

3. THE FIGHT AGAINST THE OPPORTUNIST TACTICAL LINE IN THE 1905 RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION AND THE DIFFERENCES OVER THE TACTICAL LINE

Lenin predicted in 1902:

History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the *most revolutionary* of all the *immediate* tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfilment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.¹

Indeed, the first great revolutionary battle of the Russian proletariat for the overthrow of tsarist autocracy began in 1905.

This revolution was hastened by the Russo-Japanese War which broke out in 1904, the culmination of protracted contention between tsarist Russia and Japan for the seizure of China and Korea. The attitude of the Bolsheviks towards this imperialist war and the attitude of the Mensheviks were completely different. The Mensheviks sank into the position of "defencism" and advo-

¹ "What Is to Be Done?", *op. cit.*, p. 373.

cated defence of the "fatherland", i.e., the fatherland of the tsar, the landlords and the capitalists. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, flayed the aggressive war of the tsarist government. Lenin declared that the policy pursued by the tsarist government was one of "foolish and criminal colonial adventure"¹ and that "it was the Russian autocracy . . . that started this colonial war".² Lenin's view was that to help bring about the defeat of the tsarist government in the war would weaken tsardom and hasten the onset of the revolutionary storm. "The military debacle, therefore," he said, "could not but precipitate a profound political crisis."³

And this is precisely how events worked out. The war deepened the internal class antagonisms in Russia and rapidly accentuated the fighting spirit of the masses. The bloodbath on January 9, 1905, when the tsarist police and troops slaughtered workers demonstrating peacefully in St. Petersburg, killing and wounding them in thousands, aroused the labouring masses to powerful indignation and touched off great strikes and demonstrations. An all-Russia political strike broke out in October. Soviets of Workers' Deputies were organized by the workers in the course of the struggles. In December, the Moscow workers staged an armed uprising. They erected barricades in the streets and engaged the tsarist police and troops in fierce battle. That same year peasants in over one-third of the *uyezds* (districts) in Russia rose against the rule of the tsar and the landlords. In June and November, sailors' revolts broke out on the battleship *Potemkin*

¹ "The Fall of Port Arthur", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 8, p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

near Odessa and elsewhere. There was unrest among the troops in a number of cities. The revolutionary tide swept the whole country. To give direct guidance to the Russian revolution Lenin returned to St. Petersburg from abroad in November 1905.

The revolutionary upsurge forced every political party to clarify its attitude and decide on its line of action. Shortly after the January 9 incident Lenin pointed out that the fundamental task at that time was to arm the proletariat and the peasants and to prepare and organize armed revolt for the overthrow of the tsarist government and the establishment of a revolutionary, democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Under Lenin's leadership, the Third Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party met in London in April 1905, adopted resolutions and worked out a Marxist tactical line. The Bolshevik tactics were designed to advance the revolution and embodied the spirit of daring to fight and daring to seize victory. The Mensheviks refused to take part in this congress and, while it was in progress, held their own conference in Geneva, at which they adopted resolutions and worked out an opportunist tactical line. Their tactics showed that they did not dare to fight and seize victory, but sought to place the proletariat under the control of the liberal bourgeoisie and to betray the revolution.

The development of the revolution brought to the fore the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks on the question of the tactical line. A thorough refutation of the Menshevik tactical line and an all-round elaboration of the Bolshevik tactical line became prerequisites for guiding the Russian revolution to victory. In July 1905, therefore, Lenin published his well-known

work, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. Here, he developed Marxism by comprehensively advancing the theory of proletarian leadership in the democratic revolution, the theory of the worker-peasant alliance led by the working class and the theory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution passing into the socialist revolution.

SHOULD THE PROLETARIAT STRIVE FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION?

The Mensheviks held that a bourgeois revolution could benefit only the bourgeoisie and that only the bourgeoisie could lead it. They held that the proletariat could only play the role of subsidiary to the bourgeoisie and should not independently try to lead and develop the entire democratic movement, lest the bourgeoisie were frightened away.

