

LENIN ON THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

LENIN on the Agrarian Question

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FOREWORD

ONE ASPECT of V. I. Lenin's work which can have great value for us in the United States is his richly creative thinking on the problems of those who live by their toil on the land. True to the Marxist principles on which he built, Lenin's economic study was always related to his conviction that the time was approaching when the people would organise the productive capacities of human society in a genuinely social manner. Therefore his economic thinking was intertwined with analysis of class relationships resulting from the basic system of production.

How are those who work on the land exploited by those who own the land? Are their problems solved if the peasant becomes an independent farmer? Can the working class solve its problems without the aid of the rural poor? What is the most fruitful relation between workers in industry and toilers on the land who live on their individual farms and are isolated from industrial struggles?

For thirty years Lenin was thinking and writing on such questions as these. He saw the capitalist world as a whole, with certain common underlying principles veiled by wide variations in historical background and degree of capitalist development. He analysed the economic structure and class relations in many countries and took part vigorously in discussion within the international labour movement. In Russia he laid the basis of the agrarian policy under which peasants were won to support of the socialist revolution and which—after Lenin's death—guided Stalin's leadership in achieving mass collectivisation of agriculture throughout the Soviet Union.

As we study Lenin's thinking on agrarian questions and see it developing against the background of special periods and situations with which he was concerned, we realise how deeply his work was rooted

in principles of social development common to the entire capitalist world.

Many of Lenin's writings on agriculture and the relation between industrial workers and those who live on the land are now available in English translations well supplied with historical notes. But these writings are voluminous and they grew out of issues and crises unfamiliar to many American readers. So the richness and clarity of Lenin's thought escape many who have little time for extended study.

The present volume sketches briefly the background of Lenin's agrarian work and traces chronologically, from his own writings, the course of Lenin's thinking on such questions. Many excerpts from Lenin's writings are included—some of them not yet otherwise available in English—but these should merely open the way to further reading of his works.

As this book is completed, a world-wide war is being waged. It is a war of democratic powers, the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and others of the United Nations, against the fascist powers—a war which directly concerns the most basic rights and the future of the American people. To assure victory in this just war against fascist tyranny, workers and farmers of the United States are urgently called upon to use their great creative powers in the united war effort of the entire American people.

For this difficult and most crucial period of world history the masses of people have a valuable heritage in Lenin's profound understanding of the interplay of class forces in the process of social change. This book will fail in its purpose if it does not stimulate a wider study of Lenin's writings.

A. R.

Spring, 1942.

A P P E N D I X A

Draft of Agrarian Programme, April, 1906

PROPOSED BY LENIN AND THE AGRARIAN COMMISSION OF THE R.S.-D.L.P.
AT THE FOURTH "UNITY" CONGRESS

For the purpose of removing remnants of the serf order, which lay a heavy burden directly upon the peasants, and in the interest of free development of the class struggle in the village, the party demands:

1. Confiscation of all church, monastery, appanage, state, imperial and landlord lands;
2. Setting-up of peasant committees for the immediate destruction of all traces of landlord power and landlord privilege and for the actual disposal of confiscated lands from now until the establishment of new land arrangements by the comprehensive Constituent Assembly;
3. Abolition of all taxes and obligations falling at the present time upon the peasantry as the tax-paying estate;
4. Abolition of all laws limiting the peasantry in disposal of its lands;
5. Giving to elected people's courts the right to lower unreasonably high rental payments and to declare void agreements having the character of bondage.

If a decisive victory of the present revolution in Russia fully assures sovereignty of the people, that is, creates a republic and a completely democratic state order, the party will strive for the abolition of private property in land and the transfer of all lands to social property of the whole people. [Note by Lenin.] Alternative wording: ... the party will support the efforts of the revolutionary peasantry for abolition of private property in land and will strive for the transference of all lands into property of the state. [End of note.]

