

V. I. LENIN

470

*A Letter to*  
**AMERICAN  
WORKERS**



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## INTRODUCTION

When the October Revolution was less than a year old, August 20, 1918, Lenin submitted a written report to the American workers on the progress of the Proletarian Revolution in Russia and the obstacles which were still in the way of complete victory.

Remembering the revolutionary traditions of the American working class and believing that "the American revolutionary proletarians are destined now to play an especially important rôle as irreconcilable foes of American imperialism," Lenin proceeded to explain the imperialist nature of the war which was still raging, the rapacious imperialist designs of the ruling classes of the warring nations, including the American, and the attempts of the capitalist governments to destroy the young Soviet Republic. In flaming words he showed how the Allies as well as the Central Powers were carrying on the wholesale slaughter for the division of spoils, for profits from the markets and colonies which would go to the victorious imperialist group.

In words full of scorn, Lenin described the betrayals of those Socialist leaders, "the watchdogs of imperialism," who aided their capitalist governments by deluding the workers. He wrote: "Thrice they deserve utmost contempt, this scum of international Socialism, these lackeys of bourgeois morality."

But the October Revolution made a breach in the strongest imperialist block. The Soviet Republic withdrew from the war and renounced all the imperialist covenants and policies of tsarism and of the Kerensky government which continued them. The October Revolution established workers' rule, which was showing the road to power to the toiling masses of the capitalist countries and the colonies. World capitalism would not countenance that. Counter-revolution in Russia was given every possible aid. Armies were fitted out and dispatched to the various borders from the Black

Sea to the Pacific Ocean. Almost the very day Lenin was writing his *Letter to the American Workers* about these imperialist attacks, American troops were disembarking in Vladivostok (August 17, 1918) to join Japanese, British and French military detachments.

Already on July 17, President Wilson had agreed to a "limited military intervention." On August 3, the American government was forced to admit publicly that it was in full accord with the other imperialist powers in the Russian interventionist policy. But in the usual, hypocritical Wilsonian manner, common to all "democratic" governments, it declared that the troops were being sent to "protect" the "stranded" Czechoslovak regiments, and to "guard the military supplies" from the Germans who were thousands of miles away. In "the most public and solemn manner," the American government informed the people of Russia that "it contemplates no interference with the political sovereignty of Russia and no intervention in her internal affairs" (sic!). The Japanese government hurried to issue a statement containing similar assurances of "friendship to Russia" and proclaiming "its avowed policy of respecting the territorial integrity of Russia and of abstaining from all interference in her internal affairs." To make sure that Russian territory in Siberia was "respected," Japan, which was to send over 7000 troops, soon landed 70,000 armed and equipped men. Troops of the other "respectors" of Russian territory were pouring in from Hong-Kong (British), Indo-China (French) and the Philippines (American). Not satisfied with sending troops to the Far East, the American government also sent military detachments to Archangel in the North with the cradle of the revolution, Petrograd, as a cherished objective.

Lenin characterised these American invasions by declaring that the American government was joining "the Anglo-Japanese beasts for the purpose of strangling the first Socialist Republic."

While Russian soil was being invaded, the enemies within, the Socialists-Revolutionaries, were organising an attempt on the life of the German Ambassador von Mirbach, in order to provoke the invasion of the German army from the West, and were plotting to behead the revolution by killing Lenin. They succeeded in killing the German Ambassador and seriously wounding Lenin.

It was in these circumstances that Lenin addressed himself directly to the American workers, telling them of the conditions under which the October Revolution was fighting to achieve its aims. He also drew lessons for the American workers and, for that matter, for the workers of the whole world, to whom the success or failure of the Russian Revolution was closely tied up with their own struggles against the oppression of imperialism.

With war again the order of the day and with Japanese imperialism and German fascism acting as spearheads in the threatening attack on the Soviet Union, Lenin's *Letter* is as timely today as it was when it was written.

The lessons which Lenin outlined in the *Letter* are also timely at the present time. To those who did not free themselves "from the pedantry of bourgeois intellectualism" and were questioning Lenin's policy of dealing with the French militarists when the German troops were marching towards the Ukraine, he declared: "To throw back the rapacious advancing Germans we made use of the equally rapacious counter-interests of the other imperialists thereby serving the interests of the Russian and the international Socialist revolution." The same reasoning was used earlier by Lenin when he fought the "revolutionary" views of those who opposed the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace with the German government, necessary, according to Lenin, to "gain a breathing spell" for the revolution.

