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Leon Trotsky

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# Leon Trotsky

## In Defense of the Russian Revolution

Speech Delivered at Copenhagen  
December 1932

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## Erratum

In making up this pamphlet a serious error was made in the sequence of pages. To read the text as it was written it is necessary to observe the following order: pages 3-36 are correct as they stand; from page 36 go to page 42; read first on this page the section which is upside down; read the rest of the page; read pages 43-45, go back to page 41; read page 41; from page 41 go e back to page 37; read from page 37-40 the pamphlet closes with the words on page 40.

# In Defense of the October Revolution

My dear listeners,

Permit me to begin by expressing my sincere regrets over my inability to speak before a Copenhagen audience in the Danish tongue. Let us not ask whether the listeners lose by it. As to the speaker, his ignorance of the Danish language deprives him of the possibility of familiarizing himself with Scandinavian life and Scandinavian literature immediately, at first hand and in the original. And that is a great loss.

The German language, to which I have had to take recourse, is rich and powerful. My German, however, is fairly limited. To discuss complicated questions with the necessary freedom, moreover, is possible only in one's own language. I must therefore beg the indulgence of the audience in advance.

The first time that I was in Copenhagen was at the international Socialist Congress, and I took away with me the kindest recollections of your city. But that was over a quarter of a century ago. Since then, the water in the Ore-Sund and in the fjords has changed over and over again. And not the water alone. The war broke the backbone of the old European continent. The rivers and seas of Europe have washed down not a little blood. Man-

kind, and particularly European mankind, has gone through severe trials, has become more sombre and more brutal. Every kind of conflict has become more bitter. The world has entered into the period of the great change. Its most extreme expressions are **war and revolution.**

Before I pass on to the theme of my lecture, the Revolution, I consider it my duty to express my thanks to the organizers of this meeting, the Copenhagen organization of the social-democratic student body. I do this as a political opponent. My lecture, it is true, pursues historico-scientific and not political aims. I want to emphasize this right from the beginning. But it is impossible to speak of a Revolution, out of which the Soviet Republic arose, without taking up a political position. As a lecturer I stand under the same banner as I did when I participated in the events of the Revolution.

Up to the war, the Bolshevik Party belonged to the international social-democracy. On August 4, 1914, the vote of the German social-democracy for the war credits put an end to this connection once and for all, and opened the period of uninterrupted and irreconcilable struggle of Bolshevism against social-democracy. Does this mean that the organizers of this assembly made a mistake in inviting me as a lecturer? On this point the audience will be able to judge only after my lecture. To justify my acceptance of the kind invitation to present a report on the Russian Revolution, permit me to point to the fact that during the 35 years of my political life the question of the Russian Revolution has been the practical and theoretical axis of my interests

and of my actions. The four years of my stay in Turkey were principally devoted to the historical elaboration of the problems of the Russian Revolution. Perhaps this fact gives me a certain right to hope that I will succeed, in part, at least, in helping not only friends and sympathizers, but also opponents, better to understand many features of the Revolution which had escaped their attention before. At all events, the purpose of my lecture is: **to help to understand**. I do not intend to conduct propaganda for the Revolution nor to call upon you to join the Revolution. I intend to explain the Revolution.

I do not know if in the Scandinavian Olympus there was a special goddess of rebellion. Scarcely! In any case, we shall not call upon her favor today. We shall place our lecture under the sign of Snotra, the old goddess of knowledge. Despite the passionate drama of the Revolution as a living event, we shall endeavor to treat it as dispassionately as an anatomist. If the lecturer is drier because of it, the listeners will, let us hope, take it into the bargain.

Let us begin with some elementary sociological principles, which are doubtless familiar to you all, but as to which we must refresh our memory in approaching so complicated a phenomenon as the Revolution.

Human society is an historically-originated collaboration in the struggle for existence and the assurance of the maintenance of the generations. The character of a society is determined by the character of its economy. The character of its economy

is determined by its means of productive labor.

For every great epoch in the development of the productive forces there is a definite corresponding social regime. Every social regime until now has secured enormous advantages to the ruling class.

Out of what has been said, it is clear that social regimes are not eternal. They arise historically, and then become fetters on further progress. "All that arises deserves to be destroyed".

But no ruling class has ever voluntarily and peacefully abdicated. In questions of life and death arguments based on reason have never replaced the argument of force. This may be sad, but it is so. It is not we that have made this world. We can do nothing but take it as it is.

Revolution means a change of the social order. It transfers the power from the hands of a class which has exhausted itself into those of another class, which is on the rise. The insurrection is the sharpest and most critical moment in the struggle of two classes for power. The insurrection can lead to the real victory of the revolution and to the establishment of a new order only when it is based on a progressive class, which is able to rally around it the overwhelming majority of the people.

As distinguished from the processes of nature, a revolution is made by human beings and through human beings. But in the course of revolution, too, men act under the influence of social conditions which are not freely chosen by them, but are handed down from the past and imperatively point out the road which they must follow. For this reason,



and only for this reason, a revolution follows certain laws.

But human consciousness does not merely passively reflect its objective conditions. It is accustomed to react to them actively. At certain times this reaction assumes a tense, passionate, mass character. The barriers of right and might are broken down. The active intervention of the masses in historical events is in fact the most indispensable element of a revolution.

But even the stormiest activity can remain in the stage of demonstration or rebellion, without rising to the height of revolution. The uprising of the masses must lead to the overthrow of the domination of one class and to the establishment of the domination of another. Only then have we a whole revolution. A mass uprising is no isolated undertaking, which can be conjured up any time one pleases. It represents an objectively-conditioned element in the development of a revolution, as a revolution represents an objectively-conditioned process in the development of society. But if the necessary conditions for the uprising exist, one must not simply wait passively, with open mouth: as Shakespeare says, "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

To sweep away the outlived social order, the progressive class must understand that its hour has struck, and set before itself the task of conquering power. Here opens the field of conscious revolutionary action, where foresight and calculation combine with will and courage. In other words: here opens the field of action of the Party.

