

## Document 2.10 Lenin's 'Marxism and Insurrection'

Lenin's calls for an immediate insurrection to overthrow the Provisional Government became ever more insistent. On the question of ending the war, Lenin believed that the Germans would grant the Bolsheviks, at the very least, an armistice. In this, as we shall see, Lenin was wrong.

One of the more vicious and probably most widespread distortions of Marxism resorted to by the dominant 'socialist' parties is the opportunist lie that preparation for insurrection, and generally the treatment of insurrection as an art, is 'Blanquism' . . .

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 a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that *turning point* 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 enemy and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution* are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*.

Once these conditions exist, however, to refuse to treat insurrection as an art is a betrayal of the revolution . . .

On 3–4 July it could have been argued, without violating the truth, that the correct thing to do was to take power, for our enemies would in any case have accused us of insurrection and ruthlessly treated us as rebels. However, to have decided on this account in favour of taking power at that time would have been wrong, because the objective conditions for the victory of the insurrection did not exist . . .

We could not have retained power politically on 3–4 July because, *before the Kornilov revolt*, the army and the provinces could and would have marched against Petrograd.

Now the picture is entirely different . . .

All the objective conditions exist for a successful insurrection . . .

And another thing. By immediately proposing a peace without annexations, by immediately breaking with the Allied imperialists and with all imperialists, either we shall at once obtain an armistice, or the entire revolutionary proletariat will rally to the defence of the country, and a really just, really revolutionary war will then be waged by revolutionary democrats under the leadership of the proletariat . . .

Source: Lenin, *Marxism and Insurrection: A Letter to the Central Committee of the RSDWP*, 13–14 (26–7) September 1917, Selected Works, pp. 357, 358, 360–1.

## Document 2.11 Lenin – 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?'

In the last days of September 1917 Lenin continued to urge the revolutionary seizure of power, but he also sought to answer those who argued that the Bolsheviks had no constructive policies and would not last long in power. All that the Bolsheviks had to do, according to Lenin, was smash the 'bourgeois' democratic political system of the old regime, and convert its economic apparatus to socialist purposes. In his view, the German war economy had already shown how this could be done: this was his model of a socialist economy. This was an extraordinarily naive view of how a modern economic system works.

On what are all trends agreed . . . They all agree that the Bolsheviks will either never dare take over full state power alone, or, if they dare, and do take power, they will not be able to retain it even for the shortest while . . .

No. We must not allow ourselves to be frightened by the screams of the frightened bourgeoisie. We must bear firmly in mind that we have never set ourselves 'insoluble' social problems, and as for the *perfectly* soluble problem of taking immediate steps towards socialism, which is the only way out of the exceedingly difficult situation, that will be *solved only* by the dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants. Victory, and lasting victory, is now more than ever, more than anywhere else, assured for the proletariat in Russia if it takes power . . .

The proletariat *cannot* 'lay hold of' the 'state apparatus' and 'set it in motion'. But it can *smash* everything that is oppressive, routine, incorrigibly bourgeois in the state apparatus and substitute its *own*, new apparatus. The Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies are exactly this apparatus . . .

This brings us to another aspect of the question of the state apparatus. In addition to the chiefly 'oppressive' apparatus – the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy – the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connections with the banks and syndicates, an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work, if it may be expressed in this way. This apparatus must not, and should not be *cut off, lopped off, chopped away from* this apparatus; it must be *subordinated* to the proletarian Soviets; it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide, and this *can* be done by utilising the achievements already made by large-scale capitalism (in the same way as the proletarian revolution can, in general, reach its goal only by utilising these achievements).

Capitalism has created an accounting *apparatus* in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies and office employees' unions. *Without big banks socialism would be impossible.*

The big banks *are* the 'state apparatus' which we *need* to bring about socialism, and which we *take ready-made* from capitalism; our task here is



merely to *lop off* what *capitalistically mutilates* this excellent apparatus, to make it *even bigger*, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the *socialist* apparatus. This will be country-wide *book-keeping*, country-wide *accounting* of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the *skeleton* of socialist society . . .

