

FOUNDATIONS OF THE

In the last issue of the *Workers Viewpoint* we initiated a new, bi-weekly feature, "Study Marxism." Its purpose is two-fold. First, we want to help our readers to study the basics of Marxism-Leninism, and second, to help focus our readers on the important theoretical and practical questions of the communist and workers' movements.

Its format will generally be excerpts from the Marxist classics with study questions, followed two weeks later by a commentary on the excerpts. Of course, we welcome comments on this series, including the format, and suggestions for future topics.

Beginning with this issue of the *WV*, we begin a series on "Left-Wing" Communism, *An Infantile Disorder*, by V.I. Lenin (Foreign Languages Press, Peking). Below are excerpts of the first four chapters; chapters five through 10 will be studied in one month.

I

In What Sense Can We Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution?

In the first months following the conquest of political power by the proletariat in Russia (October 25 [November 7], 1917), it might have seemed that the tremendous difference between backward Russia and the advanced countries of Western Europe would cause the proletarian revolution in these latter countries to have very little resemblance to ours. Now we already have very considerable international experience which most definitely shows that certain fundamental features of our revolution have a significance which is not local; not peculiarly national, not Russian only, but international. I speak here of international significance not in the broad sense of the term: not some, but all the fundamental and many of the secondary features of our revolution are of international significance in the sense that the revolution influences all countries. No, taking it in the narrowest sense, i.e., understanding international significance to mean the international validity or the historical inevitability of a repetition on an international scale of what has taken place in our country, it must be admitted that certain fundamental features of our revolution are of international significance. ~~Of course, it would be to exaggerate this truth and to apply it not only to certain fundamental features of our revolution. It would also be a mistake to lose sight of the fact that after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries things will in all probability take a sharp turn, viz., Russia will soon after cease to be the model country and once again become a backward country (in the "Soviet" and socialist sense).~~

But at the present moment of history the situation is precisely such that the Russian model reveals to all countries something, and something very essential, of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in every land have long understood this; and more often they have not so much understood it as grasped it, sensed it, by revolutionary class instinct. Herein lies the international "significance" (in the narrow sense of the term) of Soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics. This the "revolutionary" leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky in Germany and Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler in Austria, failed to understand, and therefore proved to be reactionaries and advocates of the worst kind of opportunism and social treachery. Incidentally, the anonymous pamphlet entitled *The World Revolution* ("Weltrevolution") which appeared in 1919 in Vienna (Sozialistische Bucherei, Heft II; Ignaz Brand) very clearly reveals their whole process of thought and their whole circle of ideas, or rather, the full depth of their stupidity, pedantry, baseness and portrayal of working-class interests — and, moreover, under the guise of "defending" the idea of "world revolution"...

II

One of the Fundamental Conditions for the Bolsheviks' Success

Certainly, almost everyone now realizes that the Bolsheviks could not have maintained themselves in power for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years, unless the strictest, truly iron discipline had prevailed in our Party, and unless the latter had been rendered the fullest and unreserved support of the whole mass of the working class, that is, of all its thinking, honest, self-sacrificing and influential elements who are capable of leading or of carrying with them the backward strata.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a more powerful enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by its overthrow (even if only in one country), and, whose power lies not only in the strength of international capital, in the strength and durability of the international connections of the bourgeoisie, but also in the force of habit, in the strength of small production. For, unfortunately, small production is still very, very widespread in the world and small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. For all these reasons the dictatorship of the proletariat is essential, and victory over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate war of life and death, a war demanding perseverance, discipline, firmness, indomitableness and unity of will.

I repeat, the experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown even to those who are unable to think, or who have not had occasion to ponder over this question, that absolute centralization and the strictest discipline of the proletariat constitute one of the fundamental conditions for victory over the bourgeoisie...

...And first of all the question arises: how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its perseverance, self-sacrifice and heroism. Secondly, by its ability to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers — primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses have been convinced by their own experience that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party that is really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end in phrase-mongering and grimacing. On the other hand, these conditions cannot arise all at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement...

