
The Bolsheviki — Socialism in Action!

by Louis C. Fraina

Letter to the editor of *The Evening Call* [New York], v. 11, no. 4 (Jan. 5, 1918), pg. 7.

Editor of *The Call*:—

In the Dec. 28th [1917] issue, *The Call*, answering a correspondent, emphasizes the confession of ignorance and the spirit of hopelessness of its editorial on “The Russian Kaleidoscope” in these words:

“It is no doubt disheartening not to possess infallibility. That is what is undoubtedly wanted, and, lacking it, the next best thing is to make the pretense of having it. That is the thing that puts ‘heart’ into the comrades, and that is all they want; not brains.”

In other words, the comrades who are pro-Bolshevik are all heart and no brains. Well, even at that, they are better off than the writer of that particular editorial and answer, who shows that he possesses neither the heart of the enthusiast nor the brain of the analyst.

Socialist philosophy should, and does, provide a standpoint for the analysis of events in Russia. What, then, is the trouble? It seems to me to lie in another important factor — the division of organized Socialism into a moderate and a revolutionary group. The moderate bias interferes with the proper application of revolutionary Socialist principles. It is apparent that, on the whole, the opportunistic, moderate Socialists in all countries are either avowedly against the Bolsheviki, usually calling them “anarchists,” as did recently the editor of the Stockholm *Social Demokraten* — or they confess an ignorance that verges on intellectual bankruptcy; while the revolutionary Socialist is heart and brain for the Bolsheviki. The conservative habits of thought of our moderates prevent them from accepting the tremendous historic fact of the revolutionary proletariat in action in Russia, a living proof of the accuracy of the Socialist theory of the class struggle

and its conception of the proletariat as a revolutionary force. If the moderates everywhere had not abandoned the class struggle in their policy, they would sense the issue in Russia — revolutionary Socialism and the proletarian class struggle in action.

A determining fact in the Russian Revolution is precisely this antagonism between the moderate and the revolutionary Socialist, between the Mensheviki and the Bolsheviki. The Mensheviki, on the whole, represent the dominant forces in the Socialist movement — the moderate Socialist parties which, as Leon Trotsky says in his pamphlet, *The War and the International*, had become obstacles to the revolutionary development of the proletariat. The trouble with Dr. Anna Ingerman, for example, is that the disputes between Mensheviki and Bolsheviki in the past still rumble in her head — she was against the Bolsheviki in the past; ergo, she is against them today! She is not big enough personally and intellectually to rise superior to the rancors of these disputes. But in Russia today many Mensheviki are doing precisely this thing — erasing the differences of the past. Trotsky was never a Bolshevik, yet he is today working hand-in-hand with the Bolsheviki. So is the Left Wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The great fact is that today the Bolsheviki no longer represent a party, but a revolution; they are no longer simply a group, but the proletariat and semi-proletarian peasantry of Russia struggling to put through the revolution.

The Call is not required to become infallible. The question is not one concerning a prediction whether or not the Bolsheviki will maintain power, but whether they represent the revolution against reaction, whether theirs is or is not a class struggle deserving of the sympathy and moral support of every Socialist. The test of

Socialism is not immediate success — it is the test of the class struggle, expressing the interests of the revolutionary proletariat.

Nor is the claim tenable of an insufficiency of information upon which to base an opinion. In spite of limited sources, the information is ample for a Socialist interpretation.

Since the revolution of 1915, the Russian bourgeoisie ceased being a revolutionary force, afraid that in the event of a revolution against the Tsarism the proletariat might seize power — as has actually been the case. Prior to 1905, the political prisoners were dominantly bourgeois intellectuals; subsequently, they were dominantly proletarians.

The bourgeoisie had become imperialistic. It was afraid to develop the internal market, a necessary condition because this involved a revolutionary struggle against the Tsarism. The bourgeoisie, accordingly, in spite and because of the underdevelopment of its capitalism, embarked upon a policy of export trade and Imperialism.

When the war broke, the Russian bourgeoisie was enthusiastically patriotic, seeing in the war an opportunity of promoting its imperialistic interests at the expense of Germany and Austrian imperialism. But when the corruption and general inefficiency of the government steered the nation straight to a crushing defeat, instead of victory, the bourgeoisie began to criticize the Tsarism — a criticism, mark you, not at all revolutionary, but strictly within the legal and parliamentary limits, within the limits of the existing regime. It wanted a government in which the bourgeoisie was represented, a government that would wage an aggressive and victorious war; it did not want the overthrow of the Tsarism; The party of the bourgeoisie, the Cadets, aimed at a constitutional monarchy, not a republic.

