

Leon Trotsky

1905: CHAPTER 25

Our Differences

The Year 1905, the Reaction, and Revolutionary Prospects [1]

"You are perfectly right in saying," Lassalle wrote to Marx in 1854, at a time of extreme world reaction, "that the present apathy cannot be overcome by theoretical means. I would go so far in extrapolating this thought as to say that apathy has never been overcome by purely theoretical means, that is, the theoretical overcoming of political apathy produced disciples, sects or unsuccessful practical movements, but has never yet produced either a real world movement or a universal mass movement of minds. The masses are drawn into the current of a movement, not only practically but also intellectually, by the dynamic force of real events alone."

Opportunism cannot understand this. It may seem paradoxical to say that the principal psychological feature of opportunism is its inability to wait. But that is undoubtedly true. In periods when friendly and hostile social forces, by virtue of their antagonism and their interaction, create a total political standstill; when the molecular process of economic growth, by intensifying the contradictions, not only fails to disturb the political balance but actually strengthens it and, as it were, makes it permanent – in such periods opportunism, devoured by impatience, looks around for "new" ways and means of putting into effect what history is not yet ready for in practice. Tired of its own inadequacy and unreliability, it goes in search of "allies." It hurls itself avidly upon the dung-heap of liberalism. It implores it, it appeals to it, it invents special formulae for how it could act. In reply, liberalism merely contaminates it with its own political putrefaction. Opportunism then begins to pick out isolated pearls of democracy from the dung-heap. It needs allies. It rushes from place to place, grabbing possible allies by their coattails. It harangues its own adherents, admonishing them to be considerate towards all potential allies. "Tact, more tact, still more tact!" It is gripped by a special disease, the mania of caution in respect to liberalism, the sickness of tact; and, driven berserk by its sickness, it attacks and wounds its own party.

Opportunism builds on relations which are not yet ripe. It wants immediate "success." When oppositional allies fail to be of use, it rushes to the government, pleading, arguing, threatening. In the end it finds a place for itself inside the government (this is called ministerialism), achieving nothing thereby except to show that history cannot be overtaken by administrative means any more than it can by theory.

Opportunism does not know how to wait. And that is precisely why great events always catch it unawares. They knock it off its feet, whiz it around like a chip of wood in a whirlpool and sweep it forward, knocking its head now against one bank, now against the other. It tries to resist, but in vain. Then it submits to its fate, pretends to be happy, waves its arms to show that it is swimming, and shouts louder than anyone else. And when the hurricane has passed, it creeps ashore, shakes itself, complains of headache and painful limbs and, in the wretched hangover following its euphoria, spares no harsh words for revolutionary "dreamers."

I

In a recently published book entitled *The Present Situation*

and the Possible Future, the well-known Moscow Menshevik Cherevanin writes: "In November and December (1905) it was not even Bolshevik tactics that triumphed, but those of Parvus and Trotsky." (p. 200.) Martynov, the semi-official philosopher of Menshevik tactics writing in the last issue of the *Golos Sozial-Demokrata* speaks of "the fantastic theory of Parvus and Trotsky ... which enjoyed momentary success among us in the October days, in the period of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies." (No.4-5, p.17.) The inconsistency in the months referred to is due simply to the fact that Martynov is not too sure of the chronology of events and by "October days" means the months of October, November and December. Philosophers who deal with large historical epochs are well-known to be careless about dates. But what was the "fantastic theory"?

Cherevanin speaks of "Parvus' and Trotsky's clearly unreasonable view according to which Russia could be carried from a semi-savage state straight into socialism." (p.177.) Cherevanin has no difficulty in exposing the unreasonableness of this view in a few pages. What is the Russian proletariat? By the most generous estimate, it represents 27.6 per cent of the population. But agricultural laborers cannot be included in the revolutionary balance sheet because they are too ignorant and backward, servants and day laborers because they are scattered and unorganized; and so we are left with a mere 3.2 million souls of the trading and industrial proletariat. "Thus 5 to 11 per cent of the entire population is the basis on which Trotsky and Parvus meant to build a socialist system! And all the while they naively believed that they were applying Marxism to reality." (p.1-9.) Cherevanin wins hands down, of that there can be no doubt. The trouble is only that he has borrowed his image of the men he opposes from those newspaper hacks, mostly renegades of Marxism, who insist on painting the devil of permanent revolution as luridly and crudely as possible.

