

# Lagging Behind the Revolution

*May 4, 1917*

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The revolution is advancing, growing deeper and wider, spreading from one sphere to another, and revolutionizing the whole social and economic life of the country from top to bottom.

Invading industry, it is raising the demand for control and regulation of production by the workers (Donets Basin).

Spreading to agriculture, it is giving an impetus to the collective cultivation of unused land and the supplying of implements and livestock to the peasantry (Schlus-selburg Uyezd). [1](#)

Exposing the ulcers of the war and the economic disruption produced by the war, it is bursting into the sphere of distribution and is raising the question, on the one hand, of the supply of food to the towns (food crisis), and, on the other, of the supply of manufactures to the rural districts (goods crisis).

The solution of all these and similar urgent problems calls for a maximum display of initiative on the part of the revolutionary masses, the active intervention of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the work of building the new life, and, lastly, the transfer of full power to the new class which is capable of leading the country on to the broad road of revolution.

The revolutionary masses in the localities are already taking this road. In some places the revolutionary organizations have already taken power into their own hands (Urals, Schlüsselburg), ignoring the so-called Committees of Public Salvation.

Yet the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which should be leading the revolution, is helplessly marking time, lagging behind and drifting away from the masses; and for the cardinal question of assuming full power it is substituting the trivial question of "candidates" to the Provisional Government. By lagging behind the masses, the Executive Committee is lagging behind the revolution and impeding its progress.

Before us lie two documents of the Executive Committee: "Notes for Workers' Delegates at the Front" who are carrying presents to the soldiers, and an "Appeal to the Soldiers at the Front." And what do they show? Why, this same backwardness of the Executive Committee. For on the most important questions of the day the Executive Committee, in these documents, gives the most revolting, the most anti-revolutionary replies!

## The Question of the War

While the Executive Committee was wrangling with the Provisional Government over annexations and indemnities, while the Provisional Government was manufacturing "Notes" and the Executive Committee was

gloating in the role of "victor," and in the meantime the war of conquest was continuing as of old, life in the trenches, the real life of the soldiers, had developed a new means of struggle—mass fraternization. Unquestionably, in itself, fraternization is only a spontaneous manifestation of the desire for peace. Nevertheless, if carried out deliberately and in organized fashion, fraternization may become a mighty instrument of the working class for revolutionizing the situation in the warring countries.

And what is the attitude of the Executive Committee towards fraternization? Listen :

"Soldier comrades, you will not get peace by fraternization. . . . Those who tell you that fraternization is the way to peace are leading you to your doom, and to the doom of Russian liberty. Don't believe them" (see the "Appeal").

Instead of fraternization, the Executive Committee urges the soldiers "not to reject the offensive operations which the military situation may demand" (see the "Appeal"). It transpires that "defence in the political sense does not preclude strategical offensives, the occupation of new sectors, etc. In the interests of defence . . . it is absolutely necessary to conduct an offensive, to occupy new positions" (see the "Notes").

In short, in order to achieve peace it is necessary to start an offensive and capture "sectors" of enemy territory.

That is how the Executive Committee argues.

But what is the difference between these imperialist arguments of the Executive Committee and General Alexeyev's counter-revolutionary "order of the day," which declares fraternization at the front to be "treason," and orders the soldiers "to fight the enemy unmercifully"?

Or again: what is the difference between these arguments and Milyukov's counter-revolutionary speech at the conference in the Mariinsky Palace, in which he demanded "offensive operations" and discipline from the soldiers in the interests of a "united front"?

### **The Question of the Land**

Everybody knows about the conflict that has arisen between the peasants and the Provisional Government. The peasants demand the immediate ploughing of land left uncultivated by the landlords, considering this step to be the only means of ensuring bread both for the population in the rear and for the army at the front. In reply, the Provisional Government has declared resolute war on the peasants, condemning the agrarian movement as "unlawful"; moreover, commissars have been sent to the localities to protect the landlords' interests from "infringement" on the part of "usurping" peasants. The Provisional Government has ordered the peasants to refrain from confiscating land until the Constituent Assembly meets: it, forsooth, will settle everything.

And what is the attitude of the Executive Committee to this question? Whom does it support — the peasants or the Provisional Government? Listen to this :

"The revolutionary democracy will most emphatically insist upon . . . the alienation without compensation . . . of the landed estates . . . in the *future* Constituent Assembly. At *present*, however, bearing in mind that immediate confiscation of the landed estates may cause . . . serious economic disturbances in the country . . . the revolutionary democracy warns the peasants against any unauthorized settlement of the land question, for agrarian disorders will benefit not the peasantry, but the counterrevolution"; in view of this, it is recommended that "the landlords' property should not be seized arbitrarily until the Constituent Assembly decides" (see the "Notes").

That is what the Executive Committee says.

Evidently, the Executive Committee supports not the peasants, but the Provisional Government.

Is it not clear that in taking such a stand the Executive Committee is espousing Shingaryov's counter-revolutionary cry: "Curb the peasants!"?

And, generally speaking, since when have agrarian movements become "agrarian disorders," and since when has the "unauthorized settlement" of questions become inadmissible? What are the Soviets, including the Petrograd Soviet, if not organizations of "unauthorized" origin? Does the Executive Committee think that the time for "unauthorized" organizations and decisions has passed?

The Executive Committee raises the bogey of a "food crisis" in connection with the unauthorized ploughing up of landed estates. But with a view to increasing the food resources of the population the "unauthorized" Schlüsselburg Uyezd Revolutionary Committee has resolved :

"In order to increase the supply of cereals of which there is a really great need, the village communities should plough up uncultivated land belonging to churches, monasteries, former appanages and private owners."

What objection can the Executive Committee have to this "unauthorized" decision?

What can it offer in place of this wise decision except empty talk about "usurpation," "agrarian disorders," "unauthorized settlement," etc., borrowed from the ukases of Mr. Shingaryov?

Is it not clear that the Executive Committee is lagging behind the revolutionary movement in the provinces, and, by lagging behind it, has come into conflict with it?

A new picture is thus unfolding. The revolution is growing in breadth and depth, spreading to new spheres, invading industry, agriculture and the sphere of distribution, and raising the question of taking over full power. The movement is being led by the provinces. Whereas Petrograd led in the early days of the revolution, it is now beginning to lag behind. And one gets the impression that the Petrograd Executive Committee is trying to halt at the point already reached.

But it is impossible to halt in a period of revolution: you have to move—either forward or backward. Therefore, whoever tries to halt in time of revolution must inevitably lag behind. And whoever lags behind receives no mercy: the revolution pushes him into the camp of counter-revolution.

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### Notes

1. The Revolutionary People's Committee, elected at a congress of representatives of volosts and hamlets of the Schlüsselburg Uyezd, adopted measures for the solution of the land question. The Committee's Land Commission resolved: 1) that the village communities should plough up unused land belonging to churches, monasteries, the royal family and private proprietors, and 2) that the required farm implements and livestock should be taken over from private estates, warehouses, etc., at a minimum valuation. In pursuance of this decision, the volost committees took all the land in the uyezd under their control, made an inventory of implements and livestock, arranged for the guarding of woods and forests, and organized the ploughing up of unused land.