

The Land Revolution in Russia

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THE LAND REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA

**Being a Speech on the
Land Question by**

LENIN

Together with the
**TWO FUNDAMENTAL LAND DECREES
OF THE RUSSIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC.**



**THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY,
8 and 9 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4.**

6d.

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FOREWORD.

We have heard a good deal of the work done by the Soviet régime of Russia in the towns, but we know next to nothing of the revolution which has been accomplished in the Russian villages. Yet the degree in which the Revolution has affected the villages is of prime importance in a country which is so pre-eminently agricultural as Russia. The present pamphlet sheds considerable light upon this highly important aspect of the great Russian Revolution. The two decrees show the principles which were applied by Socialism in power to the solution of the land question, and Lenin's speech gives an outline of what has been practically accomplished in the application of those principles. It will be seen that Lenin considers the Revolution as having proved triumphant also in the villages.

The two decrees have already been translated in America, but rather badly. The present new translation is authoritative. Lenin's speech is translated for the first time, and the translation may also be regarded as accurate in every respect.

It deserves to be noted that the first Land Decree was issued by the congress of Soviets on the day following the successful accomplishment of the Bolshevik Revolution on November 7th, 1917, when the supreme executive authority in the country was grasped by the Council of People's Commissaries, entirely Bolshevik in its composition. Nevertheless, recognising the will of the people as the supreme law, the Council adopted as the basis for the decree the programme drawn up by the peasants themselves, who were at that time under the preponderating influence of the Socialist-Revolutionaries—a programme which the Bolsheviks had regarded as, on many points, impracticable.

The second decree was issued by the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets at a time when the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the Left were forming part of the Government and held, among others, the all-important portfolio of Agriculture. It represents, on the whole, a development of the first one, but contains highly important additions for the encouragement of collective tillage, introduced by the Bolsheviks. Lenin's speech explains the true significance of these additions.

We have pleasure in presenting these important documents to British readers on account not only of their historical interest, but because of their practical value.

PHILIP SNOWDEN,

August, 1919.

Editor.

LENIN'S SPEECH

At the First All-Russian Congress of Land Departments (of Soviets), Committees of the Poor, and Communes.

COMRADES,

The very composition of the present Congress indicates, in my opinion, the important change and the great step forward which has been made by us, the Soviet Republic, in the domain of Socialist reconstruction, especially in its agrarian aspect, the most important for our country. The present Congress unites in its body representatives of the Land Departments of the Soviets, of the committees of the Poor, and of agricultural communes; and this unity shows that our Revolution, in the short space of one year, has already gone far in the task of reconstructing those relations of society which always are hardest to alter, which in all previous revolutions more than anything else obstructed the path of Socialism, and which it is necessary to reconstruct most radically of all, in order to guarantee the victory of Socialism.

The first stage in the development of our Revolution after November was mainly devoted to the task of crushing the common enemy of the whole peasant class—the landowners.

You all know well, comrades, that even the March revolution, the revolution of the bourgeoisie and of the party of "compromise," promised the peasants this victory over the landowners. But it did not keep its promise. Only the November Revolution, only the victory of the working class in the towns, only the authority of the Soviets, made it possible really to free the whole of Russia, from end to end, from the mischievous heritage of our former serfdom—from the economic exploitation of the peasantry by the landowning bourgeoisie, whose yoke pressed impartially on all peasants without distinction.

The peasants—all sections of them—could not but rise—and actually did rise—in this war against the landowners. The struggle allied the poorest peasant class, which does not live by the exploitation of hired labour, with the more prosperous and even with the richest section of the peasantry, which cannot exist without hired labour.

So long as our Revolution was still preoccupied with this problem, so long as we had still to strain every nerve to the end that an independent peasant movement, assisted by the workers in the towns, might really sweep away and finally destroy the power of the landowners—so long our Revolution remained essentially the work of the entire peasantry, and for that reason could not free itself from its bourgeois setting. It did not as yet touch the stronger, the more up-to-date enemy of all workers—that is, Capitalism. It threatened, consequently, to remain half-finished, just as the majority of revolutions had remained in Western Europe, where a temporary alliance of urban workers with all the peasantry succeeded in overthrowing the Monarch, in sweeping away the remnants of medievalism, and in destroying, more or less completely, the great estates or the power of the landowners, but never succeeded in tearing up the foundations themselves of that power—viz., Capitalism.

It was to this task, much more important and much more difficult, that our Revolution began to turn its energies since summer and autumn of this year. A wave of counter-revolutionary revolts arose in the summer of this year, when all the elements that stand for exploitation and oppression in Russian life joined the campaign started against Russia by the Western European Imperialists and by their Czecho-Slovak hirelings; and it was this wave which awakened new activities and new life in the village. The risings united in practice, in a desperate struggle against Soviet power, the European Imperialists, their mercenaries, the Czecho-Slovaks, and all that remained in Russia on the side of the Capitalists and of the landlords; and, in their train, the village vultures revolted also. The village then ceased to be

homogeneous. In that community, which had fought as one man against the landlords, two camps were now formed: the camp of the labouring, the poorest peasants, who, together with the town workers, continued resolutely on the path towards the realisation of Socialism, and were passing from the war against landlords to the war against Capitalism, against the power of money, against exploitation for selfish ends of the great agrarian transformation; and the camp of the richer peasants. This struggle, which finally, definitely freed the Revolution from the propertied and exploiting classes, it was which shunted our Revolution, in all its entirety, on to the Socialist track on which the workers of the towns had firmly and resolutely intended to set it in November, but in which they would have never been able victoriously to guide it if they had not found conscious and united support in the villages.

