
LESSONS OF THE MOSCOW UPRISING

The publication of the book *Moscow in December 1905* (Moscow, 1906) could not have been more timely. It is an urgent task of the workers' party to assimilate the lessons of the December uprising.⁸ Unfortunately, this book is like a barrel of honey spoilt by a spoonful of tar: most interesting material—despite its incompleteness—and incredibly slovenly, incredibly trite conclusions. We shall deal with these conclusions on another occasion*; at present we shall turn our attention to the burning political question of the day, to the lessons of the Moscow uprising.

The principal forms of the December movement in Moscow were the peaceful strike and demonstrations, and these were the only forms of struggle in which the vast majority of the workers took an active part. Yet, the December action in Moscow vividly demonstrated that the general strike, as an independent and predominant form of struggle, is out of date, that the movement is breaking out of these narrow bounds with elemental and irresistible force and giving rise to the highest form of struggle—an uprising.

In calling the strike, all the revolutionary parties, all the Moscow unions recognised and even intuitively felt that it must inevitably grow into an uprising. On December 6 the Soviet of Workers' Deputies resolved to "strive to transform the strike into an armed uprising". As a matter of fact, however, none of the organisations were prepared for this. Even the Joint Council of Volunteer Fighting

* See *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, pp. 189-93.—Ed.

Squads⁹ spoke (on December 9!) of an uprising as of something remote, and it is quite evident that it had no hand in or control of the street fighting that took place. The organisations *failed to keep pace* with the growth and range of the movement.

The strike was growing into an uprising, primarily as a result of the pressure of the objective conditions created after October.¹⁰ A general strike could no longer take the government unawares: it had already organised the forces of counter-revolution, and they were ready for military action. The whole course of the Russian revolution after October, and the sequence of events in Moscow in the December days, strikingly confirmed one of Marx's profound propositions: revolution progresses by giving rise to a strong and united counter-revolution, i.e., it compels the enemy to resort to more and more extreme measures of defence and in this way devises ever more powerful means of attack.¹¹

December 7 and 8: a peaceful strike, peaceful mass demonstrations. Evening of the 8th: the siege of the Aquarium. The morning of the 9th: the crowd in Strastnaya Square is attacked by the dragoons. Evening: the Fiedler building is raided. Temper rises. The unorganised street crowds, quite spontaneously and hesitatingly, set up the first barricades.

The 10th: artillery fire is opened on the barricades and the crowds in the streets. Barricades are set up more deliberately, and no longer in isolated cases, but on a really mass scale. The whole population is in the streets; all the main centres of the city are covered by a network of barricades. For several days the volunteer fighting units wage a stubborn guerrilla battle against the troops, which exhausts the troops and compels Dubasov to beg for reinforcements. Only on December 15 did the superiority of the government forces become complete, and on December 17 the Semyonovsky Regiment¹² crushed Presnya District, the last stronghold of the uprising.

From a strike and demonstrations to isolated barricades. From isolated barricades to the mass erection of barricades and street fighting against the troops. Over the heads

of the organisations, the mass proletarian struggle developed from a strike to an uprising. This is the greatest historic gain the Russian revolution achieved in December 1905; and like all preceding gains it was purchased at the price of enormous sacrifices. The movement was raised from a general political strike to a higher stage. It compelled the reaction to go *to the limit* in its resistance, and so brought vastly nearer the moment when the revolution will also go to the limit in applying the means of attack. The reaction *cannot* go further than the shelling of barricades, buildings and crowds. But the revolution can go very much further than the Moscow volunteer fighting units, it can go very, very much further in breadth and depth. And the revolution has advanced far since December. The base of the revolutionary crisis has become immeasurably broader—the blade must now be sharpened to a keener edge.

The proletariat sensed sooner than its leaders the change in the objective conditions of the struggle and the need for a transition from the strike to an uprising. As is always the case, practice marched ahead of theory. A peaceful strike and demonstrations immediately ceased to satisfy the workers; they asked: What is to be done next? And they demanded more resolute action. The instructions to set up barricades reached the districts exceedingly late, when barricades were already being erected in the centre of the city. The workers set to work in large numbers, but *even this did not satisfy them*; they wanted to know: What is to be done next?—they demanded active measures. In December, we, the leaders of the Social-Democratic proletariat, were like a commander-in-chief who has deployed his troops in such an absurd way that most of them took no active part in the battle. The masses of the workers demanded, but failed to receive, instructions for resolute mass action.