Turning to American history, Lenin recalled how the leaders of the American Revolution sought the aid of other Powers in their struggle against the British. "The American people utilised the differences that existed between the French, the Spanish and the English, at times even fighting side by side with the armies of the French and Spanish oppressors against the English oppressors. First it vanquished the English and then freed itself (partly by purchase) from the French and the Spanish."

There were voices in America, as elsewhere, who were bemoaning the "destruction" which was entailed in the civil war brought about by the imperialist invasion and counter-revolution at home. Drawing again the parallel with epochal events in American history and

suggesting that immediately after the Civil War the United States may have appeared "behind" that of the pre-war period, Lenin exclaimed: "But what a pedant, what an idiot is he who denies on such grounds, the greatest, world-historic, progressive and revolutionary significance of the American Civil War of 1861-1865!"

Those in the American labor movement who ranged themselves against Lenin and the Bolsheviks were prepared to admit the progressive character of the war for the abolition of *chattel* slavery, but, "frightened by the bourgeoisie and shunning the revolution, cannot understand or do not want to understand the necessity and the legality of civil war" in the struggle for the abolition of *wage* slavery—"a vastly greater task."

Over the heads of the treacherous and faint-hearted leaders, the Gomperses and the Hillquits, Lenin passed on to the American workers the great lesson "that there can be no successful revolution without *crushing the resistance of the exploiters*," a truth "left as a heritage to the workers by the best teachers, the founders of modern Socialism."

The workers of Germany and Austria are today smarting under the iron heel of fascism because the socialist leaders refused to follow this truth "taught by all revolutions" when the revolutions of 1918 occurred. Instead of allowing the workers' revolution to develop to its logical conclusion—proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power—the socialist leaders permitted the counter-revolution of the bourgeoisie to develop to its logical conclusion—fascism.

Under Lenin's tutelage, the Bolsheviks, on the other hand, mastered the "great truth" and continually urged the Russian workers and peasants to carry on the struggle until every vestige of capitalism in the city and on the land was destroyed and the workers' rule firmly entrenched.

Every line of Lenin's *Letter* breathes with faith in the ultimate triumph of the revolution, and not only in Russia, but throughout the world. Fervently confident that the international revolution would materialise, Lenin foresaw that "before the outburst of the international revolution there may be several defeats of separate revolutions." And, in his *Letter* he wrote: "We know that help from



you, comrades American workers, will probably not come soon."

Irrespective, therefore, of the temporary fortunes of the revolutions in other countries, the Russian Revolution must carry on. Thus, under the leadership of Lenin, the Russian workers conquered power, and under the leadership of his successor, Stalin, are now building successfully a classless society—Socialism.

But the overthrow of the rule of capital, throughout the world, is inevitable. Writing in the darkest hour of the Russian Revolution—imperialist attacks on all sides, far-flung civil war—Lenin concluded his historic message to the American workers with the words which the toiling masses of all countries can inscribe on their banners: "*We are invincible, because the world proletarian revolution is invincible.*"

*A Letter to American Workers*, dated August 20, 1918, was first published in the United States in the December, 1918, issue of the *Class Struggle*, a bi-monthly issued by an internationalist group in the Socialist Party. It was reprinted in pamphlet form from that magazine and widely distributed. It played an important part in developing among American Socialists an understanding of the nature of imperialism, of the aims of the October Revolution and of the rôle of the social-chauvinists in the labor movement. It directly contributed to the building of the Left Wing in the Socialist Party which led later to the splitting away of the revolutionary elements and the formation of the Communist Party.

The version of the *Letter* printed in the *Class Struggle* and reprinted on numerous occasions in the periodical press, was not only inaccurate but also incomplete. Whole passages were left out, some of them giving Lenin's estimate of the rôle of American imperialism in the World War and stressing the imperialist designs of both warring groups. Much of what Lenin wrote about the rôle of the reformist and centrist Socialists—the forerunners of present-day social-fascists—in the war was omitted. The translation was free, whole sections of the *Letter* being rendered only in bare outline.

