

15. UPHOLDING THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE  
PROLETARIAT AND CLASS STRUGGLE  
DURING THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

THE CHIEF CRITERION DISTINGUISHING THE  
MARXISTS FROM THE OPPORTUNISTS

The great October Revolution succeeded in establishing the first state of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the world, and it precipitated a revolutionary tide in various countries. In many of them proletarian revolution became the order of the day. Lenin declared that the dictatorship of the proletariat, the substance of proletarian revolution, had become the essential problem in the entire class struggle waged by the proletariat. The attitude towards the dictatorship of the proletariat had become the chief criterion distinguishing the Marxists from the opportunists.

The opportunists of the Second International vied with one another in attacking the Bolsheviks and the Soviet state. The "learned" Kautsky, versed in the art of sophistry, wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* in which he tried all he could to distort Marx's teachings on the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat, changing them into vulgar and liberal theories acceptable to the bourgeoisie. In defining the "dictatorship of the proletariat" he tried his utmost to

conceal its basic feature, i.e., revolutionary violence. He ranted about the possibility of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat in "democracy in general" or "pure democracy" through "peaceful" and "democratic" elections. He blamed the Bolsheviks for using violence and accused the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia of "having not the slightest reason" for "encroaching on democracy", for "suppressing democracy". In substance all this nonsense of Kautsky's amounted to using bourgeois democracy, i.e., bourgeois dictatorship, against the dictatorship of the proletariat. In several works Lenin comprehensively and categorically refuted the erroneous views of Kautsky and other opportunists of the Second International with regard to the problem of the state and proletarian dictatorship, and vividly depicted their ugly and repulsive features. These works include the following: *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*; "Democracy" and Dictatorship; *Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Presented to the First Congress of the Communist International*; *The State*; *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*; *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*; *The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*; and *A Contribution to the History of the Question of Dictatorship*. Like his earlier work *The State and Revolution*, these writings represent an important development of Marx's teachings on the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat; they are an extremely valuable contribution to the theoretical treasure-house of the world proletariat.

KAUTSKY DISTORTS THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE  
PROLETARIAT CONCEPT, RULING OUT THE  
USE OF REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE

Kautsky made the absurd statement that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was merely a "little word" occasionally used by Marx in one of his letters. Lenin strongly denounced Kautsky for his ridiculous distortion of the truth. He quoted the following passage from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin pointed out that this famous statement of Marx's epitomized his entire revolutionary theory. The theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the quintessence of Marxism.

Lenin said that the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is political power won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. The dictatorship of the proletariat means the destruction of bourgeois democracy and establishment of proletarian democracy. The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution for it of a new one. This new machine is, therefore, the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Kautsky concealed or ignored the class content of bourgeois democracy. He shamelessly harped on "pure

<sup>1</sup>Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", *Marx and Engels, Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, pp. 32-33.

democracy" and "democracy in general". He applied to the era of imperialism in the 20th century the hypothesis, which Marx made in the 1870s, that Britain and the United States could become socialist through peaceful transition. He talked freely of a peaceful transition, i.e., "by democratic means". He falsely declared that the Paris Commune was established through voting by all the people, i.e., "democratically". Kautsky and other revisionists "taught" the people that the proletariat should first win a majority by universal suffrage, then obtain state power by a majority ballot, and finally organize socialism on the basis of "consistent" or "pure" democracy.

Lenin hit the nail on the head in exposing the real nature of bourgeois democracy. He said that there would never be "pure" democracy and that, so long as classes existed, there could only be class democracy. He declared:

Bourgeois democracy . . . nevertheless remains and under capitalism cannot but remain restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and a deception for the exploited, for the poor.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of all the pleasing expressions it uses, such as "liberty" and "equality", the constitution of the bourgeoisie is, in the final analysis, a protection for the bourgeoisie's system of private ownership. Lenin said:

. . . and everyone of you who has read Marx — I think even everyone who has read one popularization of Marx — knows that Marx had devoted the greater part of his life and his literary works, and the greater

