
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

The agenda of the forthcoming All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. includes the question: "The present situation and the tasks of the Party". The organisations of our Party have already begun (Moscow and St. Petersburg ahead of all other centres in this respect) systematically to discuss this question, which is undoubtedly of extreme importance.

The present period of lull in the movement for liberation, of rampant reaction, of betrayals and despondency in the camp of the democrats, of crisis and partial breakdown in the Social-Democratic organisations, makes it particularly vital to take into account first of all the main lessons of the first campaign of our revolution. We have in mind not tactical lessons in the narrow sense of the word, but in the first place the general lessons of the revolution. And, in keeping with this, our first question will be, what are the objective changes which have taken place in the grouping of classes and the political balance of forces in Russia between 1904 and 1908²⁴? The main changes can be reduced, in our view, to the following five: (1) There has been a fundamental shift in the agrarian policy of the autocracy on the peasant question; support and reinforcement of the old village commune have been superseded by a policy of speeded-up police destruction and plundering of that commune.²⁵ (2) The representative arrangements of the Black-Hundred nobility and big bourgeoisie have made a tremendous step forward: instead of the former local elected committees of the nobles and merchants, instead of sporadic attempts at representing them on an all-Russian

scale, there is a single representative body, the State Duma, in which these classes are guaranteed complete preponderance. Representation of the liberal professions—to say nothing of the peasantry and the proletariat—is reduced to the role of an appendage and a makeweight in this so-called “constitutional” institution, the purpose of which is to strengthen the autocracy. (3) For the first time the classes have achieved a definite cleavage and taken shape in open political struggle during this period: the political parties which now exist openly and secretly (half-secretly, to be more exact, for there are no completely “secret” parties in Russia since the revolution), express with previously unheard-of exactness the interests and viewpoint of classes which during the three years have matured a hundred times more than during the preceding half-century. The Black-Hundred nobility, the national-“liberal” bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeois democrats (the Trudoviks with their small Left wing of S.R.s) and proletarian Social-Democracy have all during this period completed the “foetal” stage of their development, and for years ahead have defined their nature, not in words but by facts and mass actions. (4) What before the revolution was known as liberal and liberal-Narodnik “society”, or the spokesman and “enlightened” part of the “nation” at large—the broad mass of well-to-do, noblemen’s and intellectuals’ “opposition”, which seemed to be something integral, and homogeneous, permeating the Zemstvos, the universities, all the “decent” press, etc., etc.—has displayed itself in the revolution as the ideologues and supporters of the bourgeoisie, and has taken up what all can recognise now as a *counter-revolutionary* position in respect of the mass struggle of the socialist proletariat and the democratic peasantry. The counter-revolutionary liberal bourgeoisie has come into existence and is growing—and this fact does not cease to be a fact because it is denied by the “progressive” legal press, or because our opportunists, the Mensheviks, keep silent about it and do not understand it. (5) Millions among the population have gained practical *experience*, in the most varied forms, of a genuinely mass and directly revolutionary struggle, including a “general strike”, the expul-

sion of landowners, the burning of their country-houses, and open armed uprising. He who was already a revolutionary or a class-conscious worker before the revolution cannot fully realise the tremendous significance of this fact, which has radically changed a number of previous conceptions of the course of development of a political crisis, the tempo of this development, the dialectics of history created in practice by the masses. The assessment of this experience *by the masses* is an invisible, painful and slow process, playing a far more important part than many an event on the surface of the country's political life which fascinate infants who are not only of an infantile age in politics but sometimes a good deal older. The leading role of the proletarian masses all through the revolution and in all the fields of struggle, from demonstrations, through insurrection, to (in chronological order) "parliamentary" activity, has become apparent for all to see during this period, if we look over it as a whole.

Such are the objective changes which have created a gulf between pre-October²⁶ and present-day Russia. Such are the *results* of three years of the most eventful period of our history, results given, of course, in a summarised form, so to speak, insofar as one is able in a few words to outline what is most important and essential. Now let us examine the conclusions in the sphere of tactics which these results dictate.

The change in the agrarian policy of the autocracy is of exceptionally great importance for a "peasant" country like Russia. This change is not an accident, it is not the fluctuations in ministerial lines of action, not an invention of the bureaucracy. No, it is a profound "shift" towards *agrarian Bonapartism*, towards a liberal (economically understood, i.e., bourgeois) policy in the sphere of peasant land relations. Bonapartism is the manoeuvring on the part of a monarchy which has lost its old patriarchal or feudal, simple and solid, foundation—a monarchy which is obliged to walk the tightrope in order not to fall, make advances in order to govern, bribe in order to gain affections, fraternise with the dregs of society, with plain thieves and swindlers, in order not to rely only on bayonets.