Partial results of an inquiry conducted recently into the cause of the criminal mutilation of Lenin's "*Letter*" revealed that the English translation was made from the Swedish text published in a Stock-

holm paper. It is yet to be established who were responsible for the excisions and free translation—those who translated the “*Letter*” from Russian into Swedish, or the English translator.

For the present edition, a completely new translation was made from the original Russian text, prepared by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute and published in Lenin’s *Collected Works*. This is, therefore, the first complete English version of the historic message of Lenin to the American workers, which remains as fresh and appropriate today as when it was penned almost sixteen years ago.

May, 1934.

ALEXANDER TRACHTENBERG.



## A LETTER TO AMERICAN WORKERS

Comrades: A Russian Bolshevik who participated in the Revolution of 1905 and for many years afterwards lived in your country has offered to transmit my letter to you. I accepted his proposal all the more joyfully, because the American revolutionary proletarians are destined precisely now to play an especially important rôle as irreconcilable foes of American imperialism, which is the newest, strongest and latest to participate in the world-wide slaughter of nations for the division of capitalist profits. Precisely now the American billionaires, these contemporary slave-owners, have opened a particularly tragic page in the bloody history of bloody imperialism by giving their approval—it makes no difference whether direct or indirect, whether open or hypocritically covered up—to an armed expedition of the Anglo-Japanese beasts for the purpose of strangling the first Socialist republic.

The history of modern civilised America opens with one of those great, really liberating, really revolutionary wars of which there have been so few among the large number of wars of conquest that were caused, like the present imperialist war, by squabbles among kings, landowners and capitalists over the division of seized lands and stolen profits. It was a war of the American people against English robbers who subjected America and held it in colonial slavery as these “civilised” bloodsuckers are even now subjecting and holding in colonial slavery hundreds of millions of people in India, Egypt and in all corners of the world.

Since that time about 150 years have passed. Bourgeois civilisation has borne all its luxuriant fruits. By the high level of development of the productive forces of organised human labour, by utilising machines and all the wonders of modern technic, America has taken the first place among free and cultured nations. But at the same time America has become one of the foremost coun-

tries as regards the depth of the abyss which divides a handful of brazen billionaires who are wallowing in dirt and in luxury on the one hand, and millions of toilers who are always on the verge of starvation. The American people, who gave the world an example of a revolutionary war against feudal subjection, now appears as a new, capitalist wage slave of a handful of billionaires; finds itself playing the rôle of a hired assassin for the wealthy gang, having strangled the Philippines in 1898 under the pretext of "liberating" them, and strangling the Russian Socialist Republic in 1918 under the pretext of "protecting" it from the Germans.

But four years of the imperialist slaughter of peoples have not passed in vain. Obvious and irrefutable facts have exposed to the end the duping of peoples by the scoundrels of both the English and the German group of brigands. The four years of war have shown in their results the general law of capitalism as applied to war between murderers for the division of spoils: that he who was richest and mightiest profited and robbed the most; that he who was weakest was robbed, decimated, crushed and strangled to the utmost.

In number of "colonial slaves" the English imperialist cutthroats have always been most powerful. English capitalists did not lose a foot of their "own" territory (acquired through centuries of robbery) but have managed to appropriate all the German colonies in Africa, have grabbed Mesopotamia and Palestine, have stifled Greece and have begun to plunder Russia.

German imperialist cutthroats were stronger in regard to the organisation and discipline of "their" armies, but weaker in colonies. They have lost all their colonies, but have robbed half of Europe and throttled most of the small countries and weaker peoples. What a great war of "liberation" on both sides! How well they have "defended the fatherland"—these bandits of both groups, the Anglo-French and the German capitalists together with their lackeys, the social-chauvinists, *i.e.*, Socialists who went over to the side of "*their own*" bourgeoisie!

The American billionaires were richest of all and geographically the most secure. They have profited most of all. They have made all, even the richest countries, their vassals. They have plundered

hundreds of billions of dollars. And every dollar is stained with filth: filthy secret pacts between England and her "allies," between Germany and her vassals, pacts on the division of spoils, pacts on mutual "aid" in oppressing the workers and persecuting the Socialists-internationalists. Every dollar is stained with the filth of "profitable" military deliveries enriching the rich and despoiling the poor in every country. And every dollar is stained with blood—of that sea of blood which was shed by the ten millions killed and twenty millions maimed in the great, noble, liberating and holy war, which was to decide whether the English or the German cut-throats will get more of the spoils, whether the English or the German executioners will be the *first* to smother the weak peoples the world over.