*Compulsory syndication*, i.e., compulsory amalgamation in associations under state control – this is what capitalism has prepared the way for, this is what has been carried out in Germany by the Junkers' state, this is what can be easily carried out in Russia by the Soviets, by the proletarian dictatorship, and this is what will *provide us with a state apparatus* that will be universal, up-to-date, and non-bureaucratic . . .

Source: Lenin, 'Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?', late September 1917, Selected Works, pp. 363, 366, 372–3, 375–6, 377.

### Document 2.12 Lenin Again Calls for the Seizure of Power

In a letter to the Bolshevik party's Central Committee (CC) and other party organisations on 1 (14) October 1917 Lenin urged the seizure of power. The Second Congress of Soviets was due to convene at the end of October, but Lenin insisted that the Bolsheviks could not wait that long.

Dear comrades! Events so clearly indicate the task for us that any delay would be tantamount to a crime. The agrarian movement is growing. The government is intensifying wild repression, in the army sympathy towards us is growing . . . In Germany it is clear that the revolution has begun, especially after the shooting of the sailors. The elections in Moscow, with 47 per cent voting for the Bolsheviks, is a gigantic victory. With the Left SRs we are clearly a majority in the country. The railway workers and post office employees are in conflict with the government . . .

The Bolsheviks do not have the right to wait for the congress of soviets, they must take *power immediately*. In this way they will save the world revolution . . . and the Russian revolution.

Source: Lenin, 'Pis'mo v TsK, MK, PK i chlenam sovetov pitera i moskvy bol'shevikam', 1 (14) October 1917, PSS, vol. 34, p. 340.

### Document 2.13 Kamenev and Zinoviev Denounce Lenin's Plans for Insurrection

Coming in disguise to the Central Committee's session of 10 (23) October 1917 Lenin urged preparations to be made for the seizure of power. It was at that meeting that a Political Bureau (Politburo) of seven leading Bolsheviks (Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Trotsky, Stalin, Sokolnikov and Bubnov) was established, though the existence of such a body was only formalised in 1919. The momentous decision to launch an armed insurrection was taken by a vote of 10 for and 2 against, largely at Lenin's instigation. The resolution, however, was opposed by Kamenev and Zinoviev at sessions of the Central Committee on the grounds that the Bolsheviks had neither the mass support nor the international backing to ensure success. They continued to agitate against the motion in the following days. In an article in Maksim Gorkii's journal *Novaya zhizn'* (New Life) on 18 (31) October Kamenev denied that the party had taken any decision to launch an uprising, insisting that it would be 'inadmissible to launch an armed uprising in the present circumstances, independently and a few days before the Congress of Soviets'. In an impassioned statement on 11 (24) October Kamenev and Zinoviev argued the case against insurrection, making points that remain valid despite the success of the Bolshevik seizure of power on 25 October.

There is a tendency becoming established and gaining ground in workers' circles to see the immediate declaration of an armed insurrection as the only way out. All the timetables have now come together that if one talks of such an insurrection, it has to be fixed directly and then for the very near future. The subject is already being discussed in one form or another in all the periodicals and at workers' meetings and it occupies the minds of a large circle of Party workers. We, in our turn, regard it as our duty and our right to express ourselves on this matter with complete frankness.

We are deeply convinced that to proclaim an armed insurrection now is to put at stake not only the fate of our Party but also the fate of the Russian and the international revolution.

There is no doubt that historical circumstances do exist when an oppressed class has to recognise that it is better to go on to a defeat than surrender without a fight. Is the Russian working class in just such a position today? *No, a thousand times no!!!*

As a result of the enormous growth in our Party's influence in the towns and particularly in the army, a position has been reached at the present moment where it is becoming more and more impossible for the bourgeoisie to block the Constituent Assembly . . . Our Party's chances in the Constituent Assembly elections are excellent. We regard the talk put about that the influence of Bolshevism is beginning to decline and suchlike as totally without foundation . . . The influence of Bolshevism is growing. Whole sections of the working population are still only beginning to be swept up in it . . .



