

V. I. Lenin

The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

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Translated by George Hanna

The symposium issued by the Socialist-Revolutionaries, *A Year of the Russian Revolution. 1917-18* (Moscow, Zemlya i Volya Publishers, 1918), contains an extremely interesting article by N. V. Svyatitsky: "Results of the All-Russia Constituent Assembly Elections (Preface)". The author gives the returns for 54 constituencies out of the total of 79.

The author's survey covers nearly all the gubernias of European Russia and Siberia, only the following being omitted: Olonets, Estonian, Kaluga, Bessarabian, Podolsk, Orenburg, Yakut and Don gubernias.

First of all I shall quote the main returns published by N. V. Svyatitsky and then discuss the political conclusions to be drawn from them.

I

The total number of votes polled in the 54 constituencies in November 1917 was 36,262,560. The author gives the figure of 36,257,960, distributed over seven regions (plus the Army and Navy), but the figures he gives for the various parties total up to what I give.

The distribution of the votes according to parties is as follows: the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries polled 16.5 million votes; if we add the votes polled by the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the other nations (Ukrainians, Moslems, and others), the total will be 20.9 million, i.e., 58 per cent.

The Mensheviks polled 668,064 votes, but if we add the votes polled by the analogous groups of Popular Socialists (312,000),

Yedinstvo (25,000), Co-operators (51,000), Ukrainian Social-Democrats (95,000), Ukrainian socialists (507,000) German socialists (44,000) and Finnish socialists (14,000), the total will be 1.7 million.

The Bolsheviks polled 9,023,963 votes.

The Cadets polled 1,856,639 votes. By adding the Association of Rural Proprietors and Landowners (215,000), the Right groups (292,000), Old Believers (73,000), nationalists – Jews (550,000), Moslems (576,000), Bashkirs (195,000), Letts (67,000), Poles (155,000), Cossacks (79,000), Germans (130,000), Byelorussians (12,000) – and the “lists of various groups and organisations” (418,000), we get a total for the landowning and bourgeois parties of 4.6 million.

We know that the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks formed a bloc during the whole period of the revolution from February to October 1917. Moreover, the entire development of events during that period and after it showed definitely that those two parties together represent petty-bourgeois democracy, which mistakenly imagines it is, and calls itself, socialist, like all the parties of the Second International.

Uniting the three main groups of parties in the Constituent Assembly elections, we get the following total:

Party of the Proletariat (Bolsheviks)	9.02 million=25%
Petty-Bourgeois democratic parties (Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, etc.)	22.62 million=62%
Parties of landowners and bourgeoisie (Cadets, etc.)	4.62 million=13%
<i>Total</i>	36.26 million=100%

Here are N. V. Svyatitsky's returns by regions:

Votes Polled (thousands)

Regions[*], (and armed forces sep- arately)	S.R.s (Russian)	%	Bolsheviks	%	Cadets	%	Total
Northern	1,140.0	38	1,77.2	40	393.3	13	2975.1
Central- Industrial	1,987.9	38	2305.6	44	550.2	10	5242.5
Volga- Black Earth	4,733.9	70	1115.6	16	267.0	4	6764.3
Western	1,242.1	43	1,282.2	44	48.1	2	2,961.0
East-Urals	1,547.7	43(62)**]	443.9	12	181.3	5	3,583.5
Siberia	2,094.8	75	273.9	10	87.5	3	2,786.7
Ukraine Army and Navy	1,878.1	25(77)***]	754.0	10	277.5	4	7,581.3
	1,885.1	43	1,671.3	38	51.9	1	4,363.6

* The author divides Russia into districts in a rather unusual way: *Northern*: Archangel, Vologda, Petrograd, Novgorod, Pskov, Baltic. *Central-Industrial*: Vladimir, Kostroma, Moscow, Nizhni-Novgorod, Ryazan, Tula, Tver Yaroslavl. *Volga-Black Earth*: Astrakhan, Voronezh, Kursk, Orel Penza Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk, Tambov. *Western*: Vitebsk, Minsk, Mogilev, Smolensk. *East-Urals*: Vyatka, Kazan, Perm, Ufa. *Siberia*: Tobolsk, Tomsk, Altai, Yeniseisk, Irkutsk, Transbaikal, Amur. *The Ukraine*: Volhynia, Ekaterinoslav, Kiev, Poltava, Taurida, Kharkov, Kherson, Chernigov.

** Svyatitsky obtains the figure in brackets, 62 per cent, by adding the Moslem and Chuvash Socialist-Revolutionaries.

*** The figure in brackets, 77 per cent, is mine, obtained by adding the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionaries.

From these figures it is evident that during the Constituent Assembly elections the Bolsheviks were the party of the proletariat and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the party of the peasantry. In the purely peasant districts, Great-Russian (Volga-Black Earth, Siberia, East-Urals) and Ukrainian, the Socialist-Revolutionaries polled 62-77 per cent. In the industrial centres the Bolsheviks had a majority over the Socialist-Revolutionaries. This majority is understated in

the district figures given by N. V. Svyatitsky, for he combined the most highly industrialised districts with little industrialised and non-industrial areas. For example, the gubernia figures of the votes polled by the Socialist-Revolutionary, Bolshevik, and Cadet parties, and by the “national and other groups”, show the following:

In the Northern Region the Bolshevik majority seems to be insignificant: 40 per cent against 38 per cent. But in this region non-industrial areas (Archangel, Vologda, Novgorod and Pskov gubernias), where the Socialist-Revolutionaries predominate, are combined with industrial areas: Petrograd City – Bolsheviks 45 per cent (of the votes), Socialist-Revolutionaries 16 per cent; Petrograd Gubernia – Bolsheviks 50 per cent, Socialist-Revolutionaries 26 per cent; Baltic – Bolsheviks 72 per cent, Socialist-Revolutionaries – 0.