<sup>1</sup>"The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 7, p. 130.

part of his scientific research precisely to ridiculing liberty, equality, the will of the majority and the Benthamites of all kinds who depicted these things, and to proving that underlying these phrases were the interests of the liberty of the commodity-owner, the liberty of capital which it uses to oppress the toiling masses.<sup>1</sup>

He also stated:

There is not a single state, however democratic, which does not contain loopholes or limiting clauses in its constitution guaranteeing the bourgeoisie the possibility of dispatching troops against the workers, of proclaiming martial law, and so forth, in case of a "disturbance of the peace," *i.e.*, in case the exploited class "disturbs" its position of slavery and tries to behave in a non-slavish manner.<sup>2</sup>

He further said:

The bourgeois parliament, however democratic and in however democratic a republic — is nothing but a machine for the suppression of millions of working people by a handful of exploiters — if the property and power of the capitalists is preserved.<sup>3</sup>

Kautsky's method of falsifying the history of the Paris Commune was clumsy and ludicrous. Lenin pointed out

<sup>1</sup>"Speech on the Deception of the People by the Slogans of Liberty and Equality, First All-Russian Congress on Adult Education", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 29, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>"The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>3</sup>"Letter to the Workers of Europe and America", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XXIII, p. 521.

that the flower of the bourgeoisie, its General Staff, and its upper strata had fled from Paris to Versailles and mustered all their strength to oppose the Paris Commune. The struggle of the Commune against Versailles was nothing but the struggle of the French workers' government against the government of the bourgeoisie. Could this be called "universal suffrage" and "pure democracy"? It was futile for Kautsky to try and defend himself by resorting to Marx's hypothesis that Britain and the United States might become socialist through peaceful transition. Lenin said that a military clique and bureaucracy did not exist in Britain and the United States in the 1870s and that when Marx made the hypothesis he was taking these countries as exceptions to the law of revolutionary history. He wrote:

... pre-monopoly capitalism, which reached its zenith in the seventies of the nineteenth century, was, by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits (which were most typical in England and America) distinguished by its relative attachment to peace and freedom. Imperialism, *i.e.*, monopoly capitalism, which finally matured only in the twentieth century, is, by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits, distinguished by the least attachment to peace and freedom, and by the greatest and universal development of militarism everywhere. To "fail to notice" this in discussing the extent to which a peaceful or violent revolution is typical or probable is to stoop to the position of a common or garden lackey of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *op. cit.*, pp. 125-26.

To gain victory in the socialist revolution the proletariat must win over to its side the great majority of the people. But if the work of trying to win over the people were limited to or determined by efforts to gain the greatest number of votes under the rule of the bourgeoisie, as the Kautskys believed, that would be the height of folly and a deception of the workers. Lenin said:

The Socialists, the fighters for the liberation of the working people from exploitation, had to use the bourgeois parliaments as a platform, as one of their bases of propaganda, agitation and organisation, *as long as our struggle was confined within the framework of the bourgeois system.* But now that world history has placed on the order of the day the complete destruction of this system, the overthrow and suppression of the exploiters, and the transition from capitalism to socialism, to confine oneself to bourgeois parliamentarism and to bourgeois democracy, to paint it up as "democracy" in general, to gloss over its bourgeois character, and to forget that universal suffrage, as long as the capitalists retain their property, is only one of the weapons of the bourgeois state, is shamefully to betray the proletariat, desert to the side of its class enemy, the bourgeoisie, become a traitor and renegade.<sup>1</sup>

He further stated:

In order to win the majority of the population to its side the proletariat must, in the first place, overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize state power; secondly, it must

<sup>1</sup>"Letter to the Workers of Europe and America", *op. cit.*, pp. 521-22.

introduce Soviet power and smash the old state apparatus to bits, whereby it immediately undermines the rule, prestige and influence of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois compromisers over the non-proletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, it must *entirely destroy* the influence of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois compromisers over the *majority* of the non-proletarian toiling masses by satisfying *their* economic needs *in a revolutionary way at the expense of the exploiters.*<sup>1</sup>