The revolutionary Party unites within itself the flower of the progressive class. Without a Party which is able to orientate itself in its environment, evaluate the progress and rhythm of events, and early win the confidence of the masses, the victory of the proletarian revolution is impossible. These are the reciprocal relations of the objective and the subjective factors in insurrection and in revolution.

In disputations, particularly theological ones, it is customary, as you know, for the opponents to discredit scientific truth by driving it to an absurdity. This method is called in logic "reducto ad absurdum". We shall try to pursue the opposite method: that is, we shall start from an absurdity so as to approach the truth with all the greater safety. In any case, we cannot complain of lack of absurdities. Let us take one of the freshest and crassest.

The Italian writer, Malaparate, who is something in the nature of a Fascist theoretician—there are such, too—not long ago launched a book on the technique of the coup d'etat. Naturally, the author devotes not an inconsiderable number of pages of his "investigation" to the October upheaval.

In contradistinction to the "strategy" of Lenin, which remained tied up with the social and political conditions of Russia in 1917, "the tactics of Trotsky", in Malaparte's words, "were, on the contrary, not tied up with the general conditions of the country". This is the main idea of the book! Malaparte compels Lenin and Trotsky, in the pages of his book, to carry on numerous dialogues, in which both participants together show as much profundity

as Nature put at the disposal of Malaparte alone. In answer to Lenin's considerations on the social and political prerequisites of the upheaval, Malaparte has his alleged Trotsky say, literally, "Your strategy requires far too many favorable circumstances; the insurrection needs nothing, it suffices to itself." You hear: "The insurrection needs nothing!" There it is, my dear listeners, the absurdity which must help us to approach the truth. The author repeats persistently, that in the October revolution, not the strategy of Lenin but the tactics of Trotsky won the victory. These tactics threaten, according to his words, even now the repose of the states of Europe. "The strategy of Lenin", I quote word for word, "is no immediate danger for the governments of Europe. But their present and, moreover, permanent danger is constituted by the tactics of Trotsky". Still more concretely, "Put Poincare in the place of Kerensky and the Bolshevik coup d'etat of October, 1917 would succeed just as well". It is hard to believe that such a book has been translated into several languages and is taken seriously.

We seek in vain to discover what is the necessity altogether of the historically-conditioned strategy of Lenin, if "Trotsky's tactics" can fulfill the same tasks in every situation. And why are successful revolutions so rare, if only a few technical recipes suffice for their success?

The dialogue between Lenin and Trotsky presented by the Fascist author is in content, as well as, form an insipid invention, from beginning to end. Of such inventions, there are not a few floating

around the world. So, for example, in Madrid there has been printed a book, "La Vida del Lenin" ("The Life of Lenin"), for which I am as little responsible as for the tactical recipes of Malaparte. The Madrid weekly, **Estampa**, published in advance whole chapters of this alleged book of Trotsky's on Lenin, which contain horrible desecrations of the memory of that man whom I valued and still value incomparably higher than anyone else among my contemporaries.

But let us leave the forgers to their fate. Old Wilhelm Liebknecht, the father of the unforgettable fighter and hero, Karl Liebknecht, liked to say, "A revolutionary politician must provide himself with a thick skin". Doctor Stockmann even more expressively recommended that anyone who proposed to act in a manner contrary to the opinion of society should refrain from putting on new trousers. We will take note of the two good pieces of advice, and go on to the order of the day.

# The Causes of October

What questions does the October revolution raise in the mind of a thinking man?

1. Why and how did this Revolution take place? More concretely, why did the proletarian revolution conquer in one of the most backward countries of Europe?

2. What have been the results of the October revolution? and finally,

3. Has the October revolution stood the test?

The first question, as to the causes, can now be answered more or less exhaustively. I have attempted to do this in great detail in my "History of the Revolution". Here I can formulate only the most important conclusions.

The fact that the proletariat reached power for the first time in such a backward country as the former Tsarist Russia seems mysterious only at first glance; in reality, it is fully in accord with historical law. It could have been predicted and it was predicted. Still more, on the basis of the prediction of this fact the revolutionary Marxists built up their strategy long before the decisive events.

The first and most general explanation is: Russia is a backward country, but only a part of world economy, only an element of the capitalist world system. In this sense Lenin exhausted the riddle

of the Russian revolution with the lapidary formula, "The chain broke at its weakest link".

A crude illustration: the great war, the result of the contradictions of world imperialism, drew into its maelstrom countries of **different** stages of development, but made the **same claims** on all the participants. It is clear that the burdens of the war had to be particularly intolerable for the most backward countries. Russia was the first to be compelled to leave the field. But to tear itself away from the war, the Russian people had to overthrow the ruling classes. In this way the chain of war broke at its weakest link.

Still, war is not a catastrophe coming from outside, like an earthquake, but as old Clausewitz said, the continuation of politics by other means. In the last war, the main tendencies of the imperialistic system of "peace"-time only expressed themselves more crudely. The higher the general forces of production, the tenser the competition on the world markets, the sharper the antagonisms, and the madder the race for armaments, in that measure the more difficult it became for the weaker participants. For precisely this reason the backward countries assumed the first places in the succession of collapses. The chain of world capitalism always tends to break at its weakest link.

If, as a result of exceptional or exceptionally unfavorable circumstances—let us say, a successful military intervention from the outside or irreparable mistakes on the part of the Soviet Government itself—capitalism should arise again on the immeasurably wide Soviet territory, together with it would

inevitably arise also its historical inadequacy, and such capitalism would in turn soon become the victim of the same contradictions which caused its explosion in 1917. No tactical recipes could have called the October Revolution into being, if Russia had not carried it within its body. The revolutionary Party in the last analysis can claim only the role of an obstetrician, who is compelled to resort to a Caesarian operation.

