tell the people the truth; yes, the peace is a harsh one. The Ukraine and Finland are perishing but we must accept this peace and all class-conscious working people in Russia will accept it because they know the unvarnished truth, they know the meaning of war, they know that to stake everything on one card on the assumption that the German revolution will begin immediately is self-deception. By concluding peace we have obtained what we gave our Finnish friends—a respite, help and not destruction.

I know of examples from history of much more rapacious peace treaties having been concluded, treaties that sur-

rendered viable nations to the mercy of the conqueror. Let us compare our peace to the Peace of Tilsit; the Peace of Tilsit was enforced on Prussia and Germany by a conqueror. That peace was so harsh that not only were all the capital cities of all the German states seized, not only were the Prussians thrown back to Tilsit, which would be the same as throwing us back to Omsk or Tomsk; not only that—the worst of all was that Napoleon compelled the conquered peoples to supply him with auxiliary troops for his wars; but nevertheless, when the situation became such that the German peoples had to withstand the attacks of the conqueror, when the epoch of revolutionary wars in France gave place to the epoch of imperialist wars of conquest, then came the revelation which those people who wax enthusiastic over empty phrases do not want to understand, those people, that is, who picture the conclusion of peace as a downfall. This psychology is understandable in an aristocratic duelist but not in a worker or peasant. The latter has been through the hard school of war and has learned to calculate. There have been even greater trials, and nations even more backward have come through them. Harsher peace treaties have been concluded, the Germans concluded one in an epoch when they had no army, or when their army was sick like ours. They concluded a very harsh peace with Napoleon. But that peace was not the downfall of Germany—on the contrary, it was the turning-point, national defence, renewal. We are on the eve of just such a turning-point and are experiencing analogous conditions. We must look truth in the face and banish all empty phrases and declarations. We must say, peace, if it is necessary, must be concluded. The war of liberation, the class war, the war of the people will take the place of the Napoleonic wars. The system of the Napoleonic wars will change, war will give place to peace and peace to war, and from every harsh peace there has always emerged a more extensive preparation for war. The harshest of peace treaties—the Peace of Tilsit—has gone down in history as a turning-point towards the time when the German people began to swing round; when they retreated to Tilsit, to Russia, they were actually gaining time, waiting for the international situation that had, at one time, favoured Napoleon—he was another plunderer like Hohenzollern or Hinden-

burg—waiting until the situation changed, until the mentality of the German people, tormented by decades of Napoleonic wars and defeats, had recuperated and the German people were resuscitated. That is what history teaches us, that is why all despair and empty phrases are criminal, that is why everyone will say yes, the old imperialist wars are ending—an historical turning-point has come.

Our revolution has been one long triumph since October, and now the lengthy times of hardship have come, we do not know for how long, but we do know that it will be a long and difficult period of defeats and retreats, because the alignment of forces is what it is, because by retreating we shall give the people a chance to recuperate. We shall make it possible for every worker and peasant to realise the truth that will enable him to understand that new wars waged by the imperialist plunderers against the oppressed peoples are beginning, and every worker and peasant will realise that we must rise in defence of the fatherland, because we have been defencists since October. Since October 25 we have said openly that we stand for the defence of the fatherland, because we have a fatherland, the one from which we have driven the Kerenskys and Chernovs, because we have torn up the secret treaties, because we have crushed the bourgeoisie—badly so far, but we shall learn to do it better.

Comrades, there is another important difference between the condition of the German people and of the Russian people who have suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the German invaders—there is a tremendous difference that must be mentioned, although I have already touched upon it briefly in the preceding part of my speech. Comrades, when the German people, over a hundred years ago, entered a period of the most cruel wars of conquest, a period when they had to retreat and conclude one shameful treaty after another before they were awakened—at that time the German people were weak and backward, just that and nothing more. They had against them not only the military forces and the might of the conqueror Napoleon, they had against them a country that was far above Germany in the revolutionary and political sense and in every other respect, a country that had risen far above all others, a country that had reached the top. That country was far above the

people who were languishing in subjection to the imperialists and landowners. A people that, I repeat, had been nothing but a weak and backward people, managed to learn from its bitter lessons and to raise itself up. We are in a better position; we are not merely a weak and backward people, we are the people who have been able—not because of any special services or of historical predestination, but because of a definite conjunction of historical circumstances—who have been able to accept the honour of raising the banner of the international socialist revolution. (*Applause.*)

I am well aware, comrades, that the banner is in weak hands, I have said that outright several times already, and the workers of the most backward country will not be able to hold that banner unless the workers of all advanced countries come to their aid. The socialist reforms that we have accomplished are far from perfect, they are weak and insufficient; they will serve as a guide to the advanced West-European workers who will say to themselves, "The Russians haven't made a very good beginning on the job that has to be done"; the important thing is that our people are not merely a weak and backward people as compared with the Germans, they are the people who have raised the banner of revolution. Although the bourgeoisie of any country you like are filling the columns of their press with slander of the Bolsheviks, although the voice of the imperialist press in France, Britain, Germany, etc., curses the Bolsheviks in unison, you will not find a meeting of workers in any country at which the names and slogans of our socialist government give rise to bursts of indignation. (*Voice* : "That's a lie!") No, it is not, it is the truth, and anyone who has been in Germany, Austria, Switzerland or America during the past few months will tell you it is the truth and not a lie, that the names and slogans of representatives of Soviet power in Russia are greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the workers and that, despite all the lies of the bourgeoisie of Germany, France, etc., the working-class masses have realised that no matter how weak we may be, their cause is being served here in Russia. Yes, our people have a very heavy burden to bear, the burden they have themselves taken up; but a people that has been able to establish Soviet power cannot perish. Again I repeat—there is not a single politically conscious socialist, not

a single worker among those who think over the history of the revolution, who can dispute the fact that Soviet power—despite all the defects that I know only too well and fully appreciate—is the highest type of state, the direct successor to the Paris Commune. It has ascended a step higher than the other European revolutions so that we are not experiencing the difficult conditions that the German people experienced a hundred years ago; the change in the balance of forces among the plunderers, taking advantage of the conflict and satisfying the demands of plunderer Napoleon, plunderer Alexander I and the plundering British monarchy—that was the only thing left, the one chance, for the German people, oppressed by feudalism; and yet the German people did not perish from the Peace of Tilsit. But we, I say again, have better conditions, we have a powerful ally in all West-European countries, the international socialist proletariat, the proletariat that is on our side no matter what our enemies may say. (*Applause.*) True, it is not easy for that ally to raise his voice, any more than it was easy for us until the end of February 1917. That ally is living in the underground, under conditions of the military prison into which all imperialist countries have been turned, but he knows us and understands our cause; it is difficult for him to come to our aid, and Soviet troops, therefore, will need much time and patience and will have to go through many trials before the time comes when he will aid us—we shall use even the slightest chance of procrastination, for time is working on our side. Our cause is gaining strength, the forces of the imperialists are weakening, and no matter what trials and defeats may emerge from the “Tilsit” peace, we are beginning the tactics of withdrawal and, once more I say it, there is no doubt the politically conscious proletariat and, likewise, the politically conscious peasants are on our side, and we shall be able not only to make heroic attacks, but also to make a heroic retreat and we shall wait until the international socialist proletariat comes to our aid and shall then begin a second socialist revolution that will be world-wide in its scope. (*Applause.*)

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*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
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*Reply to the Debate on the Report  
on Ratification of the Peace Treaty  
March 15*

Comrades, had I desired to find a confirmation of what was said in my first speech about the nature of the revolutionary war that was proposed to us, the best and clearest confirmation would have been given me by the report of the representative of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries.<sup>48</sup> I think it will be most expedient if I quote his speech from the verbatim report and we shall see what arguments they adduce in confirmation of their propositions. (*Reads the verbatim report.*)

Here is a specimen of the arguments on which they rely. There has been talk here of the volost gathering.<sup>49</sup> Those who consider this meeting a volost gathering can resort to such arguments, but it is clear that these people are repeating our words but are incapable of thinking them out. People repeat what the Bolsheviks taught the Left S.R.s when the latter were still among the Rights, and when they speak it is evident that they have learnt by rote what we said, but they have not understood on what it was based, and now they repeat it. Tsereteli and Chernov were defencists, and now we are defencists, we are "traitors", we are "betrayers". The accomplices of the bourgeoisie speak here about a volost gathering—they make eyes when they say this—but every worker understands very well the aims of the defencism by which Tsereteli and Chernov were guided and the grounds which cause us to be defencists.

If we were to support the Russian capitalists who wanted to be given the Dardanelles, Armenia and Galicia, as it was written in the secret treaty, that would be defencism in the spirit of Chernov and Tsereteli, and that defencism was disgraceful then, but now our defencism is honourable. (*Applause.*)

And when, alongside such arguments, in the verbatim report of Kamkov's speech I find twice repeated the statement that the Bolsheviks are agents of German imperialism (*applause from the Right*), a harsh term—I am very glad that all those who pursued Kerensky's policy emphasise it by their applause. (*Applause.*) And indeed, of course, it is not for me to object to harsh words. I shall never raise any objection to that. Only, in order to be harsh one must have the right to be so, and the right to be harsh is given by one's words not differing from one's deeds. That is the little condition which many intellectuals do not appreciate, but which the workers and peasants have grasped even at volost gatherings—it is such a meagre thing, the volost gathering—they have grasped it both at volost gatherings and in Soviet organisations, and their word does not differ from their deed. But we are very well aware that they, the Left S.R.s, remained in the party of the Right S.R.s until October, during the time when the latter were sharing the rewards of office, when they acted as agents because they had been promised ministerial posts in return for keeping silent about the secret treaties. (*Applause.*) But it is quite impossible to call agents of imperialism people who actually proclaimed war against it, tore up the treaties and undertook the risk that this involved, undertook to drag out the negotiations in Brest, knowing that this would ruin the country, endured the military attack and a series of unprecedented defeats, and did not conceal the slightest thing from the people.

