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V. I. LENIN

**A GREAT
BEGINNING**

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!



W. H. H. H. H. H.

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*Heroism of the Workers in the Rear.
"Communist Subbotniks"*

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present English translation of *A Great Beginning* is reprinted from V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1952, Vol. II, Part 2. Some changes have been made after a check with the original Russian text in V. I. Lenin, *Works*, fourth edition, published in Moscow. The footnotes and notes at the end of the book are based on those in existing editions, both in English and Chinese.

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THE press reports many instances of the heroism of the Red Army men. In the fight against the Kolchakites, Denikinites and other forces of the landlords and capitalists, the workers and peasants very often display miracles of bravery and endurance, defending the gains of the socialist revolution. The overcoming of the guerrilla spirit, weariness and indiscipline is a slow and difficult process, but it is making headway in spite of everything. The heroism of the working people who are voluntarily making sacrifices for the cause of the victory of socialism — this is the foundation of the new, comradely discipline in the Red Army, the foundation on which it is regenerating, gaining strength and growing.

The heroism of the workers in the rear is no less worthy of attention. In this connection, the *communist subbotniks* organized by the workers on their own initiative are of enormous significance indeed. Evidently, this is only a beginning, but it is a beginning of unusually great importance. It is the beginning of a revolution that is more difficult, more substantial, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory over the habits that accursed capitalism left as a heritage to the

worker and peasant. Only when *this* victory is consolidated will the new social discipline, socialist discipline, be created; then and only then will a reversion to capitalism become impossible, will communism become really invincible.

Pravda in its issue of May 17 published an article by Comrade A. J. entitled: "Work in a Revolutionary Way (A Communist Saturday)." This article is so important that we reproduce it here in full.

"WORK IN A REVOLUTIONARY WAY (A Communist Saturday)

"The letter of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on working in a *revolutionary way* gave a powerful impetus to the Communist organizations and to the Communists. The general wave of enthusiasm carried many Communist railway workers to the front, but the majority of them could not leave their responsible posts or find new forms of working in a revolutionary way. Reports from the localities about the tardiness with which the work of mobilization was proceeding and the prevalence of red tape compelled the Moscow-Kazan Railway subdistrict to turn its attention to the way the railway was functioning. It transpired that owing to the shortage of labour and the inadequate intensity of work urgent orders and repairs to locomotives were being held up. At a meeting of Communists and sympathizers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway subdistrict held on May 7, the question was raised of passing from words to deeds in helping to achieve victory over Kolchak. The following resolution was moved:

"In view of the grave internal and external situation, the Communists and sympathizers, in order to gain the upper hand over the class enemy, must spur themselves on again and tear away an extra hour from their rest, i.e., lengthen their workday by one hour, accumulate these extra hours and put in six extra hours of manual labour on Saturday for the purpose of creating material values of immediate worth. Being of the opinion that Communists should not spare their health and life for the gains of the revolution, this work should be performed without pay. *Communist Saturdays* are to be introduced throughout the subdistrict and to continue until complete victory over Kolchak has been achieved."

"After some hesitation, the resolution was adopted unanimously.

"On Saturday, May 10, at 6 p.m., the Communists and sympathizers turned up to work like soldiers, formed ranks, and without fuss or bustle were taken by the foremen to their various jobs.

"The results of working in a *revolutionary way* are evident. The accompanying table gives the places of work and the character of the work performed.

"The total value of the work performed at ordinary rates of pay is 5,000,000 rubles; calculated at overtime rates it would be 50 per cent higher.

"The productivity of labour in loading cars was 270 per cent higher than that of regular workers. The productivity of labour on other jobs was approximately the same.

"Jobs (urgent) which had been held up for periods ranging from seven days to three months owing to the shortage of labour and to red tape were put through.

"The work was performed in spite of the state of disrepair (easily remedied) of accessories, as a result of which certain groups were held up from thirty to forty minutes.

"The administrative staff left in charge of the work could hardly keep pace with the men in finding new jobs for them, and perhaps it was only a slight exaggeration when an old foreman said that as much work was done at this *communist Saturday* as would have been done in a week by non-class-conscious and slack workers.

"In view of the fact that many people who were simply sincere supporters of the Soviet power also joined in the work, and that many more are expected on future Saturdays, and also in view of the fact that many other districts desire to follow the example of the Communist railway workers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway, I shall deal in greater detail with the organizational side of the matter as seen from reports received from the localities.

"Of those taking part in the work, some 10 per cent were Communists permanently employed in the localities. The rest were persons occupying responsible and elective posts, from the commissar of the railway to commissars of individual enterprises, representatives of the trade union, and employees of the head office and of the Commissariat for Railways.

"The enthusiasm and team spirit displayed during work were extraordinary. When the workers, clerks and head office employees, without even a curse-word or argument, caught hold of a forty-pood wheel tire of a passenger locomotive and, like industrious ants, rolled it into place, one's

Place of work	Character of work	Number of workers	Hours worked		Work performed
			Per person	Total	
Moscow. Main locomotive shops	Loading materials for the line, devices for repairing locomotives and carriage parts for Perovo, Murom, Alatyř and Syzran	48	5	240	Loaded 7,500 poods Unloaded 1,800 poods
		21	3	63	
		5	4	20	
Moscow. Passenger depot	Complex current repairs to locomotives	26	5	130	Repairs done on 1½ locomotives
Moscow. Shunting yards	Current repairs to locomotives	24	6	144	2 locomotives completed; parts to be repaired dismantled on 4 locomotives
Moscow. Carriage department	Current repairs to passenger carriages	12	6	72	2 third-class carriages
Perovo. Main carriage workshops	Carriage repairs and minor repairs on Saturday and Sunday	46	5	230	12 box carriages and 2 flat carriages
		23	5	115	
	<i>Total</i>	205	—	1,014	4 locomotives and 16 carriages turned out and 9,300 poods unloaded and loaded

heart was filled with fervent joy at the sight of this collective effort, one's conviction that the victory of the working class was unshakable was strengthened. The international bandits will not strangle the victorious workers; the internal saboteurs will not live to see Kolchak.

