

## THE TASKS OF THE PROLETARIAT IN THE PRESENT REVOLUTION<sup>[1]</sup>

I did not arrive in Petrograd until the night of April 3, and therefore at the meeting on April 4 I could, of course, deliver the report on the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat only on my own behalf, and with reservations as to insufficient preparation.

The only thing I could do to make things easier for myself – and for *honest* opponents – was to prepare the theses *in writing*. I read them out, and gave the text to Comrade Tsereteli. I read them *twice* very slowly: first at a meeting of Bolsheviki and then at a meeting of both Bolsheviki and Mensheviki. I publish these personal theses of mine with only the briefest explanatory notes, which were developed in far greater detail in the report.

### THESES

1) In our attitude towards the war, which under the now government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism" is permissible.

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests.

In view of the undoubted honesty of those broad sections of the mass believers in revolutionary defencism who accept the war only as a necessity, and not as a means of conquest, in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with particular thoroughness, persistence and patience to explain their error to them, to explain the inseparable connection existing between capital and the imperialist war, and to prove that without overthrowing capital *it is impossible* to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence.

The most widespread campaign for this view must be organised in the army at the front.

Fraternisation.

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to its *second* stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.

This transition is characterised, on the one hand, by a maximum of legally recognised rights (Russia is *now* the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world); on the other, by the absence of violence towards the masses, and, finally, by their unreasoning trust in the government of capitalists, those worst enemies of peace and socialism.

This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the *special* conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.

3) No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations. Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding “demand” that *this* government, a government of capitalists, should cease to be an imperialist government.

4) Recognition of the fact that in most of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies our Party is in a minority, so far a small minority, as against *a bloc of all* the petty-bourgeois opportunist elements, from the Popular Socialists and the Socialist-Revolutionaries down to the Organising Committee<sup>[2]</sup> (Chkheidze, Tsereteli, etc.), Steklov, etc., etc., who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread that influence among the proletariat.

The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as *this* government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent *explanation* of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

5) Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.\*

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker.

6) The weight of emphasis in the agrarian programme to be shifted to the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers’ Deputies.

Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of *all* lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies. The organisation of separate Soviets of Deputies of Poor Peasants. The setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates (ranging in size from 100 to 300 dessiatines, according to local and other conditions, and to the decisions of the local bodies) under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers’ Deputies and for the public account.

7) The immediate amalgamation of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.

8) It is not our *immediate* task to “introduce” socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies.

9) Party tasks:

(a) Immediate convocation of a Party congress;

(b) Alteration of the Party Programme, mainly:

(1) On the question of imperialism and the imperialist war;

(2) On our attitude towards the state and our demand for a “commune state”;<sup>†</sup>

(3) Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme.

(c) Change of the Party’s name.\*

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\* I.e., the standing army to be replaced by the arming of the whole people.

† I.e., a state of which the Paris Commune was the prototype.

10) A new International.

We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the *social-chauvinists* and against the “Centre”.<sup>†</sup>

In order that the reader may understand why I had especially to emphasise as a rare exception the “case” of honest opponents, I invite him to compare the above theses with the following objection by Mr. Goldellberg: Lenin, he said, “has planted the banner of civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy” (quoted in No. 5 of Mr. Plekhanov’s *Yedinstvo*<sup>[3]</sup>).

Isn’t it a gem?

I write, announce and elaborately explain: “In view of the undoubted honesty of those *broad* sections of the *mass* believers in revolutionary defencism... in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with particular thoroughness, persistence and patience to explain their error to them...”

Yet the bourgeois gentlemen who call themselves Social-Democrats, who do not belong either to the *broad* sections or to the mass believers in defencism, with serene brow present my views thus: “The banner[!]‡ of civil war” (of which there is not a word in the theses and not a word in my speech!) has been planted(!) “in the midst[!!] of revolutionary democracy...”.

What does this mean? In what way does this differ from riot-inciting agitation, from *Russkaya Volya*<sup>[4]</sup>?

I write, announce and elaborately explain: “The Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and therefore our task is to present a patient, systematic,

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\* Instead of “Social-Democracy”, whose official leaders *throughout* the world have betrayed socialism and deserted to the bourgeoisie (the “defencists” and the vacillating “Kautskyites”), we must call ourselves the Communist Party.

† The “Centre” in the international Social-Democratic movement is the trend which vacillates between the chauvinists (= “defencists”) and internationalists, i.e. Kautsky and Co. in Germany, Longuet and Co. in France, Chkheidze and Co. in Russia, Turati and Co. in Italy, MacDonald and Co. in Britain, etc.

‡ Interpolations in square brackets (within passages quoted by Lenin) have been introduced by Lenin, unless otherwise indicated. – *Ed.*

and persistent *explanation* of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.”

Yet opponents of a certain brand present my views as a call to “civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy”!

I attacked the Provisional Government for *not* having appointed an early date, or any date at all, for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, and for confining itself to promises. I argued that *without* the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies the convocation of the Constituent Assembly is not guaranteed and its success is impossible.

And the view is attributed to me that I am opposed to the speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly!

I would call this “raving”, had not decades of political struggle taught me to regard honesty in opponents as a rare exception.

Mr. Plekhanov in his paper called my speech “raving”. Very good, Mr. Plekhanov! But look how awkward, uncouth, and slow-witted you are in your polemics. If I delivered a raving speech for two hours, how is it that an audience of hundreds tolerated this “raving”? Further, why does your paper devote a whole column to an account of the “raving”? Inconsistent, highly inconsistent!