In the meanwhile, the proletariat became more and more aggressive, inspired by Socialist activity, particularly the revolutionary activity of the Bolshevik groups. The Revolution of 1917 was made by the proletariat and not by the bourgeoisie. The Cadets and bourgeoisie wanted a compromise with the Tsarism, not its overthrow. Theirs was a palace revolt, in which a Grand Duke was to be substituted for the deposed Tsar. The proletariat frustrated the scheme.

While the workers of Petrograd were fighting in

the streets and making the revolution, the Cadets and the bourgeoisie generally acted as spectators; their contribution was a passive one, in that they did not oppose the revolution; but after victory was secured by the proletariat, Cadets and bourgeois tried to step in and control the course of the revolution in their own class interests.

The bourgeoisie wanted the revolution to continue an imperialistic war. The proletariat said, “No”; and through its Workers’ and Soldiers’ councils secured the downfall of the Miliukov-Guchkov imperialistic government.

The Mensheviks, in control of the councils at this time, insisted upon a new coalition government with the “liberal” bourgeoisie, in spite of the Bolshevik opposition. Such a coalition government was an impossibility in operation. Either it honestly tried to represent both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the revolution and the reaction, in which case it might talk but could not act, because of the antagonism of class interests; or else, under the pressure of events, it might act, but in the interest of one or the [other]. *<Line missing>* [It was a fortunate accident of ?] history that the head of this government was Kerensky, an orator, a waster of words. Only words could be the expression of a since two-class government. And where the government of Kerensky did act, it fatefully acted against the revolution.

The Bolsheviks from the start pointed out the inevitable antagonisms and contradictions, and consequent impotence, of a coalition government. The bourgeoisie wanted war, the proletariat peace. The peasants wanted immediate distribution of the lands, the bourgeoisie did not, as it menaced the financial interests of the banks and the bourgeois agrarian magnates. The proletariat alone was revolutionary; the bourgeoisie imperialistic and reactionary, in its dominant expressions. The bourgeoisie aimed simply at a political revolution, the proletariat at a general social revolution. Only the class-conscious proletariat, accordingly, could make the revolution, continue the revolution, and establish permanently the achievements of the revolution.

At this point, the pseudo-Marxist may interject, “But Russia is ripe only for a bourgeois revolution. You cannot skip a stage in social development.” This argument ignores two historic factors missing in all

previous revolutions, and which completely alters the situation — the existence of a class-conscious, revolutionary proletariat in Russia, and a capitalism ripe for Socialism in the rest of Europe. These two factors, and the existence of imperialism, make a national democratic revolution of the bourgeoisie incompatible with the requirements of capitalism. The Russian bourgeoisie was willing to skip a stage in social development, as did the bourgeoisie of Germany and Japan; why shouldn't the Russian proletariat skip a stage? The situation cannot be summed up in the formula: Socialism or capitalism in Russia? This is a purely national standpoint, ignoring the fact that Russia is a part of Europe. Two forces are necessary to establish Socialism: the material — capitalism in the fullness of its development of the forces of production; the dynamic — a revolutionary, class-conscious proletariat. The material forces exist in the Western European countries, but not in Russia; the dynamic force exists in Russia, but not, as yet, in West Europe. Now consider Europe as one great social arena, as it is in fact. The revolutionary energy of the Russian proletariat, uniting with the impulse of a war that is developing intense revolutionary currents, may conceivably arouse the European proletariat for the Social Revolution; and this would wean Socialism in Europe, including Russia. This is fully a Marxian conception. In their preface to a new Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto (1883), Marx and Engels wrote: "If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the west, so that both supplement each other, then the present-day communal property [peasant land tenure] can serve as the starting point of a communist development." Russia would not under these conditions have to pass through all the stages of capitalism. And bear in mind that when Marx and Engels wrote, the situation, equally in Russia and throughout Europe, was not in the least as revolutionary as today.

