

V. I. LENIN

**ECONOMICS AND POLITICS
IN THE ERA OF
THE DICTATORSHIP OF
THE PROLETARIAT**

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

WORKS BY ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



W. J. [unclear] (unclear)

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The following English translation of V. I. Lenin's *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* is based on the text given in the pamphlet published under the same title by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1955. Some changes have been made after checking with the Russian original.

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I had intended in connection with the second anniversary of Soviet rule to write a small pamphlet dealing with the subject indicated in the title. But owing to the rush of everyday work I have been unable so far to get beyond the preliminary preparations for certain sections. I have therefore decided to essay a brief, summarized exposition of what, in my opinion, are the most essential ideas on the subject. A summarized exposition, of course, brings with it many inconveniences and shortcomings. Nevertheless, a short magazine article may perhaps achieve the modest aim in view, which is, to present the problem and the groundwork for its discussion by the Communists in the various countries.

1

Theoretically, there can be no doubt that between capitalism and communism there lies a definite transition period. It cannot but combine the features and properties of both these forms of social economy. This transition period cannot but be a period of struggle between moribund capitalism and nascent communism — or, in other words, between capitalism which has been defeated but not destroyed and communism which has been born but which is still very feeble.

The necessity for a whole historical era distinguished by these features of a transition period should be obvious not only to Marxists, but to every educated person who is in any degree acquainted with the theory of development. Yet all the talk on the subject of the transition to socialism which we hear from present-day representatives of petty-bourgeois democracy (and such, in spite of their spurious socialist label, are all the representatives of the Second International, including such individuals as MacDonald, Jean Longuet, Kautsky and Friedrich Adler) is marked by complete obliviousness to this obvious truth. Petty-bourgeois democrats are distinguished by an aversion to class struggle, by the hope of managing without it, by the endeavour to smooth over and reconcile, to take the edge off sharp corners. Such democrats therefore either brush aside any recognition of the necessity of a whole historical period of transition from capitalism to communism or regard it as their task to concoct schemes for reconciling the two contending forces, instead of leading the struggle of one of these forces.

2

In Russia, the dictatorship of the proletariat must inevitably differ in certain specific features from that in the advanced countries, owing to the very great backwardness and petty-bourgeois character of our country. But the basic forces — and the basic forms of social economy — are the same in Russia as in any capitalist country, so that these specific features can relate only to what is not most important.

These basic forms of social economy are capitalism, petty commodity production and communism. The basic forces are

the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie (particularly the peasantry) and the proletariat.

The economy of Russia in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat represents a struggle of the first steps of labour communistically united — on the scale of a single vast state — against petty commodity production and capitalism, the capitalism which still persists and the capitalism which arises anew on the basis of petty commodity production.

In Russia, labour is united communistically in so far as, firstly, private ownership of the means of production has been abolished, and, secondly, the proletarian state power is organizing large-scale production on state-owned land and in state-owned enterprises on a national scale, is distributing labour power among the various branches of production and the various enterprises, and is distributing large quantities of articles of consumption belonging to the state among the working people.

We say “the first steps” of communism in Russia (so spoken of also in the program of our Party adopted in March 1919), because all these conditions have been only partially achieved in our country, or, to put it otherwise, the achievement of these conditions is only in its early stages. We accomplished instantly, at one revolutionary blow, all those things that in general can be instantly accomplished: for instance, on the first day of the dictatorship of the proletariat, October 26 (November 8), 1917, private ownership of land was abolished without compensation to the big landowners; the big landowners were expropriated. Within the space of a few months practically all the big capitalists, owners of mills and factories, joint-stock companies, banks, railways, and so forth, were expropriated, also without compensation. The state organization of large-scale production in industry and the transition from “workers’

control" to "workers' administration" of factories, mills and railways — this, in its basic and main features, has already been accomplished; but in relation to agriculture it has only just begun ("state farms," i.e., large farms organized by the workers' state on state-owned land). Similarly, we have only just begun the organization of various forms of co-operative societies of small cultivators as a transition from petty commodity agriculture to communist agriculture.* The same must be said of the state organization of the distribution of products in replacement of private trade, i.e., the state procurement and delivery of grain to the cities and of industrial products to the countryside. Available statistical data on this subject will be given below.