"When the work was finished those present witnessed an unprecedented scene: a hundred Communists, weary, but with the light of joy in their eyes, greeted their success with the solemn strains of the *Internationale*. And it seemed as if the triumphant strains of the triumphant anthem would sweep over the walls through the whole of working-class Moscow and that like the waves caused by a stone thrown into a pool they would spread through the whole of working-class Russia and shake up the weary and the slack.

"A.J."

Appraising this remarkable "example worthy of emulation," Comrade N. R. in an article in *Pravda* of May 20, under that heading, wrote:

"Cases of Communists working like this are not rare. I know of similar cases at an electric power station, and on various railways. On the Nikolayevsky Railway, the Communists worked overtime several nights to lift a locomotive that had fallen into the turntable pit. In the winter, all the Communists and sympathizers on the Northern Railway worked several Sundays clearing the track of snow; and the Communist Party cells at many freight stations patrol the stations at night to prevent the stealing of freights. But all this work was casual and unsystematic. The new thing introduced by the comrades on the Moscow-Kazan line is that they are making this work systematic and permanent. The Moscow-Kazan comrades say in their resolution, 'until complete victory over Kolchak has been achieved,' and therein lies the significance of their work. They are lengthening the working day of every Communist and sympathizer by one hour for the whole duration of the state of war; simultaneously, they are displaying exemplary productivity of labour.

"This example has called forth, and is bound to call forth, further emulation. A general meeting of the Communists and sympathizers on the Alexandrovsky Railway, after discussing the military situation and the resolution adopted by the comrades on the Moscow-Kazan Railway, resolved: 1) to introduce 'subbotniks' for the Communists and sympathizers on the Alexandrovsky Railway, the first subbotnik to take place on May 17; 2) to organize the Communists and sympathizers in exemplary, model

teams which must show the workers how to work and what can really be done with the present materials and tools and in the present food situation.

"The Moscow-Kazan comrades say that their example has made a great impression and that they expect a large number of *non-Party* workers to turn up next Saturday. At the time these lines are being written the Communists have not yet started working overtime in the Alexandrovsky railway workshops, but as soon as the rumour spread that they were to do so the masses of the non-Party workers were astir and said: 'We did not know yesterday, otherwise we would have got ready and worked too!' 'I will certainly come next Saturday,' can be heard on all sides. The impression created by work of this sort is very great.

"The example set by the Moscow-Kazan comrades should be emulated by all the Communist Party cells in the rear; not only the Communist Party cells in the Moscow Junction, but the whole Party organization in Russia. In the rural districts too, the Communist Party cells should in the first place set to work to till the fields of Red Army men and thus help their families.

"The comrades on the Moscow-Kazan line finished their first communist subbotnik by singing the *Internationale*. If the Communist organizations throughout Russia follow this example and steadfastly apply it, the Russian Soviet Republic will successfully weather the coming severe months to the mighty strains of the *Internationale* sung by all the working people of the republic. . . .

"To work, comrade Communists!"

On May 23, 1919, *Pravda* reported the following:

"The first communist 'subbotnik' on the Alexandrovsky Railway took place on May 17. In accordance with the resolution adopted by their general meeting, ninety-eight Communists and sympathizers worked five hours overtime without pay, receiving in return only the right to purchase a second dinner, and, as manual labourers, half a pound of bread to go with their dinner."

Although the work was poorly prepared and organized the *productivity of labour was nevertheless from two to three times higher than usual.*

Here are a few examples.

Five turners turned eighty spindles in four hours. The productivity is 213 per cent of the ordinary.

Twenty labourers in four hours collected scrap materials of a total weight of 600 poods, and 70 laminated car springs, each weighing 3½ poods, making a total of 850 poods. Productivity, 300 per cent of the ordinary.

"The comrades explain this by the fact that ordinarily their work is boring and tiresome, whereas here they worked with a will and with enthusiasm. Now, however, they will be ashamed to turn out less in regular working hours than they did at the communist subbotnik."

"Now many non-Party workers say that they would like to take part in the subbotniks. The locomotive crews volunteer to take locomotives from the 'cemetery,' repair them and set them going during a subbotnik.

"It is reported that similar subbotniks are to be organized on the Vyazma line."

How the work is done at these communist subbotniks is described by Comrade A. Dyachenko in an article in *Pravda* of June 7, entitled "Notes of a Subbotnik Worker." We quote the main passages from this article.

"It was with great joy that I and another comrade got ready to do our 'bit' in a subbotnik arranged by the decision of the railway subdistrict committee of the Party; for a time, for a few hours, I would give my head a rest and my muscles a bit of exercise. . . . We were told off to the railway carpenter shop. We got there, found a number of our people, said hello, joked for a while, counted up our forces and found that there were thirty of us. . . . And in front of us lay a 'monster,' a steam boiler weighing no less than six or seven hundred poods; our job was to 'shift' it, i.e., move it over a distance of a quarter or a third of a verst, to its base. Doubts crept into our minds. . . . However, we started on the job. Some comrades placed wooden rollers under the boiler, attached two ropes to it, and we began to tug away. . . . The boiler gave way reluctantly, but just the same it budged. We were delighted. After all, there were so few of us. . . . For nearly two weeks this boiler had resisted the efforts of thrice our number of non-Communist workers and nothing could make it budge until we tackled it. . . . We worked for an hour, strenuously, rhythmically, to the command of our 'gangboss' comrade — 'one, two, three,' and the boiler kept on rolling. Suddenly there was confusion, and a number of our comrades went tumbling onto the ground in the funniest fashion. The rope 'let them down'. . . . A moment's

delay, and a thicker rope was made fast. . . . Evening. It was getting dark, but we had yet to overcome a small hillock, and then our job would soon be done. Our arms ached, our palms burned, we were hot and pulled for all we were worth — and were making headway. The ‘manager’ stood round and somewhat shamed by our success, clutched at a rope. ‘Lend a hand, it’s time you did!’ A Red Army man was watching our labours; in his hands he held a concertina. What was he thinking? Who were these people? Why should they be working on Saturday when everybody was at home? I solved his riddle and said to him: ‘Comrade, play us a jolly tune. We are not casual labourers, we are real Communists. Don’t you see how fast the work is going under our hands? We are not loafing on the job, we are pulling for all we are worth!’ In response, the Red Army man carefully put his concertina on the ground and hastened to grab at a rope end. . . .