The question for us was never whether Russia can be "carried straight into socialism." Even to pose the question in such a way demands a very special type of brain.

The question for us concerned the class dynamics of the Russian revolution – not the "permanent revolution," not the "socialist revolution," but the one that is going on in Russia at the present time.

These quotations are in themselves enough to show how opportunists write history in a state of revolutionary hangover. But perhaps it is still more interesting to show how they make history. We cannot, alas, say anything about Cherevanin in this context, as we have not the least idea of the role he played in the events of the revolution. But we do have documentary evidence of the views (if not the activities) of some of his confederates. "You ask," one of them wrote, "what our demands in the Constituent Assembly are going to be? Our clear and categorical reply is this: we shall demand, not 'socialization,' but socialism, not equal shares of the land, but public ownership of all (italics in the original) means of production." True, "vulgar Marxists" might object that "a socialist revolution in Russia is technically impossible in the near future." But the author triumphantly demolishes their objections and concludes: "The social-democrats alone ... have boldly raised the slogan of permanent revolution at the present time, they alone will lead the masses to the last and

decisive victory." Who wrote this? A distinguished Menshevik.

It is true that Martynov tells us of the "momentary success" of the views of Parvus and Trotsky in the "October days." But then the same Martynov talks about "the warning voice of the Mensheviks, whose heads were not turned so quickly (?) and who continued steadfastly (steadfastly!), sometimes against the tide of events, to preserve the legacy of Russian social democracy." (Golos Sozial-Demokrata, No.4-5, p.16.) Such valor is beyond praise, who shall deny it? And yet, and yet the article we have quoted, which vulgarizes the idea of permanent revolution, was written by a Menshevik (cf. Nachalo, Nos.7 and 11, leading articles). Perhaps this Menshevik who suffered such a violent attack of revolutionary vertigo was not a "reliable," not a "real" Menshevik? But no. It was the St. Peter of Menshevism, its very cornerstone. It was Comrade Martynov.

Here you have a page from a textbook on the political physiology of opportunism. Is it to be wondered at if men who, at the most important and responsible moment in our history lost every notion of their fundamental premises, are today raging against the "unreasonableness" of the unrepentant and against the insanity of revolution itself?

## II

Social democracy was born of revolution and is heading towards revolution. All its tactics, in periods of so-called peaceful development, can be ultimately reduced to the policy of accumulating forces which can only be fully realized in periods of open revolutionary conflict. "Normal," "peaceful" periods are those in which the ruling classes impose on the proletariat their own legality and their forms of political resistance (courts of law, police-supervised political assemblies, parliamentarianism). Revolutionary periods are those in which the proletariat pours its political indignation into the molds best suited to express its revolutionary nature (free assemblies, free press, general strikes, insurrection). "But in the fever of revolution (!), when revolutionary aims seem so close to fulfillment, it is difficult for sensible Menshevik tactics to find the right path." (Cherevanin, p.209.) Social-democratic tactics which cannot be applied because of the "fever of revolution"? The fever of revolution, what terminology! In the end it turns out that "sensible Menshevik tactics" consisted in "demanding a temporary concerted effort" with the Kadet party – and this policy, which would, of course, have saved the revolution, was prevented by the madness of revolution.

When you re-read the correspondence between the great founders of Marxism, as they mounted guard so vigilantly in their watchtowers – one, the youngest, in Berlin, the other two, the stronger ones, in London, the center of world capitalism – and intently scanned the political horizon, noting every phenomenon that might indicate the approach of revolution; when you re-read those letters and hear bubbling in them the lava of revolution on the point of eruption; when you breathe that atmosphere of an impatient and yet tireless anticipation of revolution then you begin to hate the cruel dialectic of history which, for its momentary purpose, associates with Marxism these barren reasoners who lack both theoretical and psychological insight, and who set their tactical wisdom against the "fever" of revolution!

Lassalle wrote to Marx in 1859:

The instinct of the masses in revolution is generally much surer than the good sense of intellectuals ... It is precisely

the masses' lack of education that protects them from the underwater reefs of "sensible" behavior. In the last analysis, revolution can only be made with the help of the masses and their passionate self-sacrifice. But the masses, just because they are "gray," just because they lack education, are quite unable to understand possibilism, and – since an undeveloped mind recognizes only extremes, knows only yea and nay with nothing between the two – because of this they are interested only in extremes, in what is immediate and whole. In the end this is bound to mean that the (sensible and intelligent) bookkeepers of revolution, instead of having their outwitted enemies before them and their friends behind them, are, on the contrary, confronted only with enemies and have no one behind them at all. Thus what seemed to be higher reason turns out in practice to be the height of foolishness.