In contrast with bourgeois democracy, proletarian democracy grants real democracy only to the working people; no democracy is granted to the exploiters. To its proletariat and working people, the overwhelming majority of the population, Soviet Russia provided a freedom and democracy which no democratic bourgeois republic ever had or could ever hope to have. At the same time, it exercised dictatorship over the exploiters, ruthlessly suppressing their resistance. Kautsky did not approve of this. Pretending to be a textualist or an innocent child, Kautsky asked why should the rule of the proletariat assume, and necessarily assume, a form which was incompatible with democracy since the exploiters represented only a very small minority of the population and the toiling masses were an overwhelming majority.

Lenin replied that the exploiters always formed only a small minority of the population. This was indisputably true. Taking that as the starting point, if one argued in a Marxist way, one would take as the basis the relation between the exploited and the exploiters. There could

<sup>1</sup>*The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, pp. 25-26.

be no abstract talk about majority and minority, ignoring the class character of the state and of democracy. The reason why the proletariat wanted to have a dictatorship was "to break down the resistance of the bourgeoisie;...to inspire the reactionaries with fear;...to maintain the authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie; in order that the proletariat may forcibly suppress its enemies!"<sup>1</sup> The indispensable characteristic, the necessary condition, of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the forcible suppression of the exploiters as a class. Lenin said:

... to assume that in a revolution that is at all profound and serious the issue is decided simply by the relation between the majority and the minority is the acme of stupidity, the stupid prejudice of a common or garden liberal, the *deception of the masses*, concealing from them a well-established historical truth. This historical truth is that in every profound revolution, the *prolonged, stubborn, desperate* resistance of the exploiters, who for a number of years enjoy important practical advantages over the exploited, is the *rule*. Never, except in the sentimental phantasies of the sentimental simpleton Kautsky, will the exploiters submit to the decision of the exploited majority without making use of their advantages in a last desperate battle, or series of battles.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin pointed out that Kautsky's purpose in so distorting Marx's theory and indulging in sophistry was to rule out the use of revolutionary violence. He said:

<sup>1</sup> "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky", *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

... Kautsky has in the most incredible manner distorted the concept "dictatorship of the proletariat," and has transformed Marx into a common or garden liberal, *i.e.*, he himself has rolled down to the level of a liberal who utters banal phrases about "pure democracy," embellishes and glosses over the class content of *bourgeois* democracy, and, above all, is mortally afraid of the oppressed class resorting to *revolutionary violence*. By "interpreting" the concept "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" to mean that the oppressed class will not use revolutionary violence against their oppressors, Kautsky beat the world record in the liberal distortion of Marx. . . .<sup>1</sup>

FAILURE TO CARRY ON THE CLASS STRUGGLE  
TO THE END PRESENTS THE DANGER OF  
THE RESTORATION OF BOURGEOIS RULE

The Russian proletariat's destruction of the state machine with revolutionary violence and its establishment of Soviet power under the dictatorship of the proletariat was a great victory of world-wide historic significance. It was necessary for the proletariat, after establishing its state power, to carry the class struggle forward to the end. Lenin said:

... after capturing state power the proletariat does not thereby cease its class struggle, but continues it in a different form, and by other means. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the class struggle of the pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

letariat conducted with the aid of an instrument like state power. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In the early years of Soviet power the struggle against the exploiting classes was waged by means of intensive civil war. Aided by the foreign armed interventionists, the overthrown landlords and bourgeoisie engaged in armed rebellion. The kulaks hoarded their grain, hoping to kill Soviet power through starvation. Speculative activity was rampant in the cities and countryside. The bourgeois intellectuals working in the departments of Soviet power attempted sabotage from within by various means. At the same time the Soviet state was confronted with the serious task of gradually remoulding the small peasants and strengthening discipline within the ranks of the proletariat.

