

V.I. LENIN

TO THE RURAL
POOR

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE



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WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

V. I. LENIN
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POOR

AN EXPLANATION FOR THE PEASANTS
OF WHAT THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS WANT!



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1. THE STRUGGLE OF THE URBAN WORKERS

Many peasants have probably already heard about the labour unrest in the towns. Some of them have themselves been in the capitals and in the factories and have seen the riots, as the police call them. Others know workers who were involved in the unrest and were deported back to their villages by the authorities. Others again must have seen the leaflets issued by the workers, or pamphlets about the workers' struggle. Still others have only heard the stories about what is going on in the towns from people who have been there.

Formerly, only students rebelled, but now thousands and tens of thousands of workers have risen in all the big towns. In most cases they fight against their employers, against the factory-owners, against the capitalists. The workers declare strikes, all the workers at a factory stop work at the same time and demand higher wages, and that they should be made to work not eleven or ten hours a day, but only eight hours. The workers also demand other things that would make the working-man's life

easier. They want the workshops to be in better condition and the machines to be protected by special appliances so as to prevent them from maiming the workers; they want their children to be able to go to school and the sick to be given proper aid in the hospitals; they want the homes of the workers to be like human dwellings instead of being like dog's kennels.

The police intervene in the workers' struggle. The police seize the workers, throw them into prison, deport them without trial back to their villages, or even to Siberia. The government has outlawed strikes and workers' meetings. But the workers wage their fight against the police and against the government. The workers say: We, millions of working people, have bent our backs long enough! We have worked for the rich and remained paupers long enough! We have allowed them to rob us long enough! We want to unite in unions, to unite all the workers in one big workers' union (a workers' *party*) and jointly to strive for a better life. We want to achieve a new and better order of society: in this new and better society there must be neither rich nor poor; all will have to work. Not a handful of rich people, but all the working people must enjoy the fruits of common labour. Machines and other improvements must serve to ease the work of all and not to enable a few to grow rich at the expense of millions and tens

of millions of people. This new and better society is called *socialist society*. The teachings about this society are called *socialism*. The workers' unions which fight for this better society are called *Social-Democratic* parties. Such parties exist openly in nearly all countries (except Russia and Turkey), and our workers, together with Socialists from among the educated people, have also formed such a party: the *Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party*.

The government persecutes that Party, but it exists in secret, in spite of all prohibitions; it publishes newspapers and pamphlets and organizes secret unions. The workers not only meet in secret, they come out into the streets in crowds and unfurl their banners bearing the inscriptions: "Long live the eight-hour day! Long live freedom! Long live socialism!" The government savagely persecutes the workers for this. It even sends troops to shoot the workers. Russian soldiers have killed Russian workers in Yaroslavl, in St. Petersburg, in Riga, in Rostov-on-Don and in Zlatoust.

But the workers do not surrender. They continue the fight. They say: neither persecution, nor prison, nor deportations, nor penal servitude, nor death can frighten us. Our cause is a just cause. We are fighting for the freedom and the happiness of all who work. We are fighting to free tens and hundreds of millions of people

from violence, oppression and poverty. The workers are becoming more and more class conscious. The number of Social-Democrats is growing fast in all countries. We shall win in spite of all persecution.

The rural poor must clearly understand who these Social-Democrats are, what they want and what must be done in the countryside to help the Social-Democrats to win happiness for the people.

2. WHAT DO THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS WANT?

The Russian Social-Democrats are first and foremost striving to win *political freedom*. They need political freedom in order to unite all the Russian workers widely and openly in the struggle for the new and better socialist order of society.

What is political freedom?

To understand this the peasant must first compare his present state of freedom with serfdom. Under serfdom the peasant could not marry without the landlord's permission. To-day the peasant is free to marry without anyone's permission. Under serfdom the peasant had to work for his landlord on the days fixed by the latter's bailiff. To-day the peasant is free to decide which employer to work for, on which days, and for what pay. Under serfdom the

peasant could not leave his village without the landlord's permission. To-day the peasant is free to go wherever he pleases—if the *mir* [the village community] allows him to go, if he is not in arrears with his taxes, if he can get a passport, and if the governor or the police do not forbid his changing residence. Thus, even to-day the peasant is not quite free to go where he pleases, he does not enjoy complete freedom of movement, the peasant is still a semi-serf. Later on we shall explain in detail why the Russian peasant is still a semi-serf and what he must do to change his condition.

Under serfdom the peasant had no right to acquire property without the landlord's permission, he could not buy land. To-day the peasant is free to acquire any kind of property (but even to-day he is not quite free to leave the *mir*, he is not quite free to dispose of his land as he pleases). Under serfdom the peasant could be flogged by order of the landlord. To-day the peasant cannot be flogged by order of the landlord, although he is still liable to corporal punishment.

This freedom is called *civil* freedom—freedom in family matters, in private matters, in matters concerning property. The peasant and the worker are free (although not quite) to arrange their family life and their private affairs, to dispose of their labour (choose their employer) and of their property.