Moreover, even the promotion of democracy and peace could be accomplished, in view of the imperialistic character of the Russian bourgeoisie, only by the uncompromising waging of the proletarian class struggle.

Today you have the *START* of the Social Revolution in Russia, not the Social Revolution itself; but if the European proletariat responds, it means *THE* social revolution. If the response is not made, then the

Bolshevik revolution becomes a phase in the development of the general revolution; the struggle will break out anew tomorrow. The Russian proletariat, because of its intense revolutionary struggle, will have acquired moral and physical reserve for action in the days to come, inspired the European proletariat, and converted the aspiration of the Social Revolution into a fact of immediate, palpitant concern to all the world.

Accordingly, the Bolsheviki, thoroughly revolutionary and Marxian in their conception, demanded the exclusion of the bourgeoisie from the government as a necessary factor in transforming the Russian Revolution into the Social Revolution of the European proletariat, and equally as a necessary factor in the solution of purely internal problems. "All power to the councils!" was their slogan.

But the proletariat alone, obviously, was insufficient to direct and control the revolution. The Mensheviki, being conservative, compromised with the bourgeoisie; the Bolsheviki, being revolutionary, tried a revolutionary solution of the situation. And here comes one of the great achievements of Lenin and the Bolsheviki: they mapped a program that would win the bulk of the peasantry for the revolution. Not the large landowner or the middle-sized landowner, but the peasant with a small patch of land and the great mass of agricultural workers, men expropriated from the land, hired laborers, those whom Lenin calls "semi-proletarians." The success of this program is shown in the split, reported about 10 days ago, in the Peasants' council, a split between the Right and the Left, the Left Wing having a majority and being, as a newspaper correspondent naively phrased it, "mere tools in the hands of the Bolsheviki." The cooperation of the industrial proletariat and the proletarian peasantry makes possible a revolutionary government without any representation for the bourgeoisie.

The Bolsheviki secured the support of the mass of the peasantry in this way: The peasants wanted the land, they wanted the abolition of hired labor. Capital, through the banks, had great financial interests in the lands that were to be expropriated without compensation; in case of a partial division the financial interests of capital would inevitably secure control of the land, and all the evils of private ownership would prevail; the peasants could not get the land unless through the abolition of private ownership, the ex-

propriation and nationalization of the lands, and the abolition of private banks. This procedure, however, emphasized the Bolsheviks, means a struggle against capital and the bourgeoisie, a general revolutionary struggle that the peasantry can engage in only with cooperation of the industrial proletariat. And this cooperation, according to all the indications, has in large measure been attained.

Revolutions make their own laws, their own programs. Revolutions are the great educator and developer of class-consciousness. People who smugly prate of the "inert mass" of the Russian people forget that this mass is proving itself very much alert, that this mass is being educated by the greatest revolution in all history. It is one of the great merits of the Bolsheviks that they used the revolution to educate the masses and develop their class consciousness. The revolution is a process, and not an ultimate act alone.

The Bolsheviks have worked out a program, a practical program of action that meets the revolutionary requirements of the situation in Russia. Revolutions do not rally around dogmas, but around programs. The sense of the revolutionist is expressed in this: that he translates his revolutionary aspirations into a revolutionary program in harmony with the historical conditions, and which can rally and unite the masses for action and conquest.

This Bolshevik program is immediate, and it is ultimate. Under the Kerensky government, industry was demoralized, the bourgeoisie using their ownership to paralyze the proletariat and strike at the revolution. Agriculture was demoralized, because the government dared not assume the revolutionary task of expropriating and distributing the land, as the task antagonized the interests of the bourgeoisie represented in the government. The task of internal reorganization could be undertaken either by a strictly bourgeois government, which would have meant a reorganization in the interest dominantly of the bourgeoisie; or by a strictly revolutionary government, which would have meant a reorganization in the interest of the proletariat and proletarian peasantry. The masses of Russia decided upon a revolutionary reorganization, and put the Bolsheviks into power.

Is Socialism in Russia the objective of the Bolsheviks? It is not, unless the Bolshevik aspiration for a general revolution of the European proletariat materi-

alizes. The nationalization of the land, the nationalization of all large scale industry, the nationalization of the banks — all this is not Socialism, but it is an approximation to Socialism in the process of the revolutionary struggle and as long as the proletariat maintains power and extends these measures in cooperation with the social revolution in Europe.