One might say in answer to this: "Your general considerations may adequately explain why old Russia had to suffer shipwreck, that country where backward capitalism and an impoverished peasantry were crowned by a parasitic nobility and a rotten monarchy. But in the simile of the chain and its weakest link there is still missing the key to the real riddle: How could the **socialist** revolution conquer in a **backward country**? History knows of more than a few illustrations of the decay of countries and civilizations accompanied by the collapse of the old classes for which no progressive successors had been found. The breakdown of old Russia should, at first sight, rather have changed the country into a capitalist colony than into a socialist state."

This objection is very interesting. It leads us directly to the kernel of the whole problem. And yet, this objection is erroneous; I might say, it lacks internal symmetry. On the one hand, it starts from an exaggerated conception of the backwardness of Russia; on the other, from a false theoretical conception of the phenomenon of historical backwardness in general.

Living beings, including man, of course, go through similar stages of development in accordance with their ages. In a normal five-year old child, we find a certain correspondence between the weight, and the size of the parts of the body and the internal organs. But when we deal with human consciousness, the situation is different. Contrary to anatomy and physiology, psychology, both individual and collective, is distinguished by expectation, power of absorption, flexibility and elasticity; therein consists the aristocratic advantage of man over his nearest zoological relatives, the apes. The absorptive and flexible psyche, as a necessary condition for historical progress, confers on the so-called social "organisms", as distinguished from the real, that is, biological organisms, an exceptional instability of internal structure. In the development of nations and states, particularly capitalist ones, there is neither similarity nor regularity. Different stages of civilization, even polar opposites, approach and intermingle with one another in the life of one and the same country.

Let us not forget, my esteemed listeners, that historical backwardness is a **relative** concept. There being both backward and progressive countries, there is also a reciprocal influencing of one by the other; there is the pressure of the progressive countries on the backward ones; there is the necessity for the backward countries to catch up with the progressive ones, to borrow their technology and science, etc. In this way arises the **combined type of development**: features of backwardness are combined with the last word in world technology and in world



thinking. Finally, the historically backward countries, in order to escape from their backwardness are often compelled to rush ahead of the others.

The flexibility of the collective consciousness makes it possible under certain conditions to achieve the result, in the social arena, which in individual psychology is called "overcoming the consciousness of inferiority". In this sense we can say that the October revolution was an heroic means whereby the people of Russia were able to overcome their own economic and cultural inferiority.

But let us pass over from these historico-philosophic, perhaps somewhat too abstract generalizations, and put the same question in concrete form, that is, within the cross-section of living economic facts. The backwardness of Russia expressed itself most clearly at the beginning of the twentieth century in the fact that industry occupied a small place in that country in comparison with agriculture, the city in comparison with the village, the proletariat in comparison with the peasantry. Taken as a whole, this meant a low productivity of the national labor. Suffice it to say that on the eve of the war, when Tsarist Russia had reached the peak of its well-being, the national income was 8 to 10 times lower than in the United States. This is expressed in figures, the "amplitude" of its backwardness, if the word "amplitude" can be used at all in connection with backwardness.

At the same time, however, the law of combined development expresses itself in the economic field at every step, in simple as well as in complex phenomena. Almost without highways, Russia was

compelled to build railroads. Without having gone through the stage of European artisanry and manufacture, Russia passed on directly to mechanized production. To jump over intermediate stages is the fate of backward countries.

While peasant agriculture often remained at the level of the 17th century, Russia's industry, if not in scope, at least in type, stood at the level of the progressive countries and rushed ahead of them in some respects. It suffices to say that the giant enterprises, with over a thousand employees each, employed, in the United States, less than 18 percent of the total number of industrial workers, in Russia over 41 percent. This fact is hard to reconcile with the conventional conception of the economic backwardness of Russia. It does not, on the other hand, refute this backwardness, but complements it dialectically.

The same contradictory character was shown by the class structure of the country. The finance capital of Europe industrialized Russian economy at an accelerated tempo. Thereby the industrial bourgeoisie assumed a large-scale capitalistic and anti-popular character. The foreign stockholders, moreover, lived outside of the country. The workers, on the other hand, were naturally Russians. Against a numerically weak Russian bourgeoisie, which had no national roots, stood therefore a relatively strong proletariat, with strong roots in the depths of the people.

The revolutionary character of the proletariat was furthered by the fact that Russia in particular, as a backward county, under the compulsion of catch-

ing up with its opponents, had not been able to work out its own conservatism, either social or political. The most conservative country of Europe, in fact of the entire world, is considered, and correctly, to be the oldest capitalist country—England. The European country freest of conservatism would in all probability be Russia.

But the young, fresh, determined proletariat of Russia still constituted only a tiny minority of the nation. The reserves of its revolutionary power lay outside of the proletariat itself—in the peasantry, living in half-serfdom, and in the oppressed nationalities.

## The Peasantry

The subsoil of the Revolution was the agrarian question. The old feudal-monarchic system became doubly intolerable under the conditions of the new capitalist exploitation. The peasant communal areas amounted to some 140 million desyatines.\* But thirty thousand large landowners, whose average holdings were over 2,000 desyatines, owned altogether 70 million desyatines, that is, as much as some 10 million peasant families or 50 millions of peasant population. **These statistics of land tenure constituted a ready-made program of agrarian revolt.**

The nobleman, Bokorkin, wrote in 1917 to the dignitary, Rodsianko, the chairman of the last municipal Duma, "I am a landowner and I cannot get it into my head that I must lose my land, and for an unbelievable purpose to boot, for the experiment of the socialist doctrine". But it is precisely the task of revolutions to accomplish that which the ruling classes cannot get into their heads.

In Autumn 1917 almost the whole country was the scene of peasant revolts. Of the 624 departments of old Russia, 482, that is, 77 percent, were affected by the movement! The reflection of the burning villages lit up the arena of the insurrections in the cities.

\* One desyatines equals 1.40 acres.

But the war of the peasants against the land-owners—you will reply to me—is one of the classic elements of the bourgeois, by no means of the proletarian revolution!