It is, of course, much easier to shout, abuse, and howl than to attempt to relate, to explain, to recall *what* Marx and Engels said in 1871, 1872 and 1875 about the experience of the Paris Commune<sup>[5]</sup> and about the kind of state the proletariat needs.

Ex-Marxist Mr. Plekhanov evidently does not care to recall Marxism.

I quoted the words of Rosa Luxemburg, who on August 4, 1914,<sup>[6]</sup> called *German* Social-Democracy a “stinking corpse”. And the Plekhanovs, Goldenbergs and Co. feel “offended”. On whose behalf? On behalf of the *German* chauvinists, because they were called chauvinists!

They have got themselves in a mess, these poor Russian social-chauvinists – socialists in word and chauvinists in deed.

## NOTES

[1] Published in *Pravda* No. 26, for April 7, 1917, over the signature *N. Lenin*, this article contains Lenin’s famous April Theses read by him at two meetings held at the Taurida Palace on April 4 (17), 1917 (at a meeting of Bolsheviks and at a joint meeting of Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates to the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Work-

ers' and Soldiers' Deputies). The article was reprinted in the Bolshevik newspapers *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Moscow), *Proletary* (Kharkov), *Krasnoyarsky Rabochy* (Krasnoyarsk), *Vperyod* (Ufa), *Bakinsky Rabochy* (Baku), *Kavkazsky Rabochy* (Tinis) and others.

[2] *Socialist-Revolutionaries* (S.R.s) – a petty-bourgeois party formed in Russia at the end of 1901 and beginning of 1902 through the amalgamation of various Narodnik groups and circles (the Union of Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, and others). The views of the S.R.s 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” (see present edition, Vol. 9, p. 310). The First World War found most of the S.R.s taking a social-chauvinist stand.

After the victory of the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917, the S.R.s, together with the Mensheviks and Cadets, were the mainstay of the counter-revolutionary Provisional Government of the bourgeoisie and landowners, and the leaders of the party (Kerensky, Avksentyev, Chernov) were members of that government. The S.R. Party refused to support the peasants' demand for the abolition of the landed estates and in effect stood for private property in land; the S.R. ministers in the Provisional Government sent punitive expeditions against the peasants who had seized landed estates. On the eve of the October armed uprising this party openly sided with the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie in defence of the capitalist system and found itself isolated from the mass of the revolutionary people.

At the end of November 1917 the Left wing of the party founded a separate Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party. In an endeavour to maintain their influence among the peasant masses, the Left S.R.s formally recognised the Soviet Government 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 S.R.s engaged in counter-revolutionary subversive activities zealously supported the interventionists and whiteguard generals, took part in counter-revolutionary plots, and organised terrorist acts against leaders of the Soviet state and Communist Party. After the Civil War they continued their anti-Soviet activities within the country and as whiteguard émigrés abroad.

*Popular Socialists* – members of the petty-bourgeois Labour Popular Socialist Party, which separated from the Right wing of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1906. The P.S.s stood for a bloc with the Cadets. Lenin called them “Social-Cadets”, “petty-bourgeois opportunists”, and “Socialist-Revolutionary Mensheviks” who vacillated be-

tween the Cadets and the S.R.s, and he emphasised that this party “differs very little from the Cadets for it deletes from its programme both the republicanism and the demand for all the land” (see present edition, Vol. 11, p. 228). The party’s leaders were A. V. Peshekhonov, N. F. Annensky, V. A. Myakotin, and others. During the First World War the P.S.s took a social-chauvinist stand. After the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917 the Popular Socialist Party merged with the Trudoviks and actively supported the bourgeois Provisional Government, in which it was represented. After the October Socialist Revolution the P.S.s participated in plots and armed acts against the Soviet government. The party went out of existence during the period of foreign military intervention and civil war.

*The Organising Committee* (O.C.) was set up in 1912 at the August conference of the liquidators. During the First World War the O.C. justified the war on the part of tsarism and advocated the ideas of nationalism and chauvinism. The O.C. published the journal *Nasha Zarya*, and when this was closed down, *Nashe Dyelo*, then *Dyelo*, and the newspapers *Rabocheye Utro*, then *Utro*. The O.C. functioned up to the time of the election of the Central Committee of the Menshevik party in August 1917.

[3] *Yedinstvo* (*Unity*) – a daily published in Petrograd from March to November 1917, and then under another name from December 1917 to January 1918. Edited by G. V. Plekhanov. United the extreme Right of the Menshevik defencists and gave unqualified support to the bourgeois Provisional Government. Carried on a fierce struggle against the Bolshevik Party.

[4] *Russkaya Volya* (*Russian Freedom*) – a bourgeois daily founded and run by the big banks. Carried on a riot-provoking campaign against the Bolsheviks. Lenin called it one of the most disreputable bourgeois newspapers. Appeared in Petrograd from December 1916 to October 1917.

[5] See Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1962, pp. 21-22, 516-30, Vol. II, Moscow, 1962, pp. 42, 463-64.

[6] On August 4, 1914, the Social-Democrats in the Reichstag voted together with the bourgeois M.P.s in favour of a 5,000 million war loan for the Kaiser government, thereby approving the imperialist policy of Wilhelm II. As it afterwards emerged, the Left Social-Democrats, during the discussion of this question by the Social-Democratic group previous to the Reichstag session, were against granting the government war loans, but they bowed to the decision of the opportunist majority and voted in favour.