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*October
Days*



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OCTOBER DAYS

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BY N. K. KRUPSKAYA

The seizure of political power in October had been carefully planned and prepared by the Bolshevik Party, the party of the proletariat. A spontaneous uprising had begun in July,¹ but the Party considered it premature and did not take rash action. The truth had

¹ A demonstration of half a million Petrograd workers and soldiers on July 3-4 (16-17), 1917, against the Provisional Government which threatened to grow into an armed uprising. The slogan of the demonstration was "All power to the Soviets!" The Bolsheviks, who assumed leadership of the demonstration, considered the moment was not ripe for an uprising and gave it a peaceful and organized character. On July 4 (17) the Provisional Government ordered its troops to open fire on the peaceful demonstration. Mass repressions were started against the Bolsheviks and against the soldiers who took part in the demonstration. The Bolshevik Party went underground and began preparations for the uprising. (This and other footnotes have been added by the Editors.)

to be faced—the masses were not ready for an insurrection and the Central Committee decided to postpone it. It was difficult to hold back the people who had come out on to the streets eager for battle, and it was hard for the Bolsheviki to have to do it. They did their duty, however, as they realized the tremendous importance of selecting the right moment for the uprising.

A couple of months passed and the situation changed. Ilyich, who had been compelled to go into hiding in Finland, between the 12th and 14th September wrote the following letter to the Central Committee and the Petrograd and Moscow committees of the Bolshevik Party in which he said in part: "Having obtained a majority in the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of both capitals, the Bolsheviki can, and *must*, take over the power of the government." He then went on to say why they should take power at that very moment. Petrograd would shortly be surrendered.¹ This would lessen the chances of suc-

¹ Kerensky's Provisional Government made secret preparations to surrender Petrograd to the German troops in order to crush the revolution.

cess. Rumours were afloat about possible separate peace between the British and German imperialists. "If we propose peace to the nations now we shall *win*," wrote Ilyich.

In another letter to the Central Committee he spoke of the way in which the moment for the uprising was to be determined and how it was to be prepared:

"To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon the *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon the *crucial moment* in the history of the growing revolution, when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemies and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point."

Ilyich concluded his letter in the following way: "And in order to treat insurrection in a Marxist way, i. e., as an art, we must at the same time, without losing a single moment, organize *headquarters* of the insurgent detachments, distribute our forces, move the

loyal regiments to the most important points surround the Alexandrinsky Theatre,¹ occupy the Peter and Paul Fortress,² arrest the General Staff and the Government, and move against the cadets and the Savage Division; such detachments as will rather die than allow the enemy to approach the centres of the city we must mobilize the armed workers and call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and telephone exchange immediately, house *our* headquarters of the insurrection in the central telephone exchange and connect it by telephone with all the factories

¹ The so-called Democratic Conference called by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries to strengthen the position of the Provisional Government was held in this theatre.

² A fortress on the Neva, in the centre of Petrograd, opposite the Winter Palace, in which political prisoners were kept. The Provisional Government turned it into a military arsenal and moved its troops there. The fortress played an important role in ensuring the success of the October uprising.

³ The division was formed of volunteers from the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus in the course of the First World War. General Kornilov intended to use this division as shock troops against revolution in Petrograd in August 1917, when he started a counter-revolutionary revolt (see footnote on p. 100).

regiments, all the points of armed fighting, etc.

"Of course, this is all by way of example, only to *illustrate* the fact that at the present moment it is impossible to remain loyal to Marxism and to the revolution *without treating insurrection as an art.*"

While he was still in Finland, Ilyich was greatly disturbed at the possibility of the most favourable moment for the insurrection being missed. On October 7 he wrote to the Petrograd City Conference, to the Central Committee and the Petrograd and Moscow committees of the Party and also to the Bolshevik members of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. On the 8th he wrote a letter to the Bolshevik delegates participating in the Regional Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region and was worried as to whether or not the letter would get there; on the 9th he went to Petrograd himself, lived illegally in the Vitebsk District and from there guided the preparations for the insurrection.