Perfectly right, I reply—so it was in the past. But the inability of capitalist society to survive in an historically backward country was expressed precisely in the fact that the peasant insurrections did not drive the bourgeois classes of Russia forward, but on the contrary drove them back for good into the camp of the reaction. If the peasantry did not want to be completely ruined, there was nothing else left for it but to join the industrial proletariat. This revolutionary joining of the two oppressed classes was foreseen with genius by Lenin and prepared by him long ahead of time.

Had the bourgeoisie courageously solved the agrarian question, the proletariat of Russia would not, obviously, have been able to take the power in 1917. But the greedy and cowardly Russian bourgeoisie, too late on the scene, prematurely a victim of senility, did not dare to lift its hand against feudal property. But thereby it delivered the power to the proletariat and together with it the right to dispose of the destinies of bourgeois society.

In order for the Soviet state to come into existence, therefore, it was necessary for two factors of different historical nature to collaborate: the peasant war, that is, a movement which is characteristic of the dawn of bourgeois development, and the proletarian insurrection, that is, a movement which announces the decline of the bourgeois movement. Precisely therein consists the **combined** char-

acter of the Russian Revolution.

Once the peasant bear stands up on his hind feet, he becomes terrible in his wrath. But he is unable to give conscious expression to his indignation. He needs a leader. For the first time in the history of the world, the insurrectionary peasantry found a faithful leader in the person of the proletariat.

Four million industrial and transportation workers led a hundred million peasants. That was the natural and inevitable reciprocal relation between proletariat and peasantry in the Revolution.

The second revolutionary reserve of the proletariat was constituted by the oppressed nationalities, who moreover were also predominantly made up of peasants. Closely tied up with the historical backwardness of the country is the extensive character of the development of the state, which spread out like a grease spot from the center at Moscow to the circumference. In the East, it subjugated the still more backward peoples, basing itself upon them, in order to stifle the more developed nationalities of the West. To the 70 million Great Russians, who constituted the main mass of the population, were added gradually some 90 millions of "other races".

In this way arose the Empire, in whose composition the ruling nationality made up only 43 percent of the population, while the remaining 57 percent consisted of nationalities of varying degrees of civilization and legal deprivation. The national pressure was incomparably cruder in Russia than in the neighboring states, and not only those beyond the western boundary but beyond the eastern one, too.

This conferred on the national problem a monstrous explosive force.

The Russian liberal bourgeoisie, in the national as well as in the agrarian question, would not go beyond certain ameliorations of the regime of oppression and violence. The "democratic" governments of Miliukov and Kerensky, which reflected the interests of the Great Russian bourgeoisie and bureaucracy, actually hastened to impress upon the discontented nationalities, in the course of the eight months of their existence, "You will obtain only what you tear away by force".

The inevitability of the development of the centrifugal national movement had been early taken into consideration by Lenin. The Bolshevik Party struggled obstinately for years for the right of self-determination for nations, that is, for the right of full secession. Only through this courageous position on the national question could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed peoples. The national independence movement, as well as the agrarian movement, necessarily turned against the official democracy, strengthened the proletariat, and poured into the stream of the October upheaval.

In these ways the riddle of the proletarian upheaval in an historically backward country loses its veil of mystery.

Marxist revolutionaries predicted, long before the events, the march of the Revolution and the historical role of the young Russian proletariat. I may be permitted to repeat here a passage from a work of my own in 1905:

"In an economically backward country the proletariat can arrive at power earlier than in a capitalistically advanced one....

"The Russian Revolution creates the conditions under which the power can (and in the event of a successful revolution must) be transferred to the proletariat, even before the policy of bourgeois liberalism receives the opportunity of unfolding its genius for government to its full extent.

"The destiny of the most elementary revolutionary interests of the peasantry....is bound up with the destiny of the whole revolution, that is, with the destiny of the proletariat. The proletariat, once arrived at power, will appear before the peasantry as the liberating class..

"The proletariat enters into the government as the revolutionary representative of the nation, as the acknowledged leader of the people in the struggle with absolutism and the barbarism of serfdom.

"The proletarian regime will have to stand from the very beginning for the solution of the agrarian question, with which the question of the destiny of tremendous masses of the population of Russia is bound up."

I have taken the liberty of quoting these passages as evidence that the theory of the October Revolution which I am presenting today is no casual improvisation, and was not constructed ex post facto under the pressure of events. No, in the form of a political prognosis it preceded the October upheaval by a long time. You will agree that a theory is in general valuable only insofar as it helps to foresee the course of development and



influences it purposively. Therein, in general terms, is the invaluable importance of Marxism as a weapon of social and historical orientation. I am sorry that the narrow limits of the lecture do not permit me to enlarge the above quotation materially. I will therefore content myself with a brief resume of the whole work which dates from 1905.

**In accordance with its immediate tasks, the Russian Revolution is a bourgeois revolution. But the Russian bourgeoisie is anti-revolutionary. The victory of the Revolution is therefore possible only as a victory of the proletariat. But the victorious proletariat will not stop at the program of bourgeois democracy; it will go on to the program of Socialism. The Russian Revolution will become the first stage of the Socialist world revolution.**

This was the theory of the permanent revolution formulated by me in 1905 and since then exposed to the severest criticism under the name of "Trotskyism".

To be more exact, it is only a part of this theory. The other part, which is particularly timely now, states:

**The present productive forces have long outgrown their national limits. A Socialist society is not feasible within national boundaries. Significant as the economic successes of an isolated workers' state may be, the program of "Socialism in one country" is a petty-bourgeois Utopia. Only a European and then a world federation of Socialist republics can be the real arena for a harmonious Socialist society.**

Today, after the test of events, I see less reason than ever to dissociate myself from this theory.

## The Bolshevik Party

After all that has been said above, is it still worth while to recall the Fascist writer, Malaparte, who ascribes to me tactics which are independent of strategy and amount to a series of technical recipes for insurrection, applicable in all latitudes and longitudes? It is a good thing that the name of the luckless theoretician of the coup d'Etat makes it easy to distinguish him from the victorious practitioner of the coup d'Etat; no one therefore runs the risk of confusing Malaparte with Bonaparte.

