

## Chapter IV

### THE NATURE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

✧ The Russian revolution seemingly mocked the specific forecasts of Marx and Engels as it defied the generally accepted Marxian law of social evolution. It was neither preceded nor supplemented by a general working class revolution in the West. It did not spring from the village community. That institution had been rapidly and steadily declining until 1917. It did not succeed an outworn capitalist system. Capitalism occupied a comparatively insignificant part in the economic life of Russia. The Russian revolution owes more to the unusual conditions created by the war than to the normal course of the country's economic or political development.

The main factors of its success were:

- ✧ 1. The sudden collapse of the whole organization of national life.
- ✧ 2. The utter demoralization of the bureaucracy.
- ✧ 3. A weak and unorganized bourgeoisie.
- ✧ 4. An impoverished, war-weary, rebellious and desperate population.

5. An overwhelmingly large and land-hungry peasantry.

6. Millions of workers and peasants organized into an army and suddenly freed from military discipline—a liberated and armed people available for revolutionary service.

7. Spontaneously created but relatively strong and well-knit organizations of industrial workers in the large cities, who represented the only active and cohesive social force of the country.

8. A small but resolute group of Socialists trained in European theories of Socialism and ready to assume and to exercise leadership.

The early Socialist movement of Russia has been characterized as the "illegitimate child of Asiatic Russia and European Capitalism." ~~X~~ From the point of view of the conventional Marxian historian the Russian revolution may be described as the illegitimate child of Asiatic Russia and European Socialism. It was not born in lawful Marxian wedlock, and this taint upon its birth has given rise to curious contentions in opposite Socialist camps. ~~X~~

The bolshevist theoretician sturdily asserts that the Russian revolution was accomplished in strict conformity and fulfillment of the Marxian formula. Thus the first congress of the Communist International, held at Moscow in March, 1919, boldly asserted with special reference to the Russian revolution that

"development has continued on the lines indicated" in the Communist Manifesto, and proclaimed: "We Communists, representatives of the revolutionary proletariat in different countries of Europe, America and Asia, now assembled in the powerful Soviet city of Moscow, both feel and consider ourselves to be the followers of and participants in a cause for which the programme (The Communist Manifesto) was drawn up seventy-two years ago."

On the other hand, some Socialist critics of the Soviet régime simply refuse to admit the "illegitimate" Russian revolution into decent Socialist society and at best accord to it the rank of a "middle-class" revolution. This pedantic attitude is based on the Marxian theory that a middle-class or bourgeois revolution must necessarily take place and run its course before a Socialist revolution can be successfully accomplished.

"The practical revolutionary experience of 1848-1849 confirmed the reasonings of theory, which led to the conclusion that the Democracy of the small traders must first have its turn, before the Communist working class could hope to permanently establish itself in power and destroy the system of wage-slavery which keeps it under the yoke of the bourgeoisie."

Thus Marx wrote as far back as 1852,<sup>1</sup> and the doctrine, frequently reiterated in the subsequent works of Marx and Engels, had become a fixed article of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," p. 186.

Socialist creed before the days of the Russian revolution.

In this connection it is worth recalling that the Russian Bolsheviki fully accepted this view, and it is significant for the suddenness and the unexpected turn of the Russian revolution that they adhered to the theory of orderly succession in revolutions until the very eve of the critical November days of 1917.

The last pre-war program of the Social Democratic Labor Party (dominated by the Bolsheviki) did not call for an immediate proletarian Soviet régime, but for a "democratic republic," to which it addressed the demand for the "confiscation of landlords' estates" in behalf of the peasants and an "eight-hour work day" as a concession to the industrial workers.<sup>2</sup>

In 1912, when this program was adopted, and practically down to the beginning of the Communist revolution, both Mensheviki and Bolsheviki believed that the coming revolution in Russia would be of a preponderatingly middle-class character, but while the former favored co-operation with the liberal sections of the bourgeoisie for the attainment of the revolution, the latter advocated a union with the peasantry against the landholding nobility and the industrial capitalists.

