

Document Packet – The Russian Revolution

Questions:

1. What is Lenin's view of dissent?
2. What must a revolutionary movement have to succeed?
3. Why does Lenin argue that revolutionary activity must be centralized? How does this reflect his own interests?
4. Is this pamphlet a good blueprint for revolutionaries? Explain your answer.

Document 1

Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This thought cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity... Our Party is only in process of formation, its features are only just becoming outlined, and it is yet far from having settled accounts with other trends of revolutionary thought, which threaten to divert the movement from the correct path.... The national tasks of Russian Social-Democracy are such as have never confronted any other socialist party in the world.... *The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory...*

The systematic strikes [of the 1890s in St. Petersburg] represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo. Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, but not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They marked the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers, but the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., theirs was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. In this sense, the strikes of the nineties despite of the enormous progress they represented as compared with [earlier] "revolts," remained a purely spontaneous movement.

We have said that there could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.

The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. By their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement, it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia... Hence, we had both the spontaneous awakening of the masses of the workers, the awakening to conscious life and conscious struggle, and a revolutionary youth, armed with the Social-Democratic theory, eager to come into contact with the workers...

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is--either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way, to turn away from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.

The political struggle of Social-Democracy is far more extensive and complex than the economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government. Similarly (indeed for that reason), the organization of a revolutionary Social-Democratic party must inevitably be of a kind *different* from the organisation of the workers designed for this struggle. A workers' organization must in the first place be a trade organization; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as little clandestine as possible (here, and further on, of course, I have only autocratic Russia in mind). On the other hand, the organizations of revolutionaries must consist first, foremost and mainly of people who make revolutionary activity their profession (that is why I speak of organizations of revolutionaries, meaning revolutionary Social-Democrats). In view of this common feature of the members of such an organization, *all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals*, not to speak of distinctions of trade and profession, in both categories *must be obliterated*. Such an organization must of necessity be not too extensive and as secret as possible....

I assert: 1) that no revolutionary movement can endure without a stable organization of leaders maintaining continuity; 2) that the broader the popular mass drawn spontaneously drawn into the struggle, forming the basis of the movement and participating in it, the more urgent the need for such an organization, and the more solid this organization must be (for it is much easier for demagogues to side track the more backward sections of the masses); 3) that such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; 4) that in an autocratic state, the more *we confine* the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and to have been professionally trained in the art of combatting the political police, the more difficult will it be to wipe out such an organization, and 5) the greater will be the number of people of the working class and of the other classes of society who will be able to join the movement and perform active work in it...

Our worst sin with regard to organization is that by our *amateurishness we have lowered the prestige of revolutionaries in Russia*. A person who is flabby and shaky on questions of theory, who has a narrow outlook, who pleads the spontaneity of the masses as an excuse for his own *sluggishness*, who resembles a trade union secretary more than a spokesman of the people, who is unable to conceive of a broad and bold plan that would command the respect even of opponents, and who is inexperienced and clumsy in his own professional art - the art of combating the political police - why, such a man is not a revolutionary but a wretched amateur!

SOURCE: V. I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?," 1902.

Document 2



SOURCE: A cartoon of Rasputin with the Tsar and the Tsarina, supposedly drawn in 1916. The words in Russian mean: The Russian Royal Family.

Questions:

1. Why did Lenin reject support for the Provisional Government?
2. To whom might this program appeal and why?
3. In what ways was this program particularly Marxist?

Document 3

.....

THESES

1. In our attitude to the war, which under the new government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism" is permissible....
2. The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution - which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie - to its *second* stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants....
3. No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made

clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations...

5. Not a parliamentary republic - to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step - but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy. i.e. the standing army to be replaced by the arming of the whole people.

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker.

6. The weight of emphasis in the agrarian programme to be shifted to the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies.

Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of *all* lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies. The organisation of separate Soviets of Deputies of Poor Peasants. The setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates (ranging in size from 100 to 300 dessiatines, according to local and other conditions, and to the decisions of the local bodies) under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and for the public account.

7. The immediate amalgamation of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

8. It is not our *immediate* task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the *control* of the Soviets of Workers Deputies...

SOURCE: Vladimir I. Lenin's *April Thesis*, 1917.

Document 4

Under the tsars, the Russian Empire faced many problems and approval of the state's demands and purposes was largely absent from society. The technological gap was widening between Russia and the other capitalist powers. Military security posed acute problems; administrative and educational co-ordination remained frail. Political parties had little impact on popular opinion, and the State Duma was to a large extent ignored. Furthermore, the traditional propertied classes made little effort to engender a sense of civic community among the poorer members of society. While most Russians lacked a strong sense of nationhood, several non-Russian nations had a sharp sense of national resentment. The Russian Empire was a restless, unintegrated society.