Without the armed insurrection of November 7, 1917, the Soviet state would not be in existence. But the insurrection itself did not drop from Heaven. A series of historical prerequisites was necessary for the October revolution.

1. The rooting away of the old ruling classes—the nobility, the monarchy, the bureaucracy.
2. The political weakness of the bourgeoisie, which had no roots in the masses of the people.
3. The revolutionary character of the peasant question.
4. The revolutionary character of the problem of the oppressed nations.
5. The significant social weight of the proletariat.

To these organic pre-conditions we must add certain conjunctural conditions of the highest importance:

6. The Revolution of 1905 was the great school, or in Lenin's words, the "dress rehearsal" of the Revolution of 1917. The Soviets, as the irreplaceable organizational form of the proletarian united front in the revolution, were created for the first time in the year 1905.

7. The imperialist war sharpened all the contradictions, tore the backward masses out of their immobility and thereby prepared the grandiose scale of the catastrophe.

But all these conditions, which fully sufficed for the **outbreak of the Revolution**, were insufficient to assure the **victory of the proletariat** in the Revolution. For this victory one condition more was needed:

8. The Bolshevik Party.

When I enumerate this condition as the last in the series, I do it only because it follows the necessities of the logical order, and not because I assign the Party the last place in the order of importance.

No, I am far from such a thought. The liberal bourgeoisie—yes, it can seize the power and has seized it more than once as the result of struggles in which it took no part; it possesses organs of seizure which are admirably adapted to the purpose. But the working masses are in a different position; they have long been accustomed to give, and not to take. They work, are patient as long as they can be, hope, lose their patience, rise up and struggle, die, bring victory to the others, are betrayed, fall into despondency, again bow their necks, again work. This is the history of the masses of the people under all regimes. In order to take the power

firmly and surely into its hands the proletariat needs a Party, which far surpasses the other parties in the clarity of its thought and in its revolutionary determination.

The Party of the Bolsheviks, which has been described more than once and with complete justification as the most revolutionary Party in the history of mankind, was the living condensation of the modern history of Russia, of all that was dynamic in it. The overthrow of Tsarism had long since become the necessary condition for the development of economy and culture. But for the solution of this task, the forces were insufficient. The bourgeoisie feared the revolution. The intelligentsia tried to bring the peasant to his feet. The muzhik, incapable of generalizing his own miseries and his aims, left this appeal unanswered. The intelligentsia armed itself with dynamite. A whole generation was burned up in this struggle.

On March 1, 1887, Alexander Ulianov carried out the last of the great terrorist plots. The attempted assassination of Alexander III failed. Ulianov and the other participants were executed. The attempt to substitute a chemical preparation for the revolutionary class suffered shipwreck. Even the most heroic intelligentsia is nothing without the masses. Under the immediate impression of these facts and conclusions grew up Ulianov's younger brother Vladimir, the later Lenin, the greatest figure of Russian history. Even in his early youth he placed himself on the foundations of Marxism, and turned his face toward the proletariat. Without losing sight of the village for a moment, he

sought the way to the peasantry through the workers. Having inherited from his revolutionary predecessors their determination, their capacity for self-sacrifice, and their willingness to go to the limit, Lenin at an early age became the teacher of the new generation of the intelligentsia and of the advanced workers. In strikes and street fights, in prisons and in exile, the workers received the necessary tempering. They needed the searchlight of Marxism to light up their historical road in the darkness of absolutism.

In the year 1883 there arose among the emigres the first Marxist group. In the year 1898, at a secret meeting, the foundation of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party was proclaimed (we all called ourselves Social-Democrats in those days). In the year 1903 occurred the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. In the year 1912 the Bolshevik fraction finally became an independent Party.

It learned to recognize the class mechanics of society in struggle, in the grandiose events of twelve years (1905-1917). It educated cadres equally capable of initiative and of subordination. The discipline of its revolutionary action was based on the unity of its doctrine, on the tradition of common struggles and on confidence in its tested leadership.

Thus stood the Party in the year 1917. Despised by the official "public opinion" and the paper thunder of the intelligentsia press, it adapted itself to the movement of the masses. Firmly it kept in hand the control of factories and regiments. More and more the peasant masses turned toward it. If we understand by "nation", not the privileged heads,

but the majority of the people, that is, the workers and peasants, then Bolshevism became in the course of the year 1917 a truly national Russian Party.

In September 1917, Lenin, who was compelled to keep in hiding, gave the signal, "The crisis is ripe, the hour of the insurrection has approached". He was right. The ruling classes had landed in a blind alley before the problems of the war, the land and national liberation. The bourgeoisie finally lost its head. The democratic parties, the Mensheviks and social-revolutionaries wasted the remains of the confidence of the masses in them by their support of the imperialist war, by their policy of ineffectual compromise and concession to the bourgeois and feudal property-owners. The awakened army no longer wanted to fight for the alien aims of imperialism. Disregarding democratic advice, the peasantry smoked the landowners out of their estates. The oppressed nationalities at the periphery rose up against the bureaucracy of Petrograd. In the most important workers' and soldiers' Soviets the Bolsheviks were dominant. The workers and soldiers demanded action. The ulcer was ripe. It needed a cut of the lancet.

Only under these social and political conditions was the insurrection possible. And thus it also became inevitable. But there is no playing around with the insurrection. Woe to the surgeon who is careless in the use of the lancet! Insurrection is an art. It has its laws and its rules.

The Party carried through the October insurrection with cold calculation and with flaming determination. Thanks to this, it conquered almost with-

out victims. Through the victorious Soviets the Bolsheviki placed themselves at the head of a country which occupies one sixth of the surface of the globe.