While the German bandits established a record of military brutalities, the English established a record not only in the number of looted colonies, but also in the subtlety of their disgusting hypocrisy. Precisely now the Anglo-French and American bourgeois press is spreading in millions upon millions of copies their lies and calumnies about Russia, hypocritically justifying their predatory expedition against her by the alleged desire to "protect" Russia from the Germans!

It is not necessary to waste many words to disprove this despicable and hideous lie; it is sufficient to point out one well-known fact. When in October, 1917, the Russian workers overthrew their imperialist government, the Soviet power, the power of revolutionary workers and peasants openly proposed a just peace, a peace without annexations and indemnities, a peace fully guaranteeing equal rights to all nations—and proposed such a peace to *all* the countries at war.

And it was the Anglo-French and the American bourgeoisie who refused to accept our proposals; they were the very ones who even refused to talk to us of a universal peace! Precisely *they* were the ones who acted treacherously towards the interests of all peoples by prolonging the imperialist slaughter.

Precisely they were the ones who, speculating upon a renewed participation of Russia in the imperialist war, have shunned peace negotiations and thereby given a free hand to the no less maraud-

ing German capitalists in foisting upon Russia the annexationist and violent Brest Peace! \*

It is difficult to imagine a more disgusting piece of hypocrisy than the one with which the Anglo-French and American bourgeoisie now put upon us the "blame" for the Brest Peace. The very capitalists of those countries upon which it depended to turn Brest into general negotiations for world peace are now our "accusers." The scoundrels of Anglo-French imperialism who profited from the loot of colonies and from the slaughter of peoples, and who prolonged the war almost a year after Brest—they "accuse" *us*, the Bolsheviks, who proposed a just peace to all countries; *us*, who tore up, exposed and put to shame the secret criminal treaties of the former Tsar with the Anglo-French capitalists.

The workers of the whole world, in whatever country they may live, rejoice with us and sympathise with us, applaud us for having burst the iron ring of imperialist ties, dirty imperialist treaties, imperialist chains, for having dreaded no sacrifice, however great, to free ourselves, for having established ourselves as a Socialist republic, even though rent asunder and plundered by the imperialists, for having gotten *out* of the imperialist war and raising the banner of peace, the banner of Socialism over the world.

No wonder that for this we are hated by the band of international imperialists; no wonder that they all "accuse" us and that the lackeys of imperialism, including our right Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, also "accuse" us. From the hatred of these watchdogs of imperialism for the Bolsheviks, as well as from the sympathy of class-conscious workers of all countries, we draw new assurance in the justice of our cause.

He is no Socialist who does not understand that one cannot and *must not* hesitate to make even such a sacrifice as the sacrifice of a piece of territory, the sacrifice of a heavy defeat at the hands of capitalists of other countries, the sacrifice of indemnities to capitalists, in the interest of victory over the bourgeoisie, in the interest of transfer of power to the working class, in the interest of the *beginning* of the international proletarian revolution. He is no

\* The treaty signed in Brest-Litovsk, March, 1918, between the Soviet Government and the Central Powers.—*Ed.*



Socialist who has not shown by *deeds* his readiness for the greatest sacrifices on the part of *his* fatherland so that the cause of the Socialist revolution may be pushed forward.

For the sake of "their" cause, that is, the conquest of world hegemony, the imperialists of England and Germany have not hesitated to ruin and to strangle a whole series of countries from Belgium and Serbia to Palestine and Mesopotamia. And what about the Socialists? Shall they, for the sake of "their" cause—the liberation of the workers of the whole world from the yoke of capital, the conquest of a universal lasting peace—wait until they can find a way that entails no sacrifice? Shall they be afraid to commence the battle until an easy victory is "guaranteed"? Shall they place the integrity and safety of "their" fatherland, created by the bourgeoisie, above the interests of the world Socialist revolution? Thrice they deserve utmost contempt, this scum of international Socialism, these lackeys of bourgeois morality who think along these lines.

The beasts of prey of Anglo-French and American imperialism "accuse" us of coming to an "agreement" with German imperialism.