Lassalle is perfectly right when he opposes the revolutionary instinct of the uneducated masses to the "sensible and intelligent" tactics of the "bookkeepers of revolution." But he does not, of course, take crude instinct as his ultimate criterion. There is a higher one: "the perfect knowledge of the laws of history and movement of peoples. Only realistic wisdom," he concludes, "can naturally transcend realistic common sense and rise above it." Realistic wisdom, which in Lassalle is still covered with a film of idealism, appears in Marx as materialist dialectics. Its whole force consists in the fact that it does not oppose its "sensible tactics" to the real movement of the masses, but only formulates, purifies and generalizes that movement. Just because revolution tears the veil of mystery from the true face of the social structure, just because it brings the classes into conflict in the broad political arena, the Marxist politician feels that revolution is his natural element. What, then, are these "sensible" Menshevik tactics that cannot be implemented, or, worse still, that ascribe their own failure to the "fever" of revolution and deliberately wait for that fever to pass, that is to say, for the revolutionary energy of the masses to be exhausted or mechanically crushed?

## III

Plekhanov was the first to have the melancholy courage of viewing the events of the revolution as a series of errors. He has given us an extraordinarily vivid example of how a man can, for twenty-five years, tirelessly defend materialist dialectics against all forms of dogmatist reasoning and rationalist utopianism, only to prove himself a dogmatist-utopian of the purest water in real revolutionary politics. In all his writings of the revolutionary period you will look in vain for the thing that matters most: the immanent mechanism of class relationships, the inner logic of the revolutionary development of the masses.

Instead, Plekhanov indulges in endless variations on the theme of that empty syllogism whose chief premise is that our revolution is a bourgeois revolution, and whose conclusion is that we must show tact in our dealings with the Kadets. He gives us neither theoretical analysis nor revolutionary policy, only a tedious reasoner's notes in the margin of the great book of events. The highest attainment of his critique is a pedagogical moral: if the Russian social-democrats were Marxists rather than metaphysicians, then our tactics at the end of 1905 would have been entirely different.

Astonishingly, Plekhanov absolutely fails to ask himself how it happened that he preached the purest Marxism for twenty-five years and succeeded only in creating a party of revolutionary "metaphysicians"; or, more important still, how these "metaphysicians" managed to carry the

working masses with them in their error, while the “true” Marxists found themselves in the position of solitary reasoners. One of two things must be true: either Plekhanov does not possess the secret of passing from Marxism as a doctrine to revolutionary action, or the “metaphysicians,” in conditions of actual revolution, have some mysterious advantage over the “real” Marxists. But if the latter were the case, it would not help if all Russian social-democrats adopted Plekhanov’s tactics, since they would anyway be put in the shade by “metaphysicians” of non-Marxist origin. Plekhanov is careful to avoid this fatal dilemma. But Cherevanin, that honest Sancho Panza of Plekhanov’s theorizing, takes the bull by the horns – or, to keep closer to Cervantes, takes the ass by the ears – and manfully proclaims: the fever of revolution leaves no room for true Marxist tactics!

Cherevanin was forced to reach this conclusion because he faced the problem which his master so carefully avoided: the problem of giving a general picture of the progress of the revolution and of the proletariat’s role within it. While Plekhanov carefully confined himself to partisan criticisms of specific actions and statements and completely ignored the inner dynamic of events, Cherevanin asked himself: what would our history look like today if it had developed in accordance with “true Menshevik tactics”? He answered the question in a brochure, *The Proletariat in Revolution* (Moscow 1907), which offers a rare example of the courage of which a limited intelligence can be capable. Then, having corrected every error and rearranged all events in the Menshevik order, so that they were logically bound to lead the proletariat to victory, he asked himself: why, then, did history take the wrong path? And he answered this question in his book *The Present Situation and the Possible Future*, which, once again, proves that the tireless courage of a limited intelligence is sometimes, although not always, capable of revealing part of the truth.

