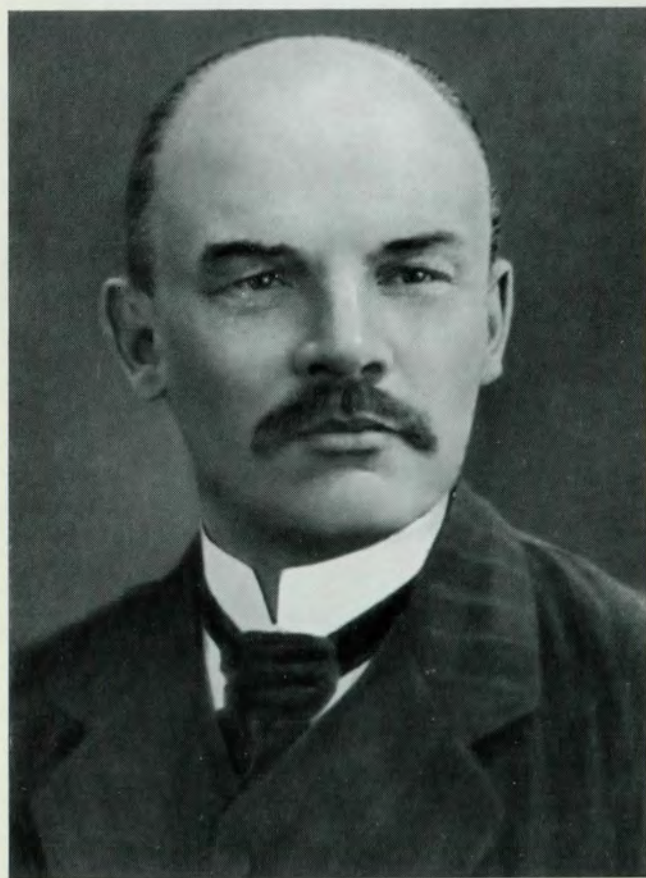


Lenin

REVOLUTIONARY ADVENTURISM



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Workers of All Countries, Unite!

V. I. Lenin

Revolutionary Adventurism

A Collection of Articles



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Revolutionary Adventurism¹

I

We are living in stormy times, when Russia's history is marching on with seven-league strides, and every year sometimes signifies more than decades of tranquillity. Results of the half-century of the post-Reform period² are being summed up, and the corner-stone is being laid for social and political edifices which will determine the fate of the entire country for many, many years to come. The revolutionary movement continues to grow with amazing rapidity—and "our trends" are ripening (and withering) uncommonly fast. Trends firmly rooted in the class system of such a rapidly developing capitalist country as Russia almost immediately reach their own level and feel their way to the classes they are related to. An example is the evolution of Mr. Struve, from whom the revolutionary workers proposed to "tear the mask" of a Marxist only one and a half years ago and who has now himself come forward without this mask as the leader (or servant?) of the liberal landlords, people who take pride in their earthiness and their sober judgement. On the other hand, trends expressing only the traditional instability of views held by the intermediate and indefinite sections of the intelligentsia try to substitute noisy declarations for rapprochement with definite classes, declarations which are all the noisier, the louder the thunder of events. "At least we make an infernal noise"—such is the slogan of many revolutionary-minded individuals who have been caught up in the maelstrom of events and who have neither theoretical principles nor social roots.

It is to these "noisy" trends that the "Socialist-Revolutionaries", whose physiognomy is emerging more and more clearly, also belong. And it is high time for the proletariat to have a better look at this physiognomy, and form a clear idea of the real nature of these people, who seek the prole-

tariat's friendship all the more persistently, the more palpable it becomes to them that they cannot exist as a separate trend without close ties with the truly revolutionary class of society.

Three circumstances have served most to disclose the true face of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. These are, first, the split between the revolutionary Social-Democrats and the opportunists, who are raising their heads under the banner of the "criticism of Marxism." Secondly, Balmashov's assassination of Sipyagin³ and the new swing towards terrorism in the sentiments of some revolutionaries. Thirdly and mainly, the latest movement among the peasantry, which has compelled such as are accustomed to sit between two stools and have no programme whatever to come out post factum with some semblance of a programme. We shall proceed to examine these three circumstances, with the reservation that in a newspaper article it is possible to give only a brief outline of the main points in the argument and that we shall in all likelihood return to the subject and expound it in greater detail in a magazine article, or in a pamphlet.

It was only in No. 2 of *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii*⁴ that the Socialist-Revolutionaries finally decided to come out with a theoretical statement of principle, in an unsigned editorial headed "The World Progress and Crisis of Socialism". We strongly recommend this article to all who want to get a clear idea of utter unprincipledness and vacillation in matters of theory (as well as of the art of concealing this behind a spate of rhetoric). The entire content of this highly noteworthy article may be expressed in a few words. Socialism has grown into a world force, socialism (=Marxism) is now splitting as a result of the war of the revolutionaries (the "orthodox") against the opportunists (the "critics"). We, Socialist-Revolutionaries, "of course" have never sympathised with opportunism, but we are overjoyed because of the "criticism" which has freed us from a dogma; we too are working for a revision of this dogma—and although we have as yet nothing at all to show by way of criticism (except bourgeois-opportunist criticism), although we have as yet revised absolutely nothing, it is nevertheless that freedom from theory which redounds to our credit. That redounds to our credit all the more because, as people free of theory, we stand firmly for general unity and vehemently condemn all

theoretical disputes over principles. "A serious revolutionary organisation," *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* (No. 2, p. 127) assures us in all seriousness, "would give up trying to settle disputed questions of social theory, which always lead to disunity, although this of course should not hinder theoreticians from seeking their solution"—or, more outspokenly: let the writers do the writing and the readers do the reading and in the meantime, while they are busying themselves, we will rejoice at the blank left behind.

There is no need, of course, to engage in a serious analysis of this theory of deviation from socialism (in the event of disputes proper). In our opinion, the crisis of socialism makes it incumbent upon any in the least serious socialists to devote redoubled attention to theory—to adopt more resolutely a strictly definite stand, to draw a sharper line of demarcation between themselves and wavering and unreliable elements. In the opinion of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, if such things as confusion and splits are possible "even among Germans," then it is God's will that we, Russians, should pride ourselves on our ignorance of whither we are drifting. In our opinion, the absence of theory deprives a revolutionary trend of the right to existence and inevitably condemns it, sooner or later, to political bankruptcy. In the opinion of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, the absence of theory is a most excellent thing, most favourable "for unity." As you see, we cannot reach agreement with them, for the fact of the matter is that we even speak different languages. There is one hope: perhaps they will be made to see reason by Mr. Struve, who also (only more seriously) speaks about the elimination of dogma and says that "our" business (as is the business of any bourgeoisie that appeals to the proletariat) is not to desunite, but to unite. Will not the Socialist-Revolutionaries ever see, with the help of Mr. Struve, what is *really signified* by their stand of liberation from socialism for the purpose of unity, and unity on the occasion of liberation from socialism?

Let us go over to the second point, the question of terrorism.

In their defence of terrorism, which the experience of the Russian revolutionary movement has so clearly proved to be ineffective, the Socialist-Revolutionaries are talking themselves blue in the face in asseverating that they

recognise terrorism only in conjunction with work among the masses, and that therefore the arguments used by the Russian Social-Democrats to refute the efficacy of this method of struggle (and which have indeed been refuted for a long time to come) do not apply to them. Here something very similar to their attitude towards "criticism" is repeating itself. We are not opportunists, cry the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and at the same time they are shelving the dogma of proletarian socialism, for reason of sheer opportunist criticism and no other. We are not repeating the terrorists' mistakes and are not diverting attention from work among the masses, the Socialist-Revolutionaries assure us, and at the same time enthusiastically recommend to the Party acts such as Balmashov's assassination of Sipyagin, although everyone knows and sees perfectly well that this act was in no way connected with the masses and, moreover, could not have been by reason of the very way in which it was carried out—that the persons who committed this terrorist act neither counted on nor hoped for any definite action or support on the part of the masses. In their naïveté, the Socialist-Revolutionaries do not realise that their predilection for terrorism is causally most intimately linked with the fact that, from the very outset, they have always kept, and still keep, aloof from the working-class movement, without even attempting to become a party of the revolutionary class which is waging its class struggle. Over-ardent protestations very often lead one to doubt and suspect the worth of whatever it is that requires such strong seasoning. Do not these protestations weary them?—I often think of these words, when I read assurances by the Socialist-Revolutionaries: "by terrorism we are not relegating work among the masses into the background." After all, these assurances come from the very people who have already drifted away from the Social-Democratic labour movement, which really rouses the masses; they come from people who are continuing to drift away from this movement, clutching at fragments of any kind of theory.