Lenin criticized these absurdities of the Mensheviks. He pointed out that the Russian bourgeoisie was a class that existed in a feudal, militaristic and imperialist country and its very class position determined its inconsistency in the democratic revolution. The very position of the proletariat as a class, he said, compelled it to be consistently democratic, and only under the leadership of the proletariat could the bourgeois-democratic revolution be carried through to the end. He pointed out that the bourgeoisie did not want the bourgeois revolution to sweep away all remnants of the past too resolutely and that it would try hard to prevent the weapon which the bourgeois revolution would supply to the proletariat from being turned against it. The proletariat is more interested than the bourgeoisie in a decisive victory of the

democratic revolution. Therefore, the bourgeois revolution is, in a sense, more advantageous to the proletariat than to the bourgeoisie. Lenin said:

Marxism teaches the proletarian not to keep aloof from the bourgeois revolution, not to be indifferent to it, not to allow the leadership of the revolution to be assumed by the bourgeoisie but, on the contrary, to take a most energetic part in it, to fight most resolutely for consistent proletarian democratism, for the revolution to be carried to its conclusion.¹

Failure to do so would mean going over completely from the platform of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat "to a platform of chaffering with the bourgeoisie, buying the bourgeoisie's voluntary consent ("so that it should not recoil") at the price of our principles, by betraying the revolution".² Lenin said:

The outcome of the revolution depends on whether the working class will play the part of a subsidiary to the bourgeoisie, a subsidiary that is powerful in the force of its onslaught against the autocracy, but impotent politically, or whether it will play the part of leader of the people's revolution.³

To ensure that it will assume leadership in the revolution, the proletariat must make a reliable ally of the peasantry. Lenin pointed out that the peasantry could become an ally of the proletariat in the democratic revolution, and wholehearted and most radical adherents of this

¹"Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 9, p. 52.

²*Ibid.*, p. 94.

³*Ibid.*, p. 19.

revolution, because only a thorough-going democratic revolution could satisfy their demand for land. He said:

The peasantry will inevitably become such if only the course of revolutionary events, which brings it enlightenment, is not prematurely cut short by the treachery of the bourgeoisie and the defeat of the proletariat.¹

On the other hand, "it [the proletariat] can become a victorious fighter for democracy only if the peasant masses join its revolutionary struggle. If the proletariat is not strong enough for this the bourgeoisie will be at the head of the democratic revolution and will impart an inconsistent and self-seeking nature to it. Nothing but a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry can prevent this."² Lenin refuted the Menshevik view that the mobilization of the peasants would induce the bourgeois classes to desert the cause of the revolution and thus diminish its sweep. He said:

Those who really understand the role of the peasantry in a victorious Russian revolution would not dream of saying that the sweep of the revolution will be diminished if the bourgeoisie recoils from it. For, in actual fact, the Russian revolution will begin to assume its real sweep, and will really assume the widest revolutionary sweep possible in the epoch of bourgeois-democratic revolution, only when the bourgeoisie recoils from it and when the masses of the peasantry come out as active revolutionaries side by side with the proletariat.³

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

To establish a firm alliance with the peasants, the proletariat must put forward and carry out an agrarian programme for the complete elimination of the feudal system.

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE BY THE PEOPLE?

The Mensheviks equivocated as to the forms of struggle in the revolution. They questioned the need or urgency for any armed uprising, and they suggested it would be better to try and convene some sort of representative institution, of the nature of a *Zemsky Sobor* or a State Duma. In opposition to their views, Lenin maintained that the most effective means of achieving victory in the democratic revolution was a people's armed uprising, that the democratic revolutionary movement had already placed armed uprising on the order of the day, and that the political party of the proletariat should take the most energetic steps to arm the proletariat and make sure that it could directly lead the uprising. Pointing to the necessity of organizing a revolutionary army, he said:

The revolutionary army is needed because great historical issues can be resolved only *by force*, and, in modern struggle, the *organisation of force* means military organisation.¹

He issued the call to "form fighting squads *at once* everywhere, among the students, and *especially among the workers*, etc., etc. Let groups be at once organised of

¹ "The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Government", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 8, p. 563.

three, ten, thirty, etc., persons. Let them arm themselves at once as best they can, be it with a revolver, a knife, a rag soaked in kerosene for starting fires, etc."¹

Guiding the masses towards an uprising, Lenin issued such revolutionary slogans as would set free their revolutionary initiative and disorganize the tsarist state apparatus. The slogans called for mass political strikes; for the immediate realization of the eight-hour working day in a revolutionary way; for the immediate organization of revolutionary peasant committees to carry out all democratic changes in a revolutionary way, including the confiscation of the landed estates, etc. The purport of these slogans, which ignored the authorities and existing law and disregarded the restrictions of the tsarist authorities and their laws, was to establish a new revolutionary order through unauthorized actions by the people.