O hypocrites! O scoundrels, who slander the workers' government and shiver from fear of that sympathy which is being shown us by the workers of "their own" countries! But their hypocrisy will be exposed. They pretend not to understand the difference between an agreement made by "Socialists" *with* the bourgeoisie (native or foreign) *against the workers*, against the toilers, and an agreement for the safety of the workers who have defeated their bourgeoisie, with a bourgeoisie of one national color *against* the bourgeoisie of another color for the sake of the utilisation by the proletariat of the contradictions between the different groups of the bourgeoisie.

In reality every European knows this difference very well, and the American people particularly, as I shall presently show, have "experienced" it in their own history. There are agreements and agreements, there are *fagots et fagots* as the French say.

When the German imperialist robbers in February, 1918, threw their armies against defenseless, demobilised Russia, which staked its hopes upon the international solidarity of the proletariat before

the international revolution had completely ripened, I did not hesitate for a moment to come to a certain "agreement" with the French monarchists. The French captain Sadoul, who sympathised in words with the Bolsheviks while in deeds a faithful servant of French imperialism, brought the French officer de Lubersac to me. "I am a monarchist. My only purpose is the defeat of Germany," de Lubersac declared to me. "That goes without saying (*cela va sans dire*)," I replied. But this by no means prevented me from coming to an "agreement" with de Lubersac concerning certain services that French officers, experts in explosives, were ready to render by blowing up railroad tracks in order to prevent the advance of German troops against us. This was an example of an "agreement" of which every class-conscious worker will approve, an agreement in the interests of Socialism. We shook hands with the French monarchist although we knew that each of us would readily hang his "partner." But for a time our interests coincided. To throw back the rapacious advancing Germans *we* made use of the equally rapacious counter-interests of the other imperialists, thereby serving the interests of the Russian and the international Socialist revolution. In this way we served the interests of the working class of Russia and other countries, we strengthened the proletariat and weakened the bourgeoisie of the whole world, we used the justified practise of manœuvring, necessary in *every* war, of shifting and waiting for the moment when the rapidly growing proletarian revolution in a number of advanced countries had *ripened*.

And despite all the wrathful howling of the sharks of Anglo-French and American imperialism, despite all the calumnies they have showered upon us, despite all the millions spent for bribing the right Socialist-Revolutionary, Menshevik and other social-patriotic newspapers, *I would not hesitate a single second* to come to the *same kind* of an "agreement" with the German imperialist robbers, should an attack upon Russia by Anglo-French troops demand it. And I know perfectly well that my tactics will meet with the approval of the class-conscious proletariat of Russia, Germany, France, England, America—in a word, of the whole civilised world. Such tactics will lighten the task of the Socialist revolution, will



hasten its advance, will weaken the international bourgeoisie, will strengthen the position of the working class which is conquering it.

The American people used these tactics long ago to the advantage of its revolution. When America waged its great war of liberation against the English oppressors, it was confronted with the French and the Spanish oppressors, who owned a portion of what is now the United States of North America. In its difficult war for freedom the American people, too, made "agreements" with one group of oppressors against the other for the purpose of weakening oppressors and strengthening those who were struggling in a revolutionary manner against oppression—in the interest of the oppressed *masses*. The American people utilised the differences that existed between the French, the Spanish and the English, at times even fighting side by side with the armies of the French and Spanish oppressors against the English oppressors. First it vanquished the English and then freed itself (partly by purchase) from the French and the Spanish.

The great Russian revolutionist Chernyshevsky once said: "Historical action is not the pavement of *Nevsky Prospect*.\* He is no revolutionist who would "permit" the proletarian revolution only under the "condition" that it proceed easily, smoothly, with the co-ordinated and simultaneous action of the proletarians of different countries and with a guarantee beforehand against defeat; that the revolution go forward along the broad, free, direct path to victory, without the necessity sometimes of making the greatest sacrifices, of "lying in wait in besieged fortresses," or of climbing along the narrowest, most impassable, winding, dangerous mountain roads—he has not yet freed himself from the pedantry of bourgeois intellectualism, he will fall back again and again into the camp of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, like our Right Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and even (although more seldom) the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Along with the bourgeoisie these gentlemen like to blame us for the "chaos" of revolution, the "destruction" of industry, the unemployment, the lack of food. What hypocrisy these accusations are

\* Reference is here made to the smoothness of the pavement of the famed main street of St. Petersburg, now Leningrad.—*Ed.*

from people who greeted and supported the imperialist war or came to an "agreement" with Kerensky, who continued this war! It is that very imperialist war which is the cause of all these misfortunes. The revolution that was born of the war must necessarily go through the terrible difficulties and sufferings left as the heritage of the prolonged, destructive, reactionary slaughter of the peoples. To accuse us of "destruction" of industries, or of "terror," is either hypocrisy or clumsy pedantry; it is an inability to understand the basic conditions of the raging class struggle, intensified to the utmost, which is called revolution.