The whole of that last month Lenin lived exclusively for the insurrection, he gave himself up to it entirely, he thought of nothing

else and infected the comrades with his enthusiasm and his confidence.

Of the greatest importance was Ilyich's last letter from Finland, addressed to the Bolsheviks participating in the Regional Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region.¹

"...Armed insurrection is a *special* form of political struggle, one subject to special laws which must be attentively pondered over. Karl Marx expressed this truth with remarkable saliency when he said that armed '*insurrection is an art quite as much as war.*'"

"Of the principal rules of this art, Marx noted the following:

"1. *Never play* with insurrection, but when beginning it firmly realize that you must *go to the end.*

"2. *Concentrate a great superiority of forces* at the decisive point, at the decisive moment, otherwise the enemy, who has the advantage of better preparation and organization, will destroy the insurgents.

"3. Once the insurrection has begun, you must act with the greatest *determination*, and,

¹ The lines quoted by N. K. Krupskaya are taken from Lenin's letter "Advice of an Onlooker."

at all costs, without fail, take the *offensive*. 'The defensive is the death of every armed uprising.'

"4. You must try to take the enemy by surprise and seize the moment when his forces are scattered.

"5. You must strive for *daily* successes even if small (one might say 'hourly' if it is the case of one town), and at all costs retain the '*moral ascendancy*.'

"Marx summed up the lessons of all revolutions in respect to armed insurrection in the words of Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary tactics yet known—'*de l'audace, encore de l'audace et toujours de l'audace!*'

"Applied to Russia and to October 1917, this means: a simultaneous offensive on Petrograd, as sudden and as rapid as possible, which must without fail be carried out from within and without, from the working-class quarters and from Finland, from Revel and from Kronstadt, an offensive of *the whole* fleet, the concentration of *a gigantic superiority* of forces over the 15,000 or 20,000 (perhaps more) of our 'bourgeois guard' (the officers' schools), our 'Vendean troops' (part of the Cossacks), etc.

“Our three main forces: the navy, the workers, and the army units must be so combined as to occupy without fail and hold at the cost of any sacrifice: (a) the telephone exchange; (b) the telegraph office; (c) the railway stations; (d) above all, the bridges.

“The *most determined* elements (our ‘storm forces’ and *young workers*, as well as the best of the sailors) must be formed into small detachments to occupy all the most important points and to *take part* everywhere in all important operations, for example:

“To encircle and cut off Petrograd; to seize it by a combined attack of the navy, workers and the troops—a task which requires *art and triple audacity*.

“To form detachments composed of the best workers, armed with rifles and bombs, for the purpose of attacking and surrounding the enemy’s ‘centres’ (the officers’ schools, telegraph office and telephone exchange, etc.). Their watchword must be: *Rather perish to a man than let the enemy pass*.

“Let us hope that if action is decided on, the leaders will successfully apply the great precepts of Danton and of Marx.

“The success of both the Russian and the world revolution depends on two or three days of fighting.”

This letter was written on 21st (8th), and on 22nd (9th) Ilyich was already in Petrograd; a day later the Central Committee met and Ilyich got a resolution passed on the armed insurrection. Zinoviev and Kamenev opposed the resolution and demanded that an extraordinary plenary session of the Central Committee be called. Kamenev demonstratively announced his withdrawal from the Central Committee. Lenin demanded that the Party adopt the most rigorous disciplinary measures against them.

The opportunist tendencies were defeated and preparations for the uprising went on apace. On October 26 (13) the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet decided to set up the Military Revolutionary Committee. On the 29th (16th) the Central Committee met with representatives of the Party organizations. On that same day a meeting of the Central Committee appointed a Military Revolutionary Centre for the practical guidance of the

uprising, which included Stalin, Sverdlov, Dzerzhinsky and others.

On October 30 (17) the draft plan for the organization of the Military Revolutionary Committee was approved not only by the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet but also by the Soviet as a whole. Five days later a meeting of regimental committees recognized the Military Revolutionary Committee as the leading body of all army units in Petrograd and passed a decision not to obey orders issued by the General Staff unless countersigned by the committee.