“Suddenly Comrade U. struck up the opening bars of *Dubinushka*. ‘*Anglichanin mudrets*,’ he sang in an excellent tenor voice and we all joined in the refrain of this labour chanty: ‘*Eb dubinushka, ukbnem, podyornem, podyornem*. . . .’

“Unaccustomed to the work, our muscles were weary, our shoulders, our backs ached . . . but tomorrow would be a free day, our day of rest, and we would be able to get all the sleep we wanted. The goal was near, and after a little hesitation our ‘monster’ rolled almost right up to the base. ‘Put some boards under, raise it on the base, and let the boiler do the work that has long been expected of it.’ We went off in a crowd to the ‘club room’ of the local Party cell. The room was brightly lit; the walls decorated with posters; rifles stacked around the room. After lustily singing the *Internationale* we enjoyed a glass of tea and ‘rum,’ and even bread. This treat, given us by the local comrades, was very welcome after our arduous toil. We took a brotherly farewell of our comrades and lined up. The strains of revolutionary songs echoed through the slumbering streets in the silence of the night and our measured tread kept time with the music. We sang ‘Comrades, the Bugles Are Sounding,’ ‘Arise Ye Prisoners of Starvation’ and other songs of the International and of labour.

“A week passed. Our arms and shoulders were rested and we were going to another ‘subbotnik,’ nine versts away this time, to repair railway cars. Our destination was Perovo. The comrades climbed on the roof of an ‘American’ box car and sang the *Internationale* well and with gusto. The people on the train listened to the singing, evidently in surprise. The wheels knocked a measured beat, and those of us who failed to get onto the roof clung to the ladder leading to the roof pretending to be ‘devil-

may-care’ passengers. The train pulled in! We had reached our destination. We passed through a long yard and were warmly greeted by the commissar, Comrade G.

“‘There is plenty of work, but few to do it! Only thirty of you and in six hours we have to do medium repairs to a baker’s dozen of cars! Here are twin-wheels already marked. We have not only empty cars, but also a filled cistern. . . . But that’s nothing, we’ll “make do,” comrades!’

“Work went with a swing. Five comrades and I were working with crowbars. Under pressure of our shoulders and two crowbars, and directed by our ‘gangboss’ comrade, these twin-wheels, weighing from sixty to seventy poods apiece, skipped from one track to another in the liveliest possible manner. One pair disappeared, another rolled into place. At last all were in their assigned places, and swiftly we shifted the old worn-out junk into a shed. . . . One, two, three — and, raised by a revolving iron hoist, they were no longer on the rails. Over there, in the dark, we heard the rapid strokes of hammers; the comrades, like worker bees, were busy on their ‘sick’ cars. Some were carpentering, others painting, still others were covering roofs, to the joy of our comrade commissar and our own. The smiths also asked for our aid. In a portable smithy a rod with coupling hook was gleaming white-hot; it had been bent owing to careless shunting. It was laid on the anvil, scattering white sparks, and, under the experienced direction of the smith, our trusty hammers beat it back into its proper shape. Still red-hot and spitting sparks, we rushed it on our shoulders to where it had to go. We pushed it into its socket. A few hammer strokes and it was fixed. We crawled under the car. The coupling system is not as simple as it looks; there are all sorts of contraptions with rivets and springs. . . .

“Work was in full swing. Night was falling. The torches seemed to burn brighter than before. Soon it would be time to knock off. Some of the comrades were taking a ‘lean up’ against some tires and ‘sucking at’ hot tea. The May night was cool, and the new moon shone, like a beautiful sickle in the sky. Jokes, laughter, hearty humour.

“‘Knock off, Comrade G., thirteen cars are enough!’

“But Comrade G. was not satisfied.

“We finished our tea, broke into our songs of triumph, and marched to the door. . . .”

The movement of “communist subbotniks” is not confined to Moscow. *Pravda* of June 6 reported the following:

"The first communist subbotnik in Tver took place on May 31. One hundred and twenty-eight Communists worked on the railway. In three and a half hours they loaded and unloaded fourteen cars, repaired three locomotives, cut up ten sages of firewood and performed other work. The productivity of labour of the skilled Communist workers was thirteen times above the ordinary."

Again, on June 8 we read in *Pravda*:

"COMMUNIST SUBBOTNIKS

"*Saratov*, June 5. In response to the appeal of their Moscow comrades, the Communist railway workers here at a general Party meeting resolved: to work five hours overtime on Saturdays without pay in order to support the national economy."

* * *

I have given the information about the communist subbotniks in the fullest and most detailed manner because in this we undoubtedly observe one of the most important aspects of communist construction, to which our press pays insufficient attention, and which all of us have as yet failed sufficiently to appreciate.

Less political fireworks and more attention to the simplest but living facts of communist construction, taken from and tested by actual life — this is the slogan which all of us, our writers, agitators, propagandists, organizers and so on, should repeat unceasingly.