The leaflet issued by the "Party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries" on April 3, 1902, may serve as a splendid illustration of what has been stated above. It is a most realistic source, one that is very close to the immediate leaders, a most authentic source. The "presentation of the question of terrorist struggle" in this leaflet "coincides in full" also

"with the Party views," according to the valuable testimony of *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*⁵ (No. 7, p. 24).*

The April 3 leaflet follows the pattern of the terrorists' "latest" arguments with remarkable accuracy. The first thing that strikes the eye is the words: "we advocate terrorism, not in place of work among the masses, but precisely for and simultaneously with that work." They strike the eye particularly because these words are printed in letters three times as large as the rest of the text (a device that is of course repeated by *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*). It is all really so simple! One has only to set "not in place of, but together with" in bold type—and all the arguments of the Social-Democrats, all that history has taught, will fall to the ground. But just read the whole leaflet and you will see that the protestation in bold type takes the name of the masses in vain. The day "when the working people will emerge from the shadows" and "the mighty popular wave will shatter the iron gates to smithereens"—"alas!" (literally, "alas!") "is still a long way off, and it is frightful to think of the future toll of victims!" Do not these words "alas, still a long way off" reflect an utter failure to understand the mass movement and a lack of faith in it? Is not this argument meant as a deliberate sneer at the fact that the working people are already beginning to rise? And, finally, even if this trite argument were just as well-founded as it is actually stuff and nonsense, what would emerge from it in particularly bold relief would be the inefficacy of terrorism, for *without* the working people all bombs are powerless, patently powerless.

Just listen to what follows: "Every terrorist blow, as it were, takes away part of the strength of the autocracy and

* True, *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* does some juggling with this point as well. On the one hand—"coincides in full", on the other—a hint at "exaggerations". On the one hand, *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* declares that this leaflet comes from only "one group" of Socialist-Revolutionaries. On the other hand, it is a fact that the leaflet bears the imprint: "Published by the Socialist-Revolutionary Party". Moreover, it carries the motto of this same *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* ("By struggle you will achieve your rights"). We appreciate that *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* finds it disagreeable to touch on this ticklish point, but we believe that it is simply unseemly to play at hide-and-seek in such cases. The existence of "economism"⁶ was just as disagreeable to revolutionary Social-Democracy, but the latter exposed it openly, without ever making the slightest attempt to mislead anyone.

transfers (!) all this strength (!) to the side of the fighters for freedom." "And if terrorism is practised systematically (!), it is obvious that the scales of the balance will finally weigh down on our side." Yes, indeed, it is obvious to all that we have here in its grossest form one of the greatest prejudices of the terrorists: political assassination of itself "transfers strength"! Thus, on the one hand you have the theory of the transference of strength, and on the other—"not in place of, but together with".... Do not these protestations weary them?

But this is just the beginning. The real thing is yet to come. "Whom are we to strike down?" asks the party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and replies: the ministers, and not the tsar, for "the tsar will not allow matters to go to extremes" (!! How did they find that out?), and besides "it is also easier" (this is literally what they say!): "No minister can ensconce himself in a palace as in a fortress." And this argument concludes with the following piece of reasoning, which deserves to be immortalised as a model of the "theory" of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. "Against the crowd the autocracy has its soldiers; against the revolutionary organisations its secret and uniformed police; but what will save it..." (what kind of "it" is this? The autocracy? The author has unwittingly identified the autocracy with a target in the person of a minister whom it is easier to strike down!) "...from individuals or small groups that are ceaselessly, and even in ignorance of one another (!!), preparing for attack, and are attacking? No force will be of avail against elusiveness. Hence, our task is clear: to remove every one of the autocracy's brutal oppressors by the only means that has been left (!) us by the autocracy—death." No matter how many reams of paper the Socialist-Revolutionaries may fill with assurances that they are not relegating work among the masses into the background or disorganising it by their advocacy of terrorism—their spate of words cannot disprove the fact that the actual psychology of the modern terrorist is faithfully conveyed in the leaflet we have quoted. The theory of the transference of strength finds its natural complement in the theory of elusiveness, a theory which turns upside down, not only all past experience, but all common sense as well. That the only "hope" of the revolution is the "crowd"; that only a revolutionary organisation which leads this crowd

(in deed and not in word) can fight against the police—all this is ABC. It is shameful to have to prove this. And only people who have forgotten everything and learned absolutely nothing could have decided "the other way about," arriving at the fabulous, howling stupidity that the autocracy can be "saved" from the crowd by soldiers, and from the revolutionary organisations by the police, but that there is *no salvation* from individuals who hunt down ministers!!

This fabulous argument, which we are convinced is destined to become notorious, is by no means simply a curiosity. No, it is instructive because, through a sweeping reduction to an absurdity, it reveals the principal mistake of the terrorists, which they share with the "economists" (perhaps one might already say, with the former representatives of deceased "economism"?). This mistake, as we have already pointed out on numerous occasions, consists in the *failure to understand* the basic defect of our movement. Because of the extremely rapid growth of the movement, the leaders lagged behind the masses, the revolutionary organisations did not come up to the level of the revolutionary activity of the proletariat, were incapable of marching on in front and leading the masses. That a discrepancy of this sort exists cannot be doubted by any conscientious person who has even the slightest acquaintance with the movement. And if that is so, it is evident that the present-day terrorists are really "economists" turned inside out, going to the equally foolish but opposite extreme. At a time when the revolutionaries *are short of* the forces and means to lead the masses, who are already rising, an appeal to resort to such terrorist acts as the organisation of attempts on the lives of ministers by individuals and groups that are not known to one another means, not only *thereby* breaking off work among the masses, but also introducing downright disorganisation into that work.

We, revolutionaries, "are accustomed to huddling together in timid knots," we read in the April 3 leaflet, "and even [N.B.] the new, bold spirit that has appeared during the last two or three years has so far done more to raise the sentiments of the crowd than of individuals." These words unintentionally express much that is true. And it is this very truth that deals a smashing rebuff to the propagandists of terrorism. From this truth every thinking socialist draws the conclusion that it is necessary to use group action more ener-

getically, boldly, and harmoniously. The Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, conclude: "Shoot, elusive individual, for the knot of people, alas, is still a long way off, and besides there are soldiers against the knot." This really defies all reason, gentlemen!

Nor does the leaflet eschew the theory of excitative terrorism. "Each time a hero engages in single combat, this arouses in us all a spirit of struggle and courage," we are told. But we know from the past and see in the present that *only* new forms of the mass movement or the awakening of new sections of the masses to independent struggle really rouses a spirit of struggle and courage *in all*. Single combat however, inasmuch as it remains *single combat* waged by the Balmashovs, has the immediate effect of simply creating a short-lived sensation, while indirectly it even leads to apathy and passive waiting for the next *bout*. We are further assured that "every flash of terrorism lights up the mind," which, unfortunately, we have not noticed to be the case with the terrorism-preaching party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. We are presented with the theory of big work and petty work. "Let not those who have greater strength, greater opportunities and resolution rest content with petty (!) work; let them find and devote themselves to a big cause—the propaganda of terrorism among the masses (!), the preparation of the intricate. . . [the theory of elusiveness is already forgotten!]. . . terrorist ventures." How amazingly clever this is in all truth: to sacrifice the life of a revolutionary for the sake of wreaking vengeance on the scoundrel Sipyagin, who is then replaced by the scoundrel Plehve—that is big work. But to prepare, *for instance*, the masses for an armed demonstration—that is petty work. This very point is explained in No. 8 of *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*, which declares that "it is easy to write and speak" of armed demonstrations "as a matter of the vague and distant future," "but up till now all this talk has been merely of a theoretical nature." How well we know this language of people who are free of the constraint of firm socialist convictions, of the burdensome experience of each and every kind of popular movement! They confuse immediately tangible and sensational results with practicalness. To them the demand to adhere steadfastly to the class standpoint and to maintain the mass nature of the movement is "vague" "theorising." In their eyes defini-

tiveness is slavish compliance with every turn of sentiment and . . . and, by reason of this compliance, inevitable helplessness at each turn. Demonstrations begin—and blood-thirsty words, talk about the beginning of the end, flow from the lips of such people. The demonstrations halt—their hands drop helplessly, and before they have had time to wear out a pair of boots they are already shouting: "The people, alas, are still a long way off. . . ." Some new outrage is perpetrated by the tsar's henchmen—and they demand to be shown a "definite" measure that would serve as an exhaustive *reply* to that particular outrage, a measure that would bring about an immediate "transference of strength," and they proudly promise this transference! These people do not understand that this very promise to "transfer" strength constitutes political adventurism, and that their adventurism stems from their lack of principle.

