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**The Agrarian Question
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The old order is breaking up, the countryside is in upheaval. The peasantry, who only yesterday were crushed and downtrodden, are today rising to their feet and straightening their backs. The peasant movement, which only yesterday was helpless, is today sweeping like a turbulent flood against the old order: get out of the way—or I'll sweep you away! "The peasants want the landlords' land," "The peasants want to abolish the remnants of serfdom"—such are the voices now heard in the rebellious villages and hamlets of Russia.

Those who count on silencing the peasants by means of bullets are mistaken: life has shown us that this only serves still further to inflame and intensify the revolutionary peasant movement.

And those who try to pacify the peasants with empty promises and "peasants' banks" are also mistaken: the peasants want land, they dream of this land, and, of course, they will not be satisfied until they have seized the landlords' land. Of what use are empty promises and "peasants' banks" to them?

The peasants want to seize the landlords' land. In this way they seek to abolish the remnants of serfdom—and those who are not betraying the peasants must strive to settle the agrarian question precisely on this basis.

But how are the peasants to gain possession of the landlords' land?

It is said that the only way is — "purchase on easy terms." The government and the landlords have plenty of spare land, these gentlemen tell us; if the peasants purchase this land, everything will settle itself, and in this way the wolves will be sated and the sheep remain whole. But they do not ask what the peasants are to buy the land with after they have been stripped not only of their money but also of their very skins. They do not stop to think that in buying the land the peasants will have only bad land foisted upon them, while the landlords will keep the good land for themselves, as they succeeded in doing during the "emancipation of the serfs"! Besides, why should the peasants buy the land which has been theirs for ages? Have not both the government's and the landlords' lands been watered by the sweat of the peasants? Did not these lands belong to the peasants? Were not the peasants deprived of this heritage of their fathers and grandfathers? What justice is there in the demand that the peasants should buy the very land that was taken from them? And is the question of the peasant movement a question of buying and selling? Is not the aim of the peasant movement to emancipate the peasants? Who will free the peasants from the yoke of serfdom if not the peasants themselves? And yet, these gentlemen assure us that the landlords will emancipate the peasants, if only they are given a little hard cash. And, believe it or not, this "emancipation," it seems, is to be carried out under the direction of the tsarist bureaucracy, the selfsame bureaucracy which more than once has met the starving peasants with cannons and machine guns! . . .

No! Buying out the land will not save the peasant. Whoever advises them to accept "purchase on easy terms" is a traitor, because he is trying to catch the peasants in the real-estate agent's net and does not want the emancipation of the peasants to be brought about by the peasants themselves.

Since the peasants want to seize the landlords' land, since they must abolish the survivals of serfdom in this way, since "purchase on easy terms" will not save them, since the emancipation of the peasants must be brought about by the peasants themselves, then there cannot be the slightest doubt that the only way is to take the land from the landlords, that is, to confiscate these lands.

That is the way out.

The question is—how far should this confiscation go? Has it any limit, should the peasants take only part of the land, or all of it?

Some say that to take all the land would be going too far, that it is sufficient to take part of the land to satisfy the peasants. Let us assume that it is so, but what is to be done if the peasants

demand more? We cannot stand in their way and say: Halt! Don't go any further! That would be reactionary! And have not events in Russia shown that the peasants are actually demanding the confiscation of all the landlords' land? Besides, what does "taking a part" mean? What part should be taken from the landlords, one half or one third? Who is to settle this question—the landlords alone, or the landlords in conjunction with the peasants? As you see, this still leaves plenty of scope for the real-estate agent, there is still scope for bargaining between the landlords and the peasants; and this is fundamentally opposed to the task of emancipating the peasants. The peasants must, once and for all, get accustomed to the idea that it is necessary not to bargain with the landlords, but to fight them. We must not mend the yoke of serfdom, but smash it, so as to abolish the remnants of serfdom forever. To "take only part" means patching up the survivals of serfdom, which is incompatible with the task of emancipating the peasants.

Clearly, the only way is to take all the land from the landlords. That alone will enable the peasant movement to achieve its aim, that alone can stimulate the energy of the people, that alone can sweep away the fossilised remnants of serfdom.

Thus: the present movement in the countryside is a democratic peasant movement. The aim of this movement is to abolish the remnants of serfdom. To abolish these remnants it is necessary to confiscate all landlord and government lands.

Certain gentlemen ask us accusingly: Why did not Social-Democracy demand the confiscