

V. I. LENIN

ALLIANCE  
OF THE  
WORKING CLASS  
AND THE  
PEASANTRY

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

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*W. Edward Baum,*

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present volume contains Lenin's articles and speeches dealing with the policy of the Communist Party toward the peasantry and showing how the task of building a lasting alliance with the peasantry was solved at various stages of the revolutionary struggle waged by the working class in Russia. They cover a period of nearly a quarter of a century and reflect the momentous events in which this span of history abounded.

In the first articles in this volume, written in the early years of the century, Lenin demonstrates the necessity of an alliance of the workers and peasants, with the working class playing the leading role, to bring about the overthrow of tsarism and the emancipation of the people from feudal exploitation. Articles written during the revolutionary years of 1905-07 set forth the fundamental political slogans relating to the peasantry in the conditions of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Lenin elaborates the concept of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry and shows that, like everything else in the world, this type of dictatorship has its past and its future. Its past was autocracy, feudalism, monarchy, class privilege; its future, the fight for socialism.

The articles and speeches in which Lenin charts the transition to socialist revolution and, basing himself on an analysis of the concrete historical situation, formulates slogans in regard to the various sections of the peasantry at a new and higher stage of the revolution relate to the period between February 1917, when the masses in Russia overthrew tsarism, and October 1917.

Considerable space is given to Lenin's writings after the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia. In the report on work in the countryside delivered at the Eighth Congress of the Party (March 1919) and in other speeches and articles Lenin brilliantly substantiates the policy of co-operation and firm alliance with the middle peasantry, the unswerving implementation of which enabled the working class of the Soviet country to forge ahead to socialism together with the broad masses of the peasantry. The volume closes with Lenin's last articles, written in 1923—"On Co-operation" and "Better Fewer, but Better." These articles outline the plan for directing agriculture on to socialist lines which underlies all the Soviet people's efforts in the socialist reorganization of the countryside.

The contents of the present volume is in strictly chronological order. Most of the articles and speeches are given in full. There are, however, a few exceptions, when only separate chapters or excerpts have been included.

The translation follows the Fourth Edition of the *Collected Works* of Lenin, published in Moscow by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the C.C. C.P.S.U. In each case the source is given on the right-hand side under the corresponding speech or article.

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## THE WORKERS' PARTY AND THE PEASANTRY

Forty years have passed since the peasants were emancipated. It is quite natural that the public should celebrate with particular enthusiasm February 19<sup>1</sup>—the anniversary of the fall of old feudal Russia and the beginning of an epoch which promised the people liberty and prosperity. But we must not forget that besides genuine loathing of serfdom and all its manifestations, there is also much hypocrisy in the laudatory orations delivered on the occasion. The now fashionable estimation of the “great” reform as “the emancipation of the peasantry with a grant of land *with the aid* of state compensation” is utterly hypocritical and false. Actually, the peasants were emancipated *from* the land, for the plots they had tilled for centuries were ruthlessly cut down,<sup>2</sup> and hundreds of thousands of peasants were deprived of all their land and settled on a wretched fourth of an allotment.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the peasants were doubly robbed: not only were their allotments cut down, but they had to pay “compensation” for the portion which was left to them and which had always been in their possession, and, moreover, the price was set far above the actual value. Ten years after the emancipation of the peasantry the landlords themselves admitted to government officials investigating the state of agriculture that the peasants were made to pay not only for their land, but also for their personal liberty. And although the peasants paid for their liberation, they did not become free men; for twenty years they remained “temporarily bound”;<sup>4</sup> they were left and have remained to this day the lower estate, who can be flogged, who pay special taxes, who have no right freely to leave the semi-feudal community, freely to dispose of their own land, or to settle freely in any part of

the country. Our peasant reform is not a tribute to the magnanimity of the government; on the contrary, it serves as a great historical example of how the autocratic government befouls everything it touches. Military defeat, appalling financial difficulties, and menacing discontent among the peasantry *compelled* the government to take the step. The tsar himself admitted that the peasants had to be emancipated from above, lest they emancipate themselves from below. But in embarking on emancipation, the government did all it possibly could to satisfy the greed of the "injured" serf owners. The government did not even stop at the base device of reshuffling the men who were to carry out the reform, although these men had been selected from among the nobility themselves. The first body of *miroviye posredniki*<sup>5</sup> was dissolved and replaced by men who could not but help the serf owners cheat the peasantry in the very process of parcelling out the land. Nor could the great reform be carried out without resort to military punitive action and the shooting down of peasants who refused to accept the charters.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the best men of the time, muzzled by the censors, met this great reform with the silence of condemnation.