The Social-Democrats will always warn against adventurism and ruthlessly expose illusions which inevitably end in complete disappointment. We must bear in mind that a revolutionary party is worthy of its name only when it guides *in deed* the movement of a revolutionary class. We must bear in mind that any popular movement assumes an infinite variety of forms, is constantly developing new forms and discarding the old, and effecting modifications or new combinations of old and new forms. It is our duty to participate actively in this process of working out means and methods of struggle. When the students' movement became sharper, we began to call on the workers to come to the aid of the students (*Iskra*, No. 2) ⁷ without taking it upon ourselves to forecast the forms of the demonstrations, without promising that they would result in an immediate transference of strength, in lighting up the mind, or a special elusiveness. When the demonstrations became consolidated, we began to call for their organisation and for the arming of the masses, and put forward the task of preparing a popular uprising. Without in the least denying violence and terrorism in principle, we demanded work for the preparation of such forms of violence as were calculated to bring about the direct participation of the masses and which guaranteed that participation. We do not close our eyes to the difficulties of this task, but will work at it steadfastly and persistently, undeterred by the objections that this is a matter of the "vague and dis-

tant future." Yes, gentlemen, we stand for future and not only past forms of the movement. We give preference to long and arduous work on what promises a future rather than to an "easy" repetition of what has been condemned by the past. We shall always expose people who in word war against hackneyed dogmas and in practice hold exclusively to such moth-eaten and harmful commonplaces as the theory of the transference of strength, the difference between big work and petty work and, of course, the theory of single combat. "Just as in the days of yore the peoples' battles were fought out by their leaders in single combat, so now the terrorists will win Russia's freedom in single combat with the autocracy," the April 3 leaflet concludes. The mere reprinting of *such* sentences provides their refutation.

Anyone who really carries on his revolutionary work in conjunction with the class struggle of the proletariat very well knows, sees and feels what vast numbers of immediate and direct demands of the proletariat (and of the sections of the people capable of supporting the latter) remain unsatisfied. He knows that in very many places, throughout vast areas, the working people are literally straining to go into action, and that their ardour runs to waste because of the scarcity of literature and leadership, the lack of forces and means in the revolutionary organisations. And we find ourselves—we see that we find ourselves—in the same old vicious circle that has so long hemmed in the Russian revolution like an omen of evil. On the one hand, the revolutionary ardour of the insufficiently enlightened and unorganised crowd runs to waste. On the other hand, shots fired by the "elusive individuals" who are losing faith in the possibility of marching in formation and working hand in hand with the masses also end in smoke.

But things can still be put to rights, comrades! Loss of faith in a real cause is the rare exception rather than the rule. The urge to commit terrorist acts is a passing mood. Then let the Social-Democrats close their ranks, and we shall fuse the militant organisation of revolutionaries and the mass heroism of the Russian proletariat into a single whole!

In the next article we shall deal with the agrarian programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

II

The Socialist-Revolutionaries' attitude to the peasant movement is of particular interest. It is precisely in the agrarian question that representatives of the old Russian socialism, their liberal-Narodnik descendants, and also adherents of opportunist criticism who are so numerous in Russia and so vociferously pass assurances that on this score Marxism has already been conclusively disproved by the "critics," have always considered themselves especially strong. Our Socialist-Revolutionaries too are tearing Marxism to shreds, so to speak: "dogmatic prejudices . . . outlived dogmas long since refuted by life . . . the revolutionary intelligentsia has shut its eyes to the countryside, revolutionary work among the peasantry was forbidden by orthodoxy," and much else in this vein. It is the current fashion to kick out at orthodoxy. But to what subspecies must one relegate those of the kickers who *did not* even *manage* to draw up an outline for an agrarian programme of their own *before the commencement* of the peasant movement? When *Iskra* sketched its agrarian programme as early as in No. 3, *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* could only mutter: "Given such a presentation of the question, still another of our differences is fading away"—what happened here is that the editors of *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* had the mishap of utterly failing to understand *Iskra's* presentation of the question (the "introduction of the class struggle into the countryside"). *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* now belatedly refers to the pamphlet entitled *The Next Question*, although it contains no programme whatever, but only panegyrics on such "celebrated" opportunists as Hertz.

And now these same people—who before the commencement of the movement were in agreement both with *Iskra* and with Hertz—come out, on the day following the peasant uprising, with a manifesto "from the peasant league (!) of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party," a manifesto in which you will not find a single syllable really emanating from the peasantry, but only a literal repetition of what you have read hundreds of times in the writings of the Narodniks,⁸ the liberals, and the "critics." . . . It is said that courage can move mountains. That is so, Messrs. the Socialist-Revolutionaries, but it is not to such courage that your garish advertisement testifies.

We have seen that the Socialist-Revolutionaries' greatest "advantage" lies in their freedom from theory; their greatest skill consists in their ability to speak without saying anything. But in order to present a programme, one must nevertheless say something. It is necessary, for instance, to throw overboard the "dogma of the Russian Social-Democrats of the late eighties and early nineties to the effect that there is no revolutionary force save the urban proletariat." What a handy little word "dogma" is! One need only slightly twist an opposing theory, cover up this twist with the bogey of "dogma"—and there you are!

Beginning with the *Communist Manifesto*, all modern socialism rests on the indisputable truth that the proletariat alone is a *really* revolutionary class in capitalist society. The other classes may and do become revolutionary only in part and only under certain conditions. What, then, must one think of people who have "transformed" this truth into a dogma of the Russian Social-Democrats of a definite period and who try to convince the naïve reader that this dogma was "based entirely on the belief that open political struggle lay far in the future"?

To counter Marx's doctrine that there is only one really revolutionary class in modern society, the Socialist-Revolutionaries advance the trinity: "the intelligentsia, the proletariat, and the peasantry," thereby revealing a hopeless confusion of concepts. If one sets the intelligentsia against the proletariat and the peasantry it means that one considers the former a definite social stratum, a group of persons occupying just as definite a social position as is occupied by the wage-workers and the peasants. But as such a stratum the Russian intelligentsia is precisely a bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. With regard to this stratum, Mr. Struve is quite right in calling his paper the mouthpiece of the Russian intelligentsia. However, if one is referring to those intellectuals who have *not yet taken* any definite social stand, or *have already been thrown off* their normal stand by the facts of life, and are passing over to the side of the proletariat, then it is altogether absurd to contrapose this intelligentsia to the proletariat. Like any other class in modern society, the proletariat is not only advancing intellectuals from its own midst, but also accepts into its ranks supporters from the midst of all and sundry educated people. The

campaign of the Socialist-Revolutionaries against the basic "dogma" of Marxism is merely additional proof that the entire strength of this party is represented by the handful of Russian intellectuals who have broken away from the old, but have not yet adhered to the new.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries' views on the peasantry are even more muddled. To take just the posing of the question: "What social classes in general (!) always (!!) cling to the existing... [the autocratic only? or bourgeois in general?]. . . order, guard it and do not yield to revolutionisation?" As a matter of fact, this question can be answered only by another question: what elements of the intelligentsia in general always cling to the existing chaos of ideas, guard it and do not yield to a definite socialist world outlook? But the Socialist-Revolutionaries want to give a serious answer to an insignificant question. To "these" classes they refer, first, the bourgeoisie, since its "interests have been satisfied." This old prejudice that the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie have already been satisfied to such a degree that we neither have nor can have bourgeois democracy in our country (cf. *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii*, No. 2, pp. 132-33) is now shared by the "economists" and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Again, won't Mr. Struve teach them some common sense?