Bonapartism is the objectively necessary evolution of the monarchy in any bourgeois country, traced by Marx and Engels through a number of facts in the modern history of Europe. And the agrarian Bonapartism of Stolypin, on this point quite consciously and steadfastly supported both by the Black-Hundred landlords and the Octobrist²⁷ bourgeoisie, could not even have seen the light, much less have lasted two years now, if the village commune itself in Russia were not developing in a capitalist direction, if within the commune elements were not steadily shaping which the autocracy could begin its flirtation with, to which it could say: "Enrich yourselves!", "Plunder the commune but support me!" Therefore, any assessment of Stolypin's agrarian policy that did not reckon with the Bonapartist methods of the latter, on the one hand, and its bourgeois (that is, liberal) essence on the other would be decidedly erroneous.

For example, our liberals express their dimly realised understanding that Stolypin's agrarian policy is Bonapartism by their attacks on its police character, on the idiotic interference of officials in peasant affairs, etc., etc. But when the Cadets lament the violent break-up of the "age-old" foundations of our country life, they become *reactionary* moaners. Without a violent, revolutionary break-up of the foundations of the old Russian countryside there can be no development of Russia. The struggle is going on—though very many indeed of its participants do not realise it—*only* about whether it will be the violence of a landlords' monarchy against the peasants, or of a peasant republic against the landlords. In both cases a bourgeois, and no other kind of agrarian revolution in Russia is *inevitable*, but in the first case it will be a slow and agonising one, in the second a swift, broad and free-moving one. The struggle of the workers' party for this second road is expressed and recognised in our agrarian programme—not in the part where the senseless idea of "municipalisation" is put forward, but in the part which speaks about *confiscating all the landed estates*. After the experience of three years it is only, perhaps, among the Mensheviks that people can be still found who do not see the link between

the struggle for that confiscation and the struggle for a republic. Stolypin's agrarian policy, if maintained for a very long time, if it reconstructed all landed relations in the countryside for good and all on purely bourgeois lines, might force us to give up the idea of any agrarian programme in bourgeois society (up to this day *even* the Mensheviks, and even the Cherevanins among the Mensheviks, have not reached the point of renouncing our agrarian programme). But Stolypin's policy can by no means induce us to change our tactics today. Since the "confiscation of all landed estates" stands in the programme, only infants can fail to see the revolutionary tactics (in the direct and narrow sense of the word "revolutionary") which follow from this. And it would be wrong to put the question in this way, that if Stolypin's policy is suffering "bankruptcy", that means that a revival is near—and vice versa. The failure of Bonapartist methods does not imply the failure of the policy of the kulak plundering of the village commune. And, vice versa, Stolypin's "success" in the countryside now and in the next years to come will *necessarily* inflame the struggle within the peasantry rather than quench it, for only by a long, a very long road, can the "goal", i.e., the final and complete consolidation of a *purely* bourgeois peasant economy, be achieved. Stolypin's "success" in the years immediately ahead might lead at best to the emergence of a stratum of consciously counter-revolutionary Octobrist peasants, but it is just such a transformation of the well-to-do minority into a politically conscious and united force that would inevitably give a tremendous impetus to the development of political consciousness and unity of the democratic mass against such a minority. We Social-Democrats could wish for nothing better than the transformation of the spontaneous, sporadic, blind struggle between the "sharks" and the "community" into a conscious and open struggle between Octobrists and Trudoviks.

Let us go on to the question of the Duma. Undoubtedly this Black-Hundred "constitutional" body is just another development of the absolute monarchy towards Bonapartism. All those features of Bonapartism which we noted

above are revealed with perfect clarity in the present electoral law, in the faked majority of Black-Hundred representatives plus the Octobrists, in the sham imitation of Europe, in the rush for loans, the expenditure of which is allegedly controlled by "the representatives of the nation", and the complete ignoring of all the debates and decisions of the Duma by the autocracy in its practical policy. The contradiction between the Black-Hundred autocracy, which virtually reigns supreme, and the window-dressing of a bourgeois "constitution" is revealing itself more and more obviously, and bringing with it the elements of a new revolutionary crisis. The autocracy was to have been covered up, dressed up, decked out with the help of the Duma; in effect, the Black-Hundred-Octobrist Duma with every day of its existence reveals, exposes, lays bare the true character of our state power, its real class foundations and its Bonapartism. One cannot but recall in this connection the remarkably profound observation of Engels (in his letter to Bernstein on August 27, 1883) on the meaning of the *transition* from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. While the liberals in general and the Russian Cadets in particular see in such a transition the workings of their notorious "peaceful" progress and its guarantee, Engels pointed out the historic role of the constitutional monarchy as a form of state which facilitates a *decisive* struggle between the feudalists and the bourgeoisie. Engels wrote: "But just as this struggle [between feudalism and the bourgeoisie] could not be fought out to a decisive conclusion under the old absolute monarchy but only in a constitutional one (England, France 1789-92 and 1815-30), so the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat can only be fought out in a republic." Engels here gives the title of constitutional monarchy, among others, to the France of 1816, when the famous *Chambre Introuvable*, a reactionary counter-revolutionary chamber, ran amuck in support of the White Terror against the revolution probably no less violently than our Third Duma. What does this mean? Does Engels recognise the reactionary assemblies of representatives of the landlords and capitalists, who support absolutism in its struggle with revolution, as being genuinely constitutional