In the Central-Industrial Region the Bolsheviks in Moscow Gubernia polled 56 per cent and the Socialist-Revolutionaries 25 per cent; in Moscow City the Bolsheviks polled 50 per cent and the Socialist-Revolutionaries 8 per cent; in Tver Gubernia the Bolsheviks polled 54 per cent and the Socialist-Revolutionaries 39 per cent; in Vladimir Gubernia the Bolsheviks polled 56 per cent and the Socialist-Revolutionaries 32 per cent.

Let us note, in passing, how ridiculous, in face of such facts, is the talk about the Bolsheviks having only a “minority” of the proletariat behind them! And we hear this talk from the Mensheviks (668,000 votes, and with Transcaucasia another 700,000-800,000, against 9,000,000 votes polled by the Bolsheviks), and also from the social-traitors of the Second International

II

How could such a miracle have occurred? How could the Bolsheviks, who polled one-fourth of the votes, have won a victory over the petty-bourgeois democrats, who were in alliance (coalition) with the bourgeoisie, and who together with the bourgeoisie polled three-fourths of the votes?

To deny this victory now, after the Entente – the all mighty Entente – has been helping the enemies of Bolshevism for two years, is simply ridiculous.

The point is that the fanatical political hatred of those who have been defeated, including all the supporters of the Second International, prevents them from even raising seriously the extremely interesting historical and political question of why the Bolsheviks

were victorious. The point is that this is a “miracle” only from the standpoint of vulgar petty-bourgeois democracy, the abysmal ignorance and deep-rooted prejudices of which are exposed by this question and the answer to it.

From the standpoint of the class struggle and socialism, from that standpoint, which the Second International has abandoned, the answer to the question is indisputable.

The Bolsheviks were victorious, first of all, because they had behind them the vast majority of the proletariat, which included the most class-conscious, energetic and revolutionary section, the real vanguard, of that advanced class.

Take the two metropolitan cities, Petrograd and Moscow. The total number of votes polled during the Constituent Assembly elections was 1,765,100, of which Socialist Revolutionaries polled 218,000, Bolsheviks – 837,000 and Cadets – 515,400.

No matter how much the petty-bourgeois democrats who call themselves socialists and Social-Democrats (the Chernovs, Martovs, Kautskys, Longuets, MacDonalds and Co.) may beat their breasts and bow to the Goddesses of “equality”, “universal suffrage”, “democracy”, “pure democracy”, or “consistent democracy”, it does not do away with the economic and political fact of the *inequality* of town and country.

That fact is inevitable under capitalism in general, and in the period of transition from capitalism to communism in particular.

The town cannot be equal to the country. The country cannot be equal to the town under the historical conditions of this epoch. The town inevitably *leads* the country. The country inevitably *follows the town*. The only question is *which class*, of the “urban” classes, will succeed in leading the country, will cope with this task, and what forms will *leadership by the town* assume?

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks had behind them the vast majority of the proletariat. By that time, the party which competed with the Bolsheviks among the proletariat, the Menshevik party, had been utterly defeated (9,000,000 votes against 1,400,000, if we add together 668,000 and 700,000-800,000 in Transcaucasia). Moreover, that party was defeated in the fifteen-year struggle (1903-17) which *steeped*, enlightened and organised the vanguard of the proletariat, and *forged* it into a genuine revolutionary vanguard. Furthermore, the first revolution, that of 1905, prepared the subsequent development, determined in a *practical* way the relations between-

the two parties, and served as the general rehearsal of the great events of 1917-19.

The petty-bourgeois democrats who call themselves socialists of the Second International are fond of dismissing this extremely important historical question with honeyed phrases about the benefits of proletarian “unity”. When they use these honeyed phrases they forget the historical fact of the *accumulation of opportunism* in the working-class movement of 1871-1914; they forget (or do not want) to *think* about the causes of the collapse of opportunism in August 1914, about the causes of the split in international socialism in 1914-17.

Unless the *revolutionary* section of the proletariat is thoroughly prepared in every way for the expulsion and suppression of opportunism it is useless even thinking about the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is the lesson of the Russian revolution which should be taken to heart by the leaders of the “independent” German Social-Democrats,¹ French socialists, and so forth, who now want to evade the issue by means of verbal recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To continue. The Bolsheviks had behind them not only the majority of the proletariat, not only the *revolutionary* vanguard of the proletariat which had been steeled in the long and persevering struggle against opportunism; they had, if it is permissible to use a military term, a powerful “striking force” in the metropolitan cities.

An overwhelming superiority of forces at the decisive point at the decisive moment – this “law” of military success is also the law of political success, especially in that fierce, seething class war which is called revolution.

Capitals, or, in general, big commercial and industrial centres (here in Russia the two coincided, but they do not everywhere coincide), to a considerable degree decide the political fate of a nation, provided, of course, the centres are supported by sufficient local, rural forces, even if that support does not come immediately.