Secondly, the Socialist-Revolutionaries include among these classes the "petty-bourgeois strata" "whose interests are individualistic, undefined as class interests, and do not lend themselves to formulation in a reformative or revolutionary socio-political programme." Whence this has come, the Lord alone knows. It is common knowledge that the petty bourgeoisie does not always and in general guard the existing order, but on the contrary often takes revolutionary action even against the bourgeoisie (specifically, when it joins the proletariat) and very often against absolutism, and that it almost always formulates programmes of social reform. Our author has simply come out with a "noisier" declaration against the petty bourgeoisie, in accordance with the "practical rule," which Turgenev expressed through an "old fox" in one of his "Poems in Prose": "Cry out most loudly against those vices you yourself feel guilty of."⁹ And so, *since* the Socialist-Revolutionaries feel that the only social basis of their position between two stools can be perhaps provided only by certain petty-bourgeois sections of the intelligentsia,

they *therefore* write about the petty bourgeoisie as if this term does not signify a social category, but is simply a polemical turn of speech. They likewise want to evade the unpleasant fact of their failure to understand that the peasantry of today belongs, as a whole, to the "petty-bourgeois strata." Won't you try to give us an answer on this score, Messrs. the Socialist-Revolutionaries? Won't you tell us why it is that, while repeating snatches of the theory of Russian Marxism (for example, about the progressive significance of peasant outside employment and tramping), you turn a blind eye to the fact that this same Marxism has revealed the petty-bourgeois make-up of Russian peasant economy? Won't you explain to us how it is possible in contemporary society for "proprietors or semi-proprietors" not to belong to the petty-bourgeois strata?

No, harbour no hopes! The Socialist-Revolutionaries will not reply; they will not say or explain anything bearing upon the matter, for they (again like the "economists") have thoroughly learned the tactic of pleading ignorance when it comes to theory. *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* looks meaningfully towards *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii*—that is their job, they say (cf. No. 4, reply to *Zarya*¹⁰), while *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* informs its readers of the exploits of the opportunist critics and keeps on threatening to make its criticism ever sharper. That is hardly enough, gentlemen!

The Socialist-Revolutionaries have kept themselves pure of the baneful influence of modern socialist doctrines. They have fully preserved the good old methods of vulgar socialism. We are confronted by a new historical fact, a new movement among a certain section of the people. They do not examine the condition of this section or set themselves the aim of explaining its movement by the nature of that section and its relation to the developing economic structure of society as a whole. To them, all this is an empty dogma, outlived orthodoxy. They do things more simply: what is it that the representatives of the rising section themselves are speaking about? Land, additional allotments, redistribution of the land. There it is in a nutshell. You have a "semi-socialist programme," "a thoroughly correct principle," "a bright idea," "an ideal which already lives in the peasant's mind in embryo form," etc. All that is necessary is to "brush up and elaborate this ideal," bring out the "pure idea of socialism."

You find this hard to believe, reader? It seems incredible to you that this Narodnik junk should again be dragged into the light of day by people who so glibly repeat whatever the latest book may tell them? And yet this is a fact, and all the words we have quoted are in the declaration "from the peasant league" published in No. 8 of *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries accuse *Iskra* of having prematurely tolled the knell of the peasant movement by describing it as the last peasant revolt. The peasantry, they inform us, can participate in the socialist movement of the proletariat as well. This accusation testifies to the confusion of thought among the Socialist-Revolutionaries. They have not even grasped that the democratic movement against the remnants of serf-ownership is one thing, and the socialist movement against the bourgeoisie is quite another. Since they have failed to understand the peasant movement itself, they have likewise been unable to understand that the words in *Iskra*, which frightened them so, refer only to the former movement. Not only has *Iskra* stated in its programme that the small producers (including the peasants), who are being ruined, can and should participate in the socialist movement of the proletariat, but it has also defined the exact conditions for this participation. The peasant movement of today, however, is not at all a socialist movement directed against the bourgeoisie and capitalism. On the contrary, it unites the bourgeois and the proletarian elements in the peasantry, which are really one in the struggle against the remnants of the serf-owning system. The peasant movement of today is leading—and will lead—to the establishment, not of a socialist or a semi-socialist way of life in the countryside, but of a bourgeois way of life, and will clear away the feudal debris cluttering up the bourgeois foundations that have already arisen in our countryside.

But all this is a sealed book to the Socialist-Revolutionaries. They even assure *Iskra* in all seriousness that to clear the way for the development of capitalism is an empty dogma, since the "reforms" (of the sixties) "did clear (!) full (!!) space for the development of capitalism." That is what can be written by a glib person who lets a facile pen run away with him and who imagines that the "peasant league" can get away with anything: the peasant won't see through it! But kindly reflect for a moment, my dear author: have you

never heard that remnants of the serf-owning system retard the development of capitalism? Don't you think that this is even all but tautological? And haven't you read somewhere about the remnants of serf-ownership in the present-day Russian countryside?

Iskra says that the impending revolution will be a bourgeois revolution. The Socialist-Revolutionaries object: it will be "primarily a political revolution and to a certain extent a democratic revolution." Won't the authors of this pretty objection try to explain this to us—does history know of any bourgeois revolution, or is such a bourgeois revolution conceivable, that is not "to a certain extent a democratic revolution"? Why, even the programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries themselves (equalitarian tenure of land that has become social property) does not go beyond the limits of a bourgeois programme, since the preservation of commodity production and toleration of private farming, even if it is conducted on common land, in no way eliminates capitalist relationships in agriculture.

The greater the levity with which the Socialist-Revolutionaries approach the most elementary truths of modern socialism, the more easily do they invent "most elementary deductions," even taking pride in the fact that their "programme reduces itself" to such. Let us then examine all three of their deductions, which most probably will long remain a monument to the keen wit and profound socialist convictions of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Deduction No. 1: "A large portion of the territory of Russia now already belongs to the state—what we need is that all the territory should belong to the people." Our teeth are "now already" on edge from the touching references to state ownership of land in Russia contained in the writings of the police Narodniks (*à la* Sazonov, etc.) and the various *Katheders*-reformers. "What we need" is that people who style themselves socialists and even revolutionaries should trail in the rear of these gentlemen. "What we need" is that socialists should lay stress on the alleged omnipotence of the "state" (forgetting even that a large share of the state land is concentrated in the uninhabited marginal regions of the country), and not on the class antagonism between the semi-serf peasantry and the privileged handful of big landowners, who own most of the best cultivated land and with whom the

"state" has always been on the best of terms. Our Socialist-Revolutionaries, who imagine that they are deducing a pure idea of socialism, are in actual fact sullyng this idea by their uncritical attitude towards the old Narodism.

Deduction No. 2: "The land is now already passing from capital to labour—what we need is that this process be completed by the state." The deeper you go into the forest, the thicker the trees.* Let us take another step towards police Narodism; let us call on the (class!) "state" to extend peasant landownership in general. This is remarkably socialistic and amazingly revolutionary. But what can one expect of people who call the purchase and lease of land by the peasants a transfer "from capital to labour" and not transfer of land from the feudal-minded landlords to the rural bourgeoisie. Let us remind these people at least of the statistics on the actual distribution of the land that is "passing to labour": between six- and nine-tenths of all peasant-purchased land, and from five- to eight-tenths of all leased land are concentrated in the hands of *one-fifth of the peasant households*, i.e., in the hands of a small minority of well-to-do peasants. From this one can judge whether there is much truth in the Socialist-Revolutionaries' words when they assert "we do not at all count" on the well-to-do peasants but only on the "labouring sections exclusively."

Deduction No. 3: "The peasant already has land, and in most cases uses it on the basis of equalitarian land distribution—what we need is that this labour tenure should be carried through to the end . . . and culminate in collective agricultural production through the development of co-operatives of every kind." Scratch a Socialist-Revolutionary and you find Mr. V. V.!¹¹ When it came to action, all the old prejudices of Narodism, which had safely preserved themselves behind shifty phrasing, crept to the surface at once. State ownership of the land—the completion by the state of the transference of the land to the peasantry—the village commune—co-operatives—collectivism—in this magnificent scheme of Messrs. Sazonov, Yuzov, N.—on, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Hofstetter, Totomians, and so on and so forth—in this scheme a mere trifle is lacking. It takes account neither of developing capitalism, nor of the class struggle. But

* A Russian saying.—Ed.

then how could this trifle enter the minds of people whose entire ideological luggage consists of Narodnik rags and smart patches of fashionable criticism? Did not Mr. Bulgakov *himself* say that there is no place for the class struggle in the countryside? Will the replacement of the class struggle by "co-operatives of every kind" fail to satisfy both the liberals and the "critics," and in general all those to whom socialism is no more than a traditional label? And is it not possible to try to soothe naïve people with the assurance: "Of course, any idealisation of the village commune is alien to us," although right next to this assurance you read some colossal bombast about the "colossal organisation of the *mir* peasants," then bombast that "in certain respects no other class in Russia is so impelled towards a purely (!) political struggle as the peasantry," that peasant self-determination (!) is far broader in scope and in competence than that of the Zemstvo,¹² that this combination of "broad" ... (up to the very boundary of the village?) ... "independent activity" with an absence of the "most elementary civic rights" "seems to have been deliberately designed for the purpose of ... rousing and exercising (!) political instincts and habits of social struggle." If you don't like all this, you don't have to listen, but...

"One has to be blind not to see how much easier it is to pass to the idea of socialising the land from the traditions of communal land tenure." Is it not the other way round, gentlemen? Are not those people hopelessly deaf and blind who to this very day do not know that it is precisely the medieval seclusion of the semi-serf commune, which splits the peasantry into tiny unions and binds the rural proletariat hand and foot, that maintains the traditions of stagnation, oppression, and barbarism? Are you not defeating your own purpose by recognising the usefulness of outside employment, which has already destroyed by three-quarters the much-vaunted traditions of equalitarian land tenure in the commune, and reduced these traditions to meddling by the police?

The minimum programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, based as it is on the theory we have just analysed, is a real curiosity. This "programme" includes two items: 1) "socialisation of the land, i.e., its conversion into the property of the whole of society, to be used by the working people";

2) "the development among the peasantry of all possible types of public associations and economic co-operatives... [for a "purely" political struggle?] ... for the gradual emancipation of the peasantry from the sway of money capital ... [and subjugation to industrial?] ... and for the preparation of collective agricultural production of the future." Just as the sun is reflected in a drop of water, so is the entire spirit of the present-day "Social-Revolutionarism" reflected in these two items. In theory, revolutionary phrase-mongering instead of a considered and integral system of views; in practice—helpless snatching at this or that modish petty expedient instead of participation in the class struggle—that is all they have to show. We must admit that it has required rare civic courage to place socialisation of the land *alongside* of co-operation in a *minimum* programme. Their minimum programme: Babeuf, on the one hand, and Mr. Levitsky, on the other. This is inimitable.

If it were possible to take this programme seriously, we should have to say that, in deceiving themselves with grandiloquent words, the Socialist-Revolutionaries are also deceiving the peasants. It is deception to assert that "co-operatives of every kind" play a revolutionary role in present-day society and prepare the way for collectivism rather than strengthen the rural bourgeoisie. It is deception to assert that socialisation of the land can be placed before the "*peasantry*" as a "minimum," as something just as close at hand as the establishment of co-operatives. Any socialist could explain to our Socialist-Revolutionaries that today the abolition of private ownership of land can only be the immediate prelude to its abolition in general; that the mere transfer of the land "to be used by the working people" would still not satisfy the proletariat, since millions and tens of millions of ruined peasants are no longer able to work the land, even if they had it. And to supply these ruined millions with implements, cattle, etc., would amount to the socialisation of all the means of production and would require a socialist revolution of the proletariat and not a peasant movement against the remnants of the serf-owning system. The Socialist-Revolutionaries are confusing socialisation of the land with bourgeois nationalisation of the land. Speaking in the abstract, the latter is conceivable on the basis of capitalism too, without abolishing wage-labour. But the very example of

these same Socialist-Revolutionaries is vivid confirmation of the truth that to advance the demand for nationalisation of the land in a police state is tantamount to obscuring the only revolutionary principle, that of the class struggle, and bringing grist to the mill of every kind of bureaucracy.

Not only that. The Socialist-Revolutionaries descend to outright reaction when they rise up against the demand of our draft programme for the "annulment of all laws restricting the peasant in the free disposal of his land." For the sake of the Narodnik prejudice about the "commune principle" and the "equalitarian principle" they deny to the peasant such a "most elementary civic right" as the right freely to dispose of his land; they complacently shut their eyes to the fact that the village commune of today is hemmed in by its social-estate reality; they become champions of the police interdictions established and supported by the "state" . . . of the rural superintendents! We believe that not only Mr. Levitsky but Mr. Pobedonostsev too will not be very much alarmed over the demand for socialisation of the land for the purpose of establishing equalitarian land tenure, once this demand is put forth as a minimum demand alongside of which such things figure as co-operatives and the defence of the police system of keeping the muzhik tied down to the official allotment which supports him.

Let the agrarian programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries serve as a lesson and a warning to all socialists, a glaring example of what results from an absence of ideology and principles, which some unthinking people call freedom from dogma. When it came to action, the Socialist-Revolutionaries did not reveal even a single of the three conditions essential for the elaboration of a consistent socialist programme: a clear idea of the ultimate aim; a correct understanding of the path leading to that aim; an accurate conception of the true state of affairs at the given moment or of the immediate tasks of that moment. They simply obscured the ultimate aim of socialism by confusing socialisation of the land with bourgeois nationalisation and by confusing the primitive peasant idea about small-scale equalitarian land tenure with the doctrine of modern socialism on the conversion of all means of production into public property and the organisation of socialist production. Their conception of the path leading to socialism is peerlessly characterised by their substitution

of the development of co-operatives for the class struggle. In their estimation of the present stage in the agrarian evolution of Russia, they have forgotten a trifle: the remnants of serf-ownership, which weigh so heavily on our countryside. The famous trinity which reflects their theoretical views—the intelligentsia, the proletariat, and the peasantry—has its complement in the no less famous three-point "programme"—socialisation of the land, co-operatives, and attachment to the allotment.

Compare this with *Iskra's* programme, which indicates to the entire militant proletariat one ultimate aim, without reducing it to a "minimum," without debasing it so as to adapt it to the ideas of certain backward sections of the proletariat or of the small producers. The road leading to this aim is the same in town and countryside—the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. But besides this class struggle, another struggle is going on in our countryside: the struggle of the entire peasantry against the remnants of serf-ownership. And in *this* struggle the party of the proletariat promises its support to the *entire* peasantry and strives to provide its revolutionary ardour with a real objective, and guide its uprising against its real enemy, considering it dishonest and unworthy to treat the muzhik as though he were under tutelage or to conceal from him the fact that at present and immediately he can achieve only the complete eradication of all traces and remnants of the serf-owning system, and only clear the way for the broader and more difficult struggle of the entire proletariat against the whole of bourgeois society.

Iskra No. 23, August 1,
and No. 24, September 1, 1902

Collected Works,
Vol. 6, pp. 186-207.

The Basic Thesis Against the Socialist-Revolutionaries

The basic thesis I am advancing against the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and for an appraisal of *all* aspects of the activities (and of the whole essence) of this trend is as follows: *the entire trend of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and their party as a whole, is nothing but an attempt by the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia at escamotage of our working-class movement, and, consequently, the whole of the socialist and the whole of the revolutionary movement in Russia.*

Let me explain at once why, in this thesis which is so important to me, I could not avoid employing a rare foreign word no doubt incomprehensible to most readers. Escamotage means deception, fraudulent appropriation of the results of the labour of others and thus rendering this labour useless, trickery, swindling, etc. It is not difficult to see why I had to reject these Russian words and choose a foreign word instead. The words "to trick, fool, deceive" are invariably associated in our minds with the idea of a deliberate, conscious lie—that in the first place, and in the second, with the idea of self-seeking, dishonest motives on the part of those who resort to this lie. Yet I am far from the idea of accusing the Socialist-Revolutionaries of anything resembling a conscious lie or dishonest motives. Nothing of the kind. I have no doubt that as a trend, as a "party," the Socialist-Revolutionaries could have originated (or could have survived since the days of the Narodnaya Volya¹³), that they could have grown and gained some strength of late, thanks *entirely* to the fact that they attracted people doubtlessly revolutionary-minded and even quite prepared for heroic self-sacrifice, people in all sincerity willing to lay down their lives in the interests of freedom and the interests of the people. But the fact that people adhere sincerely and by conviction to a certain social

and political stand does not in any way predetermine whether this stand is not absolutely false and internally contradictory. Would not the results of the best-intended activity based on this stand inevitably prove to be (even though unconsciously and against the will of those who conduct it) "escamotage" of the working-class movement, diverting it from the correct course, decoying it into an impasse, etc.?