Nicholas II, the last tsar, had put himself in double jeopardy. He had seriously obstructed and annoyed the emergent elements of a civil society: the political parties, professional associations and trade unions. But he also stopped trying to suppress them entirely. The result was a constant challenge

to the tsarist regime. The social and economic transformation before the First World War merely added to the problems. Those groups in society which had undergone impoverishment were understandably hostile to the authorities. Other groups had enjoyed improvement in their material conditions; but several of these, too, posed a danger since they felt frustrated by the nature of the political order. It was in this situation that" the Great War broke out and pulled down the remaining stays of the regime. The result was the February Revolution of 1917 in circumstances of economic collapse, administrative dislocation and military defeat. Vent was given to a surge of local efforts at popular self-rule; and workers, peasants and military conscripts across the empire asserted their demands without impediment.

These same circumstances made liberalism, conservatism and fascism impractical for a number of years ahead: some kind of socialist government was by far the likeliest outcome in those years. Yet it was not inevitable that the most extreme variant of socialism-Bolshevism should take power. What was scarcely avoidable was that once the Bolsheviks made their revolution, they would not be able to survive without making their policies even more violent and regimentative than they already were. Lenin's party had much too little durable support to remain in government without resort to terror. This in turn placed limits on their ability to solve those many problems identified by nearly all the tsarist regime's enemies as needing to be solved. The Bolsheviks aspired to economic competitiveness, political integration, inter-ethnic, cooperation, social tranquility, administrative efficiency, cultural dynamism and universal education. But the means they employed inevitably vitiated their declared ends.

SECONDARY SOURCE: Robert Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, 1998.

Questions:

1. What were the problems facing the Russian Empire?
2. How did Tsar Nicholas II place himself in "double jeopardy?"
3. Why did the Bolsheviks resort to terror?

Document 5

The Bolshevik revolutionary takeover in October 1917 was followed by over two years of civil war in Russia between the new Communist regime (with its Red Army) and its enemies--the conservative military officers commanding the so-called White armies. The struggle saw much brutality and excesses on both sides with the peasants suffering most from extortionate demands of food supplies and recruits by both sides. The repressive and dictatorial methods of the Bolshevik government had so alienated the mass of peasants and industrial working class elements that the erstwhile most loyal supporters of the regime, the sailors at the Kronstadt naval base, rebelled in March 1921 (see ob19.doc) to the great embarrassment of senior Bolsheviks. Though the rebellion was mercilessly crushed, the regime was forced to moderate its ruthless impulses. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was the result, a small concession to the capitalist and free market instincts of peasant and petty bourgeois alike. Moreover, victory in the civil war was assured by this stage, thus allowing a relaxation of the coercive methods symbolized by the War Communism of the previous two to three years.

... The most urgent thing at the present time is to take measures that will immediately increase the productive forces of peasant farming. Only in this way will it be possible to improve the conditions of

the workers and strengthen the alliance between the workers and peasants, to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . .

This cannot be done without a serious modification of our food policy. Such a modification [effected by NEP] was the substitution of the surplus-appropriation system [a euphemism for forcible acquisition of grain production above what is needed for subsistence] by the tax in kind [i.e., handing over of grain in amounts to satisfy tax due], which implies free trade . . .

The tax in kind is one of the forms of transition from that peculiar "War Communism," which we were forced to resort to by extreme want, ruin and war, to the proper socialist exchange of products. The latter, in its turn, is one of the forms of transition from Socialism, with the peculiar features created by the predominance of the small peasantry among the population, to Communism.

The essence of the peculiar "War Communism" was that we actually took from the peasant, all the surplus grain--and sometimes even not only surplus grain, but part of the grain the peasant required for food--to meet the requirements of the army and sustain the workers . . . It was a temporary measure. The correct policy of the proletariat which is exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant requires. . . . only such a policy can strengthen the foundations of Socialism and lead to its complete victory . . .

The effect will be the revival of the petty bourgeoisie and of capitalism on the basis of a certain amount of free trade (if only local). This is beyond doubt. It would be ridiculous to shut our eyes to it. The question arises: Is it necessary? Can it be justified? Is it dangerous? . . .

. . . . What is to be done? Either to try to prohibit entirely . . . all development of private, non-state exchange, i.e., trade, i.e., capitalism, which is inevitable amidst millions of small producers. But such a policy would be foolish because such a policy is economically impossible. It would be suicidal because the party that tried to apply such a policy would meet with inevitable disaster. We need not conceal from ourselves the fact that some Communists sinned... in this respect . . . We shall try to rectify these mistakes . . . otherwise things will come to a very sorry state.

A wise Communist will not be afraid of learning from a capitalist (no matter whether that capitalist is a big capitalist . . . or a little capitalist cooperator). Did we not in the Red Army [which was partly created from officers and men of the old tsarist army] learn to catch treacherous military experts, to single out the honest and conscientious, and on the whole, to utilize . . . tens of thousands of military experts? . . . We shall learn to do the same . . . with the commission agents, with the buyers who are working for the state, with the little-cooperator capitalists, with the entrepreneur concessionaires, etc. . . .

SOURCE: Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP), 1921.