Martov has assured us here that he has not read the treaty. Let those who like to, believe him. We know that these people are accustomed to read a lot of newspapers, but they have not read the treaty. (*Applause.*) Let those who wish, believe it. But I tell you that, while the party of the S.R.s knows very well that we are giving way in the face of violence, which has been fully exposed by us, that we are doing so deliberately, frankly saying that we are unable to fight just now but are giving way—history knows of a number of most shameful treaties and a number of wars—when people in reply to this produce the word "agents", this harshness exposes them, and when they assure us that they disclaim responsibility for what they are doing—is it not hypocrisy, when people disclaim respon-

sibility but continue to be in the government? I maintain that when they say that they disclaim responsibility—they do not divest themselves of it, and they are quite wrong in thinking this is a volost gathering. No, this is everything that is honest and best among the working masses. (*Applause.*) This is no bourgeois parliament to which people are elected once or twice a year to take their seats and receive a salary. These are people sent from the provinces and tomorrow they will be in the provinces and will relate that if the party of Left S.R.s is losing votes, it deserves to, because the party which acts in this way is the same soap bubble among the peasantry as it proved to be among the working class. (*Applause, voices: "Quite right."*)

Further, I will quote you one more passage from Kamkov's speech to show how every representative of the working and exploited people reacts to it. "When yesterday Comrade Lenin asserted here that Comrades Tsereteli and Chernov and others had demoralised the army, can we really not find the courage to say that Lenin and I also demoralised the army?" He is a long way wide of the mark. (*Applause.*) He has heard that we were defeatists, and he has recalled this when we have ceased to be defeatists. He has recalled it at the wrong time. They have learnt the word by heart, they have a revolutionary-sounding toy rattle to play with, but they are incapable of giving some thought to the actual state of affairs. (*Applause.*) I assert that out of a thousand volost gatherings where Soviet power has been consolidated, in more than nine hundred there are people who will tell the Party of Left S.R.s that they do not deserve any confidence. They will say—all right; we demoralised the army and we must recall that now. But how did we demoralise the army? We were defeatists at the time of the tsar, but at the time of Tsereteli and Chernov we were not defeatists. We published in *Pravda* a proclamation which Krylenko, who was then still being persecuted, addressed to the army: "Why I am going to Petrograd." He said: "We are not calling on you for mutinies." That was not demoralisation of the army. Those who declared this war to be a great war were the ones who demoralised the army.

It was Tsereteli and Chernov who demoralised the army because they spoke grand words to the people, words which

many Left Socialist-Revolutionaries were accustomed to throw out at random. It is easy to play with words, but the Russian people at volost gatherings are accustomed to think over them and take them seriously. If, however, the people were told that we were striving for peace and discussing the conditions of the imperialist war, then I ask: and what about the secret treaties and the June offensive? That is how they demoralised the army. If they spoke to the people about the struggle against the imperialists, about defence of the homeland, the people asked themselves: do they seize the capitalists by the scruff of the neck somewhere?—that is how they demoralised the army, and that is why I said, and no one has refuted it, it would have been the salvation of the army if we had taken power in March or April, and if instead of the furious hatred of the exploiters because we suppressed them—they quite justifiably hate us—if instead of this they had put the interests of the homeland of the working and exploited people higher than the interests of the homeland of Kerensky and Ryabushinsky's secret treaties, and of designs on Armenia, Galicia and the Dardanelles, that would have spelt salvation. And in this connection—beginning with the great Russian revolution, and especially from March, when a half-hearted appeal to the peoples of all countries was issued—the government, which issued the appeal that called for the overthrow of the bankers of all countries, was itself sharing profits and favours with the bankers—that is what demoralised the army and why the army could not keep going. (*Applause.*)

And I assert that we—beginning from this appeal of Krylenko's, which was not the first, and which I am recalling because it stuck in my mind—we did not demoralise the army but said: hold the front—the sooner you take power the easier will it be to retain it, and to say now: we are against civil war and for an uprising—how unworthy this is and how despicable this chatter of some people. When this reaches the countryside and when the soldiers there, who have seen war not as the intellectuals have, and who know that it is easy to wave only a cardboard sword, when they say that at the critical moment they, unshod, badly clothed and suffering, were helped by being driven into an offensive—they are now being told that it doesn't matter that there will be no army, there will be an uprising

instead. To drive the people against a regular army with superior technical equipment—that is criminal, and we, as socialists, taught that it is so. Indeed, the war taught a great deal, not only that people suffered, but also that those who have the greatest technical equipment, organisation and discipline, and the best machines, will gain the upper hand; the war taught this, and it is excellent that it did so. It has to be learnt that it is impossible to live in modern society without machines, without discipline—one has either to master modern techniques or be crushed. Years of most painful suffering have taught the peasants what war is. And when anyone goes speech-making at the volost gatherings, when the party of Left S.R.s goes there, they will receive well-merited punishment. (*Applause.*)

One more example, another quotation from Kamkov's speech. (*He reads it.*)

It is sometimes surprisingly easy to raise questions; only there is a saying—an impolite, rude one—which refers to such questions—I'm afraid I can't change the proverb—I will remind you of it: one fool can ask more questions than ten wise men can answer.

Comrades, in the quotation I have just read out I am invited to answer the question: will the respite last one week, two weeks, or will it last more? I assert that at any volost gathering or at any factory a person who in the name of a serious party comes out with such a question will be laughed at by the people and chased away, because at any volost gathering they will understand that there is no point in raising questions about something that cannot be known. That will be understood by any worker and peasant. (*Applause.*) If you absolutely insist on an answer, I will tell you that of course any Left S.R. who writes in the newspapers or speaks at meetings will say what this duration depends on: it depends on when Japan attacks, with what forces, and what resistance it encounters; on the extent to which the Germans get into difficulties in Finland, in the Ukraine; on when the offensive on all fronts begins; on how it develops; on the further course of the internal conflict in Austria and Germany, and on many other things as well. (*Applause.*)

Therefore, when at a serious meeting people with an air of triumph raise the question: answer me, what kind of a

respite will it be?—I say that such people will be chased out of workers' and peasants' meetings by those who understand that after three years of war torment, every week of respite is a very great boon. (*Applause.*) And I assert that whatever the abuse now heaped on us here, if tomorrow all the abusive terms addressed to us from the Rights, almost-Rights, near-Rights, Left S.R.s, Cadets, and Mensheviks were collected together and published, even if some hundreds of poods were the result, as far as I am concerned all this would weigh as light as a feather compared with the fact that among us in the Bolshevik group nine-tenths of its representatives have said: we know war and we see that now, when we have secured this short respite, it is an advantage for the recovery of our sick army. And at every peasant meeting nine-tenths of the peasants will say what everyone who concerns himself with the matter knows, and when able to help in any way we have not rejected and do not reject any practical proposal.

We have gained the possibility of a respite, even if only for twelve days, thanks to the policy which has countered revolutionary phrase-making and "public" opinion. When Kamkov and the Left S.R.s play a game with you and make eyes at you, then, on the one hand, they are making eyes at you and, on the other, they are saying to the Constitutional-Democrats: put that down in our favour, indeed, we are heart and soul with you. (*Voice from the hall:* "It's a lie.") And when one of the representatives of the S.R.s, apparently not even of the Lefts, but of the super-Lefts, a Maximalist, spoke about phrase-making, he said that phrase-making was everything that concerned honour. (*A voice:* "Quite right.") Well, of course, in the Right-wing camp they call out "quite right"; this exclamation is pleasanter to me than the exclamation "it's a lie", although that does not impress me in the slightest either. But if I were to accuse them of phrase-making without giving any clear and precise confirmation of it, but the fact is I quoted two examples and I took them not from my imagination but from actual occurrence.

Remember, were not the representatives of the S.R.s in the same situation when in 1907 they gave their signatures to Stolypin that they would faithfully and truly serve the Emperor Nicholas II? I hope that I have learnt something

from the long years of the revolution, and when I am defamed by accusations of treachery, I say: one must first of all be able to find one's way in history. If we wanted to alter the course of history and it turns out that it was we who altered course and not history—then execute us. History is not to be convinced by speeches, and history will show that we were right, that we brought the workers' organisations into the Great October Revolution of 1917, but only thanks to the fact that we rose above phrase-making and knew how to look at the facts, to learn from them. And when now, on March 14-15, it has become clear that if we had fought we should have helped imperialism, we should have finally wrecked the transport system and lost Petrograd—we see that to play with words and wave a cardboard sword is useless. But when Kamkov comes to me and asks "will this respite be for long?", it is impossible to give an answer because internationally there has not been an objective revolutionary situation. There cannot be a long respite for reaction now, because the objective situation is everywhere revolutionary, because everywhere the working-class masses are indignant, are at the limit of their patience, at the limit of exhaustion from the war; that is a fact. It is impossible to escape from this fact, and therefore I have been proving to you that there was a period when the revolution went ahead and we went in front and the Left S.R.s stepped out perkily behind us. (*Applause.*) But now a period has begun when we have to retreat in the face of overwhelming force. That is an absolutely concrete description. No one will rebut me on this. Historical analysis is bound to confirm it. Here you have our Marxist, almost Marxist, Martov, speaking ill of the volost gathering; he speaks ill of the closing down of newspapers; he boasts that the oppressed and offended newspapers were closed down because they were helping to overthrow Soviet power, he speaks ill of (*applause*)... About this he does not keep silent. Such things he sets before you, but an attempt to answer the historical question put point-blank by me, whether it is the truth or not that since October we have made a triumphant advance... (*Voices from the Right: "No."*) You say "no", but all these say "yes". I ask: can we now make a victorious advance in an offensive against world imperialism? We cannot, and everyone knows it.

When this, a frank simple statement, is made forthrightly in order to teach people revolution—revolution is a profound, difficult and complex science—in order to teach both the workers and the peasants, the people who are making the revolution, how to do so, our enemies cry out: cowards, traitors, the flag has been abandoned; they fall back on words, they wave their arms. No. The whole history of revolutions has shown many such revolutionary phrasemongers and nothing is left of them but stench and smoke. (*Applause.*)

Another example I cited, comrades, was that of Germany, of Germany which was crushed by Napoleon, of Germany which witnessed shameful peace alternating with wars. I am asked: are we going to observe the treaties for a long time? If it were a three-year-old child who asked me: are you going to observe the treaty or not?—it would be both pleasant and naïve. But when grown-up Kamkov of the party of Left S.R.s asks it, I know a few adult workers and peasants will believe in the naïveté, but the majority of them will say: “Stop being hypocritical.” For the historical example I cited shows as clearly as can be that emancipatory wars of peoples that have lost an army—and that has happened more than once—of peoples crushed to the extent of complete loss of all their territory, crushed to such an extent that they have surrendered auxiliary corps to the conqueror for new annexationist campaigns—cannot be struck out of history, and can in no way be erased. If, however, the Left S.R. Kamkov, in rebutting me, said, as I saw in the verbatim report: “In Spain, however, there were revolutionary wars,” he thereby confirmed what I am saying, indeed he hit out at himself. Spain and Germany precisely confirm my example that to decide the question of the historical period of annexationist wars on the basis of “are you going to observe the treaty and, when you violate it, when will they catch you...?” is indeed worthy of children. History tells us that every treaty results from a cessation of struggle and a change in the relationship of forces, that there have been peace treaties which were shattered in a few days, that there have been peace treaties which were shattered after a month, that there were periods of many years when Germany and Spain concluded peace and violated it after a few months, violated it several times,



and in a series of wars the peoples learnt what waging war means. When Napoleon led German armies in order to strangle other peoples he taught them revolutionary war. Such was the course of history.