It was natural and inevitable in the first period after the proletarian revolution that we should be engaged primarily on the main and fundamental task of overcoming the resistance of the bourgeoisie, of vanquishing the exploiters, of crushing their conspiracy (like the "slave-owners' conspiracy" to surrender Petrograd,¹ in which all from the Black Hundreds and Cadets² to the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries³ were involved). But simultaneously with this task, another

task comes to the forefront just as inevitably and ever more imperatively as time goes on, namely, the more important task of positive communist construction, the creation of new economic relations, of a new society.

As I have had occasion to point out more than once, and specifically in the speech I delivered at the meeting of the Petrograd Soviet on March 12, the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only the use of force against the exploiters, and not even mainly the use of force. The economic foundation of this revolutionary force, the guarantee of its effectiveness and success is the fact that the proletariat represents and gives effect to a higher type of social organization of labour compared with capitalism. This is the essence. This is the source of the strength of communism and the guarantee of its inevitable complete triumph.

The feudal organization of social labour rested on the discipline of the bludgeon, while the working people, robbed and tyrannized over by a handful of landlords, were utterly ignorant and downtrodden. The capitalist organization of social labour rested on the discipline of hunger; and, notwithstanding all the progress of bourgeois culture and bourgeois democracy, the vast mass of the working people in the most advanced, civilized and democratic republics remained an ignorant and downtrodden mass of wage slaves, or oppressed peasants, robbed and tyrannized over by a handful of capitalists. The communist organization of social labour, the first step towards which is socialism, rests, and will do so more and more as time goes on, on the free and conscious discipline of the working people themselves who have thrown off the yoke both of the landlords and of the capitalists.

This new discipline does not drop from the skies, nor is it born from pious wishes; it grows out of the material con-

ditions of large-scale capitalist production, and out of them alone. Without them it is impossible. And the repository, or the vehicle, of these material conditions is a definite historical class, created, organized, united, trained, educated and hardened by large-scale capitalism. This class is the proletariat.

If we translate the Latin, scientific, historical-philosophical term "dictatorship of the proletariat" into simpler language, it means just the following:

Only a definite class, namely, the urban workers and the factory, industrial workers in general, is able to lead the whole mass of the working and exploited people in the struggle for the overthrow of the yoke of capital, in the process of this overthrow, in the struggle to maintain and consolidate the victory, in the work of creating the new, socialist social system and in the whole struggle for the complete abolition of classes. (Let us observe in parenthesis that the only scientific distinction between socialism and communism is that the first term implies the first stage of the new society arising out of capitalism, while the second implies the next and higher stage.)

The mistake the "Berne" yellow International⁴ makes is that its leaders accept the class struggle and the leading role of the proletariat only in word and are afraid to think it out to its logical conclusion. They are afraid precisely of that inevitable conclusion which particularly terrifies the bourgeoisie, and which is absolutely unacceptable to it. They are afraid to admit that the dictatorship of the proletariat is *also* a period of class struggle, which is inevitable as long as classes have not been abolished, and which changes in form, being particularly fierce and particularly peculiar in the period immediately following the overthrow of capital. The proletariat does not cease the class struggle after it has cap-

tured political power, but continues it until classes are abolished — of course under different circumstances, in different form and by different means.

And what does the "abolition of classes" mean? All those who call themselves socialists recognize this as the ultimate goal of socialism, but by no means all ponder over its significance. Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labour, and, consequently, by the mode of acquisition and the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.

Clearly, in order to abolish classes completely, it is not enough to overthrow the exploiters, the landlords and capitalists, not enough to abolish *their* rights of ownership; it is necessary also to abolish *all* private ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to abolish the distinction between town and country, as well as the distinction between manual workers and brain workers. This requires a very long period of time. In order to achieve this an enormous step forward must be taken in developing the productive forces; it is necessary to overcome the resistance (frequently passive, which is particularly stubborn and particularly difficult to overcome) of the numerous survivals of small production; it is necessary to overcome the enormous force of habit and conservatism which are connected with these survivals.

The assumption that all "working people" are equally capable of doing this work would be an empty phrase, or the

illusion of an antediluvian, pre-Marxist socialist; for this ability does not come of itself, but grows historically, and grows *only* out of the material conditions of large-scale capitalist production. This ability, at the beginning of the road from capitalism to socialism, is possessed by the proletariat *alone*. It is capable of fulfilling the gigantic task that confronts it, first, because it is the strongest and most advanced class in civilized societies; secondly, because in the most developed countries it constitutes the majority of the population, and thirdly, because in backward capitalist countries, like Russia, the majority of the population consists of semi-proletarians, i.e., of people who regularly live in a proletarian way part of the year, who regularly earn a part of their means of subsistence as wage-workers in capitalist enterprises.

Those who try to solve the problems involved in the transition from capitalism to socialism on the basis of general talk about liberty, equality, democracy in general, equality of labour democracy, etc. (as Kautsky, Martov and other heroes of the Berne yellow International do), thereby only reveal their petty-bourgeois, philistine nature and ideologically slavishly follow in the wake of the bourgeoisie. The correct solution of this problem can be acquired only by concrete study of the specific relations between the specific class which has conquered political power, namely, the proletariat, and the whole non-proletarian, and also semi-proletarian, mass of the toiling population — relations which do not take shape in fantastically harmonious, “ideal” conditions, but in the real conditions of the frantic resistance of the bourgeoisie which assumes many and diverse forms.

The vast majority of the population — and all the more so of the toiling population — of any capitalist country, including Russia, have thousands of times experienced, them-

selves and through their kith and kin, the oppression, the robbery and every sort of outrage and insult perpetrated by capital. The imperialist war, i.e., the slaughter of ten million people in order to decide whether British or German capital was to have supremacy in plundering the whole world, intensified, increased and deepened these ordeals exceedingly, and made the people realize their meaning. Hence the inevitable sympathy displayed by the vast majority of the population, particularly the working masses, for the proletariat, because it is, with heroic courage and revolutionary ruthlessness, overthrowing the yoke of capital, overthrowing the exploiters, suppressing their resistance, and shedding its blood to pave the road for the creation of the new society, in which there will be no room for exploiters.