## The birth of the Soviet state, 1917–1921

In October 1917 several streams of revolutionary activism – peasant, worker, soldier, nationalist – converged, and it was Lenin's genius to seize the unique opportunity to knot them together in a single revolutionary moment. It must be stressed, however, that the Bolshevik revolution was directed as much against the moderate 'evolutionary' socialists as it was against the decaying authority of the 'bourgeois' Provisional Government. The revolution, moreover, appeared to run counter to Marx's own views on the necessary developmental foundations for socialism – a mature economy and an advanced society. For Lenin – as for so many other revolutionaries in the twentieth century – the revolution appeared to be the key to development, and not vice versa. Once in power the revolutionary knot began to unravel, with open dissension within the party over various issues throughout the Civil War. It was only in March 1921 that the Leninist discipline, which had been so much discussed earlier, was finally imposed in practice. The aims of the other revolutionary threads also diverged, while 'democracy' as an aspiration, not only for the defenders of the Constituent Assembly but also for revolutionary workers and sailors in Kronstadt, did not disappear. Lenin's second stroke of genius, then, was not only to have made a revolution but to have forged a 'Leninist' party-state out of a fissiparous revolutionary socialist movement.

### The Consolidation of Power

The Kadet Party was banned on 28 November 1917. On 9 December 1917 the Left SRs agreed to join Sovnarkom and took three ministerial appointments, including Steinberg as People's Commissar of Justice, and two without portfolio. Despite the broadening of the government, repression continued. One of the first acts of all twentieth-century revolutionary socialist governments was to establish a secret police, and the Bolsheviks led the way in this.

#### Document 3.1 Establishment of the Secret Police

Having already banned the opposition press and right-wing parties, Sovnarkom on 7 (20) December 1917 moved against not only actual but also possible sources of opposition, establishing the Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-Revolution, better known by the acronym of the first two words, the Cheka.

The Commission is to be named the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission and is to be attached to the Council of People's Commissars. [This commission] is to make war on counter-revolution and sabotage . . .

The duties of the Commission will be:

- 1 To persecute and break up all acts of counter-revolution and sabotage all over Russia, no matter what their origin.
- 2 To bring before the Revolutionary Tribunal all counter-revolutionists and saboteurs and to work out a plan for fighting them.
- 3 To make preliminary investigation only – enough to break up [the counter-revolutionary act]. The Commission is to be divided into sections: (a) the information section, (b) the organisation section (in charge of organising the fight against counter-revolution all over Russia) with branches, and (c) the fighting section.

The Commission will be formed tomorrow (December 21) . . . The Commission is to watch the press, saboteurs, strikers, and the Socialist-Revolutionists of the Right. Measures [to be taken against these counter-revolutionists are] confiscation, confinement, deprivation of [food] cards, publication of the names of the enemies of the people, etc.

*Source: James Bunyan and H. H. Fisher, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918: Documents and Materials (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1934), pp. 297–8.*

Headed by Felix Dzerzhinskii, the Cheka soon emerged as a largely independent body, despite the attempts by Bolshevik leaders like Kamenev to regulate and bring its activities under political control. Applying the death penalty at will, the Cheka came into its own during the 'Red Terror' in autumn 1918, following the attempted assassination of Lenin by the Left Socialist Revolutionary Fanny Kaplan, on 30 August 1918. At various points thereafter the Cheka and its successors enjoyed the right to arrest and summarily to execute. In 1922 the Cheka became the GPU (State Political Administration); in 1924 OGPU (Unified State Political Administration); in 1934 the interior and secret police ministries merged to create Stalin's killing machine, the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs); after the war the ministry was split to create the MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs, which lasts to this day), and the MGB (Ministry of State Security); following Stalin's death the latter changed to the KGB (the Committee for State Security), which led the struggle against dissent and saw out the Soviet Union.

#### Document 3.2 Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly was intended to establish forms of governance and to devise a new constitution. It was elected on the basis of universal proportional election in the autumn of 1917, the first completely free national elections in Russia's history. Fifty per cent of the electorate took part. In the country as a whole



which she has hit us quite painfully – and a man who has been thrashed is worth two that haven't. That is why I think that after history has given us a very painful thrashing, because of our hope that the Germans cannot attack and that we can get everything by shouting 'hurrah!', this lesson, with the help of our Soviet organisations, will be very quickly brought home to the masses all over Soviet Russia . . .

