

# J. STALIN

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## OCTOBER REVOLUTION

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

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## **THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION**

The national question must not be regarded as something self-contained and fixed for all time. Being only part of the general question of the transformation of the existing order, the national question is wholly determined by the conditions of the social environment, by the kind of power in the country and by the whole course of social development in general. This is being strikingly borne out in the period of revolution in Russia, when the national question and the national movement in the border regions of Russia are rapidly and obviously changing their character in accordance with the course and outcome of the revolution.

### **I**

#### **THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION**

In the period of the bourgeois revolution in Russia (February 1917) the national movement in the border regions bore the character of a bour-



geois liberation movement. The nationalities of Russia, which for ages had been oppressed and exploited by the "old regime," for the first time felt their strength and rushed into the fight with their oppressors. "Abolish national oppression"—such was the slogan of the movement. "All-national" institutions sprang up overnight throughout the border regions of Russia. The movement was headed by the national, bourgeois-democratic intelligentsia. "National Councils" in Latvia, the Estonian region, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus, Kirghizia and the Middle Volga region; the "Rada" in the Ukraine and in Byelorussia; the "Sfatul Tsării" in Bessarabia; the "Kurultai" in the Crimea and in Bashkiria; the "Autonomous Government" in Turkestan—such were the "all-national" institutions around which the national bourgeoisie rallied its forces. It was a question of emancipation from tsarism—the "fundamental cause" of national oppression—and of the formation of national bourgeois states. The right of nations to self-determination was interpreted as the right of the national bourgeoisies in the border regions to take power into their own hands and to take advantage of the February Revolution for forming "their own" national states. The further development of the revolution did not, and could not, come within the calculations of the above-mentioned bourgeois institutions. And the fact was overlooked that tsarism

was being replaced by naked and barefaced imperialism, and that this imperialism was a stronger and more dangerous foe of the nationalities and the basis of a new national oppression.

The abolition of tsarism and the accession to power of the bourgeoisie did not, however, lead to the abolition of national oppression. The old, crude form of national oppression was replaced by a new, refined, but all the more dangerous, form of oppression. Far from abandoning the policy of national oppression, the Lvov-Milyukov-Kerensky Government organized a new campaign against Finland (dispersal of the Diet in the summer of 1917) and the Ukraine (suppression of Ukrainian cultural institutions). What is more, that Government, which was imperialist by its very nature, called upon the population to continue the war in order to subjugate new lands, new colonies and nationalities. It was compelled to this not only because of the intrinsic nature of imperialism, but also because of the existence of the old imperialist states in the West, which were irresistibly striving to subjugate new lands and nationalities and threatening to narrow its sphere of influence. A struggle of the imperialist states for the subjugation of small nationalities as a condition for the existence of these states—such was the picture which was revealed in the course of the imperialist war. This unsightly picture was in no way improved by the abolition of tsarism and the

appearance of the Milyukov-Kerensky Government on the scene. Since the "all-national" institutions in the border regions displayed a tendency to political independence, naturally they encountered the insuperable hostility of the imperialist government of Russia. Since, on the other hand, while establishing the power of the national bourgeoisie, they remained deaf to the vital interests of "their own" workers and peasants, they evoked grumbling and discontent among those. What were known as the "national regiments" only added fuel to the flames: they were impotent against the danger from above and only intensified and aggravated the danger from below. The "all-national" institutions were left defenceless against blows from without and explosions from within. The incipient bourgeois national states began to fade before they could blossom.

Thus, the old bourgeois-democratic interpretation of the principle of self-determination became a fiction and lost its revolutionary significance. It was clear that under such circumstances there could be no question of the abolition of national oppression and establishing the independence of the small national states. It became obvious that the emancipation of the labouring masses of the oppressed nationalities and the abolition of national oppression were inconceivable without a break with imperialism, without the labouring masses

overthrowing "their own" national bourgeoisie and taking power themselves.

That was strikingly borne out after the October Revolution.

## II

### THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The February Revolution harboured irreconcilable inner contradictions. The revolution was accomplished by the efforts of the workers and the peasants (soldiers), but as a result of the revolution power passed not to the workers and peasants, but to the bourgeoisie. In making the revolution the workers and peasants wanted to put an end to the war and to secure peace. But the bourgeoisie, on coming to power, strove to use the revolutionary ardour of the masses for a continuation of the war and against peace. The economic disruption of the country and the food crisis demanded the expropriation of capital and industrial establishments for the benefit of the workers, and the confiscation of the landlords' land for the benefit of the peasants, but the bourgeois Milyukov-Kerensky Government stood guard over the interests of the landlords and capitalists, resolutely protecting them against all encroachments on the part of the workers and peasants. It was a bour-

geois revolution, accomplished by the agency of the workers and peasants for the benefit of the exploiters.