I shall try to illustrate my idea by an example. Imagine that we are in a huge, dark, humid, and dense semi-virgin forest. Imagine that only by burning down this forest is it possible to prepare the way for the cultivation of the entire area covered by the forest or surrounded by it, and that it is extremely difficult to procure fire and to sustain it in this forest. It is necessary to dry the timber which is available everywhere in abundance but which catches fire with difficulty, the fire dying easily again and again in the oppressively humid atmosphere. It is necessary to get together the material to be set alight. It is necessary to maintain the fire (combustion), to protect it, to nurture every flash of fire, to let the flame grow, preparing systematically and stubbornly the general conflagration without which the damp and dark forest will not cease to be a forest. This work, however, is very difficult, not only because of the external, atmospheric, conditions, but also because of the great scarcity of the only suitable material which can burn, which cannot cease burning under any circumstances, which has really caught fire and is burning continuously, with a steady flame unlike the numerous flickering lights which lack intrinsic power and which in the past too so often flashed into being only to die out after burning for a short time. And now, when this basic inflammable material has begun to burn so well as to cause a general rise in the temperature, thereby lending strength and brightness to a mass of other, flickering little flames, people suddenly appear and declare with an overweening air: how narrow-minded one must be to believe in the antiquated dogma about the only basic, the only unquestionably reliable inflammable material! How stereotyped it is to consider all the other little flares merely as by-products, as auxiliary elements, and to think it absolutely necessary to cling first of all and most of all to this *one* material, at any cost! How one-sided it is to keep on endlessly preparing, preparing and preparing the real general conflagration and

to allow those outrageous scoundrels, the tree-tops, to shelter and maintain the dampness and gloom. What should be done is to fire flares which will knock down the tree-tops, singe them, frighten all the dark forces and produce such a sensation, such a stir, encouragement and excitation. And these people get to work briskly. With a sigh of relief they heave overboard the antiquated prejudices about some kind of basic inflammable material. With a calm conscience they accept into their ranks all and sundry, without inquiring into their views and opinions, convictions and aspirations: we are a party of action, and it does not matter to us even if some of us have adopted arguments which tend to extinguish the fire. They call boldly for an indiscriminating attitude towards all kinds of little flames and towards the firing of flares, brushing aside with contempt the lessons of the past; now, they say, there is a great deal more inflammable material, and therefore sheer light-mindedness is permissible! . . . And so, despite the harm people of this kind are causing to the movement, can it be thought that they are ordinary deceivers? Nothing of the kind! They are not deceivers at all, but simply pyrotechnists!

That, incidentally, is my answer to those Socialist-Revolutionaries who have simply interpreted the term "adventurer" as "swindler" (Mr. Rafailov in Geneva) or "rogue" (Mr. Zhitlovsky in Berne). Gentlemen, I told them, you should not necessarily interpret everything in terms of the criminal code! The adventurism of a revolutionary trend, an internally contradictory, unprincipled, unstable trend which conceals emptiness behind high-sounding promises and is therefore inevitably doomed to bankruptcy, should not be confused with the adventurism of rogues who know very well that they are committing punishable offences and that they are in danger of being exposed for swindling. We have accused you of adventurism, stating plainly and concretely (see Nos. 23 and 24 of *Iskra*) that it stems from your utter lack of principle in all the basic questions of international socialism, from the incredible muddle of views in your hastily concocted agrarian programme served out to the "consumer" under a savoury dressing, from the shakiness and groundlessness of your terrorist tactics. And you reply: look here, we are called adventurers, rogues, swindlers; we are offended, insulted! But these cries, esteemed gentlemen, seem very

much to imply that in essence you have nothing to object to.

It may now be asked: where is the proof of the correctness of my thesis? What distinguishing, characteristic features of the entire Socialist-Revolutionary trend should I demonstrate in order to justify the appraisal of the entire trend given in this thesis? If this appraisal is correct, then (it is to be hoped) there is no socialist in the least conscientious and serious who would deny the need for a determined and merciless war against this trend, for its harmfulness to be completely exposed to the widest possible sections of the people. And so, to be able to dig down to the essence of this question and analyse it from every aspect, I suggest that attention be directed mainly and primarily to what should constitute the *answers* to this question. Let those who wish to disprove the correctness of the appraisal not confine themselves to "complaints" or "amendments," but answer just as plainly: what are the points which *they* think require proof in order to corroborate the correctness of the thesis I advanced?

The central point of this thesis (escamotage of the working-class movement by the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia) is the fact of escamotage, or, in other words, the fundamental contradiction between the principles, the programme of the "party," and its actual attitude towards the process of revolutionising present-day society. The contradiction lies in the fact that in reality the party of "Socialist-Revolutionaries" does not at all adhere to the standpoint of scientific revolutionary socialism (=Marxism) in questions relating to either the international or the Russian working-class movement. In actual fact, the characteristic feature of this "party" is utter lack of principle in all most important fundamental questions of modern socialism.*

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* Here the manuscript breaks off.—Ed.

On the Tasks of the Social-Democratic Movement

When hypocritical flirting with both the working class and the "legal" opposition goes hand in hand with action on the part of a horde of infuriated scoundrels of the type of Val or Obolensky, it means that the government wants to corrupt and split up those masses and sections of the people which it is powerless to break, and in order to facilitate its task it wants to divert the revolutionary forces, small as their number is, to hunt down each of these scoundrels. It does not matter whether one representative or another of the government is aware of this in general, or how well he is aware of it. What matters is that the tactics to which the government is impelled by all its immense political experience and police instinct, *really* has this significance. When the revolutionary movement permeates the truly revolutionary classes of the people, moreover, when it grows in depth and extent, holding out the promise of developing soon into an invincible force, then the government finds it advantageous to provoke the best revolutionary forces to hunt after mediocre leaders of most outrageous violence. But we must not allow ourselves to be provoked. We must not lose our heads at the very first peals of really revolutionary thunder coming from the people, cast all caution to the winds, and, to ease mind and conscience, eschew all the experience of Europe and the experience of Russia, all more or less definite socialist convictions, all claims to fundamentally consistent, and not adventurist, tactics. In short, we must not allow realisation of an attempt to restore the Narodnaya Volya movement and to repeat all its theoretical and practical mistakes that the Socialist-Revolutionaries have undertaken and persist in furthering more and more. Our answer to efforts made to corrupt the masses and provoke the revolutionaries must not be given in a "programme" which would open the

door wide to the most harmful old mistakes and to new ideological waverings, or in tactics that would tend to deepen the isolation of the revolutionaries from the masses, which is the main source of our weakness and of our incapacity to start a determined struggle at once. We must answer by strengthening the contact between the revolutionaries and the people, and this contact can be established in our time only by developing and strengthening the Social-Democratic labour movement. Only the working-class movement rouses that truly revolutionary and advanced class which has nothing to lose from the collapse of the existing political and social order, the class which is the final and inevitable product of that order, the class which alone is the unquestionable and uncompromising enemy of that order. Only by relying upon the theory of revolutionary Marxism, upon the experience of international Social-Democracy, can we bring about the fusion of our revolutionary movement with the labour movement and create an invincible Social-Democratic movement. Only in the name of a real workers' party can we, without losing faith in our convictions, call on all the progressive elements in the country to join in revolutionary work, call on all working, all suffering and oppressed people to support socialism.