That is why I tell you, comrades, that I am deeply convinced that the decision adopted by nine-tenths of our Bolshevik group will be approved by nine-tenths of all the politically conscious working people of Russia—workers and peasants. (*Applause.*)

We have a means of checking whether I spoke the truth or whether I am mistaken, for you will go into the provinces and each one of you will report to the local Soviets, and everywhere there will be local decisions. I will say in conclusion: do not succumb to provocation. (*Applause.*) The bourgeoisie knows what it is doing, the bourgeoisie knows why it rejoiced in Pskov, rejoiced recently in Odessa, the bourgeoisie of the Vinnichenkos, of the Ukrainian Kerenskys, of Tsereteli and Chernov. It rejoiced because it understood perfectly what a tremendous mistake in diplomacy, in taking account of the situation, Soviet power had committed by trying to wage war with a fleeing, sick army. The bourgeoisie is trying to draw you into the pitfall of war. One has not only to attack but also to retreat. Every soldier knows that. Realise that the bourgeoisie is trying to draw both you and us into a trap. Realise that the whole bourgeoisie and all its voluntary and involuntary accomplices are setting this trap. You will be able to endure the most severe defeats and to maintain the most difficult positions, and by retreating to gain time. Time is on our side. The imperialists, having glutted themselves, will burst, and in their womb a new giant is developing; it is growing more slowly than we should like, but it is growing, it will come to our aid, and when we see that it is beginning to strike its first blow, we shall say: the time for retreat has come to an end, the era of the world offensive and the era of the victory of the world socialist revolution is beginning. (*Stormy applause, continuing for a long time.*)

### *Resolution on Ratification of the Brest Treaty*

The Congress confirms (ratifies) the peace treaty signed by our representatives at Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918.

The Congress recognises as correct the actions of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars in deciding to conclude the present incredibly harsh, rapacious and humiliating peace in view of our having no army and of the extreme war weariness of the people, who in their distress have received no support from the bourgeoisie and bourgeois intelligentsia, but have seen that distress made use of for selfish class purposes.

The Congress also recognises the undoubted correctness of the actions of the peace delegation that refused to enter into a detailed discussion on the German peace terms, because those terms were imposed on us in the form of an obvious ultimatum and by undisguised force.

The Congress most insistently urges upon all workers, soldiers and peasants, all the working and oppressed masses, the main, immediate and most urgent task of the moment—the improvement of the discipline and self-discipline of the working people; the creation throughout the country of strong, well-founded organisations that cover, as far as possible, all production and distribution; a ruthless struggle against the chaos, disorganisation and economic ruin which are historically inevitable as the legacy of a most agonising war, but which are, at the same time, the main obstacle to the complete victory of socialism and the strengthening of the foundations of socialist society.

Today, after the October Revolution, after the overthrow of the political power of the bourgeoisie in Russia, after our denunciation and publication of all secret imperialist treaties, after the cancellation of the foreign loans, after the workers' and peasants' government has proposed a just

peace to all peoples without exception, Russia, having escaped from the clutches of the imperialist war, has the right to announce that she is not a participant in the plunder and suppression of other countries.

The Russian Soviet Federative Republic, having unani- mously condemned predatory wars, from now on deems it its right and its duty to defend the socialist fatherland against all possible attacks by any of the imperialist powers.

The Congress therefore deems it the unconditional duty of all working people to muster all forces to re-establish and improve the defence potential of our country, to re- establish its military strength on the basis of a socialist militia and the universal military training of all adolescents and adults of both sexes.

The Congress expresses its absolute confidence that Soviet power, which has valiantly fulfilled all the obligations of the international solidarity of the workers of all countries in their struggle for socialism against the yoke of capital, will in future do everything possible to promote the inter- national socialist movement, to secure and shorten the road leading mankind to deliverance from the yoke of capital and from wage slavery, to the creation of a socialist society and to an enduring, just peace between the peoples.

The Congress is firmly convinced that the international workers' revolution is not far away, that the full victory of the socialist proletariat is assured despite the fact that the imperialists of all countries do not hesitate to use the most brutal means for the suppression of the socialist movement.

■  
*From Speech in the Moscow Soviet  
of Workers', Peasants'  
and Red Army Deputies  
April 23, 1918*  
■

I repeat again that the most difficult, the gravest phase in the life of our revolution has now begun. The task before us is the inflexible exertion of all our strength and its application to new creative work, for only iron endurance and labour discipline will enable the revolutionary Russian proletariat, as yet so solitary in its gigantic revolutionary work, to hold out till the time of deliverance when the international proletariat will come to our aid.

We are a revolutionary working-class contingent that has advanced to the forefront, not because we are better than other workers, not because the Russian proletariat is superior to the working class of other countries, but solely because we were one of the most backward countries in the world. We shall achieve final victory only when we succeed at last in conclusively smashing international imperialism, which relies on the tremendous strength of its equipment and discipline. But we shall achieve victory only together with all the workers of other countries, of the whole world.

By force of circumstances, we have had to make an onerous peace in Brest, and we do not hide the fact that at any moment this peace may be treacherously violated by the numerous enemies of the revolution who are advancing upon us from all sides, and against whom we are powerless to begin an active struggle at the present moment. Bear in mind that anyone who would call you just now to this active, armed, open struggle against international predatory imperialism would commit an act of treachery to the people, would be a voluntary or involuntary agent provocateur and servitor of one or other clique of the imperialists.

And anyone who acts in opposition to the tactics to which we have adhered in the recent period—even if he calls himself the most “Left”, even super-Left, Communist—is a bad revolutionary, I will say more, is not a revolutionary at all. (*Applause.*)

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■

*From Report on the Immediate Tasks  
of the Soviet Government,  
Delivered at the Session of the All-Russia  
Central Executive Committee  
April 29, 1918*

■

For our opponents from the petty-bourgeois camp, the chief arena of struggle against us is the sphere of home policy and economic construction; their weapon is the undermining of everything that the proletariat decrees and endeavours to bring about in the matter of building an organised, socialist economy. Here the petty-bourgeois element—the element of petty proprietors and unbridled selfishness—acts as the determined enemy of the proletariat.

And in the graph shown by the petty bourgeoisie throughout the events of the revolution we see their most marked withdrawal from us. Naturally we find here in this camp the chief opposition to the immediate and current tasks of the moment, opposition in the more exact sense of the word; here we have the opposition of people who do not reject agreement with us in principle, who support us on more essential questions than those on which they criticise, an opposition that is combined with support.

We shall not be surprised if in the pages of the Left S.R. press we come across such statements as those I found in *Znamya Truda* of April 25. It writes: "The Right-wing Bolsheviks are ratifiers" (a horribly contemptuous nickname). What would happen if the opposite nickname was given to the warriors? Would it produce a less horrible impression? Well, if one encounters such trends in Bolshevism, it is an indication of something. It was on April 25 that I happened to look at the theses in a newspaper that gave a political characterisation of us. When I read this thesis I thought this must be someone from *Kommunist*, the newspaper of the "Left Communists", or from their magazine—there is so much that is similar here; but I was destined to disillusionment, because it turned

out to be a thesis of Isuv's, published in the newspaper *Uperyod*.<sup>50</sup> (*Laughter, applause.*)

And so, comrades, when we observe such political phenomena as the solidarity of *Znamya Truda* with a particular trend of Bolshevism or with some sort of formulation of Menshevik theses of the very party that pursued the policy of an alliance with Kerensky, of the very party in which Tsereteli concluded an agreement with the bourgeoisie, when we meet with attacks exactly coinciding with those emanating from the group of Left Communists and the new magazine—there is something amiss here. There is something here which sheds light on the real significance of these attacks, and it is worth while paying attention to these attacks if only because we have here an opportunity of assessing the chief tasks of the Soviet government in disputes with people with whom it is worth while disputing, because here we have Marxist theory, and we can take into consideration the significance of the events of the revolution and the undoubted desire to seek out the truth. Here the main basis for a real debate is provided by devotion to socialism and the obvious resolve to be on the side of the proletariat, against the bourgeoisie, whatever errors—in the opinion of particular persons, groups or trends—may have been committed in this respect by the proletariat in fighting against the bourgeoisie.

When I say that it is worth while disputing with them, I mean by a worth-while dispute, of course, not a polemic, but the fact that the question concerns a dispute over the most essential, fundamental problem of the present time. It is no accident that it is along this line that disputes are taking place. Objectively, it is along this line that the cardinal task lies at the present time—the task of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, which is dictated by the existing conditions in Russia and which has to be carried out in every way in the presence of an abundance of the most diverse petty-bourgeois trends, and when there is every need for the proletariat to say to itself that on this point it cannot make any concessions, because the socialist revolution, begun by wresting power from the bourgeoisie and continued by smashing all resistance of the bourgeoisie, places firmly in the forefront the problems of proletarian discipline and organisation of the working people and ability to tackle

the work with strictly businesslike methods and knowledge of the interests of large-scale industry. These problems the proletariat must solve in practice, for otherwise it will suffer defeat.—Here is the chief, real difficulty of the socialist revolution.—This is the reason why it is so worth while, so important, in the historical and political sense of the word, to argue with the representatives of the group of Left Communists, in spite of the fact that, taking their position and theory and examining it, we see there, I repeat—and I shall prove it in a moment—absolutely nothing but the same petty-bourgeois waverings. The comrades of the group of Left Communists, whatever they call themselves, strike a blow primarily at their own theses. I assume that their views are known to the great majority of those at this meeting, because we have discussed the essence of them in Bolshevik circles, starting from the beginning of March, while those who have not taken an interest in the major political literature must have got to know and must have discussed these views in connection with the disputes that arose at the last All-Russia Congress of Soviets.