institutions? No. It means that there may arise historical conditions when institutions which falsify a constitution inflame the struggle for a real constitution, and become a stage in the development of new *revolutionary* crises. In the first campaign of our revolution the majority of the people still believed in the possibility of reconciling a genuine constitution with the autocracy; and the Cadets built their whole policy on systematically sustaining this belief among the people, while the Trudoviks followed the lead of the Cadets at least half-way in this respect. Now the autocracy by its Third Duma is showing the people in practice with what "constitution" it can "reconcile itself"—and thereby brings nearer a wider and more resolute struggle *against the autocracy*.

It follows from this, incidentally, that it would be quite wrong to replace our old slogan of "down with the autocracy" with the slogan "down with the Third Duma". Under what conditions could a slogan like "down with the Duma" acquire meaning? Let us assume that we are faced with a liberal, reform-seeking, compromising Duma in a period of the sharpest revolutionary crisis, which had developed to the point of direct civil war. It is quite possible that at such a moment our slogan might be "down with the Duma", i.e., down with peaceable negotiations with the tsar, down with the deceptive institution of "peace", let's call for a direct attack. Now let us assume, on the contrary, that we are faced with an arch-reactionary Duma, elected under an obsolete electoral law, and the absence of any acutely revolutionary crisis in the country. In that case the slogan "down with the Duma" might become the slogan of a struggle for electoral reform. We see neither of these contingencies at the present time. The Third Duma is not a compromising but a downright counter-revolutionary body, which does not cover up the autocracy, but exposes it, and which plays no independent part in any respect; no one anywhere expects it to produce progressive reforms; no one imagines that the source of tsarism's real power and strength lies in this assembly of diehards. All are agreed that tsarism does not repose on it, but makes use of it; that tsarism can pursue its entire present policy,

both if the calling of such a Duma be postponed (as the calling of a parliament was "postponed" by Turkey in 1878) and if it be replaced by a "Zemsky Sobor"* or something similar. The slogan "down with the Duma" would mean concentrating the main attack on an institution which is neither independent nor decisive, and which does not play the principal part. Such a slogan would be wrong. We must keep the old slogan of "down with the autocracy" and "long live the Constituent Assembly", because it is precisely the autocracy which continues to remain the real authority, the real support and bulwark of reaction. The fall of the autocracy inevitably means the removal (and the revolutionary removal at that) of the Third Duma as an institution of tsarism; but the fall of the Third Duma by itself would mean either a new adventure by that same autocracy or an attempt at reform—a deceptive and only apparent reform—undertaken by the same autocracy.**

To proceed. We have seen that the class nature of the political parties during the three years of the first revolutionary campaign has become defined with remarkable force and salience. Hence it follows that in all discussions of the present balance of political forces, of the tendencies to change in this balance, etc., it is essential to reckon with these concrete data of historical experience, and not with abstract "general arguments". The entire history of the European states bears witness that precisely in the periods of direct revolutionary struggle deep and lasting foundations of class groupings are laid, and divisions into large political parties take place, which thereafter persist even in very long periods of stagnation. Some parties may go underground, give no sign of life, disappear from the front of the political stage: but at the slightest revival the main political forces inevitably will give signs of themselves again, perhaps in an altered form but with the same character and direction of their activity, so long as the objec-