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New Events and Old Questions

To all appearances the brief "lull" which has marked our revolutionary movement for the past six to nine months, as distinguished from its previous rapid and stormy development, is drawing to a close. However brief this "lull" may have been, however obvious it has been to every careful and informed observer that the absence (for so short a time) of open manifestations of mass indignation among the workers by no means signifies a stop in the growth of this indignation both in depth and in extent, numerous voices have nevertheless been raised among our intelligentsia—who are revolutionary in spirit but frequently have neither firm ties with the working class nor a sound foundation of definite socialist convictions—expressing despondency and a lack of faith in the mass working-class movement, on the one hand, and, on the other, calling for a repetition of the old tactics of individual political assassinations as a necessary and obligatory method of political struggle at the present time. During the few months that have elapsed since the demonstrations of the previous season, a "party" of "Socialist-Revolutionaries" has had time to arise in our country, and has begun to declaim loudly that demonstrations have a discouraging effect, that "the people, alas, are still a long way off," and that it is easy, *of course*, to speak and write of arming the masses, but that now it is necessary to get down to "individual resistance" without trying to wriggle out of the urgent necessity of individual terror by obsolete references to one and the same old task (so dull and "uninteresting" to the intellectual who is free from "dogmatic" faith in the working-class movement!) of carrying on agitation among the proletarian masses and organising a mass onslaught.

But what at first sight seemed a most ordinary and "com-

mon place" strike suddenly broke out in Rostov-on-Don¹⁴ and led to events which manifestly demonstrated the utter stupidity and harmfulness of the Socialist-Revolutionaries' attempt to restore the Narodnaya Volya movement with all its theoretical and tactical mistakes. The strike, which involved many thousand of workers and began with demands of a purely economic nature, rapidly developed into a political event, despite the extreme dearth of organised revolutionary forces participating in it. Crowds of people which, according to some participants, numbered between twenty and thirty thousand, held astonishingly serious and well-organised political meetings where Social-Democratic leaflets were read and eagerly discussed, political speeches were delivered, the most casual and untrained representatives of the working people were told the elementary truths of socialism and the political struggle, and practical and "object" lessons were given on how to deal with the soldiers and how to appeal to them. The authorities and the police lost their heads (perhaps partly because the soldiers could not be relied on?) and for several days proved unable to interfere with the organising of open-air political mass gatherings, the like of which had never before been seen in Russia. When armed force was finally brought in, the crowd offered desperate resistance, and the murder of a comrade served as the occasion for a political demonstration at his funeral the following day.... The Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, most likely see the thing in a different light; from their standpoint it would perhaps have been "more expedient" if the six comrades murdered in Rostov had given their lives in an attempt on the lives of individual police tyrants.

We, however, are of the opinion that it is only such mass movements, in which mounting political consciousness and revolutionary activity are openly manifested to all by the working class, that deserve to be called *genuinely revolutionary* acts and are capable of really encouraging everyone who is fighting for the Russian revolution. What we see here is not the much-vaunted "individual resistance," whose only connection with the masses consists of verbal declarations, publication of sentences passed, etc. What we see is genuine resistance on the part of the crowd; and the lack of organisation, unpreparedness and spontaneity of this

resistance remind us how unwise it is to exaggerate our revolutionary forces and how criminal it is to neglect the task of steadily improving the organisation and preparedness of this crowd, which is waging an actual struggle before our very eyes. The only task worthy of a revolutionary is to learn to elaborate, utilise and make our own the material which Russian life furnishes in only too great sufficiency, rather than fire a few shots in order to create pretexts for stimulating the masses, and material for agitation and for political reflection. The Socialist-Revolutionaries cannot find enough praise of the great "agitational" effect of political assassinations, about which there is so much whispering both in the drawing-rooms of the liberals and in the taverns of the common people. It is nothing to them (since they are free of all narrow dogmas on anything even approximating a definite socialist theory!) to stage a political *sensation* as a substitute (or, at least, as a supplement) for the political education of the proletariat. We, however, consider that the *only* events that can have a real and serious "agitational" (stimulating), and not only stimulating but also (and this is far more important) educational, effect are events in which the masses themselves are the actors, events which are born of the sentiments of the masses and not staged "for a special purpose" by one organisation or another. We believe that even a hundred regicides can never produce so stimulating and educational an effect as this participation of tens of thousands of working people in meetings where their vital interests and the links between politics and these interests are discussed, and as this participation in a struggle, which really *rouses* ever new and "untapped" sections of the proletariat to greater political consciousness, to a broader revolutionary struggle. We are told of the disorganisation of the government (which has been obliged to replace Messrs. the Sipyagins by Messrs. the Plehves and to "select" the vilest scoundrels to serve it), but we are convinced that to *sacrifice* one revolutionary, even in exchange for ten scoundrels, means only disorganising our own ranks, which are thin as it is, so thin that they cannot keep up with all that is "demanded" of them by the workers. We believe that the government is truly disorganised when, and only when, the broad masses, genuinely organised by the struggle itself, plunge the government into

a state of confusion; when the legitimacy of the demands of the progressive elements of the working class becomes apparent to the crowd in the street and begins to be clear even to part of the troops called out for the purpose of "pacification"; when military action against tens of thousands of the people is preceded by wavering among the authorities, who have no way of really knowing what this military action will lead to; when the crowd see and feel that those who have fallen on the field of civil war are their comrades, a part of themselves, and are filled with new wrath and a desire to grapple more decisively with the enemy. Here it is no longer some scoundrel, but the existing system as a whole that comes out as the enemy of the people, against whom are arrayed the local and the St. Petersburg authorities, the police, the Cossacks, and the troops, to say nothing of the gendarmes and the courts which, as ever, supplement and complete the picture in every popular uprising.

Yes, uprising. However far the beginning of what seemed to be a strike movement in a remote provincial town was from a "genuine" uprising, its continuation and its finale nevertheless evoke involuntary thoughts of an uprising. The prosaic motive for the strike and the minor nature of the demands presented by the workers throw into particularly bold relief, not only the mighty power of the solidarity of the proletariat, which at once saw that the railway workers' struggle was the common cause of the proletarians, but also its receptiveness of political ideas and political propaganda, and its readiness to defend with might and main, in open battle with the troops, those rights to a free life and free development which all thinking workers have already come to consider common and elementary. And the Don Committee was a thousand times right when it declared in its proclamation, "To All Citizens," which we print in full elsewhere in this issue, that the Rostov strike was one of the steps towards a general upsurge among the Russian workers with the demand for political liberty. In events of this sort we really see with our own eyes how an armed uprising of the whole people against the autocratic government is maturing, not only as an idea in the minds and programmes of the revolutionaries, but also as the inevitable, natural and practical *next* step of the movement itself,

as the result of the growing indignation, growing experience, and growing boldness of the masses, who are being given such valuable lessons, such a splendid education by the realities of Russian life.

An inevitable and natural step, I have said—and I hasten to make the reservation: *if only* we do not permit ourselves to depart by a single step from the impending and pressing task of assisting these masses, who have already begun to rise, to act more boldly and concertedly; of giving them not a couple but dozens of open-air speakers and leaders; of creating a real, militant organisation capable of guiding the masses, and not a so-called “combat organisation” that guides elusive individuals (if it does guide them at all). That this is a difficult task goes without saying, but we can quite justifiably adapt Marx’s words which have so frequently and so ineptly been quoted of late, and say: “Every step of *real* movement is more important than a dozen” individual attempts and cases of resistance, more important than a hundred organisations and “parties”¹⁵ belonging only to the intelligentsia.

Besides the Rostov fighting, the penal sentences passed on demonstrators are outstanding among recent political events. The government has decided to use every possible method of intimidation, from floggings to penal servitude. And what a splendid reply it received from the workers, whose speeches in court we give below; how instructive this reply is to all those who were especially loud in their outcries about the discouraging effect of demonstrations, not because they wanted to encourage further work in this direction, but because they wanted to preach much-vaunted individual resistance! These speeches, coming as they do from the very thick of the proletariat, are excellent commentaries on events like those in Rostov, and, at the same time, they are remarkable statements (“public manifestations,” I would say if this were not so specifically police terminology), imbuing with boundless vigour the long and difficult work for the “real” steps of the movement. What is remarkable in these speeches is the simple, authentically precise description of how the most everyday facts, occurring in *scores and hundreds of millions*, of the “misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation” of the workers in present-day society lead to the awakening of their consciousness, to their growing

“revolt,” to a revolutionary expression of this revolt (I have put in quotation marks the words I *had* to use in describing the speeches of the Nizhni-Novgorod workers, for they are the famous words which Marx uses in the last pages of the first volume of *Capital*, and which evoked such clamorous and unsuccessful attempts on the part of the “critics”, opportunists, revisionists, etc., to refute the Social-Democrats and accuse them of not telling the truth).