“The revolution’s defeat is so profound,” Cherevanin says, “that to reduce the causes for it to any errors on the part of the proletariat would be quite impossible. Obviously it is not a matter of errors,” he reasons, “but of other, deeper causes.” (p. 174.) The fatal role in the revolution was played by the return of the big bourgeoisie to its alliance with Tsarism and the nobility. In the process of the unification of these forces into a single counter-revolutionary whole, “the proletariat played a major, determining role. And, looking back, we can now say that this was its inevitable role.” (p. 175, italics mine throughout. L.T.) In his earlier brochure he followed Plekhanov’s line and ascribed all our troubles to the Blanquism of the social-democrats. Now his honest, though limited, intelligence rebels against this and he says: “Let us imagine that the proletariat had been under the leadership of true Mensheviks all the time and had acted according to Menshevik principles. [2] The proletariat’s tactics would then have been better, but its fundamental aspirations would not have changed and these would inevitably have led to defeat” (p. 176). In other words, the proletariat as a class would not have been capable of imposing on itself the Menshevik self-denying ordinance. By carrying on its class struggle, it inevitably pushed the bourgeoisie into the camp of reaction. Tactical errors merely “reinforced the proletariat’s melancholy (!) role in the revolution, but did not play a decisive part.” Thus the “melancholy role of the proletariat” was determined by the nature of its class interests.

A shameful conclusion, tantamount to complete surrender in the face of all the accusations addressed by liberal cretinism to the proletariat’s class party! And yet this shameful conclusion contains a particle of the historical

truth: collaboration between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie proved impossible, not because the social-democrats’ thinking was faulty, but because of the profound dismemberment of the bourgeois “nation.” Given its clearly defined social type and its level of political consciousness, the Russian proletariat could give free rein to its revolutionary energy only under the banner of its own interests. But the radicalism of its interests, even the most immediate ones, inevitably pushed the bourgeoisie over to the right.

Cherevanin has understood this. But, he says, that was precisely the cause of our defeat. Very well. But what is the conclusion to be drawn? What was there left for the social democrats to do? Try to deceive the bourgeoisie with algebraic formulae à la Plekhanov? Fold their arms and leave the proletariat to their inevitable fate? Or on the contrary, to recognize that any hope of an enduring alliance with the bourgeoisie was vain, to base its tactics on tapping the full class force of the proletariat to awaken the deepest social interests of the peasant masses, to appeal to the proletarian and peasant army – and seek victory along this path? In the first place, no one could tell in advance whether victory was possible or not and, secondly, regardless of whether victory was probable or not, this was the only path upon which the party of the revolution could enter unless it preferred immediate suicide to the mere possibility of defeat.

That inner logic of the revolution which Cherevanin is only now, in retrospect, beginning to sense, was clear to those whom he now dismisses as “unreasonable” even before the start of the decisive revolutionary events.

We wrote in July 1905:

Initiative and resolution can be expected from the bourgeoisie even less today than in 1848. On the one hand, the obstacles are much greater, and on the other hand the social and political dismemberment of the nation has gone infinitely further. A silent national and world conspiracy of the bourgeoisie is putting terrible obstacles in the path of the harsh process of liberation, trying to stop it from going any further than a deal between the property-owning classes and the representatives of the old order – a deal aimed at holding down the popular masses. Under such conditions, democratic tactics can develop only in the process of struggle against the liberal bourgeoisie. We must be clearly aware of this. Not the fictitious “unity” of the nation against its enemies (Tsarism), but a profound development of the class struggle within the nation: that is our path ... Undoubtedly the class struggle alone can do this. And, on the other hand, there can be no doubt that the proletariat, having by its pressure released the bourgeoisie from stagnation, must nevertheless, at a certain moment, enter into conflict with it as with a direct obstacle, however regular and logical the progress of events.

The class which is capable of winning this battle will have to fight it, and will then have to assume the role of a leading class – if Russia is to be truly re-born as a democratic state. These conditions, then, lead to the hegemony of the “fourth estate.” It goes without saying that the proletariat must fulfill its mission, just as the bourgeoisie did in its own time, with the help of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. It must lead the countryside, draw it into the movement, make it vitally interested in the success of its plans. But, inevitably, the proletariat remains the leader. This is not the “dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,” it is the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry. And the proletariat’s work will not, of course, be confined within the limits of a single state. The very logic of its position will immediately throw it into the world arena. [3]

#### IV

Despite their differences, the various factions in the party all agreed on one issue: everyone counted on total victory, that is, on the revolution seizing state power. Cherevanin now pulls out his abacus to calculate the respective forces of the revolution and the reaction and, after adding up the grand total, comes to the conclusion that "all the revolution's successes contained in embryo the inevitable defeat to come." (p.198.) On what does he base his calculations? On the extent of various strikes, on the nature and forms of peasant unrest, on figures of elections to the three Dumas. In other words he deduces the progress and outcome of the battle not directly from economic relations, but from the forms and episodes of the revolutionary struggle. His conclusion that the Russian revolution was doomed to failure from the start is not based on the economic characteristics and statistics of the classes, but on a study of the active struggle between those classes, their clashes, the open trial of their respective forces.