The peasant, "emancipated" from serf labour, emerged from the hands of the reformers crushed, plundered, degraded, tied to his plot of land, so much so that nothing was left for him to do but "voluntarily" accept serf labour. And he began to cultivate the land of his former master, "renting" from him the very land that had been cut off from his own allotment, hiring himself out in the winter for summer work in return for the corn he had to borrow from the landlord to feed his hungry family. The "free labour," for which the manifesto drawn up by a Jesuit priest called upon the peasantry to ask the "blessing of God," turned out to be nothing more nor less than serf labour and bondage.

To oppression by the landlords, which was preserved thanks to the magnanimity of the officials who introduced and carried out the reform, was added oppression by capital. The power of money, which crushed even the French peasant who was emancipated from the power of the feu-

dal landlords not by miserable, half-hearted reforms but by a mighty popular revolution—this power of money bore down with all its weight upon our semi-serf muzhik. The peasant had to obtain money at all costs—in order to pay the taxes which had increased as a result of the beneficent reform, in order to rent land, to buy the few miserable articles of factory-made goods which began to squeeze out the home manufactures of the peasant, to buy corn, etc. The power of money not only crushed the peasantry, but split it up. An enormous number of peasants were steadily ruined and turned into proletarians. From the minority arose a small group of grasping kulaks and thrifty muzhiks who laid hands upon the peasant economy and the peasants' lands, and who represented the kernel of the rising rural bourgeoisie. The forty years since the reform have been marked by this constant process of "de-peasantizing" the peasants, a process of slow and painful extinction of the peasantry. The peasant was reduced to beggary. He lived together with his cattle, was clothed in rags, and fed on weeds; he fled from his allotment if he had anywhere to go, and even *paid* to be relieved of it, if he could induce anyone to take over a plot of land the payments on which exceeded the income it yielded. The peasants were in a state of chronic starvation, and died by the tens of thousands from famine and epidemics in bad harvest years, which recurred with increasing frequency.

This is the state of our countryside even at the present time. One might ask: what is the way out, and how can the lot of the peasantry be improved? The small peasantry can free itself from the yoke of capital only by joining the labour movement, by helping the workers in their fight for the socialist system, to make the land as well as other means of production (factories, works, machines, etc.) public property. To try to save the peasantry by protecting small-scale farming and small holdings from the onslaught of capitalism would be a useless attempt to retard social development; it would mean deceiving the peasantry with illusions about the possibility of prosperity even under capitalism, disuniting the toiling classes and creating a privileged position for the minority at the expense

of the majority. That is why Social-Democrats shall always fight against senseless and vicious institutions such as that prohibiting the peasant from disposing of his land, such as collective responsibility,<sup>7</sup> the system of prohibiting the peasants from freely leaving the community and freely accepting into it persons belonging to any estate. But, as we have seen, our peasants are suffering not only and not so much from oppression by capital as from oppression by the landlords and the survivals of serfdom. Ruthless struggle against these shackles, which immeasurably worsen the condition of the peasantry and tie it hand and foot, is not only possible but even necessary in the interest of the country's social development in general; for the hopeless poverty, ignorance, tyranny, and degradation, from which the peasants suffer, lay an Asiatic imprint upon the entire life of our country. Social-Democrats would not be doing their duty if they did not render every assistance to this struggle. This assistance should take the form, to put it briefly, of *carrying the class war to the countryside*.