The majority of my present listeners, it is to be presumed, did not occupy themselves at all with politics in the year 1917. So much the better. Before the young generation lies much that is interesting, if not always easy. But the representatives of the older generation in this hall will surely well remember how the seizure of power by the Bolsheviki was received: as a curiosity, as a misunderstanding, as a scandal; most often as a nightmare which was bound to disappear with the first rays of dawn. The Bolsheviki would last twenty-four hours, a week, a month, a year. The period had to be constantly lengthened....The rulers of the whole world armed themselves against the first workers' state: civil war was stirred up, interventions again and again, blockade. So passed year after year. Meantime history has recorded fifteen years of existence of the Soviet power.

## 15 Years of the Soviet Regime

"Yes", some opponent will say, "the adventure of October has shown itself to be much more substantial than many of us thought. Perhaps it was not even quite an 'adventure'. Nevertheless, the question retains its full force: What was achieved at this high cost? Were then those dazzling tasks fulfilled which the Bolsheviki proclaimed on the eve of the Revolution?"

Before we answer the hypothetical opponent, let us note that the question in and of itself is not new. On the contrary, it followed right at the heels of the October Revolution, since the day of its birth.

The French journalist, Claude Anet, who was in Petrograd during the Revolution, wrote as early as October 27, 1917:

"Les maximalistes ont pris le pouvoir et le grand jour est arrive. Enfin, me dis-je, je vais voir se realiser l'Eden socialiste qu'on nous promet depuis tant d'annees....Admirable adventure! Position privilegee!"

"The maximalists (which was what the French called the Bolsheviki at that time) have seized the power and the great day has come. At last, I say to myself, I shall behold the realization of the socialist Eden which has been promised us for so many years....Admirable adventure! A privileged position!" And so on and so forth. What sincere hatred behind the ironical salutation! The very



morning after the capture of the Winter Palace, the reactionary journalist hurried to register his claim for a ticket of admission to Eden. Fifteen years have passed since the Revolution. With all the greater absence of ceremony our enemies reveal their malicious joy over the fact that the land of the Soviets, even today, bears but little resemblance to a realm of general well-being. Why then the Revolution and why the sacrifices?

Worthy listeners—permit me to think that the contradictions, difficulties, mistakes and want of the Soviet regime are no less familiar to me than to anyone else. I personally have never concealed them, whether in speech or in writing. I have believed and I still believe that revolutionary politics, as distinguished from conservative, cannot be built up on concealment. "To speak out that which is" must be the highest principle of the workers' state.

But in criticism, as well as in creative activity, perspective is necessary. Subjectivism is a poor adviser, particularly in great questions. Periods of time must be commensurate with the tasks, and not with individual caprices. Fifteen years! How much that is in the life of one man! Within that period not a few of our generation were borne to their graves and those who remain have added innumerable gray hairs. But these same fifteen years—what an insignificant period in the life of a people! Only a minute on the clock of history.

Capitalism required centuries to maintain itself in the struggle against the Middle Ages, to raise the level of science and technology, to build railroads, to stretch electric wires. And then? Then

humanity was thrust by capitalism into the hell of wars and crises! But Socialism is allowed by its enemies, that is, by the adherents of capitalism, only a decade and a half to install Paradise on earth with all modern improvements. No, such obligations were never assumed by us. Such periods of time were never set forth. The processes of great changes must be measured by scales which are commensurate with them. I do not know if the Socialist society will resemble the biblical Paradise. I doubt it. But in the Soviet Union there is no Socialism as yet. The situation that prevails there is one of transition, full of contradictions, burdened with the heavy inheritance of the past, and in addition under the hostile pressure of the capitalistic states. The October Revolution has proclaimed the principle of the new society. The Soviet Republic has shown only the first stage of its realization. Edison's first lamp was very bad. We must know how to distinguish the future from among the mistakes and faults of the first Socialist construction.

But the unhappiness that rains on living men? Do the results of the Revolution justify the sacrifice which it has caused? A fruitless question, rhetorical through and through; as if the processes of history admitted of an accounting balance-sheet! We might just as well ask, in view of the difficulties and miseries of human existence, "Does it pay to be born altogether?" To which Heine wrote, "And the fool waits for answer"...Such melancholy reflections have not hindered mankind from being born and from giving birth. Suicides, even in these

days of unexampled world crisis, fortunately constitute an unimportant percentage. But peoples never resort to suicide. When their burdens are intolerable, they seek a way out through revolution.

Besides, who becomes indignant over the victims of the socialist upheaval? Most often those who have paved the way for the victims of the imperialist war, and have glorified or, at least, easily accommodated themselves to it. It is now our turn to ask, "Has the war justified itself? What has it given us? What has it taught?"

The reactionary historian, Hippolyte Taine, in his eleven-volume pamphlet against the great French Revolution describes, not without malicious joy, the sufferings of the French people in the years of the dictatorship of the Jacobins and afterward. The worst off were the lower classes of the cities, the plebeians, who as "sansculottes" had given up the best of their souls for the revolution. Now they or their wives stood in line throughout cold nights to return empty-handed to the extinguished family hearth. In the tenth year of the revolution Paris was poorer than before it began. Carefully selected, artificially pieced-out facts serve Taine as justification for his annihilating verdict against the revolution. Look, the plebeians wanted to be dictators and have precipitated themselves into misery!

It is hard to conceive of a more uninspired piece of moralizing. First of all, if the revolution precipitated the country into misery, the blame lay principally on the ruling classes who drove the people to revolution. Second, the great French Revolution did not exhaust itself in hungry lines be-

fore bakeries. The whole of modern France, in many respects the whole of modern civilization, arose out of the bath of the French Revolution!

In the course of the Civil War in the United States in the '60's of the last century, 500,000 men were killed. Can these sacrifices be justified?

From the standpoint of the American slaveholder and the ruling classes of Great Britain who marched with them—no! From the standpoint of the negro or of the British workingman—absolutely! And from the standpoint of the development of humanity as a whole—there can be no doubt whatever. Out of the Civil War of the '60's came the present United States with its unbounded practical initiative, its rationalized technology, its economic élan. On these achievements of Americanism humanity will build the new society.