Of course Cherevanin's method is an ignorant one. But even this ignorant method is only possible because the strike spread over the entire country, insurrection flared up, the muzhiks wrecked and burned several provinces and, in the end, elections to the State Duma were held. And how could it be otherwise? You could not, for example, in the case of a revolution in Persia, imagine a Persian Cherevanin predicting to his compatriots the fatal effect of an alliance between Tsarism (a Tsarism strengthened by domestic events) and England's liberal government. And even if such a prophet were to be found, even if, on the grounds of his calculations, he tried to restrain the popular masses from risings which ultimately led to defeat, the Persian revolutionaries would be quite right to advise this sage to take up temporary residence in a lunatic asylum.

The Russian revolution occurred before Cherevanin had a chance to calculate its debit and credit. Revolution was the ready-made arena in which we had to act. We did not create the events, but we had to adapt our tactics to them. Once we were engaged in the struggle, we had, by that very fact, to count on victory. But a revolution is a struggle for state power. Being the party of the revolution, we have the task of making the masses conscious of the need to seize state power.

#### V

The Mensheviks' view on the Russian revolution was never distinguished by great clarity. Together with the Bolsheviks they spoke of "carrying the revolution to the end," but both sides interpreted this in a purely formal sense, that is, in the sense that we had to achieve our minimum program, after which would come an era of "normal" capitalism in a democratic setting. However, "carrying the revolution to the end" presupposed the overthrow of Tsarism and the transfer of state power into the hands of a revolutionary public force. What force? The Mensheviks said: bourgeois democracy. The Bolsheviks said: the proletariat and the peasantry.

But what is the bourgeois democracy of the Mensheviks? It is not a definite, tangible social force having concrete existence, it is an extra-historical category created by journalistic analogy and deduction. Because the revolution has to be "carried to the end," because it is a bourgeois revolution, because, in France, the Revolution was carried to the end by democratic revolutionaries - the Jacobins - therefore the Russian revolution can transfer

power only into the hands of a revolutionary bourgeois democracy.

Having thus erected an unshakable algebraic formula of revolution, the Mensheviks then try to insert into it arithmetical values which do not in fact exist. While reproaching others with exaggerating the strength of the proletariat, they themselves placed limitless hopes in the Union of Unions and the Kadet party. Martov greeted the formation of the "people's socialism" group with the greatest enthusiasm, while Martynov picked on the "Folk Teachers" of Kursk. The Mensheviks realized that in a capitalist country where wealth, population, energy, knowledge, public life, and political experience were becoming increasingly concentrated in the towns, the peasantry cannot play a leading revolutionary role. History cannot entrust the muzhik with the task of liberating a bourgeois nation from its bonds. Because of its dispersion, political backwardness, and especially of its deep inner contradictions which cannot be resolved within the framework of a capitalist system, the peasantry can only deal the old order some powerful blows from the rear, by spontaneous risings in the countryside, on the one hand, and by creating discontent within the army on the other.

But in the capitalist towns, those centers of modern history, there has to be a decisive party, based upon the revolutionary urban masses, and capable of utilizing the peasant risings and the discontent in the army to deal a final ruthless blow to the enemy, displacing him from all positions and seizing state power. The Mensheviks were unable to find such a party. That is why their abstract "carrying the revolution to the end" turned, in practice, into "supporting the Kadets quand même [4] while the most logical among them, as we have already seen, came to the conclusion that the climate of revolution is, in any case, too harsh for the exotic tactics of Menshevism.

The contradictions of Menshevism are a caricatured mirror-image of the contradictions of history itself - history which has set our country an immense revolutionary task, but which first swept away bourgeois democracy, as a political and economic force in any part of the world, with the iron broom of large-scale industry.