In the two chief cities, in the two principal commercial and industrial centres of Russia, the Bolsheviks had an overwhelming, decisive superiority of forces. Here our forces were *nearly four times* as great as those of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. We had here *more than the Socialist Revolutionaries and Cadets put together*. Moreover, our adversaries were split up, for the “coalition” of the Cadets with the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks (in Pet-

rograd and Moscow the Mensheviks polled only 3 per cent of the votes) was utterly discredited among the working people. Real unity between the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks and the Cadets against us was quite out of the question at that time.* It will be remembered that in November 1917, even the leaders of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, who were a hundred times nearer to the idea of a bloc with the Cadets than the Socialist-Revolutionary and Menshevik workers and peasants, even those leaders thought (and bargained with us) about a bloc with the Bolsheviks *without* the Cadets!

We were *certain* of winning Petrograd and Moscow in October-November 1917, for we had an overwhelming superiority of forces and the most thorough political preparation, insofar as concerns both the assembly, concentration, training, testing and battle-hardening of the Bolshevik “armies”, and the disintegration, exhaustion, disunity and demoralisation of the “enemy’s” “armies”.

And being certain of winning the two metropolitan cities, the two centres of the capitalist state machine (economic and political), by a swift, decisive blow, we, in spite of the furious resistance of the bureaucracy and intelligentsia, despite sabotage, and so forth, were able with the aid of the central apparatus of state power to *prove by deeds* to the non-proletarian working people that the proletariat was their only reliable ally, friend and leader.

III

But before passing on to this most important question – that of the attitude of the proletariat towards the non-proletarian working people – we must deal with the armed forces.

The flower of the people’s forces went to form the army during the imperialist war; the opportunist scoundrels of the Second International (not only the social-chauvinists, i.e., the Scheidemanns and Renaudels who directly went over to the side of “defence of the fatherland”, but also the Centrists²) by their words and deeds strengthened the subordination of the armed forces to the leadership of the imperialist robbers of both the German and Anglo-French

* It is interesting to note that the above figures also reveal the unity and solidarity of the party of the proletariat and the extremely fragmented state of the parties of the petty bourgeoisie and of the bourgeoisie.

groups, but the real proletarian revolutionaries never forgot what Marx said in 1870: “The bourgeoisie will give the proletariat practice in arms!”³ Only the Austro-German and Anglo Franco-Russian betrayers of socialism could talk about “defence of the fatherland” in the imperialist war, i.e., a war that was predatory on both sides; the proletarian revolutionaries, however (from August 1914 onwards), turned all their attention to revolutionising the armed forces, to utilising them *against* the imperialist robber bourgeoisie, to converting the unjust and predatory war between the two groups of imperialist predators into a just and legitimate war of the proletarians and oppressed working people in each country against “their own”, “national” bourgeoisie.

During 1914-17 the betrayers of socialism *did not make preparations* to use the armed forces against the imperialist government of *each* nation.

The Bolsheviks prepared for this by the whole of their propaganda, agitation and underground organisational work from August 1914 onwards. Of course, the betrayers of socialism, the Scheidemanns and Kautskys of all nations, got out of this by talking about the *demoralisation* of the armed forces by Bolshevik agitation, but we are *proud* of the fact that we performed our duty in demoralising the forces of our class enemy, in winning away *from him* the armed masses of the workers and peasants *for the struggle* against the exploiters.

The results of our work were seen in, among other things, the votes polled in the Constituent Assembly elections in November 1917, in which, in Russia, the armed forces also participated.

The following are the principal results of the voting as given by N. V. Svyatitsky:

**Number of Votes Polled in the Constituent Assembly Elections,
November 1917
(thousands)**

Army and Navy units	S.R.s	Bolsheviks	Cadets	National and other groups	<i>Total</i>
Northern Front	240.0	480.0	?	60.0[**]	780.0
Western	180.6	653.4	16.7	125.2	976.0
South- Western	402.9	300.1	13.7	290.6	1,007.4
Rumanian	679.4	167.0	21.4	260.7	1,128.6
Caucasian	360.4	60.0	?	—	420.0
Baltic Fleet	—	(120.0)[*]	—	—	(120.0)[*]
Black Sea Fleet	22.2	10.8	—	19.5	52.5
<i>Total</i>	1,885.1	1,671.3 + (120.0)* =1,791.3	51.8 +?	756.0	4,364.5 +(120.0)* + ?

* The figure is Approximate. Two Bolsheviks were elected. N. V. Svyatitsky counts an average of 60,000 votes per elected person. That is why I give the figure 120,000.

** No information is given as to which party polled 19,500 votes in the Black Sea Fleet. The other figures in this column evidently apply almost entirely to the Ukrainian socialists for 10 Ukrainian socialists and one Social-Democrat (i.e., a Menshevik) were elected.

Summary: the Socialist-Revolutionaries polled 1,885,100 votes; the Bolsheviks polled 1,671,300 votes. If to the latter we add the 120,000 votes (approximately) polled in the Baltic Fleet, the total votes polled by the Bolsheviks will be 1,791,300.

The Bolsheviks, therefore, polled a *little less* than the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

And so, by October-November 1917, the armed forces were *half Bolshevik*.

If that had not been the case we could not have been victorious.

