

AN OPEN LETTER TO LENIN ¹

*From the inaugural meeting of the Communist Party of Finland held in Moscow
in September
3rd, 1918.*

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Comrade, —

With deep consternation and anger, we have heard that the bullet of an assassin hired by the bourgeois has wounded you, the greatest soldier of the Soviet Republic, and leader of the International Revolutionary Labor movement.

We meet here, in the capital of the Socialist Soviet Republic, to organize a Finnish Communist Party, in place of the Social Democratic Party, that fell in the revolutionary storms last spring. We hoped to see you amongst us, honored comrade, and best adviser; we had already adopted a resolution asking you to come to our Conference. As our wish to see you here with us cannot be realized owing to the infamous attack on your life, we desire by this open letter to convey to you the thoughts in our hearts that we had hoped to express to you verbally.

A year ago, you were an exile in our country; now we are visiting yours. You were exiled by the terrorism of the Russian Bourgeoisie, and afterwards by the Temporary Administration, which coerced and exiled Russia's struggling proletariat. Now it is we who have been chased to Russia by the violent terrorism of the united Finnish and German bourgeoisie, which by a bloody military dictatorship is now crushing the workers of Germany and Finland.

A year ago, we could not believe that during the war Russia could achieve a real proletarian revolution. We thought: "First peace, then revolution." But you, comrade Lenin, declared with deep confidence, "First revolution, then peace."

You acted with decision and in harmony with that belief. You hurried from Helsingfors ² to Viborg, from Viborg to Petrograd. We sent you a special warning: "Take care, Kerensky is seeking your life." But you disregarded our warning because you thought that the time had come to lead the workers to revolution.

In October the Russian proletariat rose; it crushed both the bourgeois administrators and their Socialist hirelings, and took all power into its own hands.

We Finnish Social Democrats did not then realize the true meaning of this tremendous stroke; we could not believe that still, in September, 1918, the power wrested by the workers from the bourgeois state which they have destroyed would remain in the workers' hands, and that they would be building a Socialist society.

Last Autumn. on the very eve of the Russian Revolution, you, comrade Lenin, advised us Finlanders: "Rise; rise without delay; take all power into the hands of the

² Modern Helsinki

organized workers." By failing to follow your wise advice in November, 1917, we made, as we know now, an historic error.

In November, 1917. there were good prospects for our Finnish Revolution. Unscrupulous profiteering had angered the Finish workers and driven them to the very verge of the class war; but one pace removed from forcible conflict. When from Russia the trumpets of proletarian revolution sounded, the Finnish workers were ready to rise. But our Social Democratic Party, the only workers' party in our country, was not prepared.

Our party was paralyzed by the Bourgeois Class Administration; it dropped to the level of peaceful class rivalry, at which, for instance, the German Social Democratic Movement has always remained. It was one of those Labor Parties which try by trade union methods to better the conditions of the workers within the Capitalist state, in the programs of which Socialism is a mere ornament, and which strive to avoid the workers' revolution, instead of making ready to fulfil the great historic mission of the working class. Therefore, after a period of hesitation and uncertainty, our party guided the revolutionary flood tide of the workers into mere general strike demonstrations, and staved off forcible conflict between the workers and the bourgeoisie. We did not believe in revolution; we did not wish to endanger our organizations and the "democratic" institutions of the country. We preferred to continue developing those institutions.

Now, looking back, it is plain to us that those tactics could at best, have led only to a temporary and relative victory; not a genuine victory of the working classes, but to a so-called democratic compromise between the capitalist parties and the majority of our Social Democratic Party. The minority would then, doubtless, have left our party to call the workers to revolutionary Socialism. A Finnish revolution last November could not have placed the working class immediately in power, but it might have taken us an historical evolutionary step in that direction. It was the duty of our party, as a class war organization of the workers, to dash forward to that goal; not merely to lay in wait, as it did, for attack by the bourgeoisie. If we had chosen revolution then, our country's class struggle would have been less costly than it has been. The process of evolution will in any case take its toll in human life, but the cost, if we had acted boldly, would have been smaller.

By failing to do its duty in November, our party of could not long prevent armed conflict. The democratic administration of the State, the eight-hour day, and other Parliamentary reforms which seemed so near, we could not secure by Parliamentary tactics. On the contrary, all these democratic prizes were, week by week, more evidently

endangered because the capitalists were preparing to frustrate our efforts to obtain reform by forming armed organizations for civil war. Under this menace our Party also began to prepare the workers for self-defense. But this work was not done with the great energy and enthusiasm we could have shown had we been mustering for a campaign that our hearts desired instead of for one we wished to avoid.

At the end of January, 1918, Finnish capitalism set its troops to attack the workers.