...On the one hand, Bolshevism arose in 1903 on the very firm foundation of the theory of Marxism. And the correctness of this — and only this — revolutionary theory has been proved not only by world experience throughout the nineteenth century, but particularly by the experience of the wanderings and vacillations, the mistakes and disappointments of revolutionary thought in Russia. For nearly half a century — approximately from the forties to the nineties — advanced thought in Russia, oppressed by an unparalleled, savage and reactionary tsardom, eagerly sought for a correct revolutionary theory and followed with astonishing diligence and thoroughness each and every "last word" in this realm in Europe and America. Russia achieved Marxism, the only correct revolutionary theory, through veritable suffering, through half a century of unprecedented torment and sacrifice, of un-

precedented revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification and comparison with European experience. Thanks to the enforced emigration caused by tsardom, revolutionary Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century possessed such a wealth of international connections and such excellent information on world forms and theories of the revolutionary movement as no other country in the world.

On the other hand, having arisen on this granite theoretical foundation, Bolshevism passed through fifteen years (1903-1917) of practical history which in wealth of experience has no equal anywhere else in the world. For no other country during these fifteen years had anything even approximating to this revolutionary experience, this rapid and varied succession of different forms of the movement — legal and illegal, peaceful and stormy, underground and open, circles and mass movements, parliamentary and terrorist. In no other country was there concentrated during so short a time such a wealth of forms, shades, and methods of struggle of all classes of modern society, and moreover, a struggle which, owing to the backwardness of the country and the severity of the tsarist yoke, matured with exceptional rapidity and assimilated most eagerly and successfully the appropriate "last word" of American and European political experience.

III

The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism

The years of preparation of the revolution (1903-1905). The approach of a great storm is felt everywhere. All classes are in a state of ferment and preparation. Abroad, the press of the political exiles discusses the theoretical aspects of all the fundamental problems of the revolution. The representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends, the liberal-bourgeois, the petty bourgeois-democratic (concealed under the labels "social-democratic" and "social-revolutionary"), and the proletarian-revolutionary trends, anticipate and prepare the approaching open class struggle by a most bitter battle on programmatic and tactical views. All the issues on which the masses waged an armed struggle in 1905-07 and 1917-20 can (and should) be studied in their embryonic form in the press of that time. Between these three main trends, there were, of course, a host of intermediate, transitional, halfway forms. Or, more correctly, in the struggle of the press, parties, factions and groups, there were crystallizing those political and ideological trends which are actually class trends; the classes were forging the requisite political and ideological weapons for the impending battles.

The years of revolution (1905-07). All classes come out into the open. All programmatic and tactical views are tested by the action of the masses. The strike struggle is unparalleled anywhere in the world for its extent and acuteness. The economic strike grows into a political strike, and the latter into insurrection. The relations between the proletariat, as the leader, and the vacillating, unstable peasantry, as the led, are tested in practice. The Soviet form of organization is born in the spontaneous development of the struggle. The controversies of that time over the significance of the Soviets anticipate the great struggle of 1917-20. The alternation of parliamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle, of tactics of boycotting parliament and tactics of participating in parliament, of legal and illegal forms of struggle, and likewise their interrelations and connections — all of this is distinguished by an astonishing richness of content. As far as teaching the fundamentals of political science — to masses and leaders, to classes and parties — was concerned, one month of this period was equivalent to a whole year of "peaceful," "constitutional" development. Without the "dress rehearsal" of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution in 1917 would have been impossible.

...The revolutionary parties must complete their education. They have learned to attack. Now they have to realize that this knowledge must be supplemented with the knowledge how to retreat properly. They have to realize — and the revolutionary class is taught to realize it by its own bitter experience —

PARTY

Excerpts from "Left Wing An Infantile Disorder"

that victory is impossible unless they have learned both how to attack and how to retreat properly. Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their "army," with its core best preserved, with the least (in respect to profundity and irremediability) splits, with the least demoralization, and in the best condition to resume the work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner. The Bolsheviks achieved this only because they ruthlessly exposed and expelled the revolutionary phrase-mongers, who refused to understand that one had to retreat, that one had to know how to retreat, and that one had absolutely to learn how to work legally in the reactionary parliaments, in the most reactionary trade unions, and cooperative societies, insurance societies and similar organizations . . .