* A central representative assembly.—*Ed.*

** In the next issue we shall examine the other aspect of the question of "Duma" tactics, and discuss the "letter" from an otzovist²⁸ comrade in *Rabocheye Znamya* No. 5 (see *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 286-302.—*Ed.*)

tive tasks of the revolution, which has suffered defeat to this or that extent, are not fulfilled. Hence, it would be the greatest short-sightedness, for example, to presume that because there are no Trudovik organisations in the local areas, and the Trudovik group in the Third Duma is distinguished by its particular confusion and impotence, the masses of the democratic peasantry have therefore completely fallen apart, and play no essential role in the process of the rise of a new revolutionary crisis. Such a view is worthy only of the Mensheviks, who more and more are falling into the most humdrum "parliamentary cretinism" (take, for example, their truly disgraceful renegade attacks against the illegal Party organisation). Marxists should know that the conditions of representation, not only in our Black-Hundred Duma but even in the most ideal bourgeois parliament, will always create an artificial disparity between the real strength of the various classes and its reflection in the representative institution. For example, the liberal-bourgeois intelligentsia always and everywhere seems in parliaments to be a hundred times stronger than it is in reality (in our revolution, too, opportunist Social-Democrats took the Cadets for what they seemed to be), and on the contrary very broad democratic strata of the petty bourgeoisie (in the towns during the bourgeois revolutions of 1848, in the countryside in Russia) often prove to be an extremely important factor in the open struggle of the masses, while being quite insignificant from the point of view of their representation in parliaments.

Our peasantry entered upon the revolution immeasurably less politically conscious than the liberal bourgeois on the one hand and the socialist proletariat on the other. For this reason it drew from the revolution more painful but valuable disillusionments, more bitter but salutary lessons, than any other class. Quite naturally, it is digesting these lessons with particular difficulty and particularly slowly. Quite naturally many "radicals" from among the intelligentsia will lose patience, and give it all up as a bad job—and so will some Social-Democratic philistines, on whose faces a contemptuous grimace appears whenever someone talks about some peasant democracy or other, but

whose mouths water at the mere sight of the "enlightened" liberals. But the class-conscious proletariat will not so easily strike out of its memory what it saw and what it took part in during the autumn and winter of 1905. And taking into account the balance of forces in our revolution, we must know that the certain sign of a genuinely widespread rise in the social tide, of a genuinely approaching revolutionary crisis, will inevitably be, in the Russia of today, a movement among the peasantry.

The liberal bourgeoisie in our country has entered upon the path of counter-revolution. Only the brave Cherevanins can deny this—they and the cowardly editors of *Golos Sotsial-Demokrata*,²⁹ who deny their own comrade-in-idea and -arms. But if this counter-revolutionary nature of the bourgeois liberals were to lead anyone to infer that their opposition and discontent, their conflicts with the Black-Hundred landlords, or any rivalry and struggle of the different sections of the bourgeoisie among themselves, can be of no importance in the process of a new upsurge, this would be a tremendous mistake, and real Menshevism inside out. The experience of the Russian revolution, like the experience of other countries, proves beyond doubt that where the objective conditions of a profound political crisis exist, the tiniest conflicts seemingly remote from the real breeding ground of revolution, can be of the most serious importance as the reason, as the last straw, as a turning-point in public feeling, etc. Let us recall that the Zemstvo campaign and the liberals' petitions of 1904 were the forerunner of such an original and purely proletarian "petition" as that of January the Ninth.³⁰ When the Bolsheviks were arguing about the Zemstvo campaign, it was not against its use for proletarian demonstrations, but against our Mensheviks wanting to confine these demonstrations to the Zemstvo assembly halls, against the demonstrations before the Zemstvo people being declared the highest form of demonstration, and against plans for the demonstrations being drawn up with a view to preventing the liberals from being frightened off. Another example is the student movements. In a country which is going through an era of bourgeois-democratic revolution involv-

ing a progressive accumulation of inflammable material, these movements may easily spark off events infinitely more far-reaching than a petty and local conflict over the management of affairs in a single branch of the state administration. Naturally, the Social-Democrats, who carry on the independent class policy of the proletariat, will never adapt themselves either to the student struggle or to new Zems-tvo congresses, or to the conceptions of sections of the bourgeoisie which have fallen out among themselves; they will never ascribe independent importance to this family quarrel, and so on. But it is precisely the Social-Democratic Party which is the party of the class leading the whole struggle for emancipation; it is unquestionably bound to make use of each and every conflict, to inflame it, to extend its importance, to link with it its own agitation for revolutionary slogans; to bring the news of these conflicts to the broad masses, to induce them to take independent and open action with their own demands, etc. In France after 1793, a counter-revolutionary liberal bourgeoisie came into being and steadily grew; nevertheless the conflicts and the struggle between its different sections continued for another hundred years to serve in one way or another as grounds for new revolutions in which the proletariat invariably played the part of the principal motive force, and which it *carried through* to the point of winning a republic.