Generally speaking, such "accusers" limit themselves to a verbal recognition even when they do "recognise" the class struggle, but in deeds they revert again and again to the philistine Utopia of "conciliation" and "collaboration" of classes. For the class struggle in revolutionary times has always inevitably and in every country taken on the form of a *civil war*, and civil war is unthinkable without the worst kind of destruction, without terror and limitations of formal democracy in the interests of the war. Only suave priests, be they Christian or "secular" parliamentary or parlor Socialists, are unable to see, understand and feel this necessity. Only a lifeless "man in the case" \* can shun the revolution for this reason instead of throwing himself into the fight with the utmost passion and decisiveness at a moment when history demands that the greatest problems of humanity be solved by struggle and war.

The American people has a revolutionary tradition adopted by the best representatives of the American proletariat, who gave repeated expression to their full solidarity with us, the Bolsheviks. This tradition is the war of liberation against the English in the 18th and the Civil War in the 19th century. If we are to take only into consideration the "destruction" of some branches of industry and national economy, America in 1870 was in some respects *behind* 1860. But what a pedant, what an idiot is he who denies on such grounds the greatest, world-historic, progressive and revolutionary significance of the American Civil War of 1861-1865!

Representatives of the bourgeoisie understand that it was worth

\* The title of a story by Anton Chekhov. The hero is hemmed in by routine like a clam in its shell.—Ed.

letting the country go through long years of civil war, the abysmal ruin, destruction and terror which are connected with every war for the sake of the overthrow of Negro slavery and the overthrow of the rule of the slave-owners. But now, when we are confronted with the vastly greater task of the overthrow of capitalist *wage* slavery, the overthrow of the rule of the bourgeoisie—now the representatives and defenders of the bourgeoisie, as well as the socialist-reformists, frightened by the bourgeoisie and shunning the revolution, cannot understand and do not want to understand the necessity and the legality of civil war.

The American workers will not follow the bourgeoisie. They will be with us for civil war against the bourgeoisie. The whole history of the world and the American labour movement strengthens my conviction. I also recall the words of one of the most beloved leaders of the American proletariat, Eugene Debs, who wrote in *The Appeal to Reason*, I believe towards the end of 1915, in the article "In Whose War I Will Fight"\* (I quoted that article at the beginning of 1916 at a public meeting of workers in Berne, Switzerland) that he, Debs, would rather be shot than vote for loans for the present criminal and reactionary imperialist war; that he, Debs, knows of only one holy and, from the standpoint of the proletariat, legal war, namely: the war against the capitalists, the war for the liberation of mankind from wage slavery!

I am not at all surprised that Wilson, the head of the American billionaires and servant of the capitalist sharks, has thrown Debs into prison. Let the bourgeoisie be brutal to the true internationalists, the true representatives of the revolutionary proletariat! The more obduracy and bestiality it displays, the nearer comes the day of the victorious proletarian revolution.

We are blamed for the destruction caused by our revolution.... Who are the accusers? The hangers-on of the bourgeoisie, that very bourgeoisie, which has destroyed almost the whole of European culture during the four years of the imperialist war, and has brought Europe to a state of barbarism, savagery and starvation. That bourgeoisie now demands of us that we do not carry on our revo-

\* *Appeal to Reason*, September 11, 1915. Reprinted in *Voices of Revolt*, Vol. IX, "Speeches of Eugene V. Debs" (International Publishers), p. 63.—Ed.

lution on the basis of this destruction, amidst the remnants of culture, ruins created by the war, nor with men whom the war turned into savages. O how humane and righteous is that bourgeoisie!