By November 5 (October 23) the Military Revolutionary Committee had already appointed commissars to the army units. On the next day, November 6 (October 24), the Provisional Government ordered the arraignment of the members of the Military Revolutionary Committee and the arrest of the commissars appointed to army units; at the Winter Palace they mustered the cadets from the officers' training-schools. It was too late, however; the army units supported the Bolsheviki, the workers were for the transfer of power to the Soviets, the Military Revolutionary Committee was working directly under the guidance of the

Central Committee of the Party and the majority of the members of the Central Committee, including Stalin, Sverdlov, Molotov, Dzerzhinsky and Bubnov, were members of the Military Revolutionary Committee. The uprising was being rapidly prepared.

On November 6 (October 24) Ilyich was still in hiding in the apartment of our Party member Margarita Vasilyevna Fofanova (on the corner of Bolshoi Sampsonyevsky Lane and Serdobolskaya Street, No. 92/1, Apartment 42, in the Viborg District). He knew that preparations for the insurrection were under way and was unhappy at the thought that he had to be inactive at such a time. He sent Margarita to me with notes to pass on, saying that the uprising must not be delayed. At last, in the evening, he was visited by Eino Rahja, a Finnish comrade who was closely connected with the factories and the Party organization and kept Ilyich in touch with them. Eino told Ilyich that the city was heavily patrolled and that the Provisional Government had ordered the opening of the Neva bridges to isolate the working-class districts, and that the bridges were being guarded by soldiers. It was obvious that the uprising was

beginning. Ilyich intended asking Eino to bring Comrade Stalin to him, but in the course of conversation it became clear that it would be almost impossible to do so since Stalin was probably at the Military Revolutionary Committee in the Smolny, the trams had probably stopped running and it would take too long. Ilyich decided to go immediately to the Smolny himself and hurried off there. He left a note for Margarita saying: "I have gone where you did not want me to go. Good-bye. Ilyich."

That night the Viborg District was arming for the insurrection and one group of workers after another came to the district committee of the Party for arms and instructions. During the night I went to see Ilyich at Fofanova's apartment and learned that he had gone to the Smolny. Together with Zhenya Yegorova, Secretary of the Viborg District Party Committee, I got on to a motor lorry that our people were sending to the Smolny for some reason or other. I wanted to know whether Ilyich had got to the Smolny. I do not remember whether I saw Ilyich at the Smolny or whether I only learned that he was there, in any case I did not speak to him since he was

up to his ears in the work of guiding the insurrection—having taken the lead he went into the minutest details, as he always did.

The Smolny Institute was brightly lit and the whole place was seething. Red Guards, factory representatives, and soldiers came from all parts for instructions. Typewriters rattled, telephones rang, our girls were bent over piles of telegrams and the Military Revolutionary Committee was in constant session on the second floor. On the square in front of the institute armoured cars had their engines running, a three-inch gun stood there and stacks of firewood had been made ready in case it should become necessary to build barricades. At the entrance there were cannon and machine-guns and sentries stood guard at the doors.

At 10 o'clock on the morning of November 7 (October 25) a message from the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet addressed "To All Citizens of Russia!" was sent to the press; the message said:

"The Provisional Government has been deposed. State power has passed into the hands of the Military Revolutionary Committee, organ of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and

Soldiers' Deputies, which heads the Petrograd proletariat and the garrison.

"The cause for which the people have been fighting—the immediate proposal of a democratic peace, the abolition of the private ownership of the land, workers' control of production, the establishment of a Soviet government—this cause is assured.

"Long live the revolution of the soldiers, workers and peasants!"¹

Although it was obvious that the revolution was victorious, all the morning of the 25th the Military Revolutionary Committee continued working feverishly, occupying one government building after another, organizing their defence, etc.

At 2.30 p.m. the meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies opened. With thunderous applause the Soviet greeted the news that the Provisional Government no longer existed, that some ministers had been, and the others would be, arrested, that the pre-Parliament² had been dissolved

¹ The message was written by V. I. Lenin.

² The pre-Parliament was the name given to the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, a consultative body of the Provisional Government, se-