Shortly before his departure for Russia, Lenin in a letter to his Swiss comrades clearly summarized this situation and his own position:

Historic conditions have made the Russians, perhaps for a short period, the leaders of the revolutionary world proletariat, but Socialism cannot now prevail in Russia.... The main result will have to be the creation of more favorable conditions for further revolutionary development,...measures for the control of production and distribution...and to influence the more highly-developed European countries into action.... When in November 1914 the Russian party demanded: "Transformation of the imperialistic war into a civil war of the oppressed against the oppressors, and for Socialism," this demand was considered ridiculous by social patriots, as well as by those who constitute the "center"... The changing of the imperialistic war into a civil war has already started.

Coming back to events in Russia, the Kerensky coalition government failed miserably in its peace policy, as well as in its program of internal reorganization. At first, the overwhelming general desire for peace obscured class antagonisms; but as events shaped themselves, the class struggles assumed definite shape, and it was seen that peace itself was a class issue. The bourgeois class wanted war; the proletarian class and proletarian peasantry wanted peace. No compromise was possible.

Kerensky talked peace and acted war. The July offensive was secretly planned for the purpose of developing a warlike spirit; and under the existing conditions it was sheer murder of the Russian soldiers and necessarily counterrevolutionary. Kerensky's pleas to the Allies to revise and restate their war aims met with a chilly response from Britain and France; Russia was to be retained in an imperialistic war. The Mensheviks in the councils tried a last desperate stroke of diplomatic action; they elected Skobolev as the representative of the Council of Soldiers and Workers to the Paris Peace Conference, to present a set of peace terms. Then came the statement of Jules Cambon that the Allies would not discuss peace terms and war aims at the conference, and that, moreover, Skobolev would not

be admitted to the conference. This collapse of the Menshevik-Kerensky peace policy, together with the sharpening and clarification of class antagonisms, resulted in the lodging of all power in the councils, now dominated by the Bolsheviki, and the formation of the Lenin-Trotsky government. Internally and internationally, it was determined to pursue a revolutionary policy.

And this peace issue is to us the issue. The Russian Revolution will go its own way, in spite of any and all criticism. The revolutionary proletariat of Russia is proving that it knows what it wants and how to get it. But what about the international peace policy of the Russian revolutionary democracy? The appeal to diplomacy has proven its futility; only the action of the international proletariat will secure an immediate, general, and democratic peace. That is our test as Socialists. Is our party cooperating to the extent that lies in its power? Unfortunately, it is not.

The Bolshevik proposal for an armistice on all belligerent fronts is the first step toward a general peace, a proposal that, if accepted, would throw open the question of peace and allow all peoples to discuss and formulate their peace terms and action, in this way making for a democratic international peace. Now, there are two ways of securing peace. One way is by means of the battlefield, until one group of belligerents or the other wins a military decision, or until both are completely exhausted; the other way is by means proposed by the Russian revolutionary democracy, through the action of the Socialists and proletariat in each belligerent nation. There is no alternative. But in what way are the official Socialists responding? The French parliamentary Socialist group issues a long declaration to the Russian proletariat, saying not a word

about the proposals of the Russian comrades, but imploring them not to make a separate peace — after the Bolsheviki have repeatedly and emphatically declared that they want a general peace! Our own party is silent officially, in spite of the apparent fact that, in New York at least, the members are overwhelmingly pro-Bolshevik. *The Call* says not a word to create sentiment to make our government accept the armistice. Officially, Local New York is equally silent, in spite of the fact that Local Kings County has pledged itself in favor of the Bolshevik proposal. The National Executive Committee meets, 2 weeks ago, and has not a word to say about the armistice and the Russian proposal for an immediate general peace.

The Russian proletariat acts internationally, offers cooperation to the proletariat of the world, and our party is silent in this historic crisis!

If the international peace policy of the Bolsheviki fails, it will fail largely because of the failure to respond of moderate Socialism, that very same moderate Socialism that directed the International straight into disaster.

Where does the Socialist Party stand? Let the membership declare itself!

Our party may not have the power to accomplish much, you say; but it can at least pledge its moral support to the revolutionary Bolshevik peace policy, and in that way encourage the Russian proletariat and contribute toward the development of action in Europe.

Louis C. Fraina,

New York, December 30 [1917].

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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