We polled nearly half the votes of the armed forces as a whole, but had an overwhelming majority on the fronts *nearest to the met-*

ropolitan cities and, in general, on those not too far away. If we leave out the Caucasian Front, the Bolsheviks obtained on the whole a majority over the Socialist-Revolutionaries. And if we take the Northern and Western fronts, the votes polled by the Bolsheviks will amount to *over one million*, compared with 420,000 votes polled by the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Thus, in the armed forces, too, the Bolsheviks already had a *political "striking force"*, by November 1917, which ensured them an overwhelming superiority of forces at the decisive point at the decisive moment. Resistance on the part of the armed forces to the October Revolution of the proletariat, to the winning of political power by the proletariat, was entirely out of the question, considering that the Bolsheviks had an enormous majority on the Northern and Western fronts, while on the other fronts, far removed from the centre, the Bolsheviks had the time and opportunity to *win the peasants away from the Socialist-Revolutionary Party*. With this we shall deal later.

IV

On the basis of the returns of the Constituent Assembly elections we have studied the three conditions which determined the victory of Bolshevism: (1) an overwhelming majority among the proletariat; (2) almost half of the armed forces; (3) an overwhelming superiority of forces at the decisive moment at the decisive points, namely: in Petrograd and Moscow and on the war fronts near the centre.

But these conditions could have ensured only a very short-lived and unstable victory had the Bolsheviks been unable to win to their side the majority of the *non-proletarian* working masses, to win them from the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the other petty-bourgeois parties.

That is the main thing.

And the chief reason why the "socialists" (read: petty-bourgeois democrats) of the Second International fail to understand the dictatorship of the proletariat is that they fail to understand that

state power in the hands of one class, the proletariat, can and must become an instrument for winning to the side of the proletariat the non-proletarian working masses, an instrument for winning those masses from the bourgeoisie and from the petty-bourgeois parties.

Filled with petty-bourgeois prejudices, forgetting the most important thing in the teachings of Marx about the state, the “socialists” of the Second International regard *state power* as something holy, as an idol, or as the result of formal voting, the absolute of “consistent democracy” (or what ever else they call this nonsense). They fail to see that state power is simply an *instrument* which *different* classes can and must use (and know how to use) *for their class aims*.

The bourgeoisie has used state power as an instrument of the capitalist class against the proletariat, against all the working people. That has been the case in the most democratic bourgeois republics. Only the betrayers of Marxism have “forgotten” this.

The proletariat must (after mustering sufficiently strong political and military “striking forces”) overthrow the bourgeoisie, take state power from it in order to use that *instrument* for *its* class aims.

What are the class aims of the-proletariat?

Suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie;

Neutralise the peasantry and, if possible, win them over (at any rate the majority of the labouring, non-exploiting section) to the side of the proletariat;

Organise large-scale machine production, using factories, and means of production in general, expropriated from the bourgeoisie;

Organise socialism on the ruins of capitalism.

* * *

In mockery of the teachings of Marx, those gentlemen, the opportunists, including the Kautskyites, “teach” the people that the proletariat must first win a majority by means of universal suffrage, then obtain state power, by the vote of that majority, and only after that, on the basis of “consistent” (some call it “pure”) democracy, organise socialism.

But we say on the basis of the teachings of Marx and the experience of the Russian revolution:

the proletariat must first overthrow the bourgeoisie and win *for itself* state power, and then use that state power, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat, as an instrument of its class for the purpose of winning the sympathy of the majority of the working people.

* * *

How can state power in the hands of the proletariat become the instrument of its class struggle for influence over the non-proletarian working people, of the struggle to draw them to its side, to win them over, to wrest them from the bourgeoisie?

First, the proletariat achieves this *not* by putting into operation the old apparatus of state power, but by *smashing* it to pieces, leveling it with the ground (in spite of the howls of frightened philistines and the threats of saboteurs) and building a *new* state apparatus. That new state apparatus is adapted to the dictatorship of the proletariat and to its struggle against the bourgeoisie to *win* the non-proletarian working people. That new apparatus is not anybody's invention, it *grows* out of the proletarian class struggle as that struggle becomes more widespread and intense. That new apparatus of state power, the new *type* of state power, is *Soviet power*.

The Russian proletariat, immediately, a few hours after winning state power, proclaimed the dissolution of the old state apparatus (which, as Marx showed, had been for centuries adapted to serve the class interests of the bourgeoisie, even in the most democratic republic⁴) and transferred *all power to the Soviets*; and only the working and exploited people could enter the Soviets, all exploiters of every kind were excluded.

In that way the proletariat at once, at one stroke, immediately *after* it had taken state power, *won* from the bourgeoisie *the vast mass* of its supporters in the petty-bourgeois and "socialist" parties; for that mass, the working and exploited people who had been deceived by the bourgeoisie (and by its yes-men, the Chernovs, Kautskys, Martovs and Co.), *on obtaining Soviet power*, acquired, *for the first time*, an instrument of mass struggle for their interests against the bourgeoisie.

Secondly, the proletariat can, and must, at once, or at all events very quickly, win from the bourgeoisie and from petty-bourgeois democrats "*their*" masses, i.e., the masses which follow them – win them *by satisfying their most urgent economic needs in a revolutionary way by expropriating the landowners and the bourgeoisie*.

The bourgeoisie *cannot* do that, no matter how "mighty" its state power may be.

The proletariat *can* do that on the very next day after it has won state power, because for this it has both an apparatus (the Soviets) and economic means (the expropriation of the landowners and the bourgeoisie).

That is exactly how the Russian proletariat *won the peasantry* from the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and won them literally *a few hours after* achieving state power; a few hours after the victory over the bourgeoisie in Petrograd, the victorious proletariat issued a “decree on land”,⁵ and in that decree it entirely, at once, with revolutionary swiftness, energy and devotion, *satisfied* all the most urgent economic needs of the *majority* of the peasants, it expropriated the landowners, entirely and without compensation.