But neither the Russian workers nor the Russian people as a whole are yet free to arrange their *public* affairs. The people as a whole are the serfs of the government officials, just as the peasants were the serfs of the landlords. The Russian people have no right to choose their officials, nor the right to elect representatives to legislate for the whole country. The Russian people have not even the right to arrange meetings for the discussion of *state* affairs. We cannot even print newspapers or books, we cannot even speak to all and for all on matters concerning the whole state without the permission of the officials who have been put in authority over us without our consent, just as the landlord used to appoint his bailiff without the consent of the peasants!

Just as the peasants were the slaves of the landlords, so the Russian people are still the slaves of the officials. Just as the peasants under serfdom lacked civil freedom, so the Russian people still lack *political* freedom. Political freedom means the freedom of the people to arrange their public, their state affairs. Political freedom means the right of the people to elect their representatives (deputies) to a State Duma (parliament). All laws should be discussed and passed, all taxes and dues should be fixed only by such a State Duma (parliament) elected by the people. Political freedom means the right of

the people themselves to choose all their officials, to arrange all kinds of meetings for the discussion of all state affairs, to publish whatever papers and books they please without having to ask for permission.

All the other European peoples won political freedom for themselves long ago. Only in Turkey and in Russia are the people still politically enslaved to the Sultan's government and to the tsarist autocratic government. Tsarist autocracy means the unlimited power of the tsar. The people play no part in the development of the state or in the administration of the state. All the laws are made and all the officials are appointed by the tsar alone, by his personal, unlimited, autocratic authority. But, of course, the tsar *cannot know* all the Russian laws and all the Russian officials. The tsar cannot know all that goes on in the country. The tsar simply endorses the will of a few score of the richest and most high-born officials. However much he may want to, one man cannot govern a vast country like Russia. It is not the tsar who governs Russia—one can only talk about autocratic, one-man rule; Russia is governed by a handful of the richest and most high-born officials. The tsar learns only what this handful is pleased to tell him. The tsar is quite powerless to go against the will of this handful of high-rank nobles: the tsar himself is a landlord and one of the nobility; from his

earliest childhood he has lived only among these high-born people; it was they who brought him up and educated him; he knows about the Russian people as a whole only what is known by these noble gentry, these rich landlords, and the few very rich merchants who are received at the tsar's court.

In every volost administration office you will find the same picture hanging on the wall; it depicts the tsar (Alexander III, the father of the present tsar) speaking to the volost head-men who have come to his coronation. The tsar is saying to them: "*Obey your marshals of the nobility!*" And the present tsar, Nicholas II, has repeated those words. Thus, the tsars themselves admit that they can govern the country only with the aid of the nobility and through the nobility. We must firmly remember those words of the tsar's about the peasants having to obey the nobility. We must clearly understand what a lie is being told the people by those who try to make out that tsarist government is the best form of government. In other countries—those people say—the government is elected; but it is the rich who are elected, and they govern unjustly and oppress the poor. In Russia the government is not elected; an autocratic tsar governs the whole country. The tsar stands above everyone, rich and poor. The tsar, they tell us, is just to everyone, to the poor and to the rich alike.

Such talk is sheer hypocrisy. Every Russian knows the kind of justice that is dispensed by our government. Everybody knows whether a plain working-man or a farm-labourer in our country can become a member of the State Council. In all other European countries, however, factory workers and farm-hands are elected to the State Duma (parliament); and they can freely speak to all the people about the miserable condition of the workers, and call upon the workers to unite and fight for better conditions. And no one dares to stop these speeches of the people's representatives, no policeman dares to lay a finger on them.

In Russia there is no elective government, and she is governed not merely by the rich and the high-born, but by the worst of these. She is governed by the most skilful intriguers at the tsar's court, by the most artful backbiters, by those who carry lies and slanders to the tsar, who flatter and toady to him. They govern in secret; the people do not and cannot know what new laws are being drafted, what wars are being hatched, what new taxes are being introduced, which officials are being rewarded and for what services, and which are being dismissed. In no country is there such a multitude of officials as in Russia. These officials tower above the voiceless people like a dark forest—a mere working-man can never make his way through this

forest, can never obtain justice. Not a single complaint against the bribery, the robbery or the violence of the officials is ever brought to light; every complaint is smothered in official red-tape. The voice of an isolated individual never reaches the people, it is lost in this dark jungle, it is stifled in the police torture-chamber. An army of officials, who were never elected by the people and who are not responsible to the people, has woven a thick web, and men and women are struggling in this web like flies.

Tsarist autocracy is an autocracy of officials. Tsarist autocracy means the feudal dependence of the people upon the officials and especially upon the police. Tsarist autocracy is police autocracy.

That is why the workers come out into the streets with banners bearing the inscriptions: "Down with the autocracy!" "Long live political freedom!" That is why the tens of millions of the village poor must also support and take up this battle-cry of the urban workers. Like them, undaunted by persecution, fearless of the enemy's threats and violence, and undeterred by the first reverses, the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants must come forward for a decisive struggle for the freedom of the whole of the Russian people and demand first of all the *convocation of the representatives of the people*. Let the people themselves all over Russia elect their counsellors (deputies). Let those counsellors form a