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Speech at a Session of the Petrograd Soviet on reports by the socialist ministers

Leon Trotsky
27 May 2017

This is a new translation of an abridged version of a speech delivered by Leon Trotsky at the Petrograd Soviet on May 26, 1917 (May 13 O.S.). It was originally published in Novaya Zhizn (New Life), No 23, 14 (27) May 1917. [1]

Comrades, Skobelev has told you that the working class will submit its demands to the government through the Ministry of Labor. Until now I have thought that the working class presents its demands to the government through its own militant class organizations, while the Ministry of Labor is in fact an organ of the bourgeois state. Or, perhaps, from the moment that Skobelev became a minister, the Ministry of Labor turned into a proletarian-class organization?

Skobelev intends to requisition all capitalist profits. Very good. But, after all, profit is the sole driving force of capitalist production. How can one destroy the driving force of capitalism while leaving power in the hands of the capitalist Provisional Government? In order to do this, it is necessary to transfer power into the hands of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Chernov, the minister of agriculture, spoke here before us not as a minister of agrarian revolution, but as a minister of agrarian statistics. He said that the seizure of land in a disorganized way would mean trouble. This is an inverse theorem. Let him give us a direct theorem and call for the organized seizure of land by the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies.

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), was the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, socialist opponent of Joseph Stalin, founder of the Fourth International, and strategist of world socialist revolution.

Pay attention to Kerensky's absence from the Soviet and to the advertising around Kerensky's name that the

bourgeois press creates: is this press not trying to use Kerensky for the aims of Russian Bonapartism? [2] And what is Kerensky himself doing? He is making fine speeches and at the same time allows commander-in-chief Alekseyev to deliver a slap in the face to the Provisional Government at the officers' congress by declaring the slogan "without annexations or indemnities" to be a utopia. But General Alekseyev [3], after all, commands the army in the name of the Provisional Government, in the name of Skobelev.

Notes:

[1] At this session of the Petrograd Soviet three socialist ministers gave reports: Skobelev, Chernov and Tsereteli. While Tsereteli depicted a "crane in the sky" [a pie in the sky] in the realm of foreign policy, Skobelev gave an empty promise to tax the profits of capitalists at 100 per cent. In subsequent speeches, as in the present one, L. D. Trotsky often emphasized the illusory nature of these promises given the existence of a bourgeois government.

[2] Bonapartism: Traces its origin from the epoch of Napoleon I (Bonaparte), who, while resting on the bourgeoisie, established a military dictatorship toward the end of the Great French revolution. The political strivings of the Russian bourgeoisie in 1917 proceeded precisely in the direction of establishing such a military dictatorship. In its preparations for Bonapartism, the bourgeoisie has used even Kerensky, who, of course, would be removed the day after accomplishing its goals.

[3] General Alekseyev: General in the tsarist army who virtually commanded the Russian army in the war from 1914-1918. In the fall of 1917, Alekseyev was appointed supreme commander-in-chief in place of

Kornilov. Soon after October, Alekseyev showed his activity by participating in the organization of White armies. After the Czechoslovak revolt, Alekseyev formed the famous volunteer army on the Don.



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