Peasant farming continues to be petty commodity production. Here we have an extremely broad and very profoundly and firmly rooted basis for capitalism. On this basis capitalism persists and arises anew in a bitter struggle with communism. The forms of this struggle are bartrading and profiteering, as against state procurement of grain (and other products) and state distribution of products in general.

3

In illustration of these abstract theoretical propositions, we shall cite concrete data.

*The number of "state farms" and "agricultural communes" in Soviet Russia amounts to approximately 3,536 and 1,961 respectively, and the number of agricultural artels to 3,696. Our Central Statistical Board is at present making an exact census of all state farms and communes. The results will begin to become available in November 1919.

According to the figures of Komprod (the People's Commissariat of Food), state procurements of grain in Russia between August 1, 1917, and August 1, 1918, amounted to about 30,000,000 poods, and in the following year to about 110,000,000 poods. During the first three months of the next campaign (1919-20) procurements will presumably total about 45,000,000 poods, as against 37,000,000 poods for the same months (August-October) in 1918.

These figures clearly express a slow but steady improvement in the state of affairs from the point of view of the victory of communism over capitalism. This improvement is being achieved in spite of the difficulties hitherto unheard of in the world caused by the civil war, which the Russian and foreign capitalists are organizing, harnessing all the forces of the strongest powers in the world.

Therefore, in spite of the lies and slanders of the bourgeoisie of all countries and of their open or masked henchmen (the "Socialists" of the Second International), one thing remains beyond dispute, viz., that from the point of view of the basic economic problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the victory of communism over capitalism in our country is assured. Throughout the world the bourgeoisie is raging and fuming against Bolshevism and is organizing military invasions, plots, etc., against the Bolsheviks, just because it fully realizes that our success in reconstructing the social economy is inevitable, provided we are not crushed by military force. And its attempts to crush us in this way are not succeeding.

The extent to which we have already vanquished capitalism in the short time we have had at our disposal, and amidst the incredible difficulties under which we have had to work, will be seen from the following summarized figures. The Central Statistical Board has just prepared for the press data regard-

ing the production and consumption of grain, not for the whole of Soviet Russia, but for twenty-six of her provinces.

The results are as follows:*

Thus, approximately half the amount of grain supplied to the cities is provided by the Commissariat of Food and the other half by profiteers. This same proportion is revealed by a careful survey, made in 1918, of the food consumed by city workers. It should be borne in mind that for bread supplied by the state the worker pays *one-ninth* of what he pays the profiteer. The profiteering price for bread is *ten times* greater than the state price. That is what is revealed by an accurate study of workers' budgets.

4

If one carefully reflects on the figures quoted, one finds that they present an exact picture of the fundamental features of Russia's present-day economy.

The working people have been emancipated from their age-old oppressors and exploiters, the landlords and capitalists. This step in the direction of real freedom and real equality, a step which for its extent, its size, its rapidity, is without parallel in the world, is ignored by the followers of the bourgeoisie (including the petty-bourgeois democrats), who when they talk of freedom and equality mean parliamentary bourgeois democracy, which they falsely declare to be "democracy" in general, or "pure democracy" (Kautsky).

But the working people are concerned only with real equality and real freedom (freedom from the landlords and

* See table, p. 7. — Tr.

26 Provinces of Soviet Russia	Population in millions		Production of grain (excluding seed and fodder), in millions of poods	Grain delivered by:		Total amount of grain at disposal of population, in millions of poods	Grain consumption per capita of population, in millions of poods
	Urban	Rural		Commissariat of Food	Profiteers		
Producing provinces	4.4	28.6	— 625.4	20.9 —	20.6 —	41.5 481.8	9.5 16.9
Consuming provinces	5.9	13.8	— 114.0	20.0 12.1	20.0 27.8	40.0 151.4	6.8 11.0
Total (26 provinces)	52.7		739.4	53.0	68.4	714.7	13.6

capitalists), and that is why they stand so firmly for Soviet power.

In this peasant country, those who were the first to gain, to gain most and gain immediately from the dictatorship of the proletariat were the peasants as a whole. The peasant in Russia starved under the landlords and capitalists. Throughout the long centuries of our history, the peasant never had the opportunity of working for himself: he starved, while giving up hundreds of millions of poods of grain to the capitalists, for the cities and for foreign delivery. The peasant *for the first time* worked for himself and *fed better than the city dweller* under the dictatorship of the proletariat. For the first time the peasant saw real freedom — freedom to consume his own grain, freedom from starvation. In the distribution of the land, as we know, equality has been established to the maximum: in the vast majority of cases the peasants are dividing the land according to the number of “mouths” to be fed.