*Source: Lenin, 'Political Report of the CC', Seventh Emergency Congress of the RCP(b), 7 March 1918, PSS, vol. 36, pp. 15–16.*

### Document 3.7 The Left Communists Condemn the Brest-Litovsk Peace

The Left Communists led by Bukharin advocated a revolutionary war, Trotsky took a middle line, while the majority led by Lenin argued that the treaty was essential for the survival of the regime. In a declaration the Left Communists insisted that there was an alternative.

In response to the offensive by the German imperialists, openly declaring their aim of crushing the proletarian revolution in Russia, the party's CC responded by agreeing to making peace on those conditions that a few days earlier had been rejected by the Soviet delegation at Brest. This agreement, accepted on the first onslaught of the enemies of the proletariat, represents the capitulation by the leading section of the international proletariat before the international bourgeoisie . . .

We consider that after seizing power, after the complete crushing of the last bastions of the bourgeoisie, there inevitably arises before the proletariat the task of fomenting civil war on an international scale, a task for whose fulfilment it cannot stop in the face of any danger. Refusal to fulfil this will lead to its destruction by internal degeneration, the equivalent of suicide . . .

*Source: Protokoly TsK RSDRP(b): avgust 1917–fevral' 1918 (Moscow, Politizdat, 1958), p. 178.*

For the Bolshevik regime to have been able to put up any military resistance to the Germans, the war would have had to have been fought not so much as a revolutionary war but as a *national* war, as Stalin did indeed fight the Great Patriotic War of 1941–5. But to have done so would have forced the Bolsheviks to ally precisely with those forces that they were intent upon destroying, threatening the Bolshevik hold on power in the process. The Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was ratified by the Fourth (Emergency) Congress of Soviets on 15 March 1918. The Left SRs refused to recognise the peace and withdrew their representatives from Sovnarkom. The Bolsheviks also committed themselves to the cessation of revolutionary propaganda. A further agreement signed in Berlin on 27 August 1918 committed Russia to paying Germany a total of 6 million marks. The Brest peace was annulled by the Soviet government on 13 November 1918.

### Document 3.8 Trotsky and the Red Army

Soon after establishing the Cheka, the Soviet authorities moved to create their own army – the tsarist army having in effect dissolved. On 23 February 1918 the Red Army was formally established, and Trotsky, who had resigned as Foreign Affairs Commissar at the time of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, was appointed Commissar of Military Affairs. While the Left Communists harked back to Marx's strictures against a standing army, favouring a revolutionary volunteer militia army using guerrilla tactics, the election of officers and democratic decision-making, Trotsky insisted on the reimposition of traditional discipline and the employment of so-called 'military specialists', former tsarist officers, under the *kontrol'* (supervision) of communist commissars.

The misfortune of the working class is that it has always been in the position of an oppressed class. This is reflected in everything: both in its level of education, and in the fact that it does not have those habits of rule which the dominant class has and which it bequeaths to its heirs through its schools, universities, etc. The working class has none of this, but must acquire it. Having come to power, it has had to view the old state apparatus as an apparatus of class oppression. But at the same time it must draw from this apparatus all the worthwhile skilled elements which are technically necessary, put them where they belong, and heighten its proletarian class power by using these elements. This, Comrades, is the task which now stands before us for our overall growth . . .

Here I turn to a ticklish point which to a familiar degree has now assumed major importance in our party life. This is one of the questions of the organisation of the army, specifically the question of recruiting military specialists – i.e., to speak plainly, former officers and generals – to create the army and to run it. All basic, guiding institutions of the army are now set up so that they consist of one military specialist and two political commissars. Such is the present basic tone of the leading organs of the army . . .

There is still another question in the area of the organisation of the army: the so-called elective principle. In general, all it means is to struggle against the old officers' corps, to control the commanding staff. As long as power was in the hands of a class that was hostile to us, when the commanding staff was an instrument in the hands of this power, we were obliged to strive to smash the class resistance of the commanding personnel by way of the elective principle. But now political power is in the hands of that same working class from whose ranks the army is recruited. Under the present regime in the army – I tell you this in all frankness – the elective principle is politically pointless and technically inexpedient, and has in fact already been set aside by decree . . .