. . . Contrary to the views that are today not infrequently met with in Europe and America, the Bolsheviks began their victorious struggle against the parliamentary (factually) bourgeois republic and against the Mensheviks very cautiously, and the preparations they made for it were by no means simple. We did *not* call for the overthrow of the government at the beginning of the period mentioned, but explained that it was impossible to overthrow it *without* first changing the composition and the sentiments of the Soviets. We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, but said — and from the April (1917) Conference of our Party onwards began to say officially in the name of the Party — that a bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly is better than a bourgeois republic without a Constituent Assembly, but that a "workers' and peasants'" republic, a Soviet republic, is better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary, republic. Without such careful, thorough, circumspect and prolonged preparations we could not have obtained victory in October 1917, nor have maintained that victory.

IV

In the Struggle Against What Enemies in the Working Class Movement did Bolshevism Grow up and Become Strong and Steeled?

Firstly and principally, in the struggle against opportunism, which in 1914 had definitely grown into social-chauvinism, had definitely sided with the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Naturally, this was the principal enemy of Bolshevism within the working-class movement. It remains the principal enemy internationally too. The Bolsheviks devoted, and continue to devote, most attention to this enemy. This aspect of Bolshevik activities is now fairly well known abroad too.

Something different, however, must be said of the other enemy of Bolshevism within the working-class movement. It is far from sufficiently known as yet abroad that Bolshevism grew up, took shape, and became steeled in long years of struggle against *petty-bourgeois revolutionism*, which smacks of, or borrows something from, anarchism, and which falls short, in anything essential, of the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle. For Marxists, it is well established theoretically — and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed it — that the small owner, the small master (a social type that is represented in many European countries on a very wide, a mass scale, who under capitalism always suffers oppression and, very often, an incredibly acute and rapid deterioration in his conditions, and ruin, easily goes to revolutionary extremes, but is incapable of perseverance, organization, discipline and steadfastness. The petty bourgeois "driven to frenzy" by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, its liability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, fantasy, and even a "frenzied" infatuation with one or another bourgeois "fad" — all this is a matter of common knowledge. But a theoretical, abstract recognition of these truths does not at all free revolutionary parties from old mistakes, which

always crop up at unexpected moments, in a somewhat new form, in hitherto unknown vestments or surroundings, in a peculiar — more or less peculiar — situation.

Anarchism was not infrequently a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement. The two monstrosities were mutually complementary. And the fact that in Russia, although her population is more petty bourgeois than that of the European countries, anarchism exercised a relatively negligible influence in the preparations for and during both revolutions (1905 and 1917), must undoubtedly be partly placed to the credit of Bolshevism, which has always combated opportunism ruthlessly and uncompromisingly.

. . . Today, when we turn back at this completed historical period, the connection of which with subsequent periods is fully revealed, it becomes particularly clear that the Bolsheviks *could not have* in 1908-14 preserved (let alone strengthened, developed and reinforced) the firm core of the revolutionary party of the proletariat had they not upheld in strenuous struggle the viewpoint that is *obligatory* to participate even in a most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions restricted by reactionary laws (sick benefit societies, etc.) . . .

. . . Today, when I hear our tactics during the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace assailed by the "Socialist-Revolutionaries," for instance, or when I hear the remark made by Comrade Lansbury in conversation with me — "Our British trade union leaders say that if it was permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, it is permissible for them to compromise too," I usually reply by first of all giving a simple and "popular" example:

Imagine that your automobile is held up by armed bandits. You hand them over your money, passport, revolver and automobile. In return you are relieved of the pleasant company of the bandits. That is unquestionably a compromise. "Do ut des" ("I give" you money, firearms, automobile, "so that you give" me the opportunity to depart in peace). But it would be difficult to find a sane man who would declare such a compromise to be "inadmissible on principle," or who would proclaim the compromiser an accomplice of the bandits (even though the bandits might use the automobile and the firearms for further robberies). Our compromise with the bandits of German imperialism was a compromise of such a kind.