In contrast to the populists, our Marxists have refused to recognize Russia's "special nature" for so long that they have come, in principle, to equate Russia's political and economic development with that of Western Europe. From this to the most absurd conclusions there is only one step.

When Dan, following Martynov's example, complains that the weakness of the urban bourgeois democracy is "our greatest misfortune," we can really do no more than shrug our shoulders sympathetically. Do these people really understand what they are bewailing? Let us try to explain it to them. They are aggrieved because large capital now reigns in the economic sphere internationally, and has not allowed a strong artisanal and commercial petty bourgeoisie to come into being in Russia. They are aggrieved because the leading role of the petty bourgeoisie in political and economic life has passed to the modern proletariat. The Mensheviks fail to understand that the social causes of the weakness of bourgeois democracy are, at the same time, the source of social democracy's strength and influence. And then they believe this to be the principal cause of the revolution's weakness. We shall not point out how pathetic this attitude is from the viewpoint of international social-democracy as the party of world socialist revolution. It is enough for us that the conditions of our revolution are as they are. The third estate cannot be brought back to life by weeping and wailing. The conclusion remains that only the proletariat in its class struggle, placing the peasant

masses under its revolutionary leadership, can “carry the revolution to the end.”

## VI

Agreed, say the Bolsheviks. For our revolution to be victorious, the proletariat and the peasantry must fight side by side. But, writes Lenin in the second issue of *Przeglad*, “the coalition of the proletariat and the peasantry which gains victory in a bourgeois revolution is nothing other than the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” Its purpose will be to democratize economic and political relations within the limits of private ownership of the means of production. Lenin draws a distinction of principle between the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat and the democratic (that is, bourgeois-democratic) dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. He believes that this logical, purely formal operation can act as a perfect protection against the contradiction between the low level of productive forces and the hegemony of the working classes. If we thought that we could achieve a socialist revolution, he says, we would be inviting complete political defeat. But all is saved if the proletariat, having achieved power together with the peasantry, is firmly aware that its dictatorship is merely “democratic.” Lenin has never tired of repeating this idea ever since 1904. But that does not make it any more correct.

Because Russia’s social conditions are not ripe for a socialist revolution, political power would be the greatest misfortune for the proletariat. So say the Mensheviks. They would be right, says Lenin, if the proletariat were not aware that the point at issue is only a democratic revolution. In other words, Lenin believes that the contradiction between the proletariat’s class interests and objective conditions will be resolved by the proletariat imposing a political limitation upon itself, and that this self-limitation will be the result of the proletariat’s theoretical awareness that the revolution in which it is playing a leading role is a bourgeois revolution. Lenin transfers the objective contradiction into the proletariat’s consciousness and resolves it by means of a class asceticism which is rooted, not in religious faith, but in a “scientific” schema. It is enough to see this intellectual construct clearly to realize how hopelessly idealistic it is.

I have demonstrated in detail elsewhere [5] that twenty-four hours after the establishment of a “democratic dictatorship” this idyll of quasi-Marxist asceticism is bound to collapse utterly. Whatever the theoretical auspices under which the proletariat seizes power, it is bound immediately, on the very first day, to be confronted with the problem of unemployment. An explanation of the difference between socialist and democratic dictatorship is not likely to be of much help here. In one form or another (public works, etc.) the proletariat in power will immediately have to undertake the maintenance of the unemployed at the state’s expense. This in turn will immediately provoke a powerful intensification of the economic struggle and a whole series of strikes.

We saw all this on a small scale at the end of 1905. And the capitalists’ reply will be the same as their reply to the demand for the eight-hour day: the shutting down of factories and plants. They will put large padlocks on the gates and will tell themselves: “There is no threat to our property because it has been established that the proletariat is at present in a position of democratic, not socialist, dictatorship.” What can the workers’ government do when faced with closed factories and plants? It must re-open them and resume production at the government’s expense. But is that not the way to

socialism? Of course it is. What other way do you suggest?

The objection might be raised that I am imagining a situation in which the dictatorship of the workers is unlimited, whereas in fact what we are talking about is the dictatorship of a coalition between the proletariat and the peasantry. Very well, let us take this objection into account. We have just seen how the proletariat, despite the best intentions of its theoreticians, must in practice ignore the logical boundary line which should confine it to a democratic dictatorship. Lenin now proposes that the proletariat’s political self-limitation should be supplemented with an objective anti-socialist “safeguard” in the form of the muzhik as collaborator or co-dictator. If this means that the peasant party, which shares power with the social-democrats, will not allow the unemployed and the strikers to be maintained at state cost and will oppose the state’s opening of factories and plants closed down by the capitalists, then it also means that on the first day of the coalition, that is, long before the fulfillment of its tasks, the proletariat will enter into conflict with the revolutionary government. This conflict can end either in the repression of the workers by the peasant party, or in the removal of that party from power. Neither solution has much to do with a “democratic” dictatorship by a coalition.