Great and inevitable as may be their petty-bourgeois waverings and vacillations back to bourgeois “order,” under the “wing” of the bourgeoisie, the non-proletarian and semi-proletarian mass of the toiling population cannot but recognize the moral and political authority of the proletariat, which is not only overthrowing the exploiters and suppressing their resistance, but is building a new and higher social bond, a social discipline, the discipline of class-conscious and united working people, who know no yoke and no authority except the authority of their own unity, of their own, more class-conscious, bold, solid, revolutionary and steadfast vanguard.

In order to achieve victory, in order to build and consolidate socialism, the proletariat must fulfil a two-fold or dual task: first, it must, by its supreme heroism in the revolutionary struggle against capital, win over the entire mass of the working and exploited people; it must win them over, organize them and lead them in the struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie and utterly suppress its resistance, of whatever

kind. Secondly, it must lead the whole mass of the working and exploited people, as well as all the petty-bourgeois strata, onto the road of new economic construction, onto the road to the creation of a new social bond, a new labour discipline, a new organization of labour, which will combine the last word in science and capitalist technology with the mass association of class-conscious workers creating large-scale socialist production.

The second task is more difficult than the first, for it cannot possibly be fulfilled by single acts of heroic fervour; it requires the most prolonged, most persistent and most difficult mass heroism in *plain, everyday* work. But this task is more essential than the first, because, in the last analysis, the deepest source of strength for victories over the bourgeoisie and the sole guarantee of the durability and permanence of these victories can only be a new and higher mode of social production, the substitution of large-scale socialist production for capitalist and petty-bourgeois production.

* * *

“Communist subbotniks” are of such enormous historic significance precisely because they demonstrate the conscious and voluntary initiative of the workers in developing productivity of labour, in adopting a new labour discipline, in creating socialist conditions of economy and life.

J. Jacoby, one of the few, in fact, it would be more correct to say one of the exceptionally rare, German bourgeois democrats who, after the lessons of 1870-71, went over not to chauvinism or national-liberalism, but to socialism, once said that the formation of a single trade union was of greater historical importance than the battle of Sadowa.⁵ This is true. The battle of Sadowa decided the supremacy of one of two

bourgeois monarchies, the Austrian or the Prussian, in creating a German national capitalist state. The formation of one trade union was a small step towards the world victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie. And we may similarly say that the first communist subbotnik, organized by the workers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway in Moscow on May 10, 1919, was of greater historical significance than any of the victories of Hindenburg, or of Foch and the British, in the imperialist war of 1914-18. The victories of the imperialists mean the slaughter of millions of workers for the sake of the profits of the Anglo-American and French billionaires, the brutality of doomed capitalism, which is bloated with glutony and is rotting alive. The communist subbotnik organized by the workers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway is one of the cells of the new, socialist society, which brings to all the peoples of the earth emancipation from the yoke of capital and from wars.

Messieurs the bourgeois and their hangers-on, including the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who are wont to regard themselves as the representatives of “public opinion,” naturally jeer at the hopes of the Communists, call them “a baobab tree in a mignonette pot,” sneer at the insignificance of the number of subbotniks compared with the vast number of cases of thieving, idleness, decline in productivity, spoilage of raw materials and finished goods, etc. Our reply to these gentry is: If the bourgeois intellectuals had dedicated their knowledge to assisting the working people instead of giving it to the Russian and foreign capitalists in order to restore their power, the revolution would have proceeded more rapidly and more peacefully. But this is utopian, for the issue is decided by the struggle of classes, and the majority of the intellectuals gravitate towards the bourgeoisie. Not with the

assistance of the intellectuals will the proletariat achieve victory, but in spite of their opposition (at least in the majority of cases), removing those of them who are incorrigibly bourgeois, reforming, re-educating and subordinating the waverers, and gradually winning ever larger sections of them to its side. Gloating over the difficulties and setbacks of the revolution, sowing panic, preaching a return to the past — these are all weapons and methods of class struggle of the bourgeois intellectuals. The proletariat will not allow itself to be deceived by them.

But if we take the matter in its essence, has it ever happened in history that a new mode of production took root immediately, without a long succession of setbacks, blunders and relapses? Half a century after the abolition of serfdom there were still quite a number of survivals of serfdom in the Russian countryside. Half a century after the abolition of slavery in America the position of the Negroes was still very often one of semi-slavery. The bourgeois intellectuals, including the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, are true to themselves in serving capital and in continuing to use utterly false arguments: before the proletarian revolution they accused us of being utopian; after the revolution they demand that we wipe out all traces of the past with fantastic rapidity!

But we are not utopians and we know what bourgeois “arguments” really amount to; we also know that for some time after the revolution traces of the old ethics will inevitably predominate over the young shoots of the new. When the new has just been born the old always remains stronger than it for some time; this is always the case in nature and in social life. Jeers at the feebleness of the young shoots of the new order, cheap scepticism of the intellectuals and the like — these are, essentially, methods of class struggle of the

bourgeoisie against the proletariat, a defence of capitalism against socialism. We must carefully study the new shoots, we must devote the greatest attention to them, do everything to promote their growth and “nurse” these feeble shoots. Some of them will inevitably perish. We cannot vouch that precisely the “communist subbotniks” will play a particularly important role. But that is not the point. The point is to foster each and every shoot of the new; and life will select the most viable. If the Japanese scientist, in order to help mankind vanquish syphilis, had the patience to test six hundred and five preparations before he developed a six hundred and sixth which met definite requirements, then those who want to solve a more difficult problem, namely, to vanquish capitalism, must have the perseverance to try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them.