Its servants accuse us of terror.... The English bourgeois has forgotten his 1649, the French his 1793.\* Terror was just and legal when used by the bourgeoisie to its own advantage against feudalism. Terror became monstrous and criminal when workers and the poorest peasants dared to use it against the bourgeoisie! Terror was legal and just when used in the interests of a substitution of one exploiting minority for another. Terror became monstrous and criminal when it began to be used in the interests of an overthrow of *every* exploiting minority, in the interests of a really vast majority, in the interests of the proletariat and semi-proletariat, the working class and the poorest peasantry!

The international imperialist bourgeoisie has killed off ten million men and maimed twenty million in "*its*" war, the war to decide whether the English or the German robbers are to rule the world.

If *our* war, the war of oppressed and exploited against oppressors and exploiters, results in half a million or a million victims in all countries, the bourgeoisie will say that the sacrifice of the former is justified, while the latter is criminal.

The proletariat will say something altogether different.

Now, amid the ravages of the imperialist war, the proletariat is thoroughly mastering that great truth taught by all revolutions and left as a heritage to the workers by their best teachers, the founders of modern Socialism. That truth is, that there can be no successful revolution without *crushing the resistance of the exploiters*. It was our duty to crush the resistance of exploiters when we, the workers and toiling peasants, seized state power. We are proud that we have been doing it and are continuing to do it. We only regret that we are not doing it in a sufficiently firm and determined manner.

We know that the fierce resistance of the bourgeoisie to the Socialist revolution is inevitable in all countries and that it will

\* The execution of King Charles I and the suppression of opposition during the régime of Cromwell in England, and the terror during the Great French Revolution.—*Ed.*



grow with the growth of this revolution. The proletariat will crush this resistance; it will definitely mature to victory and power in the course of struggle against the resisting bourgeoisie.

Let the kept bourgeois press howl to the whole world about each mistake made by our revolution. We are not afraid of our mistakes. Men have not become saints because the revolution has begun. The toiling classes, oppressed and downtrodden for centuries and forced into the clutches of poverty, savagery and ignorance, cannot be expected to bring about a revolution flawlessly. And the cadaver of bourgeois society, as I had occasion to point out once before,\* cannot be nailed in a casket and buried. Defeated capitalism is dying and rotting around us, polluting the air with germs and poisoning our lives, grasping the new, the fresh, the young and the live with thousands of threads and bonds of the old, the rotten, the dead.

For every hundred mistakes of ours heralded to the world by the bourgeoisie and its lackeys (including our own Mensheviks and Right Socialist-Revolutionaries) there are 10,000 great and heroic deeds, the greater and the more heroic for their simplicity, for their being unseen and hidden in the everyday life of an industrial quarter or provincial village, performed by men who are not used to (and who do not have the opportunity to) herald their achievements to the world.

But even if the contrary were true—although I know this supposition to be incorrect—even if there were 10,000 mistakes for every 100 correct actions of ours, even in that case our revolution would be great and invincible, and *so it will be in the eyes of world history*, because, *for the first time* not the minority, not only the rich, not only the educated, but the *real* masses, the vast majority of toilers are *themselves* building a new life, are deciding *by their own experience* the most difficult problems of Socialist organisation.

Each mistake in such a work, in this most honest and sincere work of tens of millions of simple workers and peasants for the reorganisation of their whole life, each such mistake is worth thou-

\* In a speech before the Joint Session of the Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet and the Trade Unions on June 4, 1918.—*Ed.*

sands and millions of "faultless" successes of the exploiting minority—successes in swindling and duping the toilers. For only *through* such mistakes will the workers and peasants *learn* to build a new life, learn to do *without* capitalists; only thus will they blaze a new trail—through thousands of obstacles—to a victorious Socialism.

In carrying on their revolutionary work mistakes were made by our peasants who abolished all private landed property at one blow in one night, October 25-26 (Nov. 7), 1917. Now, month after month, overcoming tremendous hardships and correcting themselves, they are solving in a practical way the most difficult tasks of organising new conditions of economic life—struggling with kulaks, securing the land for the *toilers* (and not for the rich people) and bringing about the transition to a *Communist* large scale agriculture.

In carrying on their revolutionary work mistakes were made by our workers, who have now nationalised, after a few months, almost all the major factories and plants and who are learning from hard, day-to-day work the new task of managing whole branches of industry; who are perfecting the nationalised economy; who are overcoming the powerful resistance of inertia, petty-bourgeois tendencies and selfishness; who are laying stone after stone the foundation of a *new* social bond, of a *new* labor discipline, of a *new* power of trade unions of workers over their members.