Furthermore, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, in all circumstances and whatever the state of the democratic agrarian reforms may be, strives continuously to secure the independent class organisation of the rural proletariat, and to explain to the latter the irreconcilable antagonism of its interests and those of the peasant bourgeoisie, to warn it against being deluded by the system of small-scale economy, which under the commodity system of production is never able to abolish the poverty of the masses and, finally, to point to the need for a complete socialist revolution, as the only means of abolishing all poverty and all exploitation.

Lenin, *Collected Works*, IX, Russian, pp. 75-76. (Closing paragraph is also in *Selected Works*, III, p. 564.)

A P P E N D I X B

Sections of Economic Programme Adopted by Eighth Congress of Russian Communist Party, 1919

ON HANDICRAFT INDUSTRY

4. In relation to small and handicraft industry it is essential to make general use of it through the granting of government orders to the craftsmen; the inclusion of handicraft and small industry in the general plan of supplying raw materials and fuel and also financial support, with the proviso that separate kustars [artisans], kustar artels, producing co-operatives and small establishments unite into much larger producing and industrial units; encouragement of such mergings through allowing them economic advantages, directed, along with other measures, toward paralysing the tendency of kustars to take on the form of small shops and toward creating a painless transition of these backward forms of production to much higher large-scale mechanised industry.

ON AGRICULTURE AND THE PEASANTS

10. The Soviet power, having effected complete abolition of private property in land, has passed on already to the enacting of a whole series of measures directed toward the organisation of large-scale socialist agriculture. The most important of these measures are: (1) organisation of Soviet farms, that is, large-scale socialist enterprises; (2) support of associations

and also of co-operatives for social cultivation of the land; (3) organisation of state sowing of all unsown lands, whomever they may belong to; (4) state mobilisation of all agronomic forces for vigorous measures to raise the level of agriculture; (5) support of agricultural communes, as completely voluntary associations of tillers of the soil for carrying on large-scale collective agriculture.

Considering all these measures as the only path toward the absolutely necessary increase of productivity of agricultural labor, the Russian Communist Party strives for the very fullest possible realisation of these measures, for their extension to the more backward districts of the country, and for further steps in this direction.

In particular, the Russian Communist Party insists upon: (1) complete government support of agricultural co-operatives, engaged in the processing of agricultural products; (2) a broadly carried out system of soil improvement; (3) broad and systematic providing of equipment for poor and middle peasants through renting stations.

Considering that small peasant agriculture will still continue to exist for a long time, the Russian Communist Party strives to carry through a number of measures directed toward raising the productivity of peasant agriculture. Such measures are: (1) setting in order peasant utilisation of land (doing away with strip farming, scattered holdings, etc.); (2) supplying of peasants with better seeds and artificial fertilisers; (3) improvement of the breed of peasants' livestock; (4) the spreading of agronomic information; (5) agronomic aid to peasants; (6) repair in Soviet repair shops of peasants' agricultural equipment; (7) setting up of places for renting equipment, experimental stations, demonstration fields, etc.; (8) improvement of peasant lands.

11. Considering that the contradictions between town and village are one of the most basic foundations of the economic and cultural backwardness of the village and, at a period of such profound crisis as the present, place both city and village before the immediate danger of degeneration and ruin, the Russian Communist Party sees in the abolition of these contradictions one of the basic tasks of communist construction, and along with general measures considers essential a broad and systematic summoning of industrial workers to communist construction in agriculture, and development of activity of the general government "Workers' Committee of Action" already created by the Soviet power for this purpose, etc.

12. In all its work in the village the Russian Communist Party depends as before on the proletarian and semi-proletarian forces of the village,

organises them, first of all, as an independent force, creating party nuclei in the village, organisations of poor peasants, labour unions of a special type of the proletarians and semi-proletarians of the village, etc., bringing them in every way nearer to the city proletariat and tearing them away from the influence of the village bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois interests.

In relation to the kulaks, to the village bourgeoisie, the policy of the Russian Communist Party consists in decisive struggle against their exploiting tendencies, in suppression of their opposition to Soviet policy.