Our Social Democratic Party replied with revolution; but the situation, both in home and foreign possibilities, was now less favorable to the workers than in November. On the eve of the revolution, it was difficult to foresee this clearly; nevertheless, we ought to have known that the time was coming, in which the workers and their Party would have no other choice. In any case a proportion of the workers would certainly have taken up arms to protect their rights; thousands of them must in any case have been butchered. It is questionable whether our organizations would have been spared, even had our Party withdrawn from the struggle, and certainly had it done so it would have split the workers' front and so helped the bloody dictatorship of the bourgeois. We could not thus degrade our Party. In every district where it was possible, the whole Labor movement, political and trade unionist, rose as one man to campaign under our leadership.

But still we had no clear understanding of the nature and mission, even of this our proletarian revolution. The armed conflict was only, in our view, a necessary evil, and we who were in charge of the revolutionary movement gave less attention to the organization of the campaign than to law making and the re-arrangement of administration. When the fierce revolution was already raging and within a few weeks we got into fighting order a Red Army of 80.000 men. That this was possible in a dominion which had but half its population of three million still left to it, and where for the last fifteen years there had been no native military, so that the workers had no source from which to draw trained officers and war technicians, must be attributed rather to the general organizing capacity of the workers than to the military talents of the revolutionary administration.

In its political aims our revolutionary administration long tried, rather to restrain, than to encourage the revolutionary tendency of the towards Socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The goal of the revolution seemed to us to be, not the Socialism, but social reforms, not the annihilation of the bourgeois State and the creation of a workers' dictatorship, but reformation by the idle way of general democracy, not the

establishment of "revolution as a lasting state," to which Marx pointed, but the getting rid of revolution as soon as possible, as though it were some horrid nightmare.

This was the logical outcome of our conceited Social Democratic teaching and of the long tramping by the ways of Parliamentaryism and trade unionism, which has paralyzed the revolutionary Socialist impulse of our workers. When we had actually to face the effective historical process; the proletarian, revolution, which, even in our Social Democratic program was ever the most shining ornament, and the preparation for which should have been the highest object of the earlier Labor movement, and from which, at last, the Labor movement should hurry to gather the long awaited fruits — then it became apparent that Social Democracy's vaunted "high stage of development" was half-blind, half-lame. To revolutionary workers it was rather an obstacle than a banner of victory. The Social Democratic Party had not made use of the blossoming time of democracy within the capitalist State to prepare for that which is the highest stage of the class struggle, the armed revolution, at the outbreak of which sees having finished its task, is, doomed to perish.

When our workers' democracy tardily and unwillingly came, at last, to revolution, the inner logic of the struggle led us on to the workers' dictatorship and the socialization of industry. When we stepped in the revolutionary path, in reality to avoid revolution; our mental conflict and unreadiness lent a mischievous uncertainty to our movements from which grew up a general discontent with the leaders of the revolutionary army. It is tragic that, perhaps, these mistakes of ours were responsible for the defeat of the workers' cause when the scales of victory or defeat were hanging in the balance. But if the working class had been victorious in the conflict we might have sailed on the waves of uncertainty, face to face with the greatest tragedy possible to the Labor movement; the tragedy in which the Russian Mensheviks have been engulfed, that of struggling, weapon in hand, against the workers' revolution. The disastrous defeat of our Finnish workers' revolution was not the outcome of the leaders' mistakes.

The revolution was crushed by the beast of German Imperialism, which hastened to the aid of Finnish capitalism with weapons of highly trained forces. Whether German Social Democracy did all that it ought to prevent this we leave it to the German workers to decide. To us the interference of the German Government was destructive — and instructive. The independence of our mother country, a gift which came to us from you honored Russian comrades, we Finnish Social Democrats enthusiastically protected; but the bourgeoisie of Finland sold it to German Imperialism for the price of the Finnish workers' blood. By this deed the bourgeoisie has stripped us of social patriotism.

By international slaughter, power and the capitalist technique of mob murder, the opposition of our revolutionary workers was strangled last April (1918); men whose bravest efforts could not withstand the pressure of our enemies, and no help came to us from abroad. The German comrades did not hear our call. Our Russian Comrade heard, but had not power enough to save us. He was himself in danger, but yet helped as much as he could. Our debt of thankfulness became larger day by day and week by week. This we felt deeply, and also were ashamed, because there was once a time when, under the influence of bourgeois local-patriotism, we hesitated to accept aid from the soldier comrade of Russia, and to enter into noble alliance with him. The sacred blood that was shed on the snowfields of Finland has bound us now in a fraternal alliance that will last forever.