The October Revolution penetrated deeper than any of its predecessors into the Holy of Holies of society—into its property relations. So much the longer time is necessary to reveal the creative consequences of the Revolution in all the domains of life. But the general direction of the upheaval is already clear: the Soviet Republic has no reason whatever to hang its head before its capitalist accusers and speak the language of apology.

To evaluate the new regime from the standpoint of human development, one must first answer the question, "How does social progress express itself and how can it be measured?"

## The Balance Sheet of October

The deepest, the most objective and the most indisputable criterion says—progress can be measured by the growth of the productivity of social labor. The evaluation of the October Revolution from this point of view is already given by experience. The principle of socialistic organization has for the first time in history shown its ability to record unheard-of results in production in a short space of time.

The curve of the industrial development of Russia, expressed in crude index numbers, is as follows, taking 1913, the last year before the war, as 100. The year 1920, the highest point of the civil war, is also the lowest point in industry—only 25, that is to say, a quarter of the pre-war production. In 1925 it rose to 75, that is, three-quarters of the pre-war production; in 1929 about 200, in 1932, 300, that is to say, three times as much as on the eve of the war.

The picture becomes even more striking in the light of the international index. From 1925 to 1932 the industrial production of Germany has declined one and a half times, in America twice; in the Soviet Union it has increased fourfold. These figures speak for themselves.

I have no intention of denying or concealing the seamy side of Soviet economy. The results of

the industrial index are extraordinarily influenced by the unfavorable development of agriculture, that is to say, of that field which has essentially not yet risen to Socialist methods, but at the same time has been led on the road to collectivization with insufficient preparation, bureaucratically rather than technically and economically. This is a great question, which however goes beyond the limits of my lecture.

The index numbers cited require another important reservation. The indisputable and, in their way, splendid results of Soviet industrialization demand a further economic checking-up from the standpoint of the mutual adaptation of the various elements of economy, their dynamic equilibrium and consequently their productive capacity. Here great difficulties and even setbacks are inevitable. Socialism does not arise in its perfected form from the Five-Year Plan, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, or Venus from the foam of the sea. Before it are decades of persistent work, of mistakes, corrections and reorganization. Moreover, let us not forget that Socialist construction in accordance with its very nature can only reach perfection on the international arena. But even the most unfavorable economic balance-sheet of the results obtained so far could reveal only the incorrectness of the preliminary calculations, the errors of the plan and the mistakes of the leadership, but could in no way refute the empirically firmly established fact—the possibility, with the aid of Socialist methods, of raising the productivity of collective labor to an unheard-of height. This conquest,

his life to physical labor. Second, he will no longer be dependent on the laws of the market, that is, on the blind and dark forces which have grown up behind his back. He will build up his economy freely, that is, according to a plan, with compass in hand. This time it is a question of subjecting the anatomy of society to the X-ray through and through, of disclosing all its secrets and subjecting all its functions to the reason and the will of collective humanity. In this sense, Socialism must become a new step in the historical advance of mankind. Before our ancestor, who first armed himself with a stone axe, the whole of **nature** represented a conspiracy of secret and hostile forces. Since then, the natural sciences, hand in hand with practical technology, have illuminated nature down to its most secret depths. By means of electrical energy, the physicist passes judgment on the nucleus of the atom. The hour is not far when science will easily solve the task of the alchemists, and turn manure into gold and gold into manure. Where the demons and furies of nature once raged, now rules ever more courageously the industrial will of man.

But while he wrestled victoriously with nature, man built up his relations to other men blindly, almost like the bee or the ant. Belatedly and most undecidedly he approached the problems of human society. He began with religion, and passed on to politics. The Reformation represented the first victory of bourgeois individualism and rationalism in a domain which had been ruled by dead tradition. From the church, critical thought went on to the state. Born in the struggle with absolutism

and the medieval estates, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people and of the rights of man and the citizen grew stronger. Thus arose the system of parliamentarism. Critical thought penetrated into the domain of government administration. The political rationalism of democracy was the highest achievement of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.

But between nature and the state stands economic life. Technology liberated man from the tyranny of the old elements—earth, water, fire and air—only to subject him to its own tyranny. Man ceased to be a slave to nature, to become a slave to the machine, and, still worse, a slave to supply and demand. The present world crisis testifies in especially tragic fashion how man, who dives to the bottom of the ocean, who rises up to the stratosphere, who converses on invisible waves with the Antipodes, how this proud and daring ruler of nature remains a slave to the blind forces of his own economy. The historical task of our epoch consists in replacing the uncontrolled play of the market by reasonable planning, in disciplining the forces of production, compelling them to work together in harmony and obediently serve the needs of mankind. Only on this new social basis will man be able to stretch his weary limbs and—every man and every woman, not only a selected few—become a full citizen in the realm of thought.

But this is not yet the end of the road. No, it is only the beginning. Man calls himself the crown of creation. He has a certain right to that claim. But who has asserted that present-day man is the last and highest representative of the species



Homo sapiens? No, physically as well as spiritually he is very far from perfection, prematurely born biologically, sick in mind and without new organic equilibrium.

It is true that humanity has more than once brought forth giants of thought and action, who tower over their contemporaries like summits in a chain of mountains. The human race has a right to be proud of its Aristotle, Shakespeare, Darwin, Beethoven, Goethe, Marx, Edison, and Lenin. But why are they so rare? Above all because, almost without exception, they came out of the upper and middle classes. Apart from rare exceptions, the sparks of genius in the suppressed depths of the people are choked before they can burst into flame. But also because the processes of creating, developing and educating a human being have been and remain essentially a matter of chance, not illuminated by theory and practice, not subjected to consciousness and will.