*Source: Trotsky, 'Labour, Discipline, Order', speech to the 27 March 1918 Moscow City Conference of the Russian Communist Party, in Daniels, Communism in Russia, p. 93.*



## Industrial Democracy and State Capitalism

Industrial democracy was at the heart of the aspirations of the workers' movement in 1917, yet following the Bolshevik assumption of power the two trends of the revolution – from above and from below – increasingly came into conflict. Having exploited the aspirations of the workers in 1917, Lenin during the 'breathing space' following the Brest-Litovsk peace soon reverted to type and insisted on strict hierarchy, discipline, and even the reimposition of piece rates, something detested by workers at this time.

### Document 3.9 Workers' Control

The following decree was issued on 14 (27) November 1917 and appeared to grant workers' demands, yet the rights of workers were limited. As mentioned above (p. 38), the Russian word *kontrol'* means 'supervision', not 'control' in the English sense.

- 1 In the interests of a systematic regulation of national economy, Workers' Control is introduced in all industrial, commercial, agricultural (and similar) enterprises which are hiring people to work for them in their shops or which are giving them work to take home. This control is to extend over the production, storing, buying and selling of raw materials and finished products as well as over the finances of the enterprise.
- 2 The workers will exercise this control through their elected organizations, such as factory and shop committees, soviets of elders, etc. The office employees and the technical personnel are also to have representation in these committees.
- 3 Every large city, province and industrial area is to have its own Soviet of Workers' Control, which, being an organ of the S(oviet) of W(orkers'), S(oldiers'), and P(easants') D(eputies), must be composed of representatives of trade-unions, Factory, shop and other workers' committees and workers' co-operatives . . .
- 6 The organs of Workers' Control have the right to supervise production, fix the minimum of output, and determine the cost of production.
- 7 The organs of Workers' Control have the right to control all the business correspondence of an enterprise. Owners of enterprises are legally responsible for all correspondence kept secret. Commercial secrets are abolished. The owners have to show to the organs of Workers' Control all their books and statements for the current year and for the past years.
- 8 The rulings of the organs of Workers' Control are binding on the owners of enterprises and can be annulled only by decisions of the higher organs of Workers' Control.

Source: Bunyan and Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1918*, pp. 308–10.

Instead of the direct control of enterprises, this decree allowed 'supervision' over the workplace. In practice, faced with lockouts and the like, workers were forced to seize their enterprises. In the 'red guard attack on capital' following the seizure of power Lenin tolerated this, but later imposed a more centralised state-directed model of industrial management. The ideal of workers' self-management of the economy was later espoused by the Workers' Opposition, and was in part implemented in the Yugoslav model of self-managing socialism.

### Document 3.10 Lenin and 'State Capitalism'

Early hopes that the October revolution would usher in workers' self-management were soon dismissed as Utopian. Following the Brest-Litovsk peace Lenin turned to the problem of shaping the transitional Soviet economic order, and (once again to the disappointment of the Left Communists) advocated the retention of the rudiments of capitalist management – with any surviving capitalists under the supervision of the Soviet state. Measures included the reintroduction of one-man management, labour discipline and piecework incentive payments, together with the employment of 'bourgeois' technical and managerial 'specialists' (known as 'spetsy' in Soviet jargon). 'Accounting and control' became the slogan of the new period.

Thanks to the peace which has been achieved – despite its extremely onerous character and extreme instability – the Russian Soviet Republic has gained an opportunity to concentrate its efforts for a while on the most important and most difficult aspect of the socialist revolution, namely, the task of organisation . . .

It also goes without saying that we shall be able to render effective assistance to the socialist revolution in the West, which has been delayed for a number of reasons, only to the extent that we are able to fulfil the task of organisation confronting us . . .

For the first time in human history a socialist party has managed to complete in the main the conquest of power and the suppression of the exploiters, and has managed to *approach directly* the task of *administration*. We must prove worthy executors of this most difficult (and most gratifying) task of the socialist revolution . . .

The decisive thing is the organisation of the strictest and country-wide accounting and control of production and distribution of goods. And yet, we have *not yet* introduced accounting and control in those enterprises and in those branches which we have taken away from the bourgeoisie; and without this there can be no thought of achieving the second and equally essential material condition for introducing socialism, namely, raising the productivity of labour on a national scale . . .