Thus, nothing could be more short-sighted than Plekhanov's view, seized upon by all the opportunists, that the strike was untimely and should not have been started, and that "they should not have taken to arms". On the contrary, we should have taken to arms more resolutely, energet-

ically and aggressively; we should have explained to the masses that it was impossible to confine things to a peaceful strike and that a fearless and relentless armed fight was necessary. And now we must at last openly and publicly admit that political strikes are inadequate; we must carry on the widest agitation among the masses in favour of an armed uprising and make no attempt to obscure this question by talk about "preliminary stages"; or to befog it in any way. We would be deceiving both ourselves and the people if we concealed from the masses the necessity of a desperate, bloody war of extermination, as the immediate task of the coming revolutionary action.

Such is the first lesson of the December events. Another lesson concerns the character of the uprising, the methods by which it is conducted, and the conditions which lead to the troops coming over to the side of the people. An extremely biased view on this latter point prevails in the Right wing of our Party. It is alleged that there is no possibility of fighting modern troops; the troops must become revolutionary. Of course, unless the revolution assumes a mass character and affects the troops, there can be no question of serious struggle. That we must work among the troops goes without saying. But we must not imagine that they will come over to our side at one stroke, as a result of persuasion or their own convictions. The Moscow uprising clearly demonstrated how stereotyped and lifeless this view is. As a matter of fact, the wavering of the troops, which is inevitable in every truly popular movement, leads to a real *fight for the troops* whenever the revolutionary struggle becomes acute. The Moscow uprising was precisely an example of the desperate, frantic struggle for the troops that takes place between the reaction and the revolution. Dubasov himself declared that of the fifteen thousand men of the Moscow garrison, only five thousand were reliable. The government restrained the waverers by the most diverse and desperate measures: they appealed to them, flattered them, bribed them, presented them with watches, money, etc.; they doped them with vodka, they lied to them, threatened them, confined them to barracks and disarmed them, and those who were suspected of being

least reliable were removed by treachery and violence. And we must have the courage to confess, openly and unreservedly, that in this respect we lagged behind the government. We failed to utilise the forces at our disposal for such an active, bold, resourceful and aggressive fight for the wavering troops as that which the government waged and won. We have carried on work in the army and we will redouble our efforts in the future ideologically to "win over" the troops. But we shall prove to be miserable pedants if we forget that at a time of uprising there must also be a physical struggle for the troops.

In the December days, the Moscow proletariat taught us magnificent lessons in ideologically "winning over" the troops, as, for example, on December 8 in Strastnaya Square, when the crowd surrounded the Cossacks, mingled and fraternised with them, and persuaded them to turn back. Or on December 10, in Presnya District, when two working girls, carrying a red flag in a crowd of 10,000 people, rushed out to meet the Cossacks crying "Kill us! We will not surrender the flag alive!" And the Cossacks were disconcerted and galloped away, amidst the shouts from the crowd: "Hurrah for the Cossacks!" These examples of courage and heroism should be impressed forever on the mind of the proletariat.

But here are examples of how we lagged behind Dubasov. On December 9, soldiers were marching down Bolshaya Serpukhovskaya Street singing the *Marseillaise*, on their way to join the insurgents. The workers sent delegates to meet them. Malakhov himself galloped at breakneck speed towards them. The workers were too late, Malakhov reached them first. He delivered a passionate speech, caused the soldiers to waver, surrounded them with dragoons, marched them off to barracks and locked them in. Malakhov reached the soldiers in time and we did not, although within two days 150,000 people had risen at our call, and these could and should have organised the patrolling of the streets. Malakhov surrounded the soldiers with dragoons, whereas we failed to surround the Malakhovs with bomb-throwers. We could and should have done this; and long ago the Social-Democratic press (the old *Iskra*) point-

ed out that ruthless extermination of civil and military chiefs was our duty during an uprising. What took place in Bolshaya Serpukhovskaya Street was apparently repeated in its main features in front of the Nesvizhskiye Barracks and the Krutitskiye Barracks, and also when the workers attempted to "withdraw" the Ekaterinoslav Regiment, and when delegates were sent to the sappers in Alexandrov, and when the Rostov artillery on its way to Moscow was turned back, and when the sappers were disarmed in Kolomna, and so on. During the uprising we proved unequal to our task in the fight for the wavering troops.