The “communist subbotniks” are so important because they were initiated by workers who were by no means placed in exceptionally good conditions, by workers of various specialities, and some with no speciality at all, just unskilled labourers, who are living under *ordinary*, i.e., *exceedingly hard*, conditions. We all know very well the main cause of the decline in the productivity of labour that is to be observed not only in Russia, but all over the world: it is ruin and impoverishment, embitterment and weariness caused by the imperialist war, sickness and malnutrition. The latter is first in importance. Starvation — that is the cause. And in order to do away with starvation, the productivity of labour must be raised in agriculture, in transport and in industry. Thus we get a sort of vicious circle: in order to raise the productivity of labour we must save ourselves from starvation, and in

order to save ourselves from starvation we must raise the productivity of labour.

We know that in practice such contradictions are solved by breaking the vicious circle, by a radical change in the mood of the masses, by the heroic initiative of individual groups which, against the background of such a radical change, often plays a decisive role. The unskilled labourers and railway workers of Moscow (of course, we have in mind the majority of them, and not a handful of profiteers, officials and other Whiteguards) are working people who are living in desperately hard conditions. They are constantly underfed, and now, before the new harvest is gathered, with the general worsening of the food situation, they are actually starving. And yet these starving workers, surrounded by the malicious counter-revolutionary agitation of the bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, are organizing "communist subbotniks," working overtime *without any pay*, and achieving *an enormous increase in the productivity of labour* in spite of the fact that they are weary, tormented, and exhausted from malnutrition. Is this not supreme heroism? Is this not the beginning of a change significant in world history?

In the last analysis, productivity of labour is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new social system. Capitalism created a productivity of labour unknown under serfdom. Capitalism can be utterly vanquished, and will be utterly vanquished, by the fact that socialism creates a new and much higher productivity of labour. This is a very difficult matter and must take a long time; but *it has been started*, and that is the main thing. If in starving Moscow, in the summer of 1919, the starving workers who had gone through four trying years of imperialist war and another year

and a half of still more trying civil war could start this great work, how will it develop later when we triumph in the civil war and win peace?

Communism is the higher productivity of labour — compared with that existing under capitalism — of voluntary, class-conscious and united workers employing advanced technique. Communist subbotniks are extraordinarily valuable as the *actual* beginning of *communism*; and this is a very rare thing, because we are in a stage when "only the *first steps* in the transition from capitalism to communism are being taken" (as our Party programme quite rightly says).

Communism begins when the *rank-and-file workers* begin to display a self-sacrificing concern that is undaunted by arduous toil for increasing the productivity of labour, for husbanding *every pood of grain, coal, iron* and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their "close" kith and kin, but to their "distant" kith and kin, i.e., to society as a whole, to tens and hundreds of millions of people united first in one socialist state, and then in a union of Soviet republics.

In *Capital*, Karl Marx ridicules the pompous and grandiloquent bourgeois-democratic great charter of liberty and the rights of man, ridicules all this phrase-mongering about liberty, equality and fraternity *in general*, which dazzles the petty bourgeois and philistines of all countries, including the present despicable heroes of the despicable Berne International. Marx contrasts these pompous declarations of rights to the plain, modest, practical, simple manner in which the question is presented by the proletariat: the shortening of the working day by state action is a typical example of such pres-

entation.⁶ The aptness and profundity of Marx's observation become the clearer and more obvious to us the more the content of the proletarian revolution unfolds. The "formulas" of genuine communism differ from the pompous, intricate and solemn phraseology of the Kautskys, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their beloved "brethren" of Berne in that they reduce everything to the *conditions of labour*. Less chatter about "labour democracy," about "liberty, equality and fraternity," about "government by the people," and all such stuff; the class-conscious workers and peasants of our day see the trickery of the bourgeois intellectual through these pompous phrases as easily as a person of ordinary common sense and experience, when glancing at the irreproachably "polished" features and immaculate appearance of the "fine gentleman," immediately and unerringly puts him down as, "in all probability, a scoundrel."

Fewer pompous phrases, more plain, *everyday* work, concern for the pood of grain and the pood of coal! More concern for supplying this pood of grain and pood of coal needed by the hungry workers and ragged and bare-footed peasants, *not* by means of *buckstering*, not in a capitalist manner, but by means of the conscious, voluntary, boundlessly heroic labour of plain working men like the unskilled labourers and workers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway.

We must all admit that traces of the bourgeois-intellectual phrase-mongering approach to questions of the revolution are observed at every step, everywhere, even in our own ranks. Our press, for example, does little to fight against these putrid survivals of the putrid, bourgeois-democratic past; it does little to foster the simple, modest, commonplace but vital shoots of genuine communism.

Take the position of women. In this sphere, not a single democratic party in the world, not even in the most advanced bourgeois republic, has done in decades a hundredth part of what we did in the very first year we were in power. We literally razed to the ground the infamous laws placing women in a position of inequality, restricting divorce and surrounding it with disgusting formalities, denying recognition to children born out of wedlock and enforcing a search for their fathers, etc. — laws, numerous survivals of which, to the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, are to be found in all civilized countries. We have a thousand times the right to be proud of what we have done in this sphere. But the more *thoroughly* we have cleared the ground of the lumber of the old, bourgeois laws and institutions, the clearer it is to us that we have only cleared the ground to build on, but the building itself is still not there.

Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a *domestic slave*, because the *petty household economy* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real *emancipation of women*, real communism, will begin only where and when a mass struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the power of the state) against this petty household economy, or rather when its *wholesale transformation* into large-scale socialist economy begins.

Do we in practice pay sufficient attention to this question, which, theoretically, is indisputable for every Communist? Of course not. Are we sufficiently solicitous about the young *shoots* of communism which already exist in this sphere? Again we must say emphatically, No! Public dining rooms,

crèches, kindergartens — here we have examples of these shoots, here we have the simple, everyday means, involving nothing pompous, grandiloquent or ceremonial, which can *in actual fact emancipate women*, which can in actual fact lessen and abolish their inequality with men as regards their role in social production and public life. These means are not new, they (like all the material prerequisites for socialism) were created by large-scale capitalism; but under capitalism they remained, first, a rarity, and secondly, which is particularly important, either *profit-making* enterprises, with all the worst features of speculation, profiteering, cheating and fraud, or “acrobatics of bourgeois philanthropy,” which the best workers quite rightly detested and despised.