Now we have to resort to the old bourgeois method and to agree to pay a very high price for the 'services' of the top bourgeois specialists. All those



who are familiar with the subject appreciate this, but not all ponder over the significance of this measure being adopted by the proletarian state. Clearly, such a measure is a compromise, a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune and of every proletarian power, which call for the reduction of all salaries to the level of the wages of the average worker, which call for fighting careerism, not with words, but with deeds.

Moreover, it is clear that such a measure not only implies the cessation – in a certain field and to a certain degree – of the offensive against capital (for capital is not a sum of money, but a definite social relation); it is also *a step backward* on the part of our socialist Soviet state power, which from the very outset proclaimed and pursued the policy of reducing high salaries to the level of the wages of the average worker . . .

It becomes immediately clear that while it is possible to capture the central government in a few days, while it is possible to suppress the military resistance (and sabotage) of the exploiters even in different parts of a great country in a few weeks, the capital solution of the problem of raising the productivity of labour requires, at all events (particularly after a most terrible and devastating war), several years. The protracted nature of the work is certainly dictated by objective circumstances . . .

The Russian worker is a bad worker compared with people in advanced countries. It could not be otherwise under the tsarist regime and in view of the persistence of the hangover from serfdom. The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is – learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the introduction of the best system of accounting and control, etc. The Soviet republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field. The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organisation with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism . . .

It would be extremely stupid and absurdly Utopian to assume that the transition from capitalism to socialism is possible without coercion and without dictatorship. Marx's theory very definitely opposed this petty bourgeois-democratic and anarchist absurdity long ago. And Russia of 1917–18 confirms the correctness of Marx's theory in this respect so strikingly, palpably and imposingly that only those who are hopelessly dull or who have obstinately decided to turn their backs on the truth can be under any misapprehension concerning this. Either the dictatorship of Kornilov (if we take him as the Russian type of bourgeois Cavaignac [the general who had suppressed the uprising of Paris workers in June 1848]) or the dictatorship of the proletariat – any other choice is *out of the question* for a country which has gone through an extremely rapid development with extremely sharp

turns and amidst desperate ruin created by one of the most horrible wars in history . . .

There is absolutely *no* contradiction in principle between Soviet (*that is*, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals. The difference between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois dictatorship is that the former strikes at the exploiting minority in the interests of the exploited majority, and that it is exercised – *also through individuals* – not only by the toiling and exploited masses, but also by organisations which are built in such a way as to rouse these masses to the work of history-making. (The Soviet organisations are organisations of this kind.)

Sources: Lenin, 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government', April 1918, Selected Works, pp. 401, 402, 404, 406, 409, 415, 417, 420, 424; 'Ocherednye zadachi sovetskoi vlasti', PSS, vol. 36, pp. 167, 168, 173, 175, 179, 187–8, 189–90, 194, 199.

### Document 3.11 The Left Communists and Economic Management

The Left Communists were not willing to accept what appeared to them to be the fundamental repudiation of the aspirations of October. The issues raised earlier by Bogdanov about the role of the party and the proletariat in the revolutionary process were once again aired. The Left Communists advocated revolutionary construction from below and argued that workers should retain a high degree of independent initiative through workers' control. They condemned the trend towards centralism and dictatorial leadership in the new system, and thus once again, as Bogdanov had done earlier, challenged the fundamental postulates of Lenin's view of the vanguard role of leadership. In a series of 'Theses on the Present Moment' presented to a conference of party leaders on 4 April 1918, the Left Communists outlined what they saw as the stark choices facing the country.

10 The party of the proletariat is faced by a choice between two paths. One is the path of preserving and strengthening the part of the Soviet state that remains intact, which is at present from the economic perspective – considering that the revolution remains partial – only an organisation for the transition to socialism (in views of incomplete nationalisation of the banks, capitalist forms of finance enterprises, the partial nationalisation of enterprises, the predominance of small-scale farming and small property-holding in the village, and the efforts of the peasants to solve the land question by dividing up the land). But from the political viewpoint this path may, under cover of the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the poorest peasantry, transform itself into an instrument for the political rule of the semi-proletarian petty bourgeois masses, and become merely a transitional stage to the complete rule of finance capital.



previously seen that the State is a class organization of the rulers. The State is always directed by one class against the other. A bourgeois State is directed against the proletariat, whereas a proletarian State is directed against the capitalists, nor wage workers; there are simply people – comrades. If there are no classes, then there is no class war, and there are no class organizations. Consequently the State has ceased to exist. Since there is no class war, the State has become superfluous. There is no one to be held in restraint, and there is no one to impose restraint.