The December events confirmed another of Marx's profound propositions, which the opportunists have forgotten, namely, that insurrection is an art and that the principal rule of this art is the waging of a desperately bold and irrevocably determined *offensive*. We have not sufficiently assimilated this truth. We ourselves have not sufficiently learned, nor have we taught the masses, this art, this rule to attack at all costs. We must make up for this omission with all our energy. It is not enough to take sides on the question of political slogans; it is also necessary to take sides on the question of an armed uprising. Those who are opposed to it, those who do not prepare for it, must be ruthlessly dismissed from the ranks of the supporters of the revolution, sent packing to its enemies, to the traitors or cowards; for the day is approaching when the force of events and the conditions of the struggle will compel us to distinguish between enemies and friends according to this principle. It is not passivity that we should preach, not mere "waiting" until the troops "come over". No! We must proclaim from the housetops the need for a bold offensive and armed attack, the necessity at such times of exterminating the persons in command of the enemy, and of a most energetic fight for the wavering troops.

The third great lesson taught by Moscow concerns the tactics and organisation of the forces for an uprising. Military tactics depend on the level of military technique. This plain truth Engels demonstrated and brought home

to all Marxists. Military technique today is not what it was in the middle of the nineteenth century. It would be folly to contend against artillery in crowds and defend barricades with revolvers. Kautsky was right when he wrote that it is high time now, after Moscow, to review Engels's conclusions,¹³ and that Moscow had inaugurated "*new barricade tactics*". These tactics are the tactics of guerrilla warfare. The organisation required for such tactics is that of mobile and exceedingly small units, units of ten, three or even two persons. We often meet Social-Democrats now who scoff whenever units of five or three are mentioned. But scoffing is only a cheap way of ignoring the *new* question of tactics and organisation raised by street fighting under the conditions imposed by modern military technique. Study carefully the story of the Moscow uprising, gentlemen, and you will understand what connection exists between "units of five" and the question of "*new barricade tactics*".

Moscow advanced these tactics, but failed to develop them far enough, to apply them to any considerable extent, to a really mass extent. There were too few volunteer fighting squads, the slogan of bold attack was not issued to the masses of the workers and they did not apply it; the guerrilla detachments were too uniform in character, their arms and methods were inadequate, their ability to lead the crowd was almost undeveloped. We must make up for all this and we shall do so by learning from the experience of Moscow, by spreading this experience among the masses and by stimulating their creative efforts to develop it still further. And the guerrilla warfare and mass terror that have been taking place throughout Russia practically without a break since December, will undoubtedly help the masses to learn the correct tactics of an uprising. Social-Democracy must recognise this mass terror and incorporate it into its tactics, organising and controlling it of course, subordinating it to the interests and conditions of the working-class movement and the general revolutionary struggle, while eliminating and ruthlessly lopping off the "hooligan" perversion of this guerrilla warfare which was so splendidly and ruthlessly dealt with by our Moscow com-

rades during the uprising and by the Letts during the days of the famous Lettish republics.¹⁴

There have been new advances in military technique in the very recent period. The Japanese War produced the hand grenade. The small-arms factories have placed automatic rifles on the market. Both these weapons are already being successfully used in the Russian revolution, but to a degree that is far from adequate. We can and must take advantage of improvements in technique, teach the workers' detachments to make bombs in large quantities, help them and our fighting squads to obtain supplies of explosives, fuses and automatic rifles. If the mass of the workers takes part in uprisings in the towns, if mass attacks are launched on the enemy, if a determined and skilful fight is waged for the troops, who after the Duma, after Sveaborg and Kronstadt¹⁵ are wavering more than ever—and if we ensure participation of the rural areas in the general struggle—victory will be ours in the next all-Russian armed uprising.

Let us, then, develop our work more extensively and set our tasks more boldly, while mastering the lessons of the great days of the Russian revolution. The basis of our work is a correct estimate of class interests and of the requirements of the nation's development at the present juncture. We are rallying, and shall continue to rally, an increasing section of the proletariat, the peasantry and the army under the slogan of overthrowing the tsarist regime and convening a constituent assembly by a revolutionary government. As hitherto, the basis and chief content of our work is to develop the political understanding of the masses. But let us not forget that, in addition to this general, constant and fundamental task, times like the present in Russia impose other, particular and special tasks. Let us not become pedants and philistines, let us not evade these special tasks of the moment, these special tasks of the given forms of struggle, by meaningless references to our permanent duties, which remain unchanged at all times and in all circumstances.

Let us remember that a great mass struggle is approaching. It will be an armed uprising. It must, as far as possi-

ble, be simultaneous. The masses must know that they are entering upon an armed, bloody and desperate struggle. Contempt for death must become widespread among them and will ensure victory. The onslaught on the enemy must be pressed with the greatest vigour; attack, not defence, must be the slogan of the masses; the ruthless extermination of the enemy will be their task; the organisation of the struggle will become mobile and flexible; the wavering elements among the troops will be drawn into active participation. And in this momentous struggle, the party of the class-conscious proletariat must discharge its duty to the full.

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