

Chapter V

THE TASK OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The Russian Revolution represents a straight leap from an absolute and semi-feudal order to a political régime of working-class Socialism. The intervening stage of bourgeois democratic government, which Marxian theorists always considered indispensable, was simply passed over, for it surely cannot be seriously contended that the Lvoff-Kerenski government compressed within the eight months of its troubled existence a completed cycle of middle-class revolution.

The Russian experiment thus contradicts the accepted Marxian theory of political evolution. But does it also set at naught the more fundamental Marxian laws of economic development? By no means. Political institutions are after all primarily deliberate products of the conscious mind, even though they are bound to adjust themselves in the long run to the existing material situation. But economic conditions are physical and organic. Their development may be stimulated, but no radical change can be effected in their substance by legislative enactment or revolutionary decree.

The Russian revolution has nationalized the indus-

*Political stages can be skipped
Economic "Cont" " "*

tries, such as they were. It has put a Socialist government in the place of the former capitalist owners, but it has not thereby changed their general character or state of maturity. Russia has a unique chance to develop her industries under working-class instead of capitalist auspices, which may accelerate the process and eliminate much of the suffering by which it was accompanied in other countries. But she cannot jump over the inevitable phase of economic development from small production to large scale industry if she is to continue on the road toward Socialism.

*
5 yr.
Plan!

* A Socialist or Communist society in the modern conception implies not only the common ownership of the tools of work but also the existence of a well-organized system of large-scale production of goods, a system that will abundantly supply all needs of the people in an advanced state of civilization. A primitive order of communal life based on scanty resources is not Socialism.

+ "Among savages and semi-savages," observes Engels in the pamphlet already quoted,¹ "there are frequently no class distinctions, and every people has passed through that state. We would not think of reverting to such a condition again, if for no other reason than because it necessarily gives rise to class divisions as the forces of social production develop. Only upon a degree of development of the social forces of production, which is very high for the con-

¹ "Internationales aus dem Volkstaat," page 50.

ditions of our times, does it become possible to increase production to such a point that the abolition of class distinctions will mark true progress and be of lasting duration without causing a standstill or even a recession in the social mode of production."

- 5 yr.
 Lenin
 carrying
 on work
- x The immediate task of the Socialist government of Russia is to build up the industries of the country, and nobody appreciates the magnitude and urgency of that task more keenly than the Russian Communists themselves, who, particularly of late, have been concentrating their efforts on the development of a system of large-scale production.

N. Bukharin, one of the foremost Communist theoreticians, explains the necessity of that policy in the following simple and direct language:

- x "The future order is intended to relieve the workers of two misfortunes and evils. x In the first place, from the oppression of man by man, from exploitation, from one man sitting on another man's neck, x This is to be attained by casting off the yoke of capital, and taking their wealth from the capitalists. But that is not the only problem. x We have also to free ourselves from the yoke of nature, to subject nature to our own wishes, in order to carry on production in the best, the most perfect manner. x Only then will it be possible for each man to devote only a small part of his time to the production of necessary food, boots, clothing, houses, etc., and turn the remainder of his time to study, to art, to all the things that beautify human

life. The ancestors of present-day man, who lived at the semi-ape stage, were equal among themselves. But they led an animal existence because they had not subjugated nature; in fact, it was nature that had enslaved them. On the other hand, under capitalism, large-scale production has taught man to subdue nature, but the working-class live like working cattle, because the capitalists, owing to the existence of economic inequality, are sitting on their necks. What follows from this? From this follows that economic independence (equality) must be combined with large-scale production. It is not enough that the capitalists should go. It is necessary to establish production on the largest possible scale. All small and futile enterprises must die out. All work must be concentrated in the largest possible factories, works, farms. There must be a single working plan. The greater the area comprised in this single plan, the better. The whole world must finally become one great workshop, one enterprise, in which all mankind may work for themselves according to a single, stringently executed plan, without any employers or capitalists, with the best machines, and in the best working quarters. In order to give production a forward impetus we shall not only not be obliged to scrap the gigantic production which capitalism has left behind as its legacy. On the contrary, we shall have to increase it."²

² "Program of the Communists," Publication of American Communist Labor Party, page 14.