While calling on the masses to rise in revolt Lenin repeatedly exhorted them to give up any illusion about constitutional government. In August 1905, under pressure of the revolution and in an attempt to blunt the revolutionary determination of the people, the tsarist government announced the convocation of the Bulygin Duma. Lenin pointed out that in the circumstances then prevailing, participation in the Bulygin Duma would amount to helping the tsarist government cheat the people and divert them from the path of revolutionary struggle. Under Lenin's leadership, the Bolsheviks worked out tactics for boycotting the Bulygin Duma. This proved to be the only correct tactics, and the birth of the Bulygin Duma was frustrated in the rising tide of revolution.

¹ "To the Combat Committee of the St. Petersburg Committee", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 9, pp. 344-45.

Then in December of the same year, the Bolsheviks led the armed working masses in an uprising.

Lenin held that it was necessary to set up a provisional revolutionary government as the organ of a victorious popular insurrection. He pointed out that this government would have to be a government of the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, which would put into practice the revolutionary dictatorship of the workers and peasants. Its task, he said, would be to consolidate the gains of the revolution, to crush the resistance of the counter-revolutionaries, to fight the attempts of the bourgeoisie to hold the revolution back and to enforce the minimum programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Party.

On the question of participation in the provisional revolutionary government, the Menshevik view was that the Social-Democratic Party should in principle not take part in it but should surrender power to the bourgeoisie and let it be a bourgeois dictatorship. In opposition to this view, Lenin maintained that in principle the Social-Democratic Party could and should take part in the provisional revolutionary government at a time when the people's revolution was achieving victory. This government should put into effect the minimum programme of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, namely, the programme of the democratic revolution, and press ahead to create the conditions for the realization of socialism. While taking part in the provisional revolutionary government, the Social-Democratic Party must mercilessly crush all counter-revolutionary attempts and defend the independent interests of the working class. There were two main conditions for participation in such a government: one was that the Party must exercise strict control over its own representatives, and the other was that it

must never for an instant lose sight of the aim of socialist revolution.

TO CONTINUE THE REVOLUTION OR
TO STOP HALF-WAY?

Lenin estimated that in the conditions in Russia at the time, after the victory of the democratic revolution the bourgeoisie would desperately try to wrest from the proletariat the gains they had made in the period of the revolution, and that inevitably a life-and-death struggle for state power would ensue between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He said:

Therefore, the proletariat, which is in the van of the struggle for democracy and heads that struggle, must not for a single moment forget the new antagonisms inherent in bourgeois democracy, or the new struggle.¹

What lay ahead of the bourgeois-democratic revolution? In this connection, Lenin developed the Marxist theory of continuous revolution and the theory of peasant struggles as the great ally of the proletarian revolution, the theory which had been cast aside by the opportunists of the Second International. In unequivocal terms, he set forth the theory of the transition from the bourgeois-democratic to the socialist revolution. The opportunists of the Second International and their companions, the Russian Mensheviks, maintained that there would be a prolonged interval between the democratic and the socialist revolution — a period of bourgeois dictator-

¹ "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *op. cit.*, p. 27.

ship. Lenin refuted this. He said that the democratic revolution could not affect the foundations of capitalism and that "a bourgeois revolution is a revolution which does not depart from the framework of the bourgeois, i.e., capitalist, socio-economic system".¹ And he added that the proletariat must "leave its proletarian, or rather proletarian-peasant, imprint" on the whole democratic revolution.² He declared:

. . . we shall bend every effort to help the entire peasantry achieve the democratic revolution, *in order thereby to make it easier* for us, the party of the proletariat, to pass on as quickly as possible to the new and higher task — the socialist revolution.³

Lenin compared the democratic revolution to the first step, and the socialist revolution to the second step, and he said:

. . . we must take this first step all the sooner, get it over all the sooner, win a republic, mercilessly crush the counter-revolution, and prepare the ground for the second step.⁴

In his article "Social-Democracy's Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement", Lenin said:

. . . from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organ-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³ "Social-Democracy's Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 9, p. 237.