But how, they will ask us, can this vast organization be set in motion without any administration? Who is going to work out the plans for social administration? Who will distribute labour power? Who is going to keep account of social income and expenditure? In a word, who is going to supervise the whole affair?

It is not difficult to answer these questions. The main direction will be entrusted to various kinds of book-keeping offices or statistical bureaux. There, from day to day, account will be kept of production and all its needs; there also it will be decided whither workers must be sent, whence they must be taken, and how much work is to be done . . . There will be no need for special ministers of state, for police and prisons, for laws and decrees – nothing of the sort . . . The bureaucracy, the permanent officialdom, will disappear. The State will die out . . .

The communist method of production will signify an enormous development of productive forces. As a result, no worker in communist society will have to do as much work as of old. The working day will grow continually shorter, and people will be to an increasing extent freed from the chains imposed on them by nature.

Source: N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, introduction by E. H. Carr (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 117–18, 121.

### Document 3.18 Trotsky on Terror and Militarisation

Trotsky became one of the most eloquent exponents of dictatorial centralisation and brutal discipline (cf. Document 3.8). Carried away by War Communism, he advocated unlimited coercion not only to defend the workers' state but also to manage it. In early 1920, in connection with the anticipated end of the Civil War, he had suggested a rethinking of policy, but once this had been rejected by the party leadership he veered to the opposite extreme. He now rejected the whole concept of 'free labour' and called for universal compulsory labour duty and the militarisation of the economy.

Who aims at the end cannot reject the means. The struggle must be carried on with such intensity as actually to guarantee the supremacy of the

proletariat . . . It follows that the dictatorship must be guaranteed at all costs . . . The man who repudiates terrorism in principle – i.e., repudiates measures of suppression and intimidation towards determined and armed counter-revolution, must reject all idea of the political supremacy of the working class and its revolutionary dictatorship. The man who repudiates the dictatorship of the proletariat repudiates the socialist revolution, and digs the grave of socialism.

The theoretical apostasy of Kautsky lies just in this point: having recognised the principle of democracy as absolute and eternal, he has stepped back from Marxist dialectics to natural law. That which was exposed by Marxism as the passing mechanism of the bourgeoisie, and was subjected only to temporary utilisation with the object of preparing the proletarian revolution, has been newly sanctified by Kautsky as the supreme principle standing above classes, and unconditionally subordinating to itself the methods of the proletarian struggle. The counter-revolutionary degeneration of parliamentarianism finds its most perfect expression in the deification of democracy by the decaying theoreticians of the Second International . . .

The question of the form of repression, or of its degree, of course, is not one of 'principle'. It is a question of expediency . . . But terror can be very efficient against a reactionary class which does not want to leave the scene of operations. *Intimidation* is a powerful weapon of policy, both internationally and internally. War, like revolution, is founded upon intimidation. A victorious war, generally speaking, destroys only an insignificant part of the conquered army, intimidating the remainder and breaking their will. The revolution works in the same way: it kills individuals, and intimidates thousands. In this sense, the Red Terror is not distinguishable from the armed insurrection, the direct continuation of which it represents. The state terror of a revolutionary class can be condemned 'morally' only by a man who, as a principle, rejects (in words) every form of violence whatsoever – consequently, every war and every rising. For this one has to be merely and simply a hypocritical Quaker.

'But, in that case, in what do your tactics differ from the tactics of Tsarism?' we are asked, by the high priest of Liberalism and Kautskianism.

You do not understand this, holy men? We shall explain to you. The terror of Tsarism was directed against the proletariat. The gendarmerie of Tsarism throttled the workers who were fighting for the Socialist order. Our Extraordinary Commissions shoot landlords, capitalists, and generals who are striving to restore the capitalist order. Do you grasp this – distinction? Yes? For us Communists it is quite sufficient . . .

The further we go, however, the more do the unions recognise that they are organs of production of the Soviet state, and assume responsibility for its fortunes – not opposing themselves to it, but identifying themselves with it. The unions become the organisers of labour discipline . . . The very principle of compulsory labour service is for the Communist quite unquestionable.