There is no doubt that the number of these institutions in our country has increased enormously and that they are *beginning* to change in character. There is no doubt that there is far more *organizing talent* among the women workers and peasant women than we are aware of, that there are many times more people than we think who are capable of organizing practical work, with the participation of large numbers of workers and of still larger numbers of consumers, without that abundance of talk, fuss, squabbling and chatter about plans, systems, etc., with which our swelled-headed “intelligentsia” or half-baked “Communists” are “diseased.” But we *do not nurse* these shoots of the new as we should.

Look at the bourgeoisie! How excellently it knows how to advertise what *it* needs! See how the enterprises which the capitalists regard as “model” are lauded in millions of copies of *their* newspapers; see how “model” bourgeois institutions are made an object of national pride! Our press does not take the trouble, or hardly takes the trouble, to describe the best dining rooms or crèches, in order, by daily insistence, to get

some of them turned into models of their kind. It does not give them enough publicity, does not describe in detail what a saving of human labour, what conveniences for the consumer, what economy of products, what an emancipation of women from domestic slavery, what an improvement in sanitary conditions can be achieved with *exemplary communist labour* and extended to the whole of society, to all working people.

Exemplary production, exemplary communist subbotniks, exemplary care and conscientiousness in procuring and distributing every pood of grain, exemplary dining rooms, exemplary cleanliness in such-and-such a workers’ apartment house, in such-and-such a block — all these should receive ten times more attention and care from our press, as well as from every workers’ and peasants’ organization, than they receive now. All these are young shoots of communism, and it is our common and primary duty to nurse them. Difficult as our food and production situation is, in the year and a half of Bolshevik rule there has been undoubted progress *along the whole front*: grain procurements have increased from 30 million poods (from August 1, 1917, to August 1, 1918) to 100 million poods (from August 1, 1918, to May 1, 1919), vegetable gardening has expanded, the margin of unsown land has diminished, railway transport has begun to improve notwithstanding the enormous fuel difficulties, and so on. Against this general background, and with the support of the proletarian state power, the young shoots of communism will not wither; they will grow and blossom into complete communism.

* * *

We must ponder very deeply over the significance of the “communist subbotniks,” in order that we may draw all the

very important practical lessons that follow from this great beginning.

This beginning must be given all-sided support — that is the first and main lesson. The word “commune” is being bandied much too freely among us. Any kind of enterprise started by Communists or with their participation is very often at once declared to be a “commune,” it being not infrequently forgotten that this *very honourable title* must be *won* by prolonged and persistent effort, by *practical* achievement in genuine communist construction.

That is why, in my opinion, the decision that has matured in the minds of the majority of the members of the Central Executive Committee to *repeal* the decree of the Council of People’s Commissars, as far as it pertains to the *title* “consumers’ communes,”⁷ is quite right. Let the title be simpler — and, incidentally, the defects and shortcomings of the *initial* stages of the new organizational work will not be blamed on the “communes,” but (as in all fairness they should be) on *bad* Communists. It would be a good thing to eliminate the word “commune” from *common* use, to prohibit every first-comer from snatching at it, or to *allow this title to be borne o n l y* by genuine communes, which have really demonstrated in practice (and have proved through unanimous recognition by the whole of the surrounding population) that they are capable of organizing their work in a communist manner. First prove that you are capable of working without remuneration in the interests of society, in the interests of all the working people, prove that you are capable of “working in a revolutionary way,” that you are capable of raising the productivity of labour, of organizing the work in an exemplary manner, and then hold out your hand for the honourable title “commune”!

In this respect, the “communist subbotniks” are a most valuable exception; for the unskilled labourers and railway workers of the Moscow-Kazan Railway *first* demonstrated *by deeds* that they are capable of working like *Communists*, and then adopted the title of “communist subbotniks” for their undertaking. We must see to it and make sure that in future anyone who calls his enterprise, institution or undertaking a commune *without having proved* it by hard work, *practical success in prolonged effort* and doing things in an exemplary and truly communist way, is mercilessly ridiculed and pilloried as a charlatan or a windbag.

That great beginning, the “communist subbotniks,” must also be utilized for another purpose, namely, to *purge* the Party. In the early period following the revolution, when the masses of “honest” and philistine-minded people were particularly timorous, and when the bourgeois intelligentsia to a man, including, of course, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, played the lackey to the bourgeoisie and sabotaged, it was absolutely inevitable that adventurers and other pernicious elements should hitch themselves to the ruling party. There never has been, and there never can be, a revolution without that. The whole point is that the ruling party should be able, relying on a sound and strong advanced class, to purge its ranks.

We started this work long ago. It must be continued steadily and untiringly. The mobilization of Communists for the war helped us in this respect: the cowards and scoundrels fled from the Party’s ranks. Good riddance! *Such* a reduction in the Party’s membership means an *enormous increase* in its strength and weight. We must continue the purge, and that new beginning, the “communist subbotniks,” must be utilized

for this purpose: members should be accepted into the Party only after six months', say, "trial," or "probation," at "working in a revolutionary way." A similar test should be demanded of *all* members of the Party who joined after October 25, 1917, and who have not proved by some special work or service that they are absolutely reliable, loyal and capable of being Communists.

The purging of the Party, through the steadily *increasing demands* it makes for genuinely communist work, will improve the *apparatus* of state power, and will bring ever so much nearer the *final transition* of the peasants to the side of the revolutionary proletariat.