⁴ "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

ised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way.¹

TWO APPRAISALS OF THE REVOLUTION OF 1905

The tide of revolution gradually ebbed in Russia after the failure of the December uprising. From then on there were fundamental differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks over the appraisal of the Revolution of 1905, the lessons to be drawn from it, and other such issues.

Plekhanov, representative of the Mensheviks, complained that the political strike was "untimely", for it had led to the armed uprising, that the defeat of the uprising was "not unexpected" and that the workers "should not have taken to arms", etc. In reply to this argument Lenin declared:

On the contrary, we should have taken to arms more resolutely, energetically and aggressively; we should have explained to the masses that it was impossible to confine things to a peaceful strike and that a fearless and relentless armed fight was necessary.²

Plekhanov had the effrontery to compare himself to Marx, saying that Marx also had put the brake on the Paris workers' uprising in 1870. Lenin pointed out that in September 1870, six months before the Paris Com-

¹ "Social-Democracy's Attitude Toward the Peasant Movement", *op. cit.*, pp. 236-37.

² "Lessons of the Moscow Uprising", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 11, p. 173.

mune, Marx had warned the French workers against a premature insurrection, but that above everything else Marx valued the historical initiative of the masses. Lenin said that "when the *masses* rose, Marx wanted to march with them, to learn with them in the process of the struggle, and not to give them bureaucratic admonitions".¹ Marx's attitude to the proletariat storming heaven was, he said, that of a practical adviser, a participant in the struggle of the masses. And after the defeat of the Paris Commune, Marx sang ardent praises to its achievements, saying:

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class.²

But what had been Plekhanov's attitude? Before the December armed uprising of the Russian workers, Lenin recalled, Plekhanov had issued no warning to them whatsoever, but he tilted at the revolutionary masses when the uprising was defeated, saying that they "should not have taken to arms". How could an opportunist like Plekhanov compare himself to Marx, the revolutionary teacher of the proletariat? They were as different as night and day!

The Mensheviks joined the bourgeois liberals after the defeat of the Revolution of 1905 in wantonly flinging mud at it. Referring to this, Lenin said:

¹ "Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx's Letters to Dr. Kugelmann", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 12, p. 111.

² Marx and Engels, "Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Civil War in France, 1871", *Selected Works*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, Vol. I, p. 542.

The question of evaluating our revolution is important not only theoretically by any means. It is important directly, practically, in the everyday sense. . . . We must proclaim openly, for all to hear, for the behoof of the wavering and feeble in spirit, to shame those who are turning renegade and deserting socialism, that the workers' party sees in the direct revolutionary struggle of the masses, in the October and December struggles of 1905, the greatest movements of the proletariat since the Commune; that only in the development of such forms of struggle lies the pledge of coming successes of the revolution; and that these examples of struggle must serve as a beacon for us in training up new generations of fighters.¹

Lenin made a profound summing-up of the lessons of the Revolution of 1905; he showed that only a mass revolutionary struggle could bring about a fundamental improvement in the living conditions of the people, that it was not enough to undermine or restrict the power of the tsar — it must be destroyed, that only the proletariat could lead the democratic revolution, and that this revolution could not be won unless the proletariat isolated the bourgeoisie and formed a solid alliance with the peasantry.

The Bolsheviks and the Russian proletariat gained a real political tempering in the Revolution of 1905; they gained a rich stock of experience in struggle, and Soviets of Workers' Deputies — the embryo of proletarian political power — were created by the revolutionary masses. Later, Lenin described the Revolution of 1905 as the dress rehearsal of the October Revolution of 1917. "Two

¹ "The Assessment of the Russian Revolution", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 15, pp. 61, 62.

Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution", which Lenin wrote during the Revolution of 1905, laid the foundations of Bolshevik tactics and armed the Party and the working class to continue their revolutionary struggle.