In relation to the middle peasantry the policy of the Russian Communist Party consists in gradually and systematically drawing them into the work of socialist construction. The party sets itself the task of separating it [the middle peasantry] from the kulaks, drawing it to the side of the working class by attentive regard for its needs, struggling against its backwardness by measures of ideological influence, never by measures of suppression, striving for practical agreements with it in all cases where its vital interests are affected, making concessions to it in determining means to further socialist transformation.

IN THE FIELD OF DISTRIBUTION

13. In the field of distribution the task of the Soviet power at the present time consists in unswervingly continuing the replacement of trade by a planned distribution of products organised on a national government scale. The goal is an organisation of the whole population in a single network of consumers' communes, able with the greatest possible speed, system, and economy and with the least possible expenditure of labor to distribute all the essential products, strictly centralising the whole distributive apparatus.

As the foundation of consumers' communes and their unification, the existing general and workers' co-operatives must be utilised since these are the largest organisations of consumers and the apparatus of mass distribution most well prepared by the history of capitalism.

Since the Russian Communist Party considers correct, in principle, only the further communist development of the co-operative apparatus and not its rejection, the party must systematically continue its policy: require all members of the party to work in co-operatives, guide them with the aid also of the labour unions in a communist spirit; develop the initiative and the discipline of the toiling population, united into co-operatives; endeavour to have the whole population included in them and to have these merge into a single co-operative embracing the whole Soviet republic; finally, and

chiefly, that the dominant influence of the proletariat over the other strata of toilers shall be constantly assured and for this purpose various measures should be tried out practically, facilitating and furthering the transition from petty bourgeois co-operatives of the old, capitalist type to consumers' communes, led by proletarians and semi-proletarians.

Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXIV, Russian, Appendix, pp. 700, 702-04.

A P P E N D I X C

The Tax in Kind, 1921

RESOLUTION OF TENTH CONGRESS OF RUSSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

1. To guarantee sound and peaceful conduct of agriculture on the basis of freer disposition of their economic resources by the tillers of the soil, to strengthen peasant agriculture and raise its productivity, and also in order to fix exactly the obligations to the government that fall upon the tillers of the soil, quotas are to be replaced by a tax in kind as the method by which the government procures provisions, raw materials, and fodder.
 2. This tax must be less than the assessment levied hitherto by means of quotas. The total of the tax must be so computed as to cover the minimum essential requirements of the army, the city workers, and the non-agricultural population. The total amount of the tax must be steadily reduced as the restoration of transport and industry enables the Soviet government to receive the products of agriculture in the normal way, *i.e.*, in exchange for manufactured and handicraft goods.
 3. The tax is to be levied as a deduction of a percentage or share of the produce of a farm, based on the amount of the harvest, the number of consumers in the household, and the livestock it actually has.
 4. The tax must have a progressive character: the percentage of deduction must be lowered for those who have small and medium-sized farms, for the farms of city workers, etc.
- Households of the poorest peasants can be exempt from some, and in some exceptional cases even from all, forms of the tax in kind.
- Efficient peasant-farmers, increasing the sown areas on their farms or

increasing the productivity of the farm as a whole, are to be entitled to privileges upon the payment of the tax in kind, either in the form of a reduction in the tax rate or in the form of partial exemption from the tax.

5. The tax law must be drawn up in such a manner and promulgated within such time that the tillers of the soil would be as accurately informed as possible, before the beginning of the spring field work, on the extent of the obligations falling on them.

6. Surrender to the government of products due under the tax is to be completed on definite dates, fixed exactly by the law.

7. The amount of products due for surrender under the tax is to be computed by agricultural units (communities). Within the agricultural unit the tax is to be allotted among the farm households according to their decision in conformity with the general rates provided for in paragraph 3.

To control application of the rates of the tax and its collection, elective organisations of local peasants are to be formed for the groups paying different tax rates.

8. All stocks of provisions, raw materials, and fodder left over to the tillers of the soil after their payment of the tax are to be at their absolute disposal and can be used by them for improvement and strengthening of their farms, for raising their personal consumption and for exchange for the products of manufacturing and handicraft industry and of agriculture.