Incidentally, the "communist subbotniks" have thrown a remarkably strong light on the class character of the apparatus of state power under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Central Committee of the Party drafts a letter on "working in a revolutionary way."* The idea is suggested by the Central Committee of a party with from 100,000 to 200,000 members (I assume that that is the number that will remain after a thorough purging; at present the membership is larger).

The idea is taken up by the workers organized in trade unions. In Russia and the Ukraine they number about four million. The overwhelming majority of them are for the state power of the proletariat, for the proletarian dictatorship. Two hundred thousand and four million: such is the ratio of the "gears," if one may so express it. Then follow the *tens*

*The reference is to the "Theses of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the Situation on the Eastern Front." (See Lenin, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 29, pp. 276-79.) — *Ed.*

of millions of peasants, who are divided into three main groups: the most numerous and the one standing closest to the proletariat is that of the semi-proletarians or poor peasants; then come the middle peasants, and lastly, the numerically very small group of kulaks or rural bourgeoisie.

As long as it is possible to trade in grain and to make profit out of famine, the peasant will remain (and this will for some time be inevitable under the dictatorship of the proletariat) a semi-working man, semi-profiteer. As a profiteer he is hostile to us, hostile to the proletarian state; he is inclined to agree with the bourgeoisie and their faithful lackeys, up to and including the Menshevik Sher or the Socialist-Revolutionary B. Chernenkov, who stand for freedom to trade in grain. But *as a working man*, the peasant is a friend of the proletarian state, a most loyal ally of the worker in the struggle against the landlord and against the capitalist. As working men, the peasants, the vast mass of them, the peasant millions, support the state "machine" which is headed by the one or two hundred thousand Communists of the proletarian vanguard, and which consists of millions of organized proletarians.

A state more democratic, in the true sense of the word, one more closely connected with the working and exploited masses, has *never yet existed*.

It is precisely such proletarian work, signified by the "communist subbotniks" and performed at these subbotniks, that will finally consolidate the respect and love of the peasantry for the proletarian state. Such work, and such work alone, will completely convince the peasant that we are right, that communism is right, and make him our devoted ally, and, hence, will lead to the complete elimination of our food diff-

iculties, to the complete victory of communism over capitalism in the matter of the production and distribution of grain, to the unqualified consolidation of communism.

June 28, 1919

NOTES

- ¹ Lenin has in mind the plan to surrender Petrograd worked out by the National Centre, a counter-revolutionary subversive spy organization, whose members included Cadets, Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. The National Centre took its cue from foreign intelligence services. On June 13, 1919, in pursuance of their plan, the conspirators engineered a mutiny at the Krasnaya Gorka fort. Stalin was then at the Petrograd front according to a decision of the Party Central Committee. Directly led by Stalin, the Soviet troops quickly suppressed the mutiny. p. 10
- ² *Cadets* — members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, which was the principal bourgeois party in Russia, the party of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie. It was founded in October 1905 and headed by P. N. Milyukov. Feigning democracy and calling themselves the party of "people's freedom," the Cadets tried to win the peasantry to their side. They strove to preserve tsarism in the form of a constitutional monarchy. Subsequently, the Cadets became the party of the imperialist bourgeoisie. After the victory of the October Revolution, the Cadets organized counter-revolutionary conspiracies and revolts against the Soviet Republic and were crushed. In December 1917 the Soviet government declared the Cadets to be enemies of the people. p. 10
- ³ *Socialist-Revolutionaries* — a petty-bourgeois party in Russia founded in early 1902 through the merger of various Narodnik groups and circles, and representing the interests of the kulaks. The views of the Socialist-Revolutionaries were an eclectic medley of Narodism and revisionism. They tried, as Lenin put it, to "patch up the rents in the Narodnik ideas with bits of fashionable opportunist 'criticism' of Marxism."

("Socialism and the Peasantry," *Collected Works*, FLPH, Moscow, 1962, Vol. 9, p. 310.)

During the First World War, the Socialist-Revolutionaries took a social-chauvinist stand.

After the bourgeois-democratic revolution in February 1917, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, together with the Mensheviks and Cadets, were the mainstay of the counter-revolutionary Provisional Government. The Socialist-Revolutionaries refused to support the peasant demand for the abolition of landed estates and favoured the preservation of private land-ownership by the landlords.

In December 1917, the Left wing of the Party formed a separate Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party, which went through the motions of recognizing the Soviet power and entered into an agreement with the Bolsheviks, but very soon turned against the Soviet power.

During the years of foreign military intervention and civil war, the Socialist-Revolutionaries engaged in numerous counter-revolutionary subversive activities, plotted rebellions of the kulaks and staged terrorist acts against Communist Party and Soviet government leaders. After the civil war they continued their anti-Soviet activities and were eventually crushed by the Soviet government. p. 10

⁴ *The Berne International* — an alliance of social-chauvinist and Centrist parties of the Second International. The organization was formed at a conference in Berne in February 1919 with the object of re-establishing the bankrupt Second International. Lenin called the Berne International "an organization of agents of international imperialism." ("The Task of the Third International," *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 29, p. 502.) p. 12

⁵ *Battle of Sadowa* — the decisive battle of the Austro-Prussian war, fought on July 3, 1866 at Sadowa, a village near the town of Königgrätz (now Hradec Králové, Czechoslovakia), where it ended in the victory of the Prussian over the Austrian and Saxon forces. Also known in history as the battle of Königgrätz. p. 16

⁶ See Marx, *Capital*, FLPH, Moscow, 1954, Vol. I, pp. 298-302. p. 22

⁷ By a decree of the Council of People's Commissars of March 16, 1919, the consumers' co-operatives were reorganized as "consumers' communes." This name led to a misunderstanding of the decree among the peasants. In view of this the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, while approving the decree in a decision of June 30, 1919, changed the name from "consumers' communes" to "consumers' societies," a name to which the public were accustomed. p. 26

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