To prove to the peasants that the proletarians did not want to steam-roller them, did not want to boss them, but to help them and be their friends, the victorious Bolsheviks did not put *a single word of their own* into that “decree on land”, but copied it, word for word, from the peasant mandates (the most revolutionary of them, of course) which the *Socialist-Revolutionaries* had published in the *Socialist-Revolutionary* newspaper.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries fumed and raved, protested and howled that “the Bolsheviks had stolen their programme”, but they were only laughed at for that; a fine party, indeed, which had to be defeated and driven from the government in order that everything in its programme that was revolutionary and of benefit to the working people could be carried out!

The traitors, blockheads and pedants of the Second International could never understand such dialectics; the proletariat cannot achieve victory if it does not win the majority of the population to its side. But to limit that winning to polling a majority of votes in an election *under the rule of the bourgeoisie*, or to make it the condition for it, is crass stupidity, or else sheer deception of the workers. In order to win the majority of the population to its side the proletariat must, in the first place, overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize state power; secondly, it must introduce Soviet power and completely smash the old state apparatus, whereby it immediately undermines the rule, prestige and influence of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois compromisers over the non-proletarian working people. Thirdly, it must *entirely destroy* the influence of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois compromisers over the *majority* of the non-proletarian masses by satisfying *their* economic needs *in a revolutionary way at the expense of the exploiters*.

It is possible to do this, of course, only when capitalist development has reached a certain level. Failing that fundamental condition, the proletariat cannot develop into a separate class, nor can

success be achieved in its prolonged training, education, instruction and trial in battle during long years of strikes and demonstrations when the opportunists are disgraced and expelled. Failing that fundamental condition, the centres will not play that economic and political role which enables the proletariat, after their capture, to lay hold of state power in its entirety, or more correctly of its vital nerve, its core, its node. Failing that fundamental condition, there cannot be the kinship, closeness and bond between the position of the proletariat and that of the non-proletarian working people which (kinship, closeness and bond) are necessary for the proletariat to influence those masses, for its influence over them to be effective.

V

Let us proceed further.

The proletariat can win state power, establish the Soviet system, and satisfy the economic needs of the majority of the working people at the expense of the exploiters.

Is that sufficient for achieving complete and final victory? No, it is not.

The petty-bourgeois democrats, their chief present-day representatives, the “socialists” and “Social-Democrats”, are suffering from illusions when they imagine that the working people are capable, under capitalism, of acquiring the high degree of class-consciousness, firmness of character, perception and wide political outlook that will enable them to decide, *merely by voting*, or at all events, to *decide* in advance, without long experience of struggle, that they will follow a particular class, or a particular party.

It is a mere illusion. It is a sentimental story invented by pedants and sentimental socialists of the Kautsky, Longuet and MacDonald type.

Capitalism would not be capitalism if it did not, on the one hand, condemn the *masses* to a downtrodden, crushed and terrified state of existence, to disunity (the countryside!) and ignorance, and if it (capitalism) did not, on the other hand, place in the hands of the bourgeoisie a gigantic apparatus of falsehood and deception to hoodwink the masses of workers and peasants, to stultify their minds, and so forth.

That is why only the proletariat can *lead the working people* out of capitalism to communism. It is no use thinking that the petty-bourgeois or semi-petty-bourgeois masses can decide in advance the

extremely complicated political question: “to be with the working class or with the bourgeoisie”. The *vacillation* of the non-proletarian sections of the working people is inevitable; and inevitable also is their own *practical experience*, which will enable them to compare leadership by the bourgeoisie with leadership by the proletariat.

This is the circumstance that is constantly lost sight of by those who worship “consistent democracy” and who imagine that extremely important political problems can be solved by voting. Such problems are actually solved by *civil war* if they are acute and aggravated by struggle, and the *experience* of the non-proletarian masses (primarily of the peasants), their experience of comparing the rule of the proletariat with the rule of the bourgeoisie, is of tremendous importance in that war.

The Constituent Assembly elections in Russia in November 1917, compared with the two-year Civil War of 1917-19, are highly instructive in this respect.

See which districts proved to be the least Bolshevik. First, the East-Urals and the Siberian where the Bolsheviks polled 12 per cent and 10 per cent of the votes respectively. Secondly, the Ukraine where the Bolsheviks polled 10 per cent of the votes. Of the other districts, the Bolsheviks polled the smallest percentage of votes in the peasant district of Great Russia, the Volga-Black Earth district, but even there the Bolsheviks polled 16 per cent of the votes.

It was precisely in the districts where the Bolsheviks polled the lowest percentage of votes in November 1917 that the counter-revolutionary movements, the revolts and the organisation of counter-revolutionary forces had the greatest success. It was precisely in those districts that the rule of Kolchak and Denikin lasted for months and months.

The vacillation of the petty-bourgeois population was particularly marked in those districts where the influence of the proletariat is weakest. Vacillation was at first in favour of the Bolsheviks when they granted land and when the demobilised soldiers brought the news about peace; later – against the Bolsheviks when, to promote the international development of the revolution and to protect its centre in Russia, they agreed to sign the Treaty of Brest and thereby “offended” patriotic sentiments, the deepest of petty-bourgeois sentiments. The dictatorship of the proletariat was particularly displeasing to the peasants in those places where there were the largest

stocks of surplus grain, when the Bolsheviks showed that they would strictly and firmly secure the transfer of those surplus stocks to the state at fixed prices. The peasants in the Urals, Siberia and the Ukraine turned to Kolchak and Denikin.