It was inevitable that for a long period after the revolution the exploiters would in fact have very great influence. They had money, movable property, organizational and administrative ability, military knowledge and a comparatively high level of education. They were closely connected with important technicians who led a bourgeois life and were imbued with bourgeois ideology. Sections of the small producers would follow them. In addition, they had very extensive international connections. Lenin said:

The transition from capitalism to communism represents an entire historical epoch. Until this epoch has terminated, the exploiters will inevitably cherish the hope of restoration, and this hope will be converted into *attempts* at restoration. And after their first

<sup>1</sup>*The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, op. cit., p. 32.*

serious defeat, the overthrown exploiters — who had not expected their overthrow, who never believed it possible, who would not permit the thought of it — will throw themselves with tenfold energy, with furious passion and hatred grown a hundredfold, into the battle for the recovery of their lost “paradise,” on behalf of their families who had been leading such a sweet and easy life and whom now the “common herd” is condemning to ruin and destitution (or to “common” work). . . .<sup>1</sup>

It was precisely for this reason that the dictatorship of the proletariat “presupposes the ruthlessly severe, swift and resolute use of force to crush the resistance of the exploiters, of the capitalists, landlords and their underlings. Whoever does not understand this is not a revolutionary, and must be removed from the post of leader or adviser of the proletariat.”<sup>2</sup>

Lenin warned that the danger of a capitalist restoration did not lie only in armed intervention by the imperialists from abroad and armed rebellion by the counter-revolutionaries at home, but also in the fact that they were trying to make Soviet power undergo “peaceful disintegration”. At the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Lenin said, “They want to turn peaceful economic development into the peaceful disintegration of Soviet power.”<sup>3</sup> At the Eleventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks),

<sup>1</sup>“The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky”, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-41.

<sup>2</sup>“Greetings to the Hungarian Workers”, *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>“Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)”, *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 336.

Lenin again pointed out that the enemy slandered the New Economic Policy of the Soviet government as "internal degeneration". He said, "It really is the class truth, bluntly and frankly uttered by the class enemy."<sup>1</sup> Lenin advised all concerned to be on the alert because the things the enemy talked about were possible. He repeatedly pointed out that after the economic expropriation of the exploiting classes there was the possibility of new exploiters emerging. He said:

Yes, by the fact that we have overthrown the landlords and the bourgeoisie, we have cleared the road for, but not built, the edifice of socialism. And on the soil cleansed of one generation there constantly appear in history new generations, if only the soil produces them, and it does produce any number of bourgeois. And as for those who regard the victory over the capitalists as the petty proprietors regard it — "they have snatched something; come on, give me some, too, and I'll make use of it" — isn't each one of these a source of a new generation of bourgeois?<sup>2</sup>

After the proletariat seizes state power the urgent tasks confronting it are: to set up strong and "symmetrical organization" to manage the production and distribution of goods, and to wage ruthless struggle against disorder, trouble-making and sabotage. These tasks depend on dictatorship for their fulfilment. The dictatorship is

<sup>1</sup> "Political Report of the Central Committee to the Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P. (B.)", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> "Report on the Current Tasks of the Soviet Power, Session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 27, pp. 267-68.

necessary for "two main reasons or along two main channels": the suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, and the suppression of all elements of disintegration. Lenin said that the elements of disintegration of the old society were very numerous and they could not "reveal themselves" in periods of profound change "otherwise than in the increase of crime: hooliganism, corruption, profiteering and outrages of every kind. We must have time and an *iron hand* to put these down".<sup>1</sup>

Lenin said that the misfortune of previous revolutions had been that the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses in suppressing the elements of disintegration did not last long. The social reason for this was the weakness of the proletariat which prevented it from winning over to its side the majority of the toilers and exploited and retaining power sufficiently long to enable it utterly to suppress all the exploiters as well as all the elements of disintegration. Lenin added:

