

From the archives of the Revolution

Speech on Comrade Uritsky's report on the attitude to the Provisional Government

Leon Trotsky
20 May 2017

This is a new translation of a speech delivered by Leon Trotsky at the Citywide Conference of United Social-Democrats on May 20, 1917 (May 7 O.S.). It was originally published in Novaia zhizn' (New Life), No 18, 9 (22) May 1917 and was republished in Trotsky's Sochineniia (Works). [1]

Our revolution is called a bourgeois revolution. This means that, in the best case, bourgeois democracy should have come to power, and the proletariat must be in opposition. [2]

That portion of the Social-Democratic Party, which gave its members Tsereteli and Skobelev to the Provisional Government, has become a governmental party, a party of bourgeois revolution, which means a bourgeois party. The difference between the mass of deputies in the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and its ideological leaders Tsereteli and Skobelev is this: the former have not examined and understood the full complexity of the driving forces of the revolution, whereas Skobelev and Tsereteli, as the ideological leaders of the Social-Democracy, are compromising not only the Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries with their tactics, but also that current in Social-Democracy (Zimmerwald) in whose ranks they number themselves and in whom we place all our hopes for rebuilding the International.

We are not expelling them from the party; with their own conduct they are placing themselves outside the ranks of Social-Democracy. We remove from ourselves even a shadow of responsibility for them. By going into the government, they have become either its captives or its agents, and the sole task for us, revolutionary Social-Democrats, is to expose them. We have a clear and definite task—the transfer of all power into the hands of the Soviet. For us, this problem is not on today's agenda.

We know that the conquest of power is a long process and that it depends on the tempo of unfolding events; we are not speaking of the seizure of power apart from the Soviet, for it is the representative form directing the entirety of revolutionary democracy. We must only strive to create our own majority in the Soviet, imbuing its work with a truly revolutionary content, and we must organize the broad popular masses around our slogans.

The seizure of power as quickly as possible is not in our interests, for the further this moment recedes from us, the more organized and conscious our ranks will become, and the more prepared we will be at the necessary moment for the seizure of power.

We categorically reject any support for the new Provisional Government, and its crisis will not be our crisis, for we continually tell the working-class masses about the true essence of the Provisional Government. It is filled with bourgeois egoism, initially concealed with democratic phraseology, and now with two socialist corpses. The entry of socialists into ministries will end with complete bankruptcy, since even Chernov can accomplish nothing. He will prepare material for the Constituent Assembly, but he will take no practical steps; meanwhile a regime of anti-revolutionary forces is shaping up. If we get tangled up in this regime, then there would be no hope for us in the future. There is turmoil in the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, with elements breaking away from the right and from the left, but this is not the last chapter in the history of the revolution. There will be a third and fourth chapter, when a complete separation from the petty-bourgeois elements of the city and countryside gets underway. We do not know if we will emerge as victors, but we know that nothing will change from the relocation of four people from the Soviet into the government. Class relations do

not change from compromises and internal reconsiderations. We must advance with our own class; we do not know whether we will be the victors, but we know that there is no other way.

If Marx was mistaken in predicting the social revolution prematurely, then this does not mean that our predictions will be premature. After all the shocks of the war, after the training of 50 years of socialist culture, after all that the people have gone through—what other conditions could be more favorable for social revolution? And if the war, which forced all peoples to cast off all the falsehood, lies, and veneer of chauvinism, does not lead Europe to social revolution, then this means that Europe is destined to undergo economic degeneration, and that it will perish as a civilized territory, and will serve only the curiosity of tourists, while the center of the revolutionary movement will move to America or Japan.

Notes:

[1] Note from the editors of Trotsky's *Sochineniia* (*Works*):

The Citywide Conference of United Social-Democrats (Bolsheviks and Internationalists) opened on 7(20) May 1917. The conference greeted comrade Trotsky who was attending as a guest. In response to the greetings, comrade Trotsky declared that for him, who had always stood for the need to unify Social-Democratic forces, unity as such was not an end in itself, but that this formula must be filled with revolutionary content. The present conference should proceed under the banner of the world social revolution, under the banner of a new International, against defensism, against the living corpses of “fake-socialism.” Then, comrade Trotsky gave this speech on comrade Uritsky's report about the attitude toward the Provisional Government and the Social-Democratic ministers, Tsereteli and Skobelev.

[2] Here the author is presenting the position of the Mensheviks. (Note from the editors).



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