Further, the experience of Kolchak and Denikin “democracy”, about which every hack writer in Kolchakia and Denikia shouted in every issue of the whiteguard newspapers, showed the peasants that phrases about democracy and about the “Constituent Assembly” serve only as a screen to conceal the dictatorship of the landowners and capitalists.

Another turn towards Bolshevism began and peasant revolts spread in the rear of Kolchak and Denikin. The peasants welcomed the Red troops as liberators.

In the long run, it was this vacillation of the peasantry, the main body of the petty-bourgeois working people, that decided the fate of Soviet rule and of the rule of Kolchak and Denikin. But this “long run” was preceded by a fairly lengthy period of severe struggle and painful trial, which have not ended in Russia after two years, have not ended precisely in Siberia and in the Ukraine. And there is no guarantee that they will end *completely* within, say, another year or so.

The supporters of “consistent” democracy have not given thought to the importance of this historic fact. They invented, and are still inventing, nursery tales about the proletariat under capitalism being able to “convince” the majority of the working people and win them firmly to its side by voting. But reality shows that only in the course of a long and fierce struggle does the stern experience of the *vacillating* petty bourgeoisie *lead it* to the conclusion, after comparing the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the capitalists, that the former is better than the latter.

In theory, all socialists who have studied Marxism and are willing to take into account the lessons of the nineteenth century political history of the advanced countries recognise that the *vacillation* of the petty bourgeoisie between the proletariat and the capitalist class is inevitable. The economic roots of this vacillation are clearly revealed by economic science, the truths of which have been repeated millions of times in the newspapers, leaflets and pamphlets issued by the socialists of the Second International.

But these people cannot apply those truths to the peculiar epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They substitute petty-bourgeois-democratic prejudices and illusions (about class “equali-

ty”, about “consistent” or “pure’ democracy, about solving great historic problems by voting, and so forth) for the *class struggle*. They will not understand that after capturing state power the proletariat does not thereby cease its class struggle, but continues it in a different form and by different means. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the class struggle of the proletariat conducted with the aid of an instrument like state power, a class struggle, one of whose aims is to demonstrate to the non-proletarian sections of the working people by means of their long experience and a long list of practical examples that it is more to their advantage to side with the dictatorship of the proletariat than with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and that there can be no third course.

The returns of the Constituent Assembly elections held in November 1917 give us the main background to the picture of the development of the Civil War that has raged for two years since those elections. The main forces in that war were *already* clearly evident during the Constituent Assembly elections – the role of the “striking force” of the proletarian army, the role of the vacillating peasantry, and the role of the bourgeoisie were already apparent. In his article N .V. Svyatitsky writes: “The Cadets were most successful in the same regions where the Bolsheviks were most successful – in the Northern and Central-Industrial regions” (p. 116). Naturally, in the most highly developed capitalist centres, the intermediary elements standing between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie were the weakest. Naturally, in those centres, the class struggle was most acute. It was there that the main forces of the bourgeoisie were concentrated and there, only there, could the proletariat defeat the bourgeoisie. Only the proletariat could rout the bourgeoisie, and only after routing the bourgeoisie could the proletariat definitely win the sympathy and support of the petty-bourgeois strata of the population by using an instrument like state power.

If properly used, if correctly read, the returns of the Constituent Assembly elections reveal to us again and again the fundamental truths of the Marxist doctrine of the class struggle.

These returns, incidentally, also reveal the role and importance of the national question. Take the Ukraine. At the last conferences on the Ukrainian question some comrades accused the writer of these lines of giving too much “prominence” to the national question in the Ukraine. The returns of the Constituent Assembly elections show that in the Ukraine, as early as November 1917, the

Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionaries and socialists polled a majority (3.4 million votes + 0.5 = 3.9 million against 1.9 million polled by the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries, out of a total poll in the whole of the Ukraine of 7.6 million votes). In the army on the South-Western and Rumanian fronts the *Ukrainian* socialists polled 30 per cent and 34 per cent of the total votes (the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries polled 40 per cent and 59 per cent).

Under these circumstances, to ignore the importance of the national question in the Ukraine – a sin of which Great Russians are often guilty (and of which the Jews are guilty perhaps only a little less often than the Great Russians) – is a great and dangerous mistake. The division between the Russian and *Ukrainian* Socialist-Revolutionaries as early as 1917 could not have been accidental. As internationalists it is our duty, first, to combat very vigorously the survivals (sometimes unconscious) of Great-Russian imperialism and chauvinism among “Russian” Communists; and secondly, it is our duty, precisely on the national question, which is a relatively minor one (for an internationalist the question of state frontiers is a secondary, if not a tenth-rate, question), to make concessions. There are other questions – the fundamental interests of the proletarian dictatorship; the interests of the unity and discipline of the Red Army which is fighting Denikin; the leading role of the proletariat in relation to the peasantry – that are more important; the question whether the Ukraine will be a separate state is far less important. We must not be in the least surprised, or frightened, even by the prospect of the *Ukrainian* workers and peasants trying out different systems, and in the course of, say, several years, testing by practice union with the R.S.F.S.R., or seceding from the latter and forming an independent *Ukrainian* S.S.R., or various forms of their close alliance, and so on, and so forth.