It was this historical experience of all revolutions, it was this world-historical — economic and political — lesson that Marx confirmed in giving his short, sharp, concise and striking formula: dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin emphasized that the dictatorship should be like iron and not jelly. He said, "Dictatorship is iron rule, government that is revolutionarily bold, quick and ruthless in suppressing the exploiters as well as hooligans."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 7, p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

The remoulding of the small commodity producers is another important task of the proletariat when it has state power in its hands. Lenin said that the broad masses of small commodity producers are on the one hand working people and on the other small owners. Small production generates capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously and on a mass scale. The small producers "encircle the proletariat on every side with a petty-bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat and causes constant relapses among the proletariat into petty-bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternate moods of exaltation and dejection".<sup>1</sup> By their ordinary, everyday, imperceptible, elusive, demoralizing activity, they "achieve the *very* results which the bourgeoisie need and which tend to *restore* the bourgeoisie".<sup>2</sup> He also said:

The abolition of classes means not only driving out the landlords and capitalists... it also means *abolishing the small commodity producers*, and they *cannot be driven out*, or crushed; we *must live in harmony* with them; they can (and must) be remoulded and re-educated only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organizational work.<sup>3</sup>

If this were done it would be possible for the peasants and small producers to go forward onto the path of socialism.

The petty-bourgeois elements attacked the proletariat from within the Soviet state; they took advantage of every

<sup>1</sup> "Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

factor of disintegration, of every weakness, in order to bribe, and to increase indiscipline, laxity and chaos. There were many weak and vacillating elements who, unable to resist the lure of speculation, bribery and personal advantage, unscrupulously sought personal benefit at the expense of the collective interest. This obstructed the Soviet state in its efforts to overcome economic difficulties. Lenin considered that those who broke proletarian discipline should be severely punished. He strongly denounced the absurd view that the enforcement of labour discipline was a step backwards, and he called on the working people to strengthen their sense of organization and observe labour discipline. He said that the dictatorship of the proletariat certainly did not mean simply the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and landlords but "is the securing of order, discipline, productivity of labour, accounting and control by the proletarian Soviet power which is stronger and firmer than the previous power".<sup>1</sup> It was necessary to train and educate the working masses in the communist spirit, help them to discard old habits and customs handed down from the old system, as well as the habits and customs of private ownership, which were deep-rooted among the masses. Great difficulties would be encountered in this kind of work — at times it might even suffer setbacks — but eventually it would succeed.

The aim of proletarian dictatorship was not only to suppress the exploiters and the elements making for disintegration but also to remould and educate the small commodity producers and strengthen labour discipline

<sup>1</sup> "Report on the Current Tasks of the Soviet Power, Session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee", *op. cit.*, p. 267.

within the ranks of the proletariat. It was not only to overcome the resistance offered by the capitalists in the military and political realms but also to overcome the very strong and most far-reaching resistance offered by the capitalists in the realm of ideology. The forms of struggle were many. Lenin said:

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a persistent struggle — bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative — against the forces and traditions of the old society.<sup>1</sup>

He pointed out that the class struggle in the transition period was a struggle between the two roads of capitalism and communism. He said:

Theoretically, there can be no doubt that between capitalism and communism there lies a definite transition period. It cannot but combine the features and properties of both these forms of social economy. This transition period cannot but be a period of struggle between moribund capitalism and nascent communism — or, in other words, between capitalism which has been defeated but not destroyed and communism which has been born but which is still very feeble.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the publication of *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Lenin said, in a section added to *The State and Revolution*:

Opportunism *does not extend* the recognition of class struggle to what is the cardinal point, to the period of

<sup>1</sup> "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder", *op. cit.*, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, F.L.P.H., Moscow, pp. 5-6.

*transition* from capitalism to Communism, to the period of the *overthrow* and the complete *abolition* of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

He further stated:

The essence of Marx's teaching on the state has been mastered only by those who understand that the dictatorship of a *single* class is necessary not only for every class society in general, not only for the *proletariat* which has overthrown the bourgeoisie, but also for the entire *historical period* which separates capitalism from "classless society," from Communism.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*