We have seen that in the modern Russian countryside two kinds of class antagonism exist side by side: first, antagonism between the rural workers and the rural employers, and second, between the peasantry as a whole and the landlord class as a whole. The first antagonism is developing and becoming more acute; the second is gradually diminishing. The first is still wholly in the future; the second to a considerable degree already belongs to the past. And yet in spite of this, it is the second antagonism that has the most vital and most practical significance for Russian Social-Democrats at the present time. It goes without saying that we must utilize all the opportunities that present themselves to us to develop the class-consciousness of the agricultural wage-workers, that we must pay attention to the urban workers who go to the countryside (for example, mechanics employed on steam threshing-machines, etc.) and to the markets where agricultural labourers are hired. This is an axiom for every Social-Democrat.

But our rural labourers are still too closely connected with the peasantry, they are still too heavily burdened with the misfortunes of the peasantry generally to enable the

movement of the rural workers to assume national significance, either now or in the immediate future. On the other hand, the question of sweeping away the survivals of serfdom, of driving the spirit of class inequality and degradation of tens of millions of the "common people" out of the whole of the Russian state system is already a matter of national significance, and the party which claims to be the vanguard in the fight for freedom cannot ignore it.

The deplorable state of the peasantry has now become (in a more or less general form) almost universally recognized. The phrase about "the defects" of the Reform of 1861, and about the need for state aid, has become a current truism. It is our duty to point out that peasant distress arises precisely from the class oppression of the peasantry; that the government is the loyal champion of the oppressing classes, and that those who sincerely and seriously desire a radical improvement in the condition of the peasantry must seek not aid from the government, but freedom from its oppression, and win political liberty. There is talk about the compensation payments<sup>s</sup> being too high, and about benevolent measures on the part of the government to reduce them and postpone the dates of payment. Our reply to this is: all payment of compensation is nothing more nor less than robbery of the peasantry by the landlords and the government, screened by legal forms and official phrases; it is nothing more nor less than tribute paid to the serf owners for emancipating their slaves. We shall put forward the demand for the immediate and complete abolition of compensation payments and quitrents, and the demand for the return to the people of the hundreds of millions which the tsarist government has extorted from them in the course of the years to satisfy the greed of the slave-owners. There is talk about the peasants not having sufficient land, about the need for state aid in providing them with more land. Our reply to this is: it is precisely *because* of state aid (aid to the landlords, of course) that the peasants in such an enormous number of cases were deprived of land they vitally needed. We shall put forward the demand for the restoration to the peasantry of the land of which they were deprived and the lack of which still keeps them in a

state of bondage and forced labour, i.e., actually in a state of serfdom. We shall put forward the demand for the establishment of peasant committees to remove the crying injustices committed against the emancipated slaves by the committees of the nobles set up by the tsarist government. We shall demand the establishment of courts empowered to reduce the excessively high payment for land extorted from the peasants by the landlords by taking advantage of their hopeless position, courts in which the peasants could prosecute for usury all those who take advantage of their extreme need to impose extortionate terms upon them. We shall take advantage of every opportunity to explain to the peasantry that the people who talk to them about the tutelage or the aid of the present state are either fools or charlatans, and their worst enemies; that what the peasants stand in need of most is relief from the tyranny and oppression of the officials, recognition of their complete and absolute equality in all respects with all other classes, complete freedom to migrate and move freely from place to place, freedom to dispose of their lands as they please and freedom to manage their own communal affairs and dispose of the communal revenues. The most common facts in the life of any Russian village provide a thousand themes for agitation on behalf of the above demands. This agitation must be based upon the local, concrete, and most pressing needs of the peasantry; yet it must not be confined to these needs, but must be steadily directed towards widening the outlook of the peasantry, towards developing their political consciousness. The peasants must be made to understand the special place occupied in the state by the landlords and the peasants respectively, and they must be taught that the only way to free the countryside from the tyranny and oppression that reigns in it is to convene an assembly of representatives of the people and to overthrow the arbitrary rule of the officials. It is absurd and stupid to assert that the demand for political liberty would not be understood by the workers: not only the workers who have engaged the factory-owners and the police in direct battle for years and who constantly see their best fighters subjected to arbitrary arrests and persecution—not only these