Socialism means the abolition of classes.

In order to abolish classes it is necessary, firstly, to overthrow the landlords and capitalists. This part of the task we have accomplished, but it is only a part, and moreover, *not* the most difficult part. In order to abolish classes it is necessary, secondly, to abolish the difference between workingman and peasant, *to make them all workers*. This cannot be done all at once. This task is incomparably more difficult and will of necessity be a protracted one. It is not a problem that can be solved by overthrowing a class. It can be solved only by the organizational reconstruction of the whole social economy, by a transition from individual, disunited, petty commodity production to large-scale social production. This transition must of necessity be extremely protracted. It may only be delayed and complicated by hasty and incautious administrative and

legislative measures. It can be accelerated only by affording such assistance to the peasant as will enable him immensely to improve his whole agricultural technique, to reform it radically.

In order to solve the second and most difficult part of the problem, the proletariat, after having defeated the bourgeoisie, must unswervingly conduct its policy towards the peasantry along the following fundamental lines: the proletariat must separate, demarcate the peasant toiler from the peasant owner, the peasant worker from the peasant huckster, the peasant who labours from the peasant who profiteers.

In this demarcation lies the *whole essence* of socialism.

And it is not surprising that the Socialists in word but petty-bourgeois democrats in deed (the Martovs, the Chernovs, the Kautskys and Co.) do not understand this essence of socialism.

The demarcation we here refer to is very difficult, for in actual life all the features of the “peasant,” however diverse they may be, however contradictory they may be, are fused into one whole. Nevertheless, demarcation is possible; and not only is it possible, it inevitably follows from the conditions of peasant economy and peasant life. The toiling peasant has for ages been oppressed by the landlords, the capitalists, the hucksters and profiteers and by *their* state, including even the most democratic bourgeois republics. Throughout the ages the toiling peasant has educated himself to hate and loathe these oppressors and exploiters, and this “education,” engendered by the conditions of life, *compels* the peasant to seek for an alliance with the workers against the capitalist and against the profiteer and trader. Yet at the same time, economic conditions, the conditions of commodity production, inevitably turn the peasant (not always, but in the vast majority of cases) into a huckster and profiteer.

The statistics quoted above reveal a striking difference between the peasant toiler and the peasant profiteer. That peasant who during 1918-19 delivered to the hungry workers of the cities 40,000,000 poods of grain at fixed state prices, who delivered this grain to the state agencies in spite of all the shortcomings of the latter, shortcomings which are fully realized by the workers' government, but which cannot be got rid of in the first period of the transition to socialism — that peasant is a toiling peasant, a comrade on an equal footing with the Socialist worker, his most faithful ally, his own brother in the fight against the yoke of capital. Whereas that peasant who clandestinely sold 40,000,000 poods of grain at ten times the state price, taking advantage of the need and hunger of the city worker, deceiving the state, and everywhere increasing and generating deceit, robbery and swindling tricks — that peasant is a profiteer, an ally of the capitalist, a class enemy of the worker, an exploiter. For whoever possesses a surplus of grain gathered from land belonging to the whole state with the help of implements in which in one way or another is embodied the labour not only of the peasant but also of the worker and so on, whoever possesses a surplus of grain and profiteers in that grain is an exploiter of the hungry worker.

You are violators of freedom, equality and democracy — they shout at us on all hands, pointing to the inequality of the worker and the peasant under our Constitution, to the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, to the forcible confiscation of surplus grain, and so forth. We reply: Never in the world has there been a state which has done so much to remove the actual inequality, the actual lack of freedom from which the toiling peasant has suffered for centuries. But we shall never recognize equality with the peasant profiteer, just as we do not recognize "equality" between the exploiter and the

exploited, between the full and the hungry, nor the "freedom" of the former to rob the latter. And those educated people who refuse to recognize this difference we shall treat as Whiteguards, even though they may call themselves democrats, Socialists, Internationalists, Kautskys, Chernovs or Martovs.