To attempt to settle this question in advance, once and for all, “firmly” and “irrevocably”, would be narrow-mindedness or sheer stupidity, for the vacillation of the non-proletarian working people on *such* a question is quite natural, even inevitable, but not in the least frightful for the proletariat. It is the duty of the proletarian who is really capable of being an internationalist to treat *such* vacillation with the greatest caution and tolerance, it is his duty to leave it to the non-proletarian masses *themselves* to *get rid* of this vacillation as a result of their own experience. We must be intolerant and ruth-

less, uncompromising and inflexible on other, more fundamental questions, some of which I have already pointed to above.

VI

The comparison of the Constituent Assembly elections in November 1917 with the development of the proletarian revolution in Russia from October 1917 to December 1919 enables us to draw conclusions concerning bourgeois parliamentarism and the proletarian revolution in every capitalist country. Let me try briefly to formulate, or at least to outline, the principal conclusions.

1. Universal suffrage is an index of the level reached by the various classes in their understanding of their problems. It shows how the various classes are *inclined* to solve their problems. The actual *solution* of those problems is not provided by voting, but by the class struggle in all its forms including civil war.

2. The socialists and Social-Democrats of the Second International take the stand of vulgar petty-bourgeois democrats and share the prejudice that the fundamental problems of the class struggle can be solved by voting.

3. The party of the revolutionary proletariat must take part in bourgeois parliaments in order to enlighten the masses; this can be done during elections and in the struggle between parties in parliament. But limiting the class struggle to the parliamentary struggle, or regarding the latter as the highest and decisive form, to which all the other forms of struggle are subordinate, is actually desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

4. All the representatives and supporters of the Second International, and all the leaders of the German, so-called “independent”, Social-Democratic Party, actually go over to the bourgeoisie in this way when they recognise the dictatorship of the proletariat in words, but in deeds, by their propaganda, imbue the proletariat with the idea that it must first obtain a formal expression of the will of the majority of the population under capitalism (i.e., a majority of votes in the bourgeois parliament) to transfer political power to the proletariat, which transfer is to take place later.

All the cries, based on this premise, of the German “independent” Social-Democrats and similar leaders of decayed socialism against the “dictatorship of a minority”, and so forth, merely indicate that those leaders fail to understand the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which actually reigns even in the most democratic re-

publics, and that they fail to understand the conditions for its destruction by the class struggle of the proletariat.

5. This failure to understand consists, in particular, in the following: they forget that, to a very large degree, the bourgeois parties are able to rule because they deceive the masses of the people, because of the yoke of capital, and to this is added self-deception concerning the nature of capitalism, a self-deception which is characteristic mostly of the petty-bourgeois parties, which usually want to substitute more or less disguised forms of class conciliation for the class struggle.

“First let the majority of the population, while private property still exists, i.e., while the rule and yoke of capital still exist, express themselves in favour of the party of the proletariat and only then can and should the party take power”– so say the petty-bourgeois democrats who call themselves socialists but who are in reality the servitors of the bourgeoisie.

“Let the revolutionary proletariat first overthrow the bourgeoisie, break the yoke of capital, and smash the bourgeois state apparatus, then the victorious proletariat will be able rapidly to gain the sympathy and support of the majority of the non-proletarian working people by satisfying their needs at the expense of the exploiters”– say we. The opposite will be rare exception in history (and even in such an exception the bourgeoisie can resort to civil war, as the example of Finland showed⁶).

6. Or in other words:

“First we shall pledge ourselves to recognise the principle of equality, or consistent democracy, while preserving private property and the yoke of capital (i.e., actual inequality under formal equality), and try to obtain the decision of the majority on this basis” – say the bourgeoisie and their yes-men, the petty-bourgeois democrats who call themselves socialists and Social-Democrats.

“First the proletarian class struggle, winning state power, will destroy the pillars and foundations of actual inequality, and then the proletariat, which has defeated the exploiters, will lead all working people to the *abolition of classes*, i.e., to socialist *equality*, the only kind that is not a deception” – say we.

7. In all capitalist countries, besides the proletariat, or that part of the proletariat which is conscious of its revolutionary aims and is capable of fighting to achieve them, there are numerous politically immature proletarian, semi-proletarian, semi-petty-bourgeois strata

which follow the bourgeoisie and bourgeois democracy (including the ‘socialists’ of the Second International) because they have been deceived, have no confidence in their own strength, or in the strength of the proletariat, are unaware of the possibility of having their urgent needs satisfied by means of the expropriation of the exploiters.

These strata of the working and exploited people provide the vanguard of the proletariat with allies and give it a stable majority of the population; but the proletariat can win these allies only with the aid of an instrument like state power, that is to say, only after it has overthrown the bourgeoisie and has destroyed the bourgeois state apparatus.

8. The strength of the proletariat in any capitalist country is far greater than the proportion it represents of the total population. That is because the proletariat economically dominates the centre and nerve of the entire economic system of capitalism, and also because the proletariat expresses economically and politically the real interests of the overwhelming majority of the working people under capitalism.

Therefore, the proletariat, even when it constitutes a minority of the population (or when the class-conscious and really revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat constitutes a minority of the population), is capable of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and, after that, of winning to its side numerous allies from a mass of semi-proletarians and petty bourgeoisie who never declare in advance in favour of the rule of the proletariat, who do not understand the conditions and aims of that rule, and only by their subsequent experience become convinced that the proletarian dictatorship is inevitable, proper and legitimate.