And so, we see in their theses primarily the same thing that we see now in the whole S.R. party, the same thing that we see now both in the Right-wing camp and in the camp of the bourgeoisie from Milyukov to Martov, for whom these present difficulties of the situation for Russia are especially painful from the point of view of the loss of her position as a Great Power, from the point of view of her conversion from the old nation, an oppressing state, into an oppressed country, from the standpoint of deciding not on paper but in practice whether the hardships of the road to socialism are worth while, whether the hardships of the newly begun socialist revolution are worth while, whether it is worth while that the country should undergo the most difficult situations as regards its statehood, as regards its national independence.

Here the deepest division of all is between those for whom that state independence is, as it is for all the bourgeoisie, an ideal and a boundary, their holy of holies—a boundary which must not be crossed and an encroachment on which is a denial of socialism—and those who say that in the age of frenzied imperialist slaughter for redivision of the world the socialist revolution cannot proceed without very heavy



defeats for many nations which were formerly considered oppressors. And so, however painful it is for mankind, socialists, class-conscious socialists are ready to undergo all such trials.

The Left S.R.s have wavered most of all on this basis, which is most of all unacceptable to them, and it is just on this basis that we see the greatest waverings among the Left Communists.

In their theses, which, as we know, they discussed with us on April 4, and which they published on April 20, they keep returning to the question of peace.

They devote the greatest attention to appraising the question of peace and thereby try to prove that peace is a manifestation of the psychology of the exhausted and declassed masses.

How very comic their arguments are, when they quote their figures: that 12 were against and 28 were for the conclusion of peace. But if one is to collect statistics, and if the vote of a month and a half ago is to be recalled, should one not take more recent figures. If political significance is to be attached to that vote, should one not call to mind the vote of the All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets before saying that the healthy South was against peace, while the exhausted, declassed, industrially weakened North was allegedly for peace. Should one not call to mind the vote of the majority of the group at the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in which not even one-tenth were against peace. If figures are to be recalled and political significance attached to them, the political voting needs to be taken as a whole, and then you will see at once that the parties which learnt certain slogans by heart, which made a fetish of these slogans, proved to be on the side of the petty bourgeoisie, while the mass of the working and exploited people, the mass of workers, soldiers and peasants, did not reject peace.

And now, when alongside the criticism of this stand for peace the allegation is made that it was insisted upon by the exhausted, declassed masses, while we see clearly that it was the declassed intelligentsia that was against peace, when we are given the appraisal of events that I read in the newspapers—this fact shows us that on the question of the conclusion of peace the majority of our Party was

absolutely right, that when we were told that the game was not worth the candle, that all the imperialists had already combined against us and would in any case strangle us, bring us into disgrace, etc.—we nevertheless concluded peace. It not only seemed to them disgraceful, it seems to them of no avail. They told us that we would not gain a respite. And when we replied: it is impossible to know how international relations will develop, but we do know that the imperialist enemies are fighting one another, events confirmed this, and it was acknowledged by the group of Left Communists, our opponents in ideology and principle, who by and large adopt the standpoint of communism.

This phrase alone is a complete recognition of the correctness of our tactics and the fullest condemnation of those waverings on the question of peace which most of all drove away from us a certain wing of our supporters, both the entire wing grouped in the party of Left S.R.s, and the wing which has existed and still exists in our Party, and which one can confidently say will remain there, and which in its vacillations especially clearly reveals the source of these vacillations. Yes, the peace which we have arrived at is in the highest degree unstable; the respite which we have gained may be cut short any day both from the West and from the East—of this there is no doubt. Our international situation is so critical that we must exert all our strength to hold out as long as possible, until the Western revolution matures, the Western revolution which is maturing much more slowly than we expected and desired, but is undoubtedly maturing; it is undoubtedly absorbing and accumulating more and more inflammable material.

If we, as a separate contingent of the world proletariat, have been the first to go forward, it is not because this contingent has been more strongly organised than others. No, it is worse, more weakly and less organised than others, but it would be the height of stupidity and pedantry to argue, as many do: well, if things had been begun by the most organised contingent, and if it had been followed by one less well organised, and after that by one with a third-rate organisation, then we should willingly have been supporters of the socialist revolution. But since things did not go according to the book, since it turned out that the lead-

ing contingent was not supported by other contingents, our revolution is doomed to perish. We, on the other hand, say: no, our task is to transform the organisation in general; our task, since we are alone, is to maintain the revolution, to preserve for it at least a certain bastion of socialism, however weak and moderately sized, until the revolution matures in other countries, until other contingents come up to us. But to expect history to set the socialist contingents of the various countries in motion in strict sequence and according to a plan, means to have no notion of revolution or, out of stupidity, to renounce support of the socialist revolution.

At a time when we have found out for ourselves and proved that we have a firm position in Russia but do not have forces to oppose international imperialism, we have only one task, our tactics become those of manoeuvring, waiting and retreat. I am very well aware that these words cannot claim to be popular and that if they are given an appropriate turn and put in association with the word "coalition", then the way is wide open here for piquant comparisons and for all kinds of reproaches and scoffing. But however much our adversaries—the bourgeoisie—on the Right and our friends of yesterday on the Left, the Left S.R.s, and our friends—friends, I am sure, of yesterday, today and tomorrow—the Left Communists, however much they aim the shafts of their wit at this, and whatever proofs they give of their petty-bourgeois vacillations, they cannot refute these facts. Events have confirmed us, we have gained a respite solely because the imperialist slaughter in the West continues, and in the Far East imperialist rivalry flares up ever more extensively—only this explains the existence of the Soviet Republic, for the time being hanging by the weakest of threads, to which we are holding tight in this political situation. Of course, no piece of paper, no peace treaty, will protect us, nor the circumstance that we do not want to fight against Japan; it is true that she is plundering us, without being deterred by any treaties or formalities. We shall be protected, of course, not by a paper treaty or "state of peace", but by the continuing struggle between the two "giants" of imperialism in the West, and by our endurance. We have not forgotten the basic Marxist lesson which has been so clearly confirmed by the Russian revolution: that it

is necessary to reckon forces in tens of millions; anything less is not taken into account in politics; politics discard anything less as a magnitude of no importance. If we look at the international revolution from this aspect, the matter is as clear as it could possibly be: a backward country can easily begin because its adversary has become rotten, because its bourgeoisie is not organised, but for it to continue demands of that country a hundred thousand times more circumspection, caution and endurance. It will be different in Western Europe; there it will be immeasurably more difficult to begin but immeasurably easier to go on. It could not be otherwise, because the degree of organisation and solidarity of the proletariat there is incomparably greater. So long as we are alone, we must say to ourselves, taking all the forces into account: we have just one chance until the outbreak of the European revolution, which will solve all our difficulties—the continuation of the struggle of the international imperialist giants; we have estimated this chance correctly, we have held on to it for several weeks, but it may be shattered tomorrow. Hence the conclusion is: to continue in our foreign policy what we began in March, which can be formulated in the words: to manoeuvre, to retreat, to wait. When the words “an active foreign policy” turn up in this Left-wing *Kommunist*, when the expression defence of the socialist fatherland is put in quotation marks, which are bound to be ironical, then I say to myself: these people have understood absolutely nothing of the position of the Western proletariat. While they call themselves Left Communists, they are going over to the standpoint of the wavering petty bourgeoisie, which regards the revolution as a means for ensuring its own specific system. International relations indicate as plainly as could be: any Russian who contemplated the task of overthrowing international imperialism on the basis of Russian forces would be a lunatic. While over there in the West the revolution is maturing, although it is now maturing more rapidly than yesterday, our task is only this: we, being the contingent that has come to the forefront despite our weakness, must do everything, take advantage of every chance, so as to hold out in the positions we have won. All other considerations must be subordinated to this, to taking full advantage of our chance, so that we can put off for a few weeks the moment when international imperialism will unite

against us. If we act in that way we shall advance along a road that will be approved by every class-conscious worker in the European countries, for he knows what we have learnt since 1905, whereas France and Britain have been learning it for centuries—he knows how slowly revolution grows in the free society of the united bourgeoisie, he knows that against such forces it will be necessary to set in operation an agitational bureau which will conduct propaganda in the true sense of the word when we stand side by side with the German, French and British proletariat which have risen in revolt. Until then, however distressing it may be, however repugnant to revolutionary traditions, the only tactics are: to wait, manoeuvre and retreat.

When people say that we have no foreign, international policy, I say: every other policy consciously or unconsciously slips into playing a provocatory role and makes Russia a tool of alliance with imperialists of the type of Chkhenkeli or Semyonov.

And we say: it is better to endure and be patient, to suffer infinitely greater national and state humiliations and hardships, but to remain at our post as a socialist contingent that has been cut off by the force of events from the ranks of the socialist army and compelled to wait until the socialist revolution in other countries comes to its aid. And it is coming to our aid. It comes slowly but it is coming. The war that is now going on in the West is revolutionising the masses more than before and is bringing near the hour of an uprising.

The propaganda conducted up to now has said that the imperialist war is a most criminal and most reactionary war for the sake of annexations. But it is now being confirmed that on the Western front, where there are hundreds of thousands and millions of French and German soldiers engaged in slaughter, the revolution cannot fail to mature more rapidly than hitherto, although this revolution is coming more slowly than we expected.

I have dwelt on the question of foreign policy more than I intended, but it seems to me that we see here very clearly that in this question we are, strictly speaking, faced with two main lines—the proletarian line, which says that the socialist revolution is what is dearest and highest for us, and that we must take account of whether it will soon break out in the

West, and the other line—the bourgeois line—which says that for it the character of the state as a Great Power and national independence are dearer and higher than anything else.

First published in 1920  
in the book: *Minutes  
of the Sessions of the  
All-Russia C.E.C.,  
4th Convocation.  
Verbatim Report.*  
Moscow

*Collected Works*, Vol. 27,  
pp. 285-93

■  
**From "Left-Wing" Childishness  
and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality**  
■

The publication by a small group of "Left Communists" of their journal, *Kommunist* (No. 1, April 20, 1918), and of their "theses", strikingly confirms my views expressed in the pamphlet *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*.<sup>\*</sup> There could not be better confirmation, in political literature, of the utter naïveté of the defence of petty-bourgeois sloppiness that is sometimes concealed by "Left" slogans. It is useful and necessary to deal with the arguments of "Left Communists" because they are characteristic of the period we are passing through. They show up with exceptional clarity the negative side of the "core" of this period. They are instructive, because the people we are dealing with are the best of those who have failed to understand the present period, people who by their knowledge and loyalty stand far, far above the *ordinary* representatives of the same mistaken views, namely, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries.