It will be noticed that in the above quotation, Bukharin does not limit the operation of the proposed system of large-scale production to purely industrial enterprises, but that he also extends it to "the farms." And rightly so. No ordered system of national economy can be organized without taking into account the vital field of agriculture. To secure the greatest possible yield of farm products with the least expenditure of human energy through the application of modern machinery and scientific methods; to relieve the hardships, bleakness and monotony of rural life, and to raise the tillers of the soil to approximately the same level of comfort, leisure and culture which the city workers enjoy or envisage, that has for decades been one of the most burning problems of the nations. It is of particular importance in Russia in view of the distressing backwardness of her agricultural methods.

The agrarian problem has always been a source of perplexity in the Socialist movement, which was made up overwhelmingly of industrial workers. International Socialism has, in fact, never formulated a comprehensive and generally accepted program of agrarian reform. The prevailing notion of agricultural organization in a Socialist commonwealth centers around the unit of the large-area farm, equipped with the most modern and scientific implements, owned by the community and operated co-operatively by shifts of workers, with ample provisions for rest and recreation. Rural life is to be made more interesting

and intellectual by the transfer of industries, particularly those more closely related to the products of the soil, from the city to the country, and the establishment of more and better schools, libraries and places of amusement.

The Russian Social Democrats, including the Bolsheviks, generally accepted this program, and the latter still adhere to it as an ultimate ideal. But the practical exigencies of the situation at the time of the revolution forced upon them a policy little related to the Socialist program.

The Russian peasants had received ludicrously inadequate land allotments upon their emancipation from serfdom in 1861, and their cry for more land grew in volume and vehemence with each advancing decade as their numbers increased and their land-holding remained practically stationary. After the fall of the tsarist régime their one demand was for the immediate partition of all crown lands and large private estates, and even before the November revolution they had begun to effect such partition on their own account in many parts of the country. The movement was spontaneous and irresistible and the Bolshevik revolution did little more than legalize and regulate the procedure.

The decree on "Land Socialization" officially promulgated on February 19, 1918, contains, among others, the following provisions:

"Art. 1. All property in land, underground wealth, waters, forests and living natural forces on the terri-

tory of the Russian Federal Soviet Republic is hereby abolished for all time."

"Art. 2. The land is hereby handed over for use to the entire laboring people without any overt or covert redemption taxes."

"Art. 9. The distribution of agricultural land among the laboring population is vested in the village, cantonal, district, provisional, regional or federal land departments of the soviets in accordance with their importance."

"Art. 12. The distribution of land among the laboring population shall be carried out on the principle of equalized labor in such manner that the combined normal unit of food and labor adopted to the historical system of land-tenure prevalent in each locality, does not exceed the labor capacity of each farming household and yet enables each family to live in adequate sufficiency."

Nominally the Russian land is thus socialized. The legal title to all of it rests in the community. The peasant is given the mere right of use. He cannot alienate or transmit it by inheritance. In actual practice, however, the peasant owns his newly acquired land as fully and unrestrictedly as he owns his original holding. He pays neither rent nor taxes to the government and does not recognize its superior title. It would be a very hazardous undertaking on the part of the soviet government to attempt to forcibly curtail

or to disturb the proprietary control of the peasant over his land.

The failure of the Russian revolution to socialize the peasants' land immediately cannot be taken as an abandonment of Socialist aims and methods with respect to its agrarian policy. Even Karl Kautsky, one of the severest Socialist critics of the Soviet régime, admits that in the Western countries also a victorious proletarian revolution would not attempt a policy of forcible interference with private peasant land ownership. "By no means," he declares, "do we demand that the proletariat as soon as it acquires power shall use it to expropriate the peasants and still less to confiscate their land." * * *

"The victorious proletariat has every reason to see to it that the production of food go on without disturbance. An expropriation of the peasants would throw this whole branch of production into mad disorder and expose the new régime to the danger of starvation. The peasants may therefore be reassured. Their economic indispensability will protect them against expropriation, entirely aside from the fact that the simplest rule of wisdom would militate against a policy which would provoke the enmity of a large section of the population." * * *

The victorious proletariat will have the means as well as the motive to aid the peasant in the technical improvement of his methods, to supply him with fer-

tilizer, cattle and perfected tools, and thus to increase the quantity of his product.