Source: Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky*, first published 1920 (London, New Park Publications, 1975), pp. 45–6, 46–7, 63, 78–9, 124, 146.

### Document 3.19 The Democratic Centralists

Trotsky's views did not go unchallenged. The Democratic Centralists, the successors to the Left Communists, as a group had first emerged in December 1918, and thereafter advocated a type of 'Bolshevik constitutionalism', the regulation and thus the ordering of what had become capricious and arbitrary personalised rule and bureaucratised decision-making by committees far removed from the lives and concerns of the workers themselves. They condemned the tendency for party 'centres' to substitute for the activity of the whole party, and in particular condemned the way that the party had usurped the role of the soviets. One of their most eloquent spokesmen was V. V. Osinskii, who had been a leading Left Communist in 1918.

I propose to make a series of amendments and additions to Comrade Trotsky's theses . . . First of all I want to give the basis for the amendment which we are introducing on the question of militarisation.

What is happening now at the congress is the clash of several cultures. Our system has given birth to different cultures: we have created a military-Soviet culture, a civil-Soviet culture, and the trade unions have created theirs. Each of these forms of our movement has its own approach to things and has created its own practices. Comrade Trotsky has posed the question from the point of view of a man coming from the sphere of military culture; we approach it from the point of view of the civil sphere, and, finally, the trade union comrades pose it in their own way. They have presented it the most poorly, insofar as they have for a long time been considering only the need to protect the workers from militarisation and to keep labour free, etc.

I want first of all to establish that we approached the question of militarisation earlier than those from the other cultures, and from the other side . . . I radically reject the proposition that we oppose militarisation *per se* . . . We are against the excessive extension of the concept of militarisation, we are against the blind imitation of military models . . .

Comrade Lenin has revealed here today a very original understanding of democratic centralism . . . Comrade Lenin says that all democratic centralism consists of is that the congress elects the Central Committee, and the Central Committee governs . . . With such an original definition we cannot agree. We consider that democratic centralism – a very old concept, a concept clear to every Bolshevik and fixed in our rules – consists of carrying out the directives of the Central Committee through local organisation; the autonomy of the latter; and their responsibility for individual spheres of work. If party work is broken down into several branches with special departments,

and if these departments are under the general direction of the local organisation, just as the departments of the soviets are under the authority and direction of the provincial executive committee – this is democratic centralism, i.e., the execution of the decisions of the centre through local organs which are responsible for all the particular spheres of work in the provinces. This is the definition of democratic centralism, a system of administration preserved from bureaucracy and closely associated with the principle of collegia . . .

If you reduce the collegial principle to nothing in our institutions, this entails the downfall of the entire system of democratic centralism. I advise careful thought about this, although the speakers following me may try to 'besmirch' this argument. Bearing this in mind, we will conduct an unyielding struggle against the principle of one-person management . . .

Source: V. V. Osinskii, 'Minority Report on Building the Economy', Ninth Party Congress, March 1920, *Devyatyi s'ezd RKP(b)* (mart-aprel' 1920g): protokoly (Moscow, Politizdat, 1960), pp. 115, 116, 121–2, 123.

### Document 3.20 Lenin Condemns Leftist 'Infantilism'

Once again, Lenin's response to criticisms within Russia and in the Third Communist International (Comintern), established in March 1919, of over-centralisation and expediency was robust. He accused of 'petty bourgeois infantilism' those who criticised compromises, going so far as to suggest that those who objected to the draconian discipline that was being imposed on the party were effectively agents of imperialism.

At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something – and something highly significant – of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more often than not, they have grasped it with their revolutionary class instinct rather than realised it. Herein lies the international 'significance' (in the narrow sense of the word) of Soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics . . .

It is, I think, almost universally realised at present that the Bolsheviks could not have retained power for two and a half months, let alone two and a half years, without the strictest, truly iron discipline in our party, or without the fullest and unreserved support from the entire mass of the working class, that is, from all thinking, honest, devoted and influential elements in it, capable of leading or carrying with them the backward strata.

The dictatorship of the proletariat means a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a *more powerful* enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased *tenfold* by their overthrow (even if only in a single country), and whose power lies, not only in the strength of