In carrying on their revolutionary work mistakes are made by our soviets, which were created back in 1905 by a mighty upsurge of the masses. The soviets of workers and peasants are a new *type* of state, a new and higher *type* of democracy, the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a means of ruling the state *without* the bourgeoisie and *against* the bourgeoisie. For the first time democracy serves the masses, the toilers, having ceased to be a democracy for the rich, as it still remains in all the bourgeois republics, even the most democratic ones. For the first time the popular masses are deciding, on a scale affecting hundreds of millions of people, the task of realising the dictatorship of proletarians and semi-proletarians—a task without the solution of which one *cannot* speak about Socialism.

Let the pedants, or people hopelessly stuffed with bourgeois-democratic or parliamentary prejudices, shake their heads perplexedly



about our soviets, for instance, about the lack of direct elections. These people forgot nothing and learned nothing during the period of the great upheavals of 1914-1918. A union of the dictatorship of the proletariat with a new democracy for the toilers—civil war with the broadest involving of the masses in politics—such union is neither to be achieved at once nor is it to be fitted into the dreary forms of routine parliamentary democracy. A new world, the world of Socialism, is what rises before us in its contours as the Soviet Republic. And it is no wonder that this world is not being born ready-made and does not spring forth all at once, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter.

While old bourgeois-democratic constitutions spoke about formal equality and right of assembly, our proletarian and peasant Soviet constitution casts aside the hypocrisy of formal equality. When bourgeois republicans overthrew thrones they did not care about formal equality of monarchists with republicans. When we speak of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, only traitors or idiots will seek to concede to the bourgeoisie formal equality of rights. The "freedom of assembly" for workers and peasants is not worth a cent when the best buildings are in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Our soviets *took away* all the good buildings from the rich both in town and country, and *turned over* all these buildings to the workers and peasants for *their* unions and meetings. That is *our* freedom of assembly—for the toilers. That is the idea and content of our Soviet, Socialist Constitution!

And this is why we are so firmly convinced that our Republic of Soviets is *invincible* no matter what misfortunes befall her.

It is invincible, because each blow of frenzied imperialism, each defeat which we suffer from the international bourgeoisie, calls to struggle new strata of workers and peasants, teaches them at the price of the greatest sacrifices, hardens them and gives birth to new mass heroism.

We know that help from you, comrades American workers, will probably not come soon, for the development of the revolution proceeds with a different tempo and in different forms in different countries (and it cannot be otherwise). We know that the European proletarian revolution also may not blaze forth during the

next few weeks,\* no matter how rapidly it has been ripening lately. We stake our chances on the inevitability of the international revolution, but this in no way means that we are so foolish as to stake our chances on the inevitability of the revolution within a *stated* short period. We have seen in our country two great revolutions, in 1905 and in 1917, and we know that revolutions are made neither to order nor by agreement. We know that circumstances brought to the fore *our* Russian detachment of the Socialist proletariat, not by virtue of our merits, but due to the particular backwardness of Russia, and that *before* the outburst of the international revolution there may be several defeats of separate revolutions.

Despite this, we are firmly convinced that we are invincible, because mankind will not break down under the imperialist slaughter, but will overcome it. And the first country which *demolished* the galley chains of imperialist war, was *our* country. We made the greatest of sacrifices in the struggle for the demolition of this chain, but we *broke* it. We are beyond imperialist dependence, we raised before the whole world the banner of struggle for the complete overthrow of imperialism.

We are now as if in a beleaguered fortress until other detachments of the international Socialist revolution come to our rescue. But these detachments *exist*, they are *more numerous* than ours, they mature, they grow, they become stronger as the bestialities of imperialism continue. The workers sever connections with their social-traitors—the Gomperses, Hendersons, Renaudels, Scheidemanns, Renners.\*\* The workers are going slowly, but unswervingly, towards Communist, Bolshevik tactics, towards the proletarian revolution, which is the only one capable of saving perishing culture and perishing mankind.

In a word, we are invincible, because the world proletarian revolution is invincible.

August 20, 1918.

N. LENIN.

First published in *Pravda*, No. 178, August 22, 1918.

\* The German Revolution broke out about ten weeks after these lines were written.—*Ed.*

\*\* Right-wing leaders of American, English, French, German and Austrian socialist and trade union movements.—*Ed.*

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