**I**

As a political magnitude, or as a group claiming to play a political role, the "Left Communist" group has presented its "Theses on the Present Situation". It is a good Marxist custom to give a coherent and complete exposition of the principles underlying one's views and tactics. And this good Marxist custom has helped to reveal the mistake committed by our "Lefts", because the mere attempt to argue and not to declaim exposes the unsoundness of their argument.

The first thing that strikes one is the abundance of allusions, hints and evasions with regard to the old question of whether it was right to conclude the Brest Treaty. The "Lefts" dare not put the question in a straightforward manner. They flounder about in a comical fashion, pile

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<sup>\*</sup> See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 235-77.—Ed.

argument on argument, fish for reasons, plead that "on the one hand" it may be so, but "on the other hand" it may not, their thoughts wander over all and sundry subjects, they try all the time not to see that they are defeating themselves. The "Lefts" are very careful to quote the figures: twelve votes at the Party Congress against peace, twenty-eight votes in favour, but they discreetly refrain from mentioning that of the hundreds of votes cast at the meeting of the Bolshevik group of the Congress of Soviets they obtained less than one-tenth. They have invented a "theory" that the peace was carried by "the exhausted and declassed elements", while it was opposed by "the workers and peasants of the southern regions, where there was greater vitality in economic life and the supply of bread was more assured".... Can one do anything but laugh at this? There is not a word about the voting at the All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets in favour of peace, nor about the social and class character of the typically petty-bourgeois and declassed political conglomeration in Russia who were opposed to peace (the Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party). In an utterly childish manner, by means of amusing "scientific" explanations, they try to conceal their own bankruptcy, to conceal the facts, the mere review of which would show that it was precisely the declassed, intellectual "cream" of the party, the élite, who opposed the peace with slogans couched in revolutionary petty-bourgeois phrases, that it was precisely the *mass* of workers and exploited peasants who carried the peace.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the above-mentioned declarations and evasions of the "Lefts" on the question of war and peace, the plain and obvious truth manages to come to light. The authors of the theses are compelled to admit that "the conclusion of peace has for the time being weakened the imperialists' attempts to make a deal on a world scale" (this is inaccurately formulated by the "Lefts", but this is not the place to deal with inaccuracies). "The conclusion of peace has already caused the conflict between the imperialist powers to become more acute."

Now this is a fact. Here is something that has *decisive* significance. That is why those who opposed the conclusion of peace were unwittingly playthings in the hands of the imperialists and fell into the trap laid for them by the



imperialists. For, until the world socialist revolution breaks out, until it embraces several countries and is strong enough to overcome *international imperialism*, it is the direct duty of the socialists who have conquered in one country (especially a backward one) *not* to accept battle against the giants of imperialism. Their duty is to try to avoid battle, to wait until the conflicts between the imperialists weaken them *even more*, and bring the revolution in other countries even nearer. Our "Lefts" did not understand this simple truth in January, February and March. Even now they are afraid of admitting it openly. But it comes to light through all their confused reasoning like "on the one hand it must be confessed, on the other hand one must admit".

"During the coming spring and summer," the "Lefts" write in their theses, "the collapse of the imperialist system must begin. In the event of a victory for German imperialism in the present phase of the war this collapse can only be postponed, but it will then express itself in even more acute forms."

This formulation is even more childishly inaccurate despite its playing at science. It is natural for children to "understand" science to mean something that can determine in what year, spring, summer, autumn or winter the "collapse must begin".

These are ridiculous, vain attempts to ascertain what cannot be ascertained. No serious politician will ever say *when* this or that collapse of a "system" "must begin" (the more so that the collapse of the *system* has already begun, and it is now a question of the moment when the outbreak of revolution in *particular* countries will begin). But an indisputable truth forces its way through this childishly helpless formulation, namely, the outbreaks of revolution in other, more advanced, countries are *nearer* now, a month since the beginning of the "respite" which followed the conclusion of peace, than they were a month or six weeks ago.

What follows?

It follows that the peace supporters were absolutely right, and their stand has been justified by the course of events. They were right in having drummed into the minds of the lovers of ostentation that one must be able to calculate the balance of forces and *not help* the imperialists by making the battle against socialism easier for them, when socialism

is still weak, and when the chances of the battle are manifestly *against* socialism.

Our "Left" Communists, however, who are also fond of calling themselves "proletarian" Communists, because there is very little that is proletarian about them and very much that is petty-bourgeois, are incapable of giving thought to the balance of forces, to calculating it. This is the core of Marxism and Marxist tactics, but they disdainfully brush aside the "core" with "proud" phrases such as:

"...That the masses have become firmly imbued with an inactive 'peace mentality' is an objective fact of the political situation..."

What a gem! After three years of the most agonising and reactionary war, the people, thanks to Soviet power and its correct tactics, which never lapsed into mere phrase-making, have obtained a very, very brief, insecure and far from sufficient respite. The "Left" intellectual striplings, however, with the magnificence of a self-infatuated Narcissus, profoundly declare "that the masses [???] have become firmly imbued [!!!] with an inactive [!!!???] peace mentality". Was I not right when I said at the Party Congress that the paper or journal of the "Lefts" ought to have been called not *Kommunist* but *Szlachcic*?\*

Can a Communist with the slightest understanding of the mentality and the conditions of life of the toiling and exploited people descend to the point of view of the typical declassed petty-bourgeois intellectual with the mental outlook of a noble or *szlachcic*, which declares that a "peace mentality" is "inactive" and believes that the brandishing of a cardboard sword is "activity"? For our "Lefts" merely brandish a cardboard sword when they ignore the universally known fact, of which the war in the Ukraine has served as an additional proof, that peoples utterly exhausted by three years of butchery cannot go on fighting without a respite; and that war, if it cannot be organised on a national scale, very often creates a mentality of disintegration peculiar to petty proprietors, instead of the iron discipline of the proletariat. Every page of *Kommunist* shows that our "Lefts" have no idea of iron proletarian discipline and how it is achieved, that they are thoroughly imbued with the mentality of the declassed petty-bourgeois intellectual.

\* See p. 91.—Ed.

Perhaps all these phrases of the "Lefts" about war can be put down to mere childish exuberance, which, moreover, concerns the past, and therefore has not a shadow of political significance? This is the argument some people put up in defence of our "Lefts". But this is wrong. Anyone aspiring to political leadership must be able to *think out* political problems, and lack of this ability converts the "Lefts" into spineless preachers of a policy of vacillation, which objectively can have only one result, namely, by their vacillation the "Lefts" *are helping* the imperialists to provoke the Russian Soviet Republic into a battle that will obviously be to its disadvantage, they *are helping* the imperialists to draw us into a snare. Listen to this:

"... The Russian workers' revolution cannot 'save itself' by abandoning the path of world revolution, by continually avoiding battle and yielding to the pressure of international capital, by making concessions to 'home capital'.

"From this point of view it is necessary to adopt a determined class international policy which will unite international revolutionary propaganda by word and deed, and to strengthen the organic connection with international socialism (and not with the international bourgeoisie)..."

I shall deal separately with the thrusts at home policy contained in this passage. But examine this riot of phrase-making—and timidity in deeds—in the sphere of foreign policy. What tactics *are binding* at the *present* time on all who do not wish to be tools of imperialist provocation, and who do not wish to walk into the snare? Every politician must give a clear, straightforward reply to this question. Our Party's reply is well known. At the *present* moment we must *retreat* and avoid battle. Our "Lefts" dare not contradict this and shoot into the air: "A determined class international policy"!!

This is deceiving the people. If you want to fight now, say so openly. If you don't wish to *retreat* now, say so openly. Otherwise, in your objective role, you are a tool of imperialist provocation. And your subjective "mentality" is that of a frenzied petty bourgeois who swaggers and blusters but senses perfectly well that the proletarian is *right* in retreating and in trying to retreat in an organised way. He senses that the proletarian is right in arguing that

because we lack strength we must retreat (before Western and Eastern imperialism) even as far as the Urals, for in this lies the *only* chance of playing for time while the revolution in the West matures, the revolution which is not "bound" (despite the twaddle of the "Lefts") to begin in "spring or summer", but which is coming nearer and becoming more probable *every month*.

The "Lefts" have no policy of their "own". They *dare not* declare that retreat at the *present moment* is unnecessary. They twist and turn, play with words, substitute the question of "continuously" avoiding battle for the question of avoiding battle at the *present moment*. They blow soap bubbles such as "international revolutionary propaganda by deed"!! What does this mean?

It can only mean one of two things: either it is mere Nozdryovism,<sup>51</sup> or it means an offensive war to overthrow international imperialism. Such nonsense cannot be uttered openly, and that is why the "Left" Communists are obliged to take refuge from the derision of every politically conscious proletarian behind high-sounding and empty phrases. They hope the inattentive reader will not notice the real meaning of the phrase "international revolutionary propaganda by deed".

The flaunting of high-sounding phrases is characteristic of the declassed petty-bourgeois intellectuals. The organised proletarian Communists will certainly punish this "habit" with nothing less than derision and expulsion from all responsible posts. The people must be told the bitter truth simply, clearly and in a straightforward manner: it is possible, and even probable, that the war party will again get the upper hand in Germany (that is, an offensive against us will commence at once), and that Germany together with Japan, by official agreement or by tacit understanding, will partition and strangle us. Our tactics, if we do not want to listen to the ranters, must be to wait, procrastinate, avoid battle and retreat. If we shake off the ranters and "brace ourselves" by creating genuinely iron, genuinely proletarian, genuinely communist discipline, we shall have a good chance of gaining many months. And then by retreating even, if the worst comes to the worst, to the Urals, we shall *make it easier* for our ally (the international proletariat) to come to our aid, to "catch up" (to use the language of sport)

the distance between the beginning of revolutionary outbreaks and revolution.