The snag is that the Bolsheviks visualize the class struggle of the proletariat only until the moment of the revolution’s triumph, after which they see it as temporarily dissolved in the “democratic” coalition, reappearing in its pure form – this time as a direct struggle for socialism – only after the definitive establishment of a republican system. Whereas the Mensheviks, proceeding from the abstract notion that “our revolution is a bourgeois revolution,” arrive at the idea that the proletariat must adapt all its tactics to the behavior of the liberal bourgeoisie in order to ensure the transfer of state power to that bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks proceed from an equally abstract notion – “democratic dictatorship, not socialist dictatorship” – and arrive at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois-democratic limitation upon itself. It is true that the difference between them in this matter is very considerable: while the anti-revolutionary aspects of Menshevism have already become fully apparent, those of Bolshevism are likely to become a serious threat only in the event of victory. [6] Of course the fact that both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks invariably talk about the “independent” policy of the proletariat (the former in relation to the liberal bourgeoisie, the latter to the peasantry) in no way alters the fact that both, at different stages of the development of events, become scared of the consequences of the class struggle and hope to limit it by their metaphysical constructs.

## VII

The victory of the revolution can transfer power only into the hands of a party that enjoys the support of the armed urban population, that is, of the proletarian militia. Once it achieves power, the social-democratic party will be faced with a profound contradiction which cannot be resolved by naïve references to “democratic dictatorship.” “Self-limitation” by a workers’ government would mean nothing other than the betrayal of the interests of the unemployed and strikers – more, of the whole proletariat – in the name of the establishment of a republic. The revolutionary authorities will be confronted with the objective problems of socialism, but the solution of these problems will, at a certain stage, be prevented by the country’s economic backwardness. There is no way out from this contradiction within the framework of a national revolution.

The workers' government will from the start be faced with the task of uniting its forces with those of the socialist proletariat of Western Europe. Only in this way will its temporary revolutionary hegemony become the prologue to a socialist dictatorship. Thus permanent revolution will become, for the Russian proletariat, a matter of class self-preservation. If the workers' party cannot show sufficient initiative for aggressive revolutionary tactics, if it limits itself to the frugal diet of a dictatorship that is merely national and merely democratic, the united reactionary forces of Europe will waste no time in making it clear that a working class, if it happens to be in power, must throw the whole of its strength into the struggle for a socialist revolution.

#### Footnotes

1. This article was published in the Polish journal *Przegląd social-demokratyczny* in the period of blackest reaction in Russia, almost a total standstill in the working-class movement, and the Mensheviks' renegade disavowal of the revolution and its methods.

The article also criticizes the official position of Bolshevism at that time on the question of the revolution's character and the proletariat's tasks within it.

The criticisms addressed to Menshevism remain valid to this day: Russian Menshevism is reaping the fruits of its fatal errors in the years 1903- 1905, its formative years; world Menshevism is today repeating the mistakes of Russian Menshevism.

The critique of the Bolshevik position of the time (democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry) is today of historic interest only. Past differences have long been resolved. In the first edition of this book the chapter was printed in an incomplete form because neither the full Russian manuscript nor the Polish review in which the article was printed were available at that time. In the present edition all gaps have been filled by following the Polish text.

2. Please note the method of thinking. The Mensheviks do not express the class struggle of the proletariat, but the proletariat acts in accordance with Menshevik principles. It might be still better to say: let us assume that history behaves in accordance with Cherevanin's principles ... etc.

3. Preface to Lassalle's Speech before a Jury. A certain international vagueness of expression can be explained by the fact that the article was written for legal publication in the "pre-constitutional" era, more precisely in July 1905.

4. In French in the original.

5. *Our Revolution*, pp.249-259.

6. Note to the present edition. This threat, as we know, never materialized because, under the leadership of Comrade Lenin, the Bolsheviks changed their policy line on this most important matter (not without inner struggle) in the spring of 1917, that is, before the seizure of power. (Author)