For the very reason that these speeches came from ordinary workers by no means advanced in their development, workers who did not even speak as members of any particular organisation, but simply as men in the crowd, for the very reason that they stressed not their personal convictions but facts from the life of every proletarian or semi-proletarian in Russia, for that very reason their conclusions are so inspiring: “that is why we consciously went to the demonstration against the autocratic government.” The ordinariness and “mass character” of the facts from which they drew their conclusions are a guarantee that thousands, tens and hundreds of thousands, can and inevitably will come to the same conclusion, provided we prove capable of continuing, extending, and strengthening systematic, theoretically consistent, and all-round revolutionary (Social-Democratic) influence over them. We are ready to be condemned to penal servitude for fighting against political and economic slavery now that we have felt the breath of liberty, said four workers from Nizhni-Novgorod. And thousands of workers in Rostov, who for several days won for themselves the right to hold political gatherings, fighting off a series of attacks on the part of the soldiers against the unarmed crowd, repeated after them as it were: we are ready to face death.

By this sign shall ye conquer, is all that remains for us to say to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Iskra No. 29, December 1, 1902

Collected Works,
Vol. 6, pp. 278-283.

Notes

¹ In his article "Revolutionary Adventurism", written in July-August 1902, Lenin criticises the theory, tactics and agrarian programme of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

Socialist-Revolutionaries (S.R.s)—a petty-bourgeois party in Russia, which came into being at the end of 1901 and beginning of 1902 as a result of a merger of several Narodnik groups and circles. The Socialist-Revolutionaries did not appreciate the class distinctions between the proletarians and the small property-owners, they glossed over the class differences and contradictions within the peasantry and denied the proletariat's leading role in the revolution. Adventurism was the characteristic feature of their policy and individual terrorism was the principal method of their struggle against the autocracy.

The agrarian programme put forward by the S.R.s envisaged the abolition of private ownership of the land and its transfer to the village communes, the implementation of the "labour principle" and "egalitarian" land tenure as well as the development of all forms of co-operatives. The Socialist-Revolutionaries called these measures the "socialisation of land", but actually there was nothing socialist in their programme. At the same time Lenin admitted that the demand for egalitarian land tenure, although not genuinely socialist, was of a progressive revolutionary-democratic nature, since it was directed against reactionary landownership.

The Bolshevik Party exposed all attempts of the S.R.s to pass for socialists; it waged a persistent struggle against them in its drive to gain the decisive influence over the peasantry and denounced their tactics of individual terrorism as pernicious to the working-class movement. Yet, when the situation demanded, the Bolsheviks concluded temporary agreements with the S.R.s in the struggle against tsarism.

The political and ideological instability and organisational confusion in the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, its constant vacillation between the liberal bourgeoisie and the proletariat were due to the absence of class homogeneity in the peasantry. Following the defeat of the 1905-1907 Revolution a considerable section of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party together with its leaders switched to join the bourgeois liberals. During the First World War the majority of the S.R.s took up a social-chauvinist stand.

After the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in February 1917, Socialist-Revolutionary leaders joined the bourgeois Provisional Government. Their party no longer supported the peasants' demand for the abolition of landed estates and came out in support of the preservation of big landownership; the S.R. ministers of the Provisional Government issued orders to send punitive detachments against the peasants who had seized landed estates.

At the end of November 1917, the Left wing of the S.R. Party formed an independent party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. Striving to maintain their influence among the peasant masses, the Left

Socialist-Revolutionaries formally recognised Soviet power and entered into an agreement with the Bolsheviks, but soon launched a campaign against the Soviet Government.

During the years of foreign military intervention and civil war the S.R.s engaged in counter-revolutionary subversion; they gave their support to the whiteguard generals and interventionists, organised counter-revolutionary conspiracies and plots and sponsored terrorist acts against leaders of the Soviet State and the Communist Party. After the Civil War the S.R.s persisted in their struggle against Soviet power.

² This refers to the period following the abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861.

³ On April 2, 1902, the Socialist-Revolutionary Balmashov assassinated Minister of the Interior Sipyagin, in protest against severe government reprisals aimed at crushing the democratic movement. This was the first act of terror on the part of the S.R. "Militant Organisation".

⁴ *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii, Sotsialno-Politicheskoye Obozreniye* (Herald of the Russian Revolution. Socio-Political Review)—an illegal magazine published from 1901 to 1905. Beginning from issue No. 2 onwards it was the theoretical organ of the S.R. Party.

⁵ *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia)—an illegal paper published by the S. R. Party from 1901 to 1905.

⁶ *Economism*—an opportunist trend in Russia's Social-Democracy at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, a Russian variety of international opportunism. The Economists confined the tasks of the working-class movement to an economic struggle for higher wages, better working conditions, etc., asserting that the political struggle was the concern of the liberal bourgeoisie, thus denying the leading role of the working-class party. In their deference of the spontaneity in the working-class movement, the Economists belittled the importance of revolutionary theory and denied the need for the Marxist Party to instil socialist consciousness into the working-class movement, thereby throwing the door open for bourgeois ideology. The Economists stood for sporadic and amateurish work in the Social-Democratic movement and opposed the foundation of a united working-class party.

⁷ *Iskra* (Spark)—the first all-Russia illegal Marxist paper, founded by Lenin in December 1900; it was published abroad and secretly smuggled into Russia.

⁸ *Narodniks*, adherents of *Narodism*—an ideological and political trend that appeared in Russia in the seventies of the nineteenth century. The repudiation of the leading role of the working class in the revolutionary movement and the erroneous assertion that the small proprietor, the peasant, was capable of performing a socialist revolution and that the village commune, actually a survival of feudalism and serfdom in rural Russia, was a socialist nucleus, were among the distinctive characteristics of Narodnik philosophy. The Narodniks preached socialism that was utopian for they ignored

the actual course of social development, dealing in idle phrases, dream, and noble intentions. p. 15

⁹ This refers to one of Turgenev's *Poems in Prose*—"A Rule of Life." p. 17

¹⁰ *Zarya* (Dawn)—a Marxist scientific and political journal published in Stuttgart in 1901-02 by the *Iskra* Editorial Board. p. 18

¹¹ V. V. (pseudonym of Vorontsov, V. P.)—an ideologist of liberal Narodism in the eighties and nineties of the last century. p. 21

¹² *Zemstvo*—the name given to the local government bodies headed by the nobility. They were introduced in the central provinces of Russia in 1864. The *Zemstvos*' activities were confined to purely local economic problems (hospitals and road building, statistics and insurance); their activities were supervised by the provincial governors and the Ministry of the Interior, which could veto any decision disapproved of by the government. p. 22

¹³ The *Narodnaya Volya* group, *Narodovoltsy*—members of *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will)—a secret political organisation of Narodnik terrorists, which was founded in August 1879. While preaching Narodnik, utopian socialism, the adherents of the *Narodnaya Volya* organisation embarked on political struggle and advocated overthrowing the autocracy and achieving political liberty.

The *Narodovoltsy* engaged in a heroic struggle against the tsarist autocracy, but they proceeded from an erroneous theory of "active" heroes and "passive" crowd and hoped to effect social transformation without popular support, relying on their own resources and resorting to terroristic acts against individuals in an attempt to intimidate and disorganise the government. Soon after March 1, 1881 (when Alexander II was assassinated) the government stamped out the *Narodnaya Volya* organisation by means of provocation, persecution and executions. p. 26

¹⁴ This reference is to a strike in Rostov-on-Don, which lasted from November 2nd to 25th, 1902. p. 33

¹⁵ Lenin is referring to the following passage from Karl Marx's letter to Wilhelm Bracke, of May 5, 1875: "Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes." p. 36

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РЕВОЛЮЦИОННЫЙ АВАНТЮРИЗМ
на английском языке