That, then, is the significance of the Revolution which took place this summer and autumn in the most obscure corners of rural Russia—a Revolution that was not noisy, was not so patently visible and arresting as the November Revolution of last year, but which has a still greater, immeasurably more profound and important meaning.

The formation in the villages of the committees of the poor was the turning point, and showed that the working class of the towns, which united last November with all the peasants for the purpose of destroying the chief enemy of free, labouring and Socialist Russia—the land-owners—had advanced from that problem to another, much more difficult, historically much higher, and really Socialistic. This was to stimulate in the villages, too, the understanding that the great agrarian Revolution, the November proclamation abolishing private property in land, and socialising it, would inevitably remain a mere paper reform if the town workers did not awaken to life the village proletariat, the village poor, the labouring peasantry, which constitutes the enormous majority, which, in common with the "middle" peasantry, does not exploit hired labour, and is not interested in such exploitation, and which, therefore, is capable of advanc-

ing—and has now done so—from a joint struggle against the landowners to a joint proletarian struggle against Capital itself, against the exploiters who rely on the power of money. In other words, having liberated Russia from the yoke of the landowners, it has now proceeded to the creation of a Socialist commonwealth.

This step, comrades, was the most difficult of all. Inevitable failure in it was the prospect held out to us by all those who doubted the Socialist character of our Revolution; and with its fate, indeed, is bound up at the present moment the fate of Socialist reconstruction in the villages. The formation of committees of the poor; the growth of a network of such committees through the length and breadth of Russia; their transformation, already begun, into fully competent village councils of delegates (Soviets), charged with the duty of laying foundations of Soviet reconstruction in the village on the basis of all authority for those who work—these are our best guarantees that we have not ended our labours at the point where the usual middle-class democratic revolutions of the West ended theirs. Having destroyed the Monarchy and the medieval power of the landowners, we now come to the problem of a genuinely Socialist régime. This problem is most difficult in the villages, but at the same time most important and most fruitful of all. If we have succeeded in the village itself in awakening class-consciousness amongst the labouring peasantry; if, by the very agency of the Capitalist revolts, its interests have been separated from those of the Capitalist class; if the labouring peasants, in their committees of the poor and their reconstructed Soviets, are becoming more and more closely united with the workers of the towns—then we have the only, the truest, the best pledge that the work of Socialist reconstruction in Russia has been put at last on a firm footing. It has acquired a foundation in the enormous mass of the agricultural village population.

There can be no doubt that, in a peasant country like Russia, Socialist reconstruction is a very difficult problem. Beyond doubt it was comparatively easy to overthrow enemies like the Tsardom or the power of the landowners.

It was possible to carry this out in the centre in a few days and throughout the country in a few weeks. But the problem we are tackling now is, of its very nature, one which can be solved only by long and stubborn effort. Here we have to fight step by step and yard by yard in the battle to secure the conquests of Socialist Russia and the communal tilling of the soil. Under no circumstances, of course, can such a change from small individual farming to communal tillage be completed all at once.

We know very well that in countries of small peasant proprietors the transition to Socialism is impossible without a whole series of gradual, preparatory stages. Recognising this, we confined ourselves to merely sweeping away and destroying the power of the landowners. The February law on socialisation of the land, by the unanimous decision, as you know, of both the Communists and of those adherents of the Soviet regime who did not share all their views, was thus both the expression of the thought and desires of the immense majority of the peasantry and a proof that the working class, the Communist Labour Party, had grasped the nature of the problem before it. Persistently and patiently, awakening by a series of gradual transitions, the class consciousness of the labouring section of the peasantry, and advancing only in proportion as that awakening progressed and the peasantry was organising by its own efforts, the working class was moving along the path to the new Socialist organisation.

We know well that such immense changes in the life of scores of millions of people, affecting the very foundations of life, as the transition from small peasant proprietorship to communal agriculture, can be effected only by prolonged effort; that, altogether, they can be realised only at the point when necessity forces men to rebuild their lives. But, after the desperate and prolonged war all over the world, we plainly see the beginning of a Socialist revolution all over the world. This necessity has been created even in the most backward countries, independently of theoretical considera-

tions and Socialist doctrines—a necessity which tells us all, in a voice of authority, that we cannot go on living in the old way.

When the country has suffered such colossal ruin and collapse; when we see that this collapse is spreading all over the world, that all the culture, arts and sciences which man acquired during many centuries have been swept away in four years of this criminal, destructive war of Capitalist greed; when we see that not only Russia, but all Europe, is returning to a state of barbarism—then among the large masses of the people, and among the peasants in particular, who perhaps have suffered most in this war, there plainly arises the consciousness that extraordinary efforts are necessary, that our capacities must be strained to the utmost, if we wish to be freed from this legacy of the accursed war, which left us only ruin and misery. We cannot live as we lived before the war; and such a waste of human power and labour, as is involved in small peasant economy, cannot go on any longer. The productivity of labour and the economy of effort would be doubled and trebled in agriculture if from the present disjointed individual system we could pass to one of collective tillage.

The ruin we have inherited from the war simply does not allow us to restore the old small peasant system. Not only have the peasant masses been awakened by the war; not only has the war shown them the technical marvels that exist nowadays, and their application to the destruction of mankind; but it has prompted in them the idea that these marvels ought to be devoted, first and foremost, to the reconstruction of the most universal as well as the most backward of all industries—agriculture. Not only has there been an awakening of consciousness as to this; but people have become aware, by the monstrous horrors of the present war, of the powers which have been created by modern technical developments, how they are wasted in this most terrible, most senseless war, and how the only escape from those horrors lies through these very forces of applied science. Our bounden duty is to direct them to the end that the most