But when the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia, the Scheidemannites (and to a large extent the Kautskyites) in Germany, Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler (not to speak of Messrs. Renner and Co.) in Austria, the Renaudels and Longuet and Co. in France, the Fabians, the "Independents" and the "Labourites" in England, in 1914-18 and in 1918-20 entered into *compromises* with the bandits of their own, and sometimes of the "Allied," bourgeoisie *against* the revolutionary proletariat of their own country, all these gentlemen did act as accomplices in banditry. The conclusion is clear: to reject compromises "on principle," to reject the admissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness, which it is difficult even to take seriously. A political leader who desires to be useful to the revolutionary proletariat must know how to single out *concrete* cases when such compromises are inadmissible, when they are an expression of opportunism and *treachery*, and direct all the force of criticism, the full edge of merciless exposure and relentless war, against *those concrete* compromises, and not allow the past masters at "practical" Socialism and the parliamentary Jesuits to dodge and wriggle out of responsibility by disquisitions on "compromises in general." It is precisely in this way that Messrs. the "leaders" of the British trade unions, as well as the Fabian society and the "Independent" Labour Party, dodge responsibility for *the treachery they have perpetrated*, for having made *such a compromise* that is really tantamount to the worst kind of opportunism, treachery and betrayal. . . .

. . . So as to leave no room for misinterpretation, I shall attempt to outline, if only very briefly, a few fundamental rules for analyzing concrete compromises.

The party which concluded a compromise with the German imperialists by signing the Brest-Litovsk Peace had been working out its internationalism in action ever since the end of 1914. It was not afraid to call for the defeat of the tsarist monarchy and to con-

demn "defence of the fatherland" in a war between two imperialist robbers. The parliamentary representatives of this party took the road to Siberia rather than the road leading to ministerial portfolios in a bourgeois government. The revolution that overthrew tsardom and established a democratic republic put this party to a new and tremendous test: the party entered into no agreements with its "own" imperialists, but prepared and carried out their overthrow. Having taken over political power, this party did not leave a vestige either of landlord or capitalist property. Having made public and repudiated the secret treaties of the imperialists, this party proposed peace to *all* nations, and yielded to the violence of the Brest-Litovsk robbers only after the Anglo-French imperialists had frustrated the conclusion of a peace, and after the Bolsheviks had done everything humanly possible to hasten the revolution in Germany and other countries. That such a compromise, entered into by such a party in such a situation, was absolutely correct, becomes clearer and more evident to everyone every day.

The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia (like all the leaders of the Second International all over the world in 1914-20) began with treachery by directly or indirectly justifying the "defence of the fatherland," that is, the defence of *their own* predatory bourgeoisie. They continued their treachery by entering into a coalition with the bourgeoisie of *their own* country and fighting together with *their own* country. Their bloc, first with Kerensky and the Cadets, and then with Kolchak and Denikin in Russia, like the bloc of their *confreres* abroad with the bourgeoisie of *their respective* countries, was a desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. From beginning to end, *their* compromise with the bandits of imperialism lay in the fact that they made themselves *accomplices* in imperialist banditry.

Study Questions:

1. What does Lenin mean by the international significance of the Russian revolution? Why is it that revisionists like Kautsky, no matter how revolutionary they pretend to be, inevitably betray the workers because they do not grasp the significance of the October Revolution?
2. Why is iron discipline necessary to prepare for and to maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat? Why is it a most important part of winning the majority of the American people to the side of socialism and workers rule?
3. Lenin enumerated three aspects of developing the communist party's discipline. How are the possibilities opened up during capitalist destabilization to develop iron discipline and strict centralization?
4. During times of capitalist stabilization, when the possibilities are more limited, how does a communist party forge that necessary discipline?
5. Why is a "granite theoretical foundation" an integral part of discipline? Explain how the CWP's historical respect for theory and the "last words" of socialism has helped the party grow and maintain its bearings in the class struggle during capitalist destabilization. What happened to those who, four and five years ago, criticized the Party for "dogmatism"?
6. Lenin writes of the preparation for revolution in the communist press, and we, too have gone through something similar a few years back. What is the connection between the instability of principle displayed by the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), Line of March, the Organizing Committee for an Ideological Center and all other opportunists during those years and their disintegration today?
7. Why must the Party and its cadre core be trained all-roundedly, in all methods and forms of struggle? What is the connection between theoretical recognition of this task (which the CWP always fought for against the opportunists) and its implementation? Why, now that the possibilities to utilize all forms of struggle are widening, is the Party in an excellent position to realize this task?
8. Why is it ridiculous to reject compromises on principle? What is the touchstone for determining when a compromise is necessary and when it is treachery?