Meanwhile, the country continued to groan under the burden of the imperialist war, economic disintegration and the breakdown of the food supply. The front was falling to pieces and melting away. Factories and mills were coming to a standstill. Famine was spreading through the country. The February Revolution, with its inner contradictions, was obviously not enough for "the salvation of the country." The Milyukov-Kerensky Government was obviously incapable of solving the basic problems of the revolution.

A new, *socialist* revolution was required to lead the country out of the blind alley of imperialist war and economic disintegration.

That revolution came as a result of the October uprising.

By overthrowing the power of the landlords and the bourgeoisie and replacing it by a government of workers and peasants, the October Revolution resolved the contradictions of the February Revolution at one stroke. The abolition of the omnipotence of the landlords and kulaks and the handing over of the land for the use of the labouring masses of the countryside; the expropriation of the mills and factories and their transfer to control by the workers; the break with imperialism and the ending of the predatory war; the publica-

tion of the secret treaties and the exposure of the policy of annexations; lastly, the proclamation of self-determination for the labouring masses of the oppressed peoples and the recognition of the independence of Finland—such were the basic measures carried into effect by the Soviet power in the early period of the Soviet revolution.

That was a genuinely *socialist* revolution.

The revolution, which started in the centre, could not long be confined to that narrow territory. Once having triumphed in the centre, it was bound to spread to the border regions. And, indeed, from the very first days of the revolution, the revolutionary tide spread from the North all over Russia, sweeping one border region after another. But here it encountered a dam in the shape of the "National Councils" and regional "governments" (Don, Kuban, Siberia) which had been formed prior to the October Revolution. The point is that these "national governments" would not hear of a socialist revolution. Bourgeois by nature, they had not the slightest wish to destroy the old, bourgeois order; on the contrary, they considered it their duty to preserve and consolidate it by every means in their power. Essentially imperialist, they had not the slightest wish to break with imperialism; on the contrary, they had never been averse to seizing and subjugating bits and morsels of the territory of "foreign" nationalities whenever opportunity offered. No wonder that the

“national governments” in the border regions declared war on the socialist government in the centre. And, once they had declared war, they naturally became hotbeds of reaction, which attracted all that was counter-revolutionary in Russia. Everyone knows that all the counter-revolutionaries thrown out of Russia rushed to these hotbeds, and there, around them, formed themselves into whiteguard “national” regiments.

But, in addition to “national governments,” there are in the border regions national workers and peasants. Organized even before the October Revolution in their revolutionary Soviets patterned on the Soviets in the centre of Russia, they had never severed connections with their brothers in the North. They too were striving to defeat the bourgeoisie; they too were fighting for the triumph of socialism. No wonder that their conflict with “their own” national governments grew daily more acute. The October Revolution only strengthened the alliance between the workers and peasants of the border regions and the workers and peasants of Russia, and inspired them with faith in the triumph of socialism. And the war of the “national governments” against the Soviet power brought the conflict of the national masses with these “governments” to the point of a complete rupture, to open rebellion against them.

Thus was formed a socialist alliance of the workers and peasants of all Russia against the counter-revolutionary alliance of the bourgeois national "governments" of the border regions of Russia.

The fight of the border "governments" is depicted by some as a fight for national emancipation against the "soulless centralism" of the Soviet regime. But that is quite untrue. No regime in the world has permitted such extensive decentralization, no government in the world has ever granted to the peoples such complete national freedom as the Soviet power in Russia. The fight of the border "governments" was, and is, a fight of bourgeois counter-revolution against socialism. The national flag is tacked on to the cause only to deceive the masses, as a popular flag which conveniently conceals the counter-revolutionary designs of the national bourgeoisie.

But the fight of the "national" and regional "governments" proved an unequal one. Attacked from two sides—from without by the Soviet power of Russia, and from within by "their own" workers and peasants—the "national governments" were obliged to retreat after the very first engagements. The uprising of the Finnish workers and torppari\* and the flight of the bourgeois

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\* Torppari—landless peasants in Finland, who were forced to rent land from the big proprietors on extortionate terms.—*Ed.*



“Senate”; the uprising of the Ukrainian workers and peasants and the flight of the bourgeois “Rada”; the uprising of the workers and peasants in the Don, Kuban and Siberia, and the collapse of Kaledin, Kornilov and the Siberian “government”; the uprising of the poor peasants of Turkestan and the flight of the “autonomous government”; the agrarian revolution in the Caucasus and the utter impotence of the “National Councils” of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan—all these are generally known facts which demonstrated the complete isolation of the border “governments” from “their own” labouring masses. Utterly defeated, the “national governments” were “obliged” to appeal for aid against “their own” workers and peasants to the imperialists of the West, to the age-long oppressors and exploiters of the nationalities of the world.

Thus began the period of foreign intervention and occupation of the border regions—a period which once more revealed the counter-revolutionary character of the “national” and regional “governments.”

Only now did it become obvious to all that the national bourgeoisie was striving not for the liberation of “its own people” from national oppression, but for liberty to squeeze profits out of them, for liberty to retain its privileges and capital.

Only now did it become clear that the emancipation of the oppressed nationalities was incon-