5

Socialism means the abolition of classes. The dictatorship of the proletariat has done all it could to abolish classes. But classes cannot be abolished all at once.

And classes *remain* and *will remain* in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat. When classes disappear the dictatorship will become unnecessary. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat they will not disappear.

Classes have remained, but in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat *every* class has undergone a change, and the relations between the classes have also changed. The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it merely assumes different forms.

Under capitalism the proletariat was an oppressed class, a class bereft of all ownership in the means of production, the only class which stood directly and completely opposed to the bourgeoisie, and therefore the only one capable of being revolutionary to the very end. Having overthrown the bourgeoisie and won political power, the proletariat has become the *ruling* class; it holds the power of state in its hands, it has at its disposal the means of production that have already been socialized; it exercises leadership over the wavering and intermediary elements and classes; it crushes the enhanced energy

of resistance of the exploiters. All these are *specific* tasks of the class struggle, tasks which the proletariat formerly did not set itself, and could not have set itself.

The class of exploiters, the landlords and capitalists, has not disappeared and cannot disappear all at once under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The exploiters have been smashed, but not destroyed. They still have an international base in the form of international capital, a branch of which they represent. They still retain a part of certain means of production, they still have money, they still have vast social connections. Just because they have been defeated, their energy of resistance has increased a hundred- and thousand-fold. The "art" of state, military and economic administration gives them a superiority, and a very great superiority, so that their importance is incomparably greater than their numerical proportion among the population would warrant. The class struggle waged by the overthrown exploiters against the victorious vanguard of the exploited, i.e., the proletariat, has become incomparably more bitter. And it cannot be otherwise if we are speaking of a revolution, if this concept is not replaced (as it is by all the heroes of the Second International) by reformist illusions.

Lastly, the peasantry, like the petty bourgeoisie in general, occupies a halfway, intermediary position *even* under the dictatorship of the proletariat: on the one hand, it represents a fairly large (and in backward Russia, a vast) mass of toilers, united by the common interest of the toilers to emancipate themselves from the landlord and the capitalist; on the other hand, it represents disunited small masters, property owners and traders. Such an economic position inevitably gives rise to vacillation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. And in view of the acute form which the struggle between these

latter has assumed, in view of the incredibly drastic break-up of all social relations, and in view of the very great habituation precisely of the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie generally to the old, the routine and the unchangeable, it is only natural that we should inevitably find them swinging from one side to the other, that we should find them wavering, changeable, uncertain, and so on.

The task of the proletariat in relation to this class — or to these social elements — is to guide it, to strive to establish its influence over it. The proletariat must lead the vacillating and unstable along with it.

If we compare all the basic forces or classes and their interrelations, as changed by the dictatorship of the proletariat, we shall realize how unutterably absurd in terms of theory and how dull-witted is the common petty-bourgeois idea shared by all representatives of the Second International, that the transition to socialism is possible "by means of democracy" in general. The fundamental source of this error lies in the prejudice inherited from the bourgeoisie that "democracy" is something absolute and apart from classes. As a matter of fact, democracy too passes into an entirely new phase under the dictatorship of the proletariat, while the class struggle rises to a higher level and dominates over each and every form.

General talk about freedom, equality and democracy is in fact but a blind repetition of concepts which are only a cast from the relations of commodity production. To attempt to solve the concrete problems of the dictatorship of the proletariat by means of such general talk is to go over to the theories and principles of the bourgeoisie all along the line. From the point of view of the proletariat, the question can be put only in the following way: freedom from the oppression of which class? equality of which class with which? democracy based

on private property, or on a struggle for the abolition of private property? — and so forth.

Long ago Engels in his *Anti-Dühring* explained that the concept “equality,” being moulded from the relations of commodity production, turns into a prejudice if equality is not understood to mean the *abolition of classes*. This elementary truth regarding the distinction between the bourgeois democratic and the socialist conception of equality is constantly being forgotten. But if it is not forgotten, it becomes obvious that by overthrowing the bourgeoisie the proletariat takes the most decisive step towards the abolition of classes, and that in order to complete the process the proletariat must continue its class struggle, making use of the apparatus of state power and employing various methods of combating, influencing and acting upon the overthrown bourgeoisie and the vacillating petty bourgeoisie.

(To be continued)*

October 30, 1919

* The article was not completed. — *Ed.*

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