Even after the fall of the Tsar, when Lenin first

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<sup>2</sup> "Vserossiskava Konferenzia Ross, Soz. Dec., Rab. Partii," Paris, 1912, p. 12.

formulated the plan to transfer the governmental power to the Soviets, L. Kameneff, one of the foremost exponents of Bolshevik policy, wrote in the Pravda :

“As for Comrade Lenin’s general scheme, it seems to us to be unacceptable, in so far as it considers the bourgeois-democratic revolution as being completed, and counts with the immediate development of that revolution into a Socialist revolution.”

And Lenin made haste to defend himself against the charge of advocating an immediate Socialist revolution in Russia in this language :

“But are we not exposed to the danger of falling into subjectivism, in a desire to “leap over” the unfinished (because it has not yet passed through the peasant movement) bourgeois-democratic revolution, in order to arrive directly at a Socialist revolution ?

“If I had said ‘No Tsar, but a labor government,’ I would be running this danger. But I did not say that; I said something quite different. I said that, apart from a capitalist government, there can be no government in Russia outside the Councils of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. I said that power can now pass in Russia from Gutchkoff and Lvoff only to those Councils, *and the majority of them are precisely the peasants, the soldiers—the lower middle class* (to use scientific Marxian terms, based on the distinctions of classes, and not those of common parlance or legal vocabulary).

"I absolutely insured myself, in my Theses, against leaping over an unexhausted peasant—or, generally speaking, lower middle-class movement, against any playing at 'the conquest of power' by a Workers' Government, against any form whatsoever of a Blanquist coup; for I referred explicitly to the experience of the Paris Commune. Which experience, as is well known, and as Marx showed in 1871 and Engels in 1891, entirely precluded Blanquism and *efficiently guaranteed the direct, immediate and absolute rule of the majority* and the effective rôle of the masses only in proportion to the conscious activity of the majority."<sup>3</sup> (Italics mine.)

And again: "I not only do not 'count' with 'an immediate development' of our revolution into a Socialist one, but distinctly warn against such an expectation." \* \* \* \*

About six months after this was written a "Socialist Soviet Republic" was proclaimed in Russia under Lenin's leadership.

And it is idle caviling to dispute the Socialist character of the Russian revolution. A Socialist revolution does not mean the immediate establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth. It is only the political act of seizing the power of government in behalf of the workers and with the object of using it for the

<sup>3</sup> "Towards Soviets" by N. Lenin, English Translation, London, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

abolition of private ownership in the means of production and for the development of collective work and enjoyment.

The Russian revolution has taken possession of the government in the name of the workers. It has effectively expropriated private capitalist owners and has nationalized the greater part of the industries. It has also written into its program the socialization of the land. Measured by all practical tests it is therefore a Socialist revolution in character as well as intent.

If it has not come as a result of the course of historic and economic development outlined by Karl Marx, it has occurred through the working of another set of social conditions and forces, which have proved potent enough to create and maintain it. Its continued existence, year after year, in the face of almost incredible domestic difficulties and embittered foreign attacks, proves that we are not dealing with a mere freakish episode, but with a monumental historic event. This will remain true even if the Soviet government of Russia should not prove able to maintain itself indefinitely and should yield to another and substantially different form of government. The consistent Marxist should be the first to recognize it.

The Paris Commune, in its origin, social program and the composition of its government, was at least as much removed from the pure ideal of a modern proletarian revolution in the Marxian sense as the severest critics of Soviet Russia can fairly charge it to be.

It was confined to a single city, it maintained itself only a little more than two months, and was succeeded by a strong, vindictive and reactionary bourgeois government. Yet Marx did not haughtily disavow it. Underneath all its crudities and blunders he discerned "an essentially working-class government the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class."<sup>5</sup>

X The "aberration" of the Russian revolution from the prescribed Marxian path of social development merely proves that Marx and his followers in the Socialist movement before the war failed to take into account the possibility of a world catastrophe of such unprecedented and unimaginable magnitude as the recent war and the cataclysmic political effects of the incidental breakdown of the international capitalist order. X

<sup>5</sup> "Civil War in France," English translation by Belford Bax, N. Y., page 48.