These, and these alone, are the tactics which can in fact strengthen the connection between one temporarily isolated section of international socialism and the other sections. But to tell the truth, all that your arguments lead to, dear "Left Communists", is the "strengthening of the organic connection" between one high-sounding phrase and another. A bad sort of "organic connection", this!

I shall enlighten you, my amiable friends, as to why such disaster overtook you. It is because you devote more effort to learning by heart and committing to memory revolutionary slogans than to thinking them out. This leads you to write "the defence of the socialist fatherland" in quotation marks, which are probably meant to signify your attempts at being ironical, but which really prove that you are muddleheads. You are accustomed to regard "defencism" as something base and despicable; you have learned this and committed it to memory. You have learned this by heart so thoroughly that some of you have begun talking nonsense to the effect that defence of the fatherland in an imperialist *epoch* is impermissible (as a matter of fact, it is impermissible only in an imperialist, reactionary war, waged by the bourgeoisie). But you have not thought out why and when "defencism" is abominable.

To recognise defence of the fatherland means recognising the legitimacy and justice of war. Legitimacy and justice from what point of view? Only from the point of view of the socialist proletariat and its struggle for its emancipation. We do not recognise any other point of view. If war is waged by the exploiting class with the object of strengthening its rule as a class, such a war is a criminal war, and "defencism" in *such* a war is a base betrayal of socialism. If war is waged by the proletariat after it has conquered the bourgeoisie in its own country, and is waged with the object of strengthening and developing socialism, such a war is legitimate and "holy".

We have been "defencists" since October 25, 1917. I have said this more than once very definitely, and you dare not deny this. It is precisely in the interests of "strengthening the connection" with international socialism that we *are in duty bound* to defend our *socialist* fatherland. Those who

treat frivolously the defence of the country in which the proletariat has already achieved victory are the ones who destroy the connection with international socialism. When we were the representatives of an oppressed class we did not adopt a frivolous attitude towards defence of the fatherland in an imperialist war. We opposed such defence on principle. Now that we have become representatives of the ruling class, which has begun to organise socialism, we demand that everybody adopt a *serious* attitude towards defence of the country. And adopting a serious attitude towards defence of the country means thoroughly preparing for it, and strictly calculating the balance of forces. If our forces are obviously small, the best means of defence is *retreat into the interior of the country* (anyone who regards this as an artificial formula, made up to suit the needs of the moment, should read old Clausewitz, one of the greatest authorities on military matters, concerning the lessons of history to be learned in this connection). The "Left Communists", however, do not give the slightest indication that they understand the significance of the question of the balance of forces.

When we were opposed to defencism on principle we were justified in holding up to ridicule those who wanted to "save" their fatherland, ostensibly in the interests of socialism. When we gained the right to be proletarian defencists the whole question was radically altered. It has become our duty to calculate with the utmost accuracy the different forces involved, to weigh with the utmost care the chances of our ally (the international proletariat) being able to come to our aid in time. It is in the interest of capital to destroy its enemy (the revolutionary proletariat) bit by bit, before the workers in all countries have united (actually united, i.e., by beginning the revolution). It is in our interest to do all that is possible, to take advantage of the slightest opportunity, to postpone the decisive battle until the moment (or *until after* the moment) the revolutionary workers' contingents have united in a single great international army.

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Signed: *N. Lenin*

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■  
*From "Left-Wing" Communism—  
an Infantile Disorder*  
■

The struggle that Bolshevism waged against "Left" deviations within its own Party assumed particularly large proportions on two occasions: in 1908, on the question of whether or not to participate in a most reactionary "parliament" and in the legal workers' societies, which were being restricted by most reactionary laws; and again in 1918 (the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk), on the question of whether one "compromise" or another was permissible.

In 1908 the "Left" Bolsheviks were expelled from our Party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary "parliament".<sup>52</sup> The "Lefts"—among whom there were many splendid revolutionaries who subsequently were (and still are) commendable members of the Communist Party—based themselves particularly on the successful experience of the 1905 boycott. When, in August 1905, the tsar proclaimed the convocation of a consultative "parliament",<sup>53</sup> the Bolsheviks called for its boycott, in the teeth of all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks, and the "parliament" was in fact swept away by the revolution of October 1905. The boycott proved correct at the time, not because non-participation in reactionary parliaments is correct in general, but because we accurately appraised the objective situation, which was leading to the rapid development of the mass strikes first into a political strike, then into a revolutionary strike, and finally into an uprising. Moreover, the struggle centred at that time on the question of whether the convocation of the first representative assembly should be left to the tsar, or an attempt should be made to wrest its convocation from the old regime. When there was not, and could not be, any certainty that the objective situation was of a similar kind, and when there was no certainty of a similar trend and the

same rate of development, the boycott was no longer correct.

The Bolsheviks' boycott of "parliament" in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that, when legal and illegal, parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle are combined, it is sometimes useful and even essential to reject parliamentary forms. It would, however, be highly erroneous to apply this experience blindly, imitatively and uncritically to *other* conditions and *other* situations. The Bolsheviks' boycott of the Duma in 1906 was a mistake, although a minor and easily remediable one.\* The boycott of the Duma in 1907, 1908 and subsequent years was a most serious error and difficult to remedy, because, on the one hand, a very rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its conversion into an uprising was not to be expected, and, on the other hand, the entire historical situation attendant upon the renovation of the bourgeois monarchy called for legal and illegal activities being combined. Today, when we look back at this fully completed historical period, whose connection with subsequent periods has now become quite clear, it becomes most obvious that in 1908-14 the Bolsheviks *could not have* preserved (let alone strengthened and developed) the core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat, had they not upheld, in a most strenuous struggle, the viewpoint that it was *obligatory* to combine legal and illegal forms of struggle, and that it was *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions hemmed in by reactionary laws (sick benefit societies, etc.).

In 1918 things did not reach a split. At that time the "Left" Communists formed only a separate group or "faction" within our Party, and that not for long. In the same year, 1918, the most prominent representatives of "Left Communism", for example, Comrades Radek and Bukharin, openly acknowledged their error. It had seemed to them that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a compromise with the

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\* What applies to individuals also applies—with necessary modifications—to politics and parties. It is not he who makes no mistakes that is intelligent. There are no such men, nor can there be. It is he whose errors are not very grave and who is able to rectify them easily and quickly that is intelligent.



imperialists, which was inexcusable on principle and harmful to the party of the revolutionary proletariat. It was indeed a compromise with the imperialists, but it was a compromise which, under the circumstances, *had to be made*.

Today, when I hear our tactics in signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty being attacked by the Socialist-Revolutionaries, for instance, or when I hear Comrade Lansbury say, in a conversation with me, "Our British trade union leaders say that if it was permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, it is permissible for them to compromise too", I usually reply by first of all giving a simple and "popular" example:

Imagine that your car is held up by armed bandits. You hand them over your money, passport, revolver and car. In return you are rid of the pleasant company of the bandits. That is unquestionably a compromise. "*Do ut des*" (I "give" you money, fire-arms and a car "so that you give" me the opportunity to get away from you with a whole skin). It would, however, be difficult to find a sane man who would declare such a compromise to be "inadmissible on principle", or who would call the compromiser an accomplice of the bandits (even though the bandits might use the car and the fire-arms for further robberies). Our compromise with the bandits of German imperialism was just that kind of compromise.

But when, in 1914-18 and then in 1918-20, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia, the Scheide-mannites (and to a large extent the Kautskyites) in Germany, Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler (to say nothing of the Renners and Co.) in Austria, the Renaudels and Longuets and Co. in France, the Fabians, the Independents and the Labourites in Britain entered into *compromises* with the bandits of their own bourgeoisie, and sometimes of the "Allied" bourgeoisie, and *against* the revolutionary proletariat of their own countries, all these gentlemen were actually acting as *accomplices in banditry*.

The conclusion is clear: to reject compromises "on principle", to reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness, which it is difficult even to consider seriously. A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must be able to

distinguish *concrete* cases of compromises that are inexcusable and are an expression of opportunism and *treachery*; he must direct all the force of criticism, the full intensity of merciless exposure and relentless war, against *these concrete* compromises, and not allow the past masters of "practical" socialism and the parliamentary Jesuits to dodge and wriggle out of responsibility by means of disquisitions on "compromises in general". It is in this way that the "leaders" of the British trade unions, as well as of the Fabian society and the "Independent" Labour Party, dodge responsibility *for the treachery they have perpetrated*, for having made a *compromise* that is really tantamount to the worst kind of opportunism, treachery and betrayal.

There are different kinds of compromises. One must be able to analyse the situation and the concrete conditions of each compromise, or of each variety of compromise. One must learn to distinguish between a man who has given up his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to lessen the evil they can do and to facilitate their capture and execution, and a man who gives his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to share in the loot. In politics this is by no means always as elementary as it is in this childishly simple example. However, anyone who is out to think up for the workers some kind of recipe that will provide them with cut-and-dried solutions for all contingencies, or promises that the policy of the revolutionary proletariat will never come up against difficult or complex situations, is simply a charlatan.

To leave no room for misinterpretation, I shall attempt to outline, if only very briefly, several fundamental rules for the analysis of concrete compromises.

The party which entered into a compromise with the German imperialists by signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been evolving its internationalism in practice ever since the end of 1914. It was not afraid to call for the defeat of the tsarist monarchy and to condemn "defence of country" in a war between two imperialist robbers. The parliamentary representatives of this party preferred exile in Siberia<sup>54</sup> to taking a road leading to ministerial portfolios in a bourgeois government. The revolution that overthrew tsarism and established a democratic republic put this party to a new and tremendous test—it did not enter into any agree-

ments with its "own" imperialists, but prepared and brought about their overthrow. When it had assumed political power, this party did not leave a vestige of either landed or capitalist ownership. After making public and repudiating the imperialists' secret treaties, this party proposed peace to *all* nations, and yielded to the violence of the Brest-Litovsk robbers only after the Anglo-French imperialists had torpedoed the conclusion of a peace, and after the Bolsheviks had done everything humanly possible to hasten the revolution in Germany and other countries. The absolute correctness of this compromise, entered into by such a party in such a situation, is becoming ever clearer and more obvious with every day.

The Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia (like all the leaders of the Second International throughout the world, in 1914-20) began with treachery—by directly or indirectly justifying "defence of country", i.e., the defence of *their own* predatory bourgeoisie. They continued their treachery by entering into a coalition with the bourgeoisie of *their own* country, and fighting, together with *their own* bourgeoisie, against the revolutionary proletariat of their own country. Their bloc, first with Kerensky and the Cadets, and then with Kolchak and Denikin in Russia—like the bloc of their *confrères* abroad with the bourgeoisie of *their* respective countries—was in fact desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie, against the proletariat. From beginning to end, *their* compromise with the bandits of imperialism meant their becoming *accomplices* in imperialist banditry.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Read by Lenin on January 8 (21), 1918, at a meeting of 63 C.C. members and Party functionaries. No records of the meeting available with the exception of Lenin's brief notes on the speeches of Osinsky (Obolensky), Trotsky, Lomov (Oppokov), Kamenev and others.

In his speech at the Central Committee's January 11 (24) meeting, Lenin stated that his Theses had won 15 votes; the "Left Communists", 32; and Trotsky, 16.

The Theses were published on February 24 when the majority of the Central Committee sided with Lenin on the conclusion of peace. p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. p. 9

<sup>3</sup> A counter-revolutionary bourgeois-nationalist organisation formed at the All-Ukraine National Congress in Kiev in April 1917 by a bloc of Ukrainian bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist parties and groups. M. S. Grushevsky, an ideologist of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, was its chairman, and V. K. Vinnichenko, vice-chairman. It rested on a social base of urban and rural bourgeoisie, and petty-bourgeois nationalist-minded intellectuals. It tried to consolidate the power of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and landowners and to set up a Ukrainian bourgeois state by utilising the national liberation movement. It waved the banner of national independence in an effort to lead the Ukrainian masses away from the All-Russia revolutionary movement, subordinate them to the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and prevent the socialist revolution from winning out in the Ukraine. The Rada supported the Provisional Government despite disagreements over the issue of Ukrainian autonomy.

After the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution, it declared itself the supreme organ of the "Ukrainian People's Republic", openly fought the Soviet power, and became one of the main centres of counter-revolution.

The First All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets, which took place in Kharkov in December 1917, proclaimed the Ukraine a Soviet Republic and the power of the Central Rada overthrown. The Council of People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. recognised the Ukrainian Soviet Government as the sole legitimate government of the Ukraine and adopted a decision to render it immediate assistance in its struggle against the counter-revolutionary Rada. In December 1917 and January 1918, armed uprisings against the Central Rada

and for the establishment of the Soviet power flared up all over the Ukraine. In January 1918, Soviet troops in the Ukraine launched an offensive, and on January 26 (February 8) occupied Kiev and overthrew the bourgeois Rada.

The Rada had had no support among the working people and now, defeated and ousted from the territory of the Soviet Ukraine, it joined the German imperialists in trying to overthrow the Soviet power and restore the bourgeois regime in the Ukraine. During the peace negotiations between the Soviet Republic and Germany, the Rada sent a delegation to Brest-Litovsk and secretly concluded a separate peace with Germany, undertaking to supply her with Ukrainian grain, coal and raw materials in return for military assistance against the Soviets. In March 1918, the Rada was reinstalled in Kiev as a puppet of the German and Austrian invaders. The Germans came to realise that the Rada was incapable of crushing the revolutionary movement in the Ukraine and ensuring food and raw material supplies, and dissolved it at the end of April. p. 13

<sup>4</sup> *Chernov, U. M.* (1876-1952)—a leader and theoretician of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, and Minister of Agriculture in the bourgeois Provisional Government. After the October Socialist Revolution took part in organising anti-Soviet revolts. p. 13

<sup>5</sup> *The State Duma*—a representative body which the tsarist government was forced to convene after the revolutionary events of 1905. It was nominally a legislature but had no real power. Elections held on the basis of the electoral law of June 3, 1907, gave a majority to the reactionary bloc of landowners and big industrialists in the Third Duma. p. 16

<sup>6</sup> A discussion of the question of war and peace was held by the Central Committee on January 11 (24), 1918, following a speech by Lenin, who was opposed by Trotsky and the "Left Communists", some of whom—Bukharin, Uritsky, Lomov (Oppokov)—supported Trotsky's "no war, no peace" proposal, Stalin, Sergeyev (Artyom) and Sokolnikov wanted to sign peace. The "Left Communists" did not expect the "revolutionary war now" slogan to go through (it won only two votes), and voted for Trotsky's proposal, which was adopted by 9 votes to 7. In the hope of overcoming the resistance within the Central Committee to the conclusion of peace and winning over the section of the masses which followed the advocates of a revolutionary war, Lenin motioned a proposal to delay the talks in every possible way, and this was carried by 12 votes to one. p. 18

<sup>7</sup> A reference to Stalin's statement: "There is no revolutionary movement in the West, there are no facts but only a potential, and that is something we cannot reckon with."

The other reference is to Zinoviev's: "... we are undoubtedly faced with a serious surgical operation, because by concluding peace we shall strengthen chauvinism in Germany and temporarily weaken the revolutionary movement all over the West. Beyond that lies the prospect of destruction for the Socialist Republic." (*Minutes of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.)*, August 1917-February 1918, Moscow, 1958, pp. 171-72.) p. 20

- <sup>8</sup> With this article, published in *Pravda* on February 21, 1918, Lenin launched a public campaign in the press for the conclusion of peace. p. 21
- <sup>9</sup> The reference is to the voting on the question of peace at the meetings of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) on January 11 (24) and on February 17, 1918. Two votes were cast in favour of a revolutionary war at the first meeting, but none at the second (those in favour of continuing the war abstaining). p. 23
- <sup>10</sup> *Liebknecht, Karl* (1871-1919)—an outstanding figure in the German and international working-class movement, a leader of the Left wing of the German Social-Democratic Party, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany; brutally murdered by counter-revolutionaries in 1919.  
*Wilhelm II* (Hohenzollern) (1859-1941)—Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia (1888-1918). p. 26
- <sup>11</sup> The reference is to the voting at the Democratic Conference on the question of a coalition with the bourgeoisie.  
*The All-Russia Democratic Conference* was held by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary Central Executive Committee of the Soviets ostensibly to decide who should rule the country. The organisers' real aim, however, was to distract the attention of the masses from the mounting revolution. The conference was held in Petrograd from September 14 to 22 (September 27 to October 5), 1917, and was attended by more than 1,500 people. The Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders secured a majority by blocking worker and peasant representation and increasing the number of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois delegates. The Bolsheviks attended for the purpose of exposing the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. p. 27
- <sup>12</sup> The bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917 overthrew the tsar and established dual power in Russia (the bourgeois Provisional Government and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies). p. 27
- <sup>13</sup> A reference to the defeatism of Zinoviev and Kamenev, who opposed the armed uprising in October 1917. p. 27
- <sup>14</sup> *Kerensky, A. F.* (1881-1971)—a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. After the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917, Minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government, and later Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. p. 28
- <sup>15</sup> At the outbreak of the imperialist world war (1914-18), Belgium was occupied by German troops which stayed on for nearly four years, until Germany's defeat in 1918. p. 28
- <sup>16</sup> *Novy Luch* (New Ray) and *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life)—Menshevik newspapers.  
*Dyelo Naroda* (People's Cause)—a Socialist-Revolutionary Party newspaper. p. 29
- <sup>17</sup> An article written by Lenin in connection with the opposition voiced by "Left Communists" at a meeting of the Central Committee of the

R.S.D.L.P.(B.) on February 22, 1918, to the acquisition of arms and food supplies from Britain and France for purposes of defence against the German imperialists. When the Council of People's Commissars discussed the question on February 21, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries objected to Allied aid and the following resolution was passed: "In view of the disagreement concerning negotiations with the Allied Powers on food and military supplies for the country, the meeting shall be adjourned to allow consultations by the groups."

Lenin was not present when the Central Committee discussed the question on February 22, but he sent the following statement: "To the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. Please register my vote in favour of accepting potatoes and arms from the Anglo-French imperialist bandits." By 6 votes to 5 the Central Committee passed a resolution deeming it possible to acquire such supplies from the capitalist governments for the revolutionary army, while retaining complete independence in foreign policy.

After the vote, Bukharin tendered his resignation from the Central Committee and the editorship of *Pravda*. In addition, eleven "Left Communists", among them Lomov (Oppokov), Uritsky, Bukharin, Bubnov and Pyatakov, submitted a statement to the Central Committee accusing it of capitulating to the international bourgeoisie, and stating their intention to conduct extensive agitation against its policy.

That same day the question was discussed by the Council of People's Commissars, which decided in favour of obtaining such supplies. p. 32

<sup>18</sup> *Kalyayev, I. P.* (1877-1905)—a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party's combat group, who took part in a number of terroristic acts. On February 4 (17), 1905, he assassinated the Governor-General of Moscow, the Grand Duke Sergei Romanov, the tsar's uncle. Executed at Schlüsselburg on May 10 (23). p. 33

<sup>19</sup> The Party's Central Committee met on February 23, 1918, to discuss the even more onerous peace terms which the Germans sent to the Soviet Government with a demand for an answer within 48 hours. Lenin's insistence on the need immediately to accept the German terms and conclude peace at all costs was again opposed by the "Left Communists" Bukharin, Uritsky and Lomov (Oppokov). Trotsky announced his resignation from the post of People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs owing to his disagreement with Lenin. Sverdlov, Zinoviev and Sokolnikov spoke in favour of signing the peace treaty. In his first speech Stalin suggested that the peace negotiations should be started but added that peace did not have to be signed, an attitude that was criticised by Lenin. In his second speech, Stalin came out in favour of signing peace immediately. Lenin, Stasova, Zinoviev, Sverdlov, Stalin, Sokolnikov and Smilga voted for immediate acceptance of the German terms; Bubnov, Uritsky, Bukharin and Lomov were against; Trotsky, Krestinsky, Dzerzhinsky and Ioffe abstained. After the vote a group of "Left Communists"—Bukharin, Lomov, Bubnov, Pyatakov, Yakovleva and Uritsky—declared that they were resigning from all their Party and

Government posts and reserved the right to conduct extensive agitation in the Party and among the masses. p. 38

- <sup>20</sup> *Stolypin, P. A.* (1862-1911)—tsarist statesman and big landowner. From 1906 to 1911, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Minister of the Interior. His name is associated with a period of harsh political reaction when capital punishment was widely applied to suppress the revolutionary movement (Stolypin reaction—1907-10). p. 42
- <sup>21</sup> The meeting of the All-Russia C.E.C. to discuss the question of peace with Germany opened at 3 a.m. on February 24, 1918 under the chairmanship of Y. M. Sverdlov. During the debate on Lenin's report the conclusion of peace was opposed by the Mensheviks, the Right and Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the anarchists. By 116 votes to 85, with 26 abstentions, the meeting passed the Bolshevik resolution to accept the German peace terms. Most of the "Left Communists" retired while the vote was taken. p. 43
- <sup>22</sup> The reference is to the Peace Treaty of Tilsit, which was signed in July 1807 between France and Prussia and which imposed onerous and humiliating obligations on the latter. She lost a large part of her territory and had to pay an indemnity of 100 million francs; she also undertook to reduce her army to 40,000 men, to provide auxiliaries for Napoleon on demand, and to cease trading with England. p. 48
- <sup>23</sup> *The Socialist-Revolutionary Party*—a petty-bourgeois party, which emerged in Russia at the close of 1901 and the beginning of 1902 through the merger of various Narodnik groups and circles professing a hotchpotch of Narodnik and revisionist ideas. Lenin said the Socialist-Revolutionaries tried "to patch up the rents in Narodnik ideas with bits of fashionable opportunist 'criticism' of Marxism" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 9, p. 310). During the First World War, most of them held social-chauvinist views.
- After the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, together with the Mensheviks, were the mainstay of the counter-revolutionary bourgeois-landowner Provisional Government, in which their leaders (Avksentyev, Kerensky and Chernov) held portfolios. They refused to support the peasants' demand for the abolition of the landed estates and their ministers in the Provisional Government sanctioned punitive expeditions against peasants who seized landed estates.
- A breakaway Left wing formed a separate party at the close of November 1917 in an effort to retain influence among the peasants; they gave nominal recognition to the Soviet government and entered into an agreement with the Bolsheviks. Very soon, however, they began to fight against the Soviet power.
- During the foreign armed intervention and civil war the Socialist-Revolutionaries engaged in subversive activity and supported the interventionists and whiteguards; they took part in counter-revolutionary plots, and staged terroristic acts against Soviet Government and Communist Party leaders. After the civil war, they continued their hostile activity against the Soviet state at home and among whiteguard émigrés. p. 52



- <sup>24</sup> Graduates of special military schools in tsarist Russia. p. 54
- <sup>25</sup> *Nicholas Romanov* (1868-1918)—the last Emperor of Russia (1894-1917). p. 56
- <sup>26</sup> *Paris Commune*—the revolutionary government set up by the working class during the proletarian revolution in Paris and the first attempt to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. It lasted for 72 days (from March 18 to May 28, 1871). p. 63
- <sup>27</sup> *Hindenburg, Paul* (1847-1934)—Commander of the German Army on the Eastern front during the imperialist world war of 1914-18; later Chief of the General Staff. One of the organisers of military intervention against Soviet Russia. p. 71
- <sup>28</sup> *Kornilov revolt*—a counter-revolutionary conspiracy of the Russian bourgeoisie in August 1917. It was led by General Kornilov and supported by high-ranking officers. Their plan was to capture revolutionary Petrograd with the help of officer cadets and Cossack troops, crush the Bolshevik Party, dissolve the Soviets and establish a military dictatorship.
- In response to a call of the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee the workers of Petrograd, revolutionary sailors and soldiers rose in defence of the revolution and defeated the Kornilov revolt. Under mass pressure, the Provisional Government was forced to issue a warrant for the arrest and trial of Kornilov and his accomplices. This marked the failure of the attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie and landowners to crush the revolution. Following the defeat of the Kornilov revolt, the Bolshevik Party's influence among the masses grew considerably, and Bolshevik representation in the Soviets increased all over the country. p. 74
- <sup>29</sup> The reference is to the defeatist attitude of L. B. Kamenev, G. Y. Zinoviev, A. I. Rykov and certain other members of the Central Committee of the Party and the Soviet Government, who, after the October Socialist Revolution, supported the Socialist-Revolutionary demand for a "homogeneous socialist government". p. 74
- <sup>30</sup> The Soviet Government published the secret diplomatic records and secret treaties between the tsarist government (and subsequently the bourgeois Provisional Government) of Russia and the governments of Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Austria-Hungary and other imperialist powers. p. 83
- <sup>31</sup> *Rasputin, G. Y.* (1872-1916)—an adventurer who enjoyed great influence at the Court of Tsar Nicholas II. p. 84
- <sup>32</sup> The reference is to the oath of loyalty to the tsar which all the deputies to the Third State Duma had to sign. The Social-Democrat deputies signed along with the rest since refusal to sign meant the loss of the Duma rostrum, which they needed to mobilise the proletariat for revolutionary struggle. p. 86
- <sup>33</sup> The term was used by V. V. Obolensky (N. Osinsky) in his *Theses on the Question of War and Peace*, written for the Party Central Committee meeting on January 21 (February 3), 1918, and published

on March 14 in the "Left Communist" newspaper *Kommunist* No. 8. Obolensky explained: "Revolutionary war, as a civil war in the field, cannot be in the nature of the regular military action taken by national armies engaged in strategic operations. . . . Military action assumes the character of guerrilla warfare (similar to barricade fighting) combined with agitation on class lines." p. 88

<sup>34</sup> *Max Hoffmann* (1869-1927)—German general. In September 1916, he became Chief of Staff and was, in effect, in command of the German forces on the Eastern front. He played a prominent part in the Brest negotiations between Soviet Russia and the Austro-German coalition. p. 88

<sup>35</sup> See Note 22. p. 89

<sup>36</sup> Workers employed at the Putilov Works in Petrograd. p. 90

<sup>37</sup> Lenin seems to be referring to the period between the launching of the German offensive, on February 18, and the arrival of the Soviet delegation in Brest-Litovsk on February 28, 1918. The German offensive continued until March 3, the day the peace treaty was signed. p. 90

<sup>38</sup> *Petlyura, S. U.* (1877-1926)—a bourgeois nationalist leader in the Ukraine. p. 96

<sup>39</sup> A reference to Lenin's conversation with the French officer, Comte de Lubersac, which took place on February 27, 1918. p. 96

<sup>40</sup> The reference is to the appeal issued by the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs to all workers and peasants to take up voluntary military training. This had to remain voluntary because under the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Russian Army was to be completely demobilised. The appeal was published on March 5, 1918, in the newspaper *Izvestia UTsIK* No. 40. p. 37

<sup>41</sup> *Canossa*—castle in Northern Italy famous as the scene of the penance performed by the German Emperor Henry IV before Pope Gregory VII in 1077. Hence the phrase "to go to Canossa", i.e., to humiliate oneself before a person whom one has previously resisted. p. 98

<sup>42</sup> According to the terms of the armistice concluded at Brest-Litovsk on December 2 (15), 1917, between the Soviet Government and the powers of the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey), either side could renew hostilities at seven days' notice. In violation of this clause, the German military command launched an offensive along the entire front on February 18, only two days after repudiating the armistice. p. 99

<sup>43</sup> The reference is to the conclusion of peace with the counter-revolutionary Ukrainian Rada (see Note 3). p. 99

<sup>44</sup> *March 12* was the provisional date for the meeting of the Fourth, Extraordinary, All-Russia Congress of Soviets to decide on the ratification of the peace treaty. It actually met on March 14-16, 1918. p. 100

- <sup>45</sup> The epigraph is taken from Nikolai Nekrasov's poem *Who Lives Well in Russia*.  
p. 105
- <sup>46</sup> The reference is to the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary parties, which were represented in the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, but which soon turned to counter-revolution. On June 14, 1918, the All-Russia Central Executive Committee passed a decision expelling the counter-revolutionary Socialist-Revolutionaries (the Right-wingers and the Centre) and the Mensheviks from the Committee and the local Soviets. The decision was published on June 18 in *Izvestia UTsIK* No. 123.  
p. 110
- <sup>47</sup> *Constitutional-Democrats (Cadets)*—members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, the chief political organisation of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie in Russia which was founded in October 1905. Its membership was made up of capitalists, landowners serving in local councils, and bourgeois intellectuals. The Cadets eventually developed into a party of the imperialist bourgeoisie. During the First World War, they gave active support to the tsarist government's predatory policy. During the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917, they tried to save the monarchy; having a key part in the bourgeois Provisional Government, they pursued a counter-revolutionary policy opposed to the people's interests. After the Great October Socialist Revolution, they became rabid enemies of the Soviet power and took part in all armed counter-revolutionary actions and interventionist campaigns against Soviet Russia. After the defeat of the interventionists and the whiteguards, the Cadets fled abroad to continue their anti-Soviet counter-revolutionary activity.  
p. 117
- <sup>48</sup> A reference to B. D. Kamkov's co-report on the question of ratifying the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.  
p. 128
- <sup>49</sup> The Menshevik L. Martov, on the plea that the delegates had no idea of the contents of the treaty, likened them to peasants forced by the authorities to sign papers at a volost gathering, without knowing what was in them.  
p. 128
- <sup>50</sup> *Uperyod* (Forward)—a Menshevik daily whose publication was started in Moscow in March 1917.  
p. 142
- <sup>51</sup> *Nozdryov*—a character in Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, personifying the bullying type of landowner.  
p. 155
- <sup>52</sup> A reference to otzovism and its variety, ultimatumism. Under the cover of the revolutionary phrases, the otzovists demanded the recall of Social-Democratic deputies from the Third Duma and a break with the legal trade unions, co-operative societies, etc.  
p. 158
- <sup>53</sup> The tsar's manifesto of August 6 (19), 1905, was a law instituting the State Duma and laying down the regulations governing elections to it. The Duma was named after Bulygin, Minister of the Interior, who had drafted the law on the tsar's instructions. Under the draft law, the Duma was to have no legislative powers, but was to deliberate on certain questions as an advisory body to the tsar. The Bolsheviks called on the workers and peasants to boycott it. No

elections were held, and the government was unable to convene the Duma, which was swept away by the revolutionary tide and the All-Russia political strike of October 1905. p. 158

<sup>64</sup> On the report of an agent-provocateur, five Bolshevik deputies, members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party group in the Fourth Duma, were arrested on November 5 (18), 1914, the day following the Bolshevik conference on the question of war. The tsarist government accused the Bolshevik deputies of "high treason", they were deprived of their parliamentary immunity and exiled for life to Eastern Siberia. p. 161

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