If we expect that this will not lead to a strengthening of small peasant economy, it is only because we assume that no measure of relief and support can avail to make the full benefits of the modern technique accessible to small peasant production, and that the peasants will therefore *voluntarily* abandon their individual form of production, which will prove an obstacle to their further social advances, as soon as the Socialist mode of production has been definitely established. The Socialist society will have every reason to help them in the transition to more advanced methods of production, because it will stand in need of an increase of food and raw material."⁸

The Russian Communists cannot be charged with lack of effort to stimulate the process of voluntary transition from individual to collective cultivation of the soil. They have made some beginnings in nationalized and co-operative farming; they are endeavoring to improve agricultural methods to the extent permitted by their crippled resources, and they carry on an extensive rural propaganda in favor of co-operative and communal land tillage.

Still there is a vital difference between the character and the effect of the proposed land policy of Western

⁸ Karl Kautsky. "Die Sozialisierung der Landwirtschaft." Berlin, 1919, page 70, et seq.

Socialism and the policy forced upon the Russian revolution by the special conditions of that country.

While a victorious proletarian revolution in the West will probably not attempt to expropriate the individual land holdings of small peasants, it may proceed to nationalize immediately large landed estates already cultivated with the application of modern methods and operated by hired labor. The peasants of Western Europe are not land-hungry. It is not more land that they require, but relief from the exactions of capitalist mortgagees, lessor, warehouse, commission house and railroad, and better facilities for work. They do not demand the partition of large estates. The Communist revolution in Russia in dividing up the large estates among the small peasant proprietors not only deprived itself of all direct and indirect benefits of a strong nucleus of socialized land cultivation, but took a decided step backward in the realization of the ultimate agrarian program of Socialism by strengthening the institution of private land ownership.

That this policy was not adopted voluntarily, but as a distinct concession to specific Russian conditions which are not applicable to Socialist revolutions generally is too obvious for argument. In fact, it is freely admitted by the more candid spokesmen of Russian Bolshevism, and by none more clearly than Nicolai Lenin. "At the very moment of the October revolution," says the latter, "we effected an informal (a

very important and highly successful) political block with the petty bourgeois peasantry, having accepted *fully*, without a single change, the 'Social Revolutionary' agrarian program. That is, we effected an undeniable compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we do not want to dominate them, but to come to an understanding with them."⁴

And again: "I draw your attention to the fact that these fundamental principles in the law (The Decree on Land Socialization) were laid down when the Communist party was not merely enacting its own program, but was also consciously *making concessions to those who in one way or another expressed the class feeling and the will of the 'middle peasantry.'* We made and are still making concessions of that kind, and we do so because the transition to the collective form of land holding, to communal tillage, to Soviet husbandry and communes is impossible all at once."⁵

The problem, while not specifically Russian, will present itself in somewhat milder form to a proletarian revolution in the Western countries, because in those countries the material conditions for collective tillage are more advanced. But the main point is that in those countries it will not be of the same acute and critical importance to the very existence of the Social-

⁴ "Left Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder," London, p. 54.

⁵ "The Land Revolution in Russia," Publication of Independent Labor Party, London, 1919, page 15.

ist régime as it is in Russia. In the more advanced countries of Europe, as in the United States of America, the center of gravity has definitely shifted from agriculture to industry. The factory system, with all its vast and intricate ramifications, dominates the economic and political life of the nation and supports the greater part of the people. When the workers secure control of the system their rule will be built on the broad and solid basis of majority interest. In a country like Russia, in which agriculture is the prevailing and overwhelming form of economic life, and urban industry is comparatively insignificant, a political régime built on the rule of the industrial working class is inherently as unstable as a pyramid poised on its apex. It could only maintain itself by special measures and concessions. These measures may have been inevitable and wise under the circumstances of the Russian revolution, but they sprang from the necessities of the special conditions and were bound to impress the form, methods and functions of the Soviet régime with their own peculiar stamp.