9. Finally, in every capitalist country there are always very broad strata of the petty bourgeoisie which inevitably vacillate between capital and labour. To achieve victory, the proletariat must, first, choose the right moment for its decisive assault on the bourgeoisie, taking into account, among other things, the disunity between the bourgeoisie and its petty-bourgeois allies, or the instability of their alliance, and so forth. Secondly, the proletariat must, after its victory, utilise this vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie in such a way as to neutralise them, prevent their siding with the exploiters; it must be able to hold on for some time *in spite of this vacillation*, and so on, and so forth.

10. One of the necessary conditions for preparing the proletariat for its victory is a long, stubborn and ruthless struggle against opportunism, reformism, social-chauvinism, and similar bourgeois influences and trends, which are inevitable, since the proletariat is operating in a capitalist environment. If there is no such struggle, if opportunism in the working-class movement is not utterly defeated beforehand, there can be no dictatorship of the proletariat. Bolshevism would not have defeated the bourgeoisie in 1917-19 if before that, in 1903-17, it had not learned to defeat the Mensheviks, i.e., the opportunists, reformists, social-chauvinists, and ruthlessly expel them from the party of the proletarian vanguard.

At the present time, the verbal recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the leaders of the German “Independents”, or by the French Longuetists,⁷ and the like, who are *actually* continuing the old, habitual policy of big and small concessions to and conciliation with opportunism, subservience to the prejudices of bourgeois democracy (“consistent democracy” or “pure democracy” as they call it) and bourgeois parliamentarism, and so forth, is the most dangerous self-deception—and sometimes sheer fooling of the workers.

December 16, 1919

Notes

1 The *Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany* – a Centrist party formed in April 1917 at the inaugural congress in Gotha. It advocated unity with social-chauvinists and went as far as to deny the class struggle. Kautsky’s group (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*) in Reichstag formed the core of the party. In October 1920 a split took place at a party congress in Halle. A considerable section of the party united with the Communist Party of Germany in December 1920 and the Right wing formed a separate party, retaining its old name. It existed till 1922.

2 *Centrists, Centrism* – a variety of opportunism in the labour movement, hostile to Marxism-Leninism. It arose in Social-Democratic parties of the Second International prior to the First World War.

The Centrists used Marxist phrases and posed as “orthodox Marxists”, but in fact emasculated Marxism of its revolutionary content, and tried to retain the influence of open opportunists and

hence of the bourgeoisie over the workers. The ideology of Centrism is the ideology of adaptation, of the subordination of the class interests of the proletariat to those of the bourgeoisie. Lenin said that Centrism was much more dangerous, much more harmful to the working-class movement than open opportunism; he described Centrism as “the social product of the contradictions within the Second International, a blend of loyalty to Marxism in word, and subordination to opportunism in deeds.” [See *Socialism and War*, ch. 1, the section entitled “Kaukskyism”.]

During the First World War the Centrists supported the policy of the opportunists, the social-chauvinists and at the same time they advanced pacifist slogans, in this way diverting the workers from the revolutionary struggle against the imperialist war. Lenin and other Bolsheviks considered Kautsky was one of the chief theoreticians of Centrism.

The Bolshevik Party headed by Lenin was an irreconcilable and consistent fighter against Centrism, against its Russian and international varieties. Exposing Centrism in Russia, the Bolsheviks helped the revolutionary elements in the parties of the Second International to get rid of Centrism, to break with the opportunists and to found genuinely Marxist, Communist Parties.

3 See Marx’s letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of December 13, 1870 (Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1955, p. 305).

4 See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France* (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1960, pp. 332-33, 48-85).

5 The Decree on Land was adopted by the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets on October 26 (November 8), 1917, the day following the establishment of Soviet power in Russia. The Decree on Land abolished the landed estates and all private ownership of land, and gave the land to the peasants for their use.

6 This refers to the civil war waged by the Finnish bourgeoisie against the proletarian revolution in Finland. The revolution began in the middle of January 1918 in the southern industrial districts of the country. On January 15 (28), 1918 the Finnish Red Guard captured the capital – Helsingfors (Helsinki), and the bourgeois government of Svinhufvud was overthrown. The workers seized power and set up a revolutionary government known as the Council of People’s Representatives; among its members were O. Kuusinen, J.

Sirola A. Taimi. Seims of workers' organisations formed the basic type of state power in the country. Lenin called them a new type of power, "proletarian power" (see present edition, Vol. 27, p. 133). Among the most important steps taken by the workers' government were the adoption of a law on the transfer without compensation of the lands tilled by the peasants to their ownership, exemption from taxation of the poor sections of the population, expropriation of the enterprises the owners of which had fled from the country, the establishment of state control over private banks (their functions were transferred to the state bank).

On March 1, 1918 a treaty was signed in Petrograd between the Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic and the R.S.F.S.R. It was based on the principles of complete equality and sovereignty, and was the first treaty in the world between two socialist countries.

However the proletarian revolution was victorious only in the towns and countryside of the South of Finland. The Svinhufvud government established itself in the North and appealed to the German Government for assistance. As a result of the intervention of the German armed forces, the revolution in Finland was defeated in May 1918 after a bitter civil war.

7 Longuetists – a minority group of the French Socialist Party led by Jean Longuet. During the First World War of 1914-18 they held Centrist views and pursued a conciliatory policy towards the social-chauvinists. The Longuetists rejected revolutionary struggle and advocated "defence of the fatherland" in the imperialist war. Lenin called them petty-bourgeois nationalists (see present edition Vol. 28, p. 286). After the victory of the October Socialist Revolution, the Longuetists declared that they supported the dictatorship of the proletariat, but in practice they went against it.