Exchange is to be allowed within the limits of local agricultural trade.

9. For the purpose of supplying the poorest population and providing exchange for the surplus provisions, forage, and raw materials voluntarily delivered by the population to the state after payment of the tax due from them, there is created a special fund of articles of agricultural equipment and of products for mass consumption. This fund is to be created from the output of domestic production and from those articles from abroad, for the obtaining of which there is to be allotted a part of the state gold stock and a part of the stock of raw materials.

The Congress, approving in principle the regulations introduced by the Central Committee on the replacement of quotas by a tax in kind, instructs the Central Committee of the party to adjust these regulations in a most speedy manner, to work out in detail the procedure for carrying out the tax, and to carry through an appropriate law in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars.

Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXVI, Russian, pp. 590-91.

APPENDIX D

On Farm Gross Income Groups in the United States*

The group of farms with "\$2,500 and over" of gross output in 1899 corresponds in volume of production with farms of \$5,730 and over in 1929 and \$3,575 and over in 1939. Since these figures do not appear in census classifications, we take for 1929 the group of "\$6,000 and over" and for 1939 the group of "\$4,000 and over." Obviously these groups make a basis of comparison which definitely understates the increasing importance of the upper groups of farms. In the same way, we compare farms "Under \$250" in 1899 with those "Under \$600" in 1929 and "Under \$400" in 1939. For intermediate groups we take as the dividing line between lower medium-sized and upper medium-sized farms the gross income levels of \$1,000 in 1899, \$2,500 in 1929, and \$1,500 in 1939. On this basis we have the following distribution of farms and of farm production:

	FARMS		
	1939	1929	1899
Very small	33.0	28.0	30.9
Lower medium-sized	44.1	52.8	52.0
Upper medium-sized	17.7	15.4	14.5
Large	5.3	3.9	2.7
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100.0	100.0	100.0
	FARM PRODUCTION		
Very small	5.4	5.7	6.6
Lower medium-sized	27.0	37.5	41.4
Upper medium-sized	31.7	31.3	32.1
Large	35.9	25.5	19.9
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Based on census data. Distribution of farm output in 1929 was estimated by National Resources Committee, Supplementary Report of Land Planning Committee, Part I, 1936, p. 5.

* To supplement Chapter XIII.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The chief sources for any study of Lenin's ideas and programmes are the many volumes of his own writings. A considerable number of these are available in English, with full historical notes.

Publication of the English translation of the twelve volumes of *Selected Works* was completed by International Publishers, of New York, in 1938. The same publishers have issued in English six of the thirty volumes which make up the third Russian edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*. These translations include Volume IV covering the years 1900 to 1902; Volume XIII, a study (in 1908) of the philosophical tenets of Marxism; and Volumes XVIII to XXI covering the period from the beginning of the Imperialist War in 1914 to the Socialist Revolution of November 7, 1917. Where articles used in this study are available both in *Selected Works* and in an English volume of *Collected Works*, reference is made to the former.

In preparing this study, the writer used also the other volumes of the *Collected Works* (third Russian edition) which have not yet appeared in English. The writer had the privilege, however, of checking certain translations with available manuscript translations of a few additional volumes. One short excerpt in Chapter XII is translated from an essay appearing for the first time in Volume I of the new, fourth Russian edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*.

The writings of Stalin, referred to in Chapter XI, are also published by International Publishers. Reference is made to volumes issued in 1934 (with one exception), but the quotations given in the text are based on revised translations for a new edition now in preparation.

In the references which follow, the title of each work actually quoted or referred to in the present study is given once in full. These works include, of course, additional sources besides the writings of Lenin and Stalin.

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10. Lenin, *Selected Works*, I, pp. 142-43. Original figures are in dessiatinas, translated to acres: one dessiatina equals 2.7 acres.
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 2. *Ibid.*, p. 56; also Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution," Jan., 1917, *Selected Works*, III, pp. 1-2.
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