Comrade Lenin, the real meaning of revolutionary Socialism, which on the eve of our workers' revolution we failed to understand, now begins to be made clear by the example of the victorious Russian proletariat and by your teaching. Here in Russia, we have been able to study *the working of the greatest revolution in the history of the world*, the first grand revolution. We were told in Finland that we should see here destruction, only destruction. It is true we have seen much destruction, but destruction which has resulted from the proletarian revolution has shattered only the capitalist class state; it has only meant the conscious and thorough annihilation of the old, rotten and oppressive State organization of the exploiting classes; from under this destruction, we have seen germination and sprouting upward a nobler crop than we have even imagined. We have seen the grand and suffering Russia bring forth to the world in life and actual reality the beautiful ideal of which the workers of the world have been dreaming for many thousands of years.

Socialism.

We now understand that only thus can Socialism be realized, that it will never grow to life from the jungle of democracy, as we in Finland believed, but from the reality of destruction, danger, suffering and warfare. The class government of Russia's victorious workers, of which you, honored Comrade, are leader, is founded to help into being the long-awaited new society. This gigantic task will daily call for the boundless straining of nerves and power. The administrative difficulties of your task would demand from the proletariat very great exertions, even if Russia had been out of the terrible war, which has raged now for several years, and in which Russia is losing still important lives. Greater efforts are needed, because you must struggle under the attack both of internal and external enemies. Sword in hand must the Russian workers build, sword in

hand must the revolutionary ploughman plough. They are building, ploughing, and struggling with inexhaustible energy and enthusiasm. "The work will be bad; the work will be worthless!" croak the expelled hawks from outside. It is true that all that is done cannot be good, because there is no time for polishing, but every day some work *is finished*. We have seen growing from your combined efforts unexpectedly rich results, and that is good testimony. If in Russia, held for so long under the tyranny of the Czardom, and lately in the grasp of Germany's iron-hand, if in Russia, where the cultural and economic process was in chaos, the Socialist Soviet Republic stands firm after eleven months, how ripe, indeed, is capitalist world for socialist revolution! The capitalist world is ripe for *communism*, as we now say, comrade Lenin, in accordance with your teaching, the value of which the workers' revolution in your country has proved to the world.

To us Finnish Social Democrats the communist revolution has brought altogether new ideas of the world end of life. We have awakened now to the sunshine of Socialism, of which before we only dreamed.

For the knowledge of communism, we are in debt, which we must pay by sincere and enthusiastic work for the international socialist revolution, above all in Finland and here in Russia. Communism has given us the bright and hopeful belief that the great sacrifices the workers of our country have endured in their campaigns this year, and still more in the beastly orgies of revenge held by the Finnish bourgeois after the workers' defeat, are not wasted but given for the international victory of the proletariat. This noble end the Finnish working class tried to help in their campaigns of last spring; small in number, knowledge and strength, it yet made great sacrifice and once more it will rise up from the dust. Communism will bring the light of new hope to the darkest night; it will break the chains of despair, and pour into the sorrowful soul of the defeated soldier a new and iron-strong belief in victory.

On the day when the commanding song, "This is our last struggle," shall sound throughout the world; when the international Red Army starts forth on its onward march, the world shall see the proletariat of Finland also storm out to the war-front and to victory.

In Germany, Austria, England, France, the United States and Japan the working class will weep and repudiate. All the Labor Parties that in those countries, which speak to postpone the workers' revolution when the moment is ripe for it, and in spite of all our warnings, still give the false advice: "First peace, then revolution." The workers will repudiate those Labor Parties that directly or indirectly are supporting the attempts of

the imperialist governments of their countries to strangle the Socialist Soviet Republic and to crush the workers' international revolution.

We send a brotherly handshake to all those Labor organizations; which, already in war time, are preparing for the revolution, to rescue the workers of their own countries, to help the Russian Soviet Republic and to build up the international socialist republic.

We believe and hope that the present world war will be the grave in which international capitalism will be buried.

Honour to you, Russian Communists, who so heroically have carried out the heaviest pioneer work for the workers' international revolution! From you and the workers you represent great exertions and many heavy sacrifices will yet be demanded, but the victorious march of international Socialism which you have started will go on unchecked to its destination.

In this creative struggle; Comrade Lenin, you are needed. Your firm hand, and bright, far-seeing eye, and the strength of your mental power are important. You will patiently bear the pain and annoyance of the wounded soldier. And soon again you will take into your strong hands the rudder of the Socialist Soviet Republic and the workers' international revolutionary movement.

Tell the Russian comrades, in our name, that their Finnish comrades will go happily under fire; they desire to be in the attack when the forts of capitalism shall be taken and destroyed. The Finnish comrades will not be out of the fighting line when the workers of all countries win the world.

Moscow.

September 3rd, 1918.