Let us now consider the conditions for an offensive by this leading and advanced class in our bourgeois-democratic revolution, the proletariat. When the Moscow comrades were discussing this question, they quite rightly underlined the root importance of the industrial crisis. They collected extremely interesting material about this crisis, took into account the significance of the struggle between Moscow and Lodz, and amended in several respects certain conceptions which had hitherto prevailed. It remains only to be wished that this material should not wither away in the subcommittees of the Moscow Committee or the Moscow Area Committee, but should be worked over and published in the press for the whole Party to discuss. For our part we shall confine ourselves to a few remarks on the *pres-*

entation of the question. The direction in which the crisis is moving is, by the way, a moot question (it is generally admitted that a very severe depression, bordering on a crisis, once more reigns in our industry after a very brief and slight boom). Some say that offensive economic struggles by the workers are as impossible as before, and consequently a revolutionary upswing is impossible in the near future. Others say that the impossibility of economic struggle impels a turn to a political struggle, and therefore a revolutionary upswing is inevitable in the near future.

We think that both arguments have at their foundation the same error, which consists in simplifying a complex issue. Undoubtedly the detailed study of the industrial crisis is of the greatest importance. But it is also beyond doubt that no data about the crisis, even if they were ideally accurate, can in reality decide the question of whether a rise of the revolutionary tide is at hand or not: because such a rise depends on a thousand additional factors which it is impossible to measure beforehand. It is indubitable that without the general groundwork of an agrarian crisis in the country, and depression in industry, profound political crises are impossible. But if the general groundwork exists, that does not permit us to conclude whether the depression will for a time retard the mass struggle of the workers in general, or whether *at a certain stage* of events *the same* depression will not push new masses and fresh forces into the political struggle. To answer such a question there is only one way: to keep a careful finger on the pulse of the country's whole political life, and especially the state of the movement and of the mood of the mass of the proletariat. Recently, for example, a number of reports from Party workers in different parts of Russia, in both industrial and agricultural areas, point to an undoubted revival of interest, an influx of fresh forces, a growing interest in agitation, etc. Comparing with this the beginning of mass unrest among the students, on the one hand, and the attempts to revive the Zemstvo congresses, on the other, we can record a certain turn in events, something that is breaking up the complete stagnation of the last eighteen months. How strong that turn is, whether it

means the opening stage for a new epoch of open struggle, etc., facts will show. All that we can do now, and all that we must do in any case, is to intensify our efforts to strengthen the illegal Party organisation and multiply ten-fold our agitation among the mass of the proletariat. Only agitation can reveal on a broad scale the real state of mind of the masses, only agitation can make for close co-operation between the Party and the whole working class, only making use for the purposes of political agitation of every strike, of every important event or issue in working-class life, of all conflicts within the ruling classes or between one section of those classes or another and the autocracy, of every speech by a Social-Democrat in the Duma, of every new expression of the counter-revolutionary policy of the government, etc.—only work like this can once again close the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat, and provide accurate material for judging the speed with which conditions for new and more decisive battles are coming to a head.

To sum up. A survey of the results of the revolution and the present situation show clearly that the objective tasks of the revolution have not been performed. The shift towards Bonapartism in the autocracy's agrarian policy and in its general policy both in the Duma and through the medium of the Duma, only sharpens and widens the contradiction between the Black-Hundred autocracy and the supremacy of the "wild landlord", on the one hand, and the requirements of the economic and social development of the whole country, on the other. The police and kulak drive against the masses in the countryside is making the struggle there more acute and politically conscious, bringing—so to speak—the struggle against the autocracy closer to the everyday and vital problems of every village. The defence of revolutionary-democratic demands in the agrarian question (confiscation of all landed estates) is exceptionally binding a duty for the Social-Democrats at such a moment. The Black-Hundred-October Duma, which shows clearly in practice with what "constitution" the autocracy can "be reconciled" and which does not resolve a single question even within the narrowest limits of meet-

ing the needs of the country's economic development, is turning the struggle "for a constitution" into a revolutionary struggle *against the autocracy*. The local conflicts of individual sections of the bourgeoisie among themselves and with the government, in these conditions, bring just such a struggle nearer. The impoverishment of the countryside, depression in industry, a general feeling that there is no way out in the present political situation and that the notorious "peaceful constitutional" way is hopeless, all give rise more and more to new elements of a revolutionary crisis. Our business now is not artificially to invent any new slogans (like that of "Down with the Duma" instead of "Down with the autocracy"), but to strengthen the illegal Party organisation (in spite of the reactionary outcry of the Mensheviks who are trying to bury it) and to develop wide revolutionary Social-Democratic agitation, which will bind the Party firmly together with the masses of the proletariat and mobilise those masses.

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