Anthropology, biology, physiology and psychology have accumulated mountains of material to raise up before mankind in their full scope the tasks of perfecting and developing body and spirit. Psychoanalysis, with the inspired hand of Sigmund Freud, has lifted the cover of the well which is poetically called the "soul". And what has been revealed? Our conscious thought is only a small part of the work of the dark psychic forces. Learned divers descend to the bottom of the ocean and there take photographs of mysterious fishes. Human thought, descending to the bottom of its own psychic sources, must shed light on the most mysterious driving

forces of the soul and subject them to reason and to will.

Once he has done with the anarchic forces of his own society, man will set to work on himself, in the pestle and the retort of the chemist. For the first time mankind will regard itself as raw material, or at best as a physical and psychic semi-finished product. Socialism will mean a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom in that other sense too, that the present-day contradictory and disharmonious man will pave the way for a new and happier race.

## The Revolution and Its Place in History

Let us now in closing attempt to ascertain the place of the October Revolution, not only in the history of Russia but in the history of the world. During the year 1917, in a period of eight months, two historical curves intersect. The February upheaval—that belated echo of the great struggles which had been carried out in past centuries on the territories of Holland, England, France, almost all of Continental Europe—takes its place in the series of bourgeois revolutions. The October Revolution proclaims and opens the domination of the proletariat. It was world capitalism that suffered its first great defeat on the territory of Russia. The chain broke at its weakest link. But it was the chain that broke, and not only the link.

Capitalism has outlived itself as a world system. It has ceased to fulfill its essential mission, the increase of human power and human wealth. Humanity cannot stand still at the level which it has reached. Only a powerful increase in productive force and a sound, planned, that is, Socialist organization of production and distribution can assure humanity—all humanity—of a decent standard of life and at the same time give it the precious feeling of freedom with respect to its own economy. Freedom in two senses—first of all, man will no longer be compelled to devote the greater part of

is so demanded by the white empires, we must put  
But even with respect to this civilization, which

to the treasury of mankind.  
the Russian people, it brought little that was new  
tions a la Talmi. While it remained inaccessible to  
tarian upheaval was only barbarism with decora-  
bourgeois "civilization" overthrown by the prole-  
disquieted ruling houses and the salons. The feudal-  
fall of its civilization. That is the voice of the  
October revolution has brought Russia to the down-  
while to spend time on the complaints, that the  
After what has been said, it is scarcely worth

from us by anybody or anything.  
of world-historical importance, cannot be taken away  
the question more precisely—in what sense is it  
ruined? Only in one sense; the monopoly of a  
small minority in the treasures of civilization has  
been destroyed. But everything of cultural value  
in the old Russian civilization has remained un-  
touched. The Huns of Bolshevism have shattered  
neither the conquests of the mind nor the creations  
of art. On the contrary, they carefully collected the  
monuments of human creativeness and arranged  
them in model order. The culture of the monarchy,  
the nobility and the bourgeoisie has now become  
the culture of the museums.

The people visits these museums eagerly. But  
it does not live in them. It learns. It builds. The  
fact alone that the October Revolution taught the  
Russian people, the dozens of peoples of Tsarist  
Russia, to read and write, stands immeasurably  
higher than the whole former hot-house Russian  
civilization.

The October Revolution has laid the foundations for a new civilization, which is designed, not for a select few, but for all. This is felt by the masses of the whole world. Hence their sympathy for the Soviet Union, which is as passionate as once was their hatred for Tsarist Russia.

Worthy listeners—you know that human language is an irreplaceable tool, not only for giving names to events but also for evaluating them. By filtering out that which is accidental, episodic, artificial, it absorbs that which is essential, characteristic, of full weight. Notice with what nicety the languages of civilized nations have distinguished two epochs in the development of Russia. The culture of the nobility brought into world currency such barbarisms as **Tsar, Cossack, pogrom, nagaika**. You know these words and what they mean. The October Revolution introduced into the language of the world such words as **Bolshevik, Soviet, kolkhoz, Gosplan, Piatiletka**. Here practical linguistics holds its historical supreme court!

The profoundest significance, but the hardest to submit to immediate measurement, of that great Revolution consists in the fact that it forms and tempers the character of the people. The conception of the Russian people as slow, passive, melancholy-mystical, is widely spread and not accidental. It has its roots in the past. But in Western countries up to the present time those far-reaching changes have not been sufficiently considered which have been introduced into the character of the people by the Revolution. Could it have been otherwise?

Every man with experience of life can recall the picture of some youth, that he has known, receptive, lyrical, all too susceptible, who later, all at once, under the influence of a powerful moral impetus, became hardened and unrecognizable. In the development of a whole nation, such moral transformations are wrought by the revolution.

The February insurrection against the autocracy, the struggle against the nobility, against the imperialist war, for peace, for land, for national equality, the October insurrection, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and of those parties which sought agreements with the bourgeoisie, three years of civil war on a front of 5,000 miles, the years of blockade, hunger, misery and epidemics, the years of tense economic reconstruction, of new difficulties and renunciations—these make a hard but a good school. A heavy hammer smashes glass, but forges steel. The hammer of the Revolution forged the steel of the people's character.

"Who will believe", wrote a Tsarist general, Zalewski, with indignation, shortly after the upheaval, "that a porter or a watchman suddenly becomes a chief justice, a hospital attendant—the director of a hospital, a barber—an officeholder, a corporal—a commander-in-chief, a day worker—a mayor, a locksmith—the director of a factory?"

"Who will believe it?" They had to believe it. They could do nothing else but believe it, when the corporals defeated generals, when the mayor—the former day worker—broke the resistance of the old bureaucracy, the wagon-greaser put the transportation system in order, the locksmith as director put

the industrial equipment into working condition. "Who will believe it?" Let them only try and not believe it.

For an explanation of the extraordinary persistence which the masses of the people of the Soviet Union are showing throughout the years of the Revolution, many foreign observers rely, in accord with ancient habit, on the "passivity" of the Russian character. The revolutionary masses endure their privations patiently but not passively. With their own hands they are creating a better future and they want to create it, at any cost. Let the class enemy only attempt to impose his will from the outside on these patient masses! No, he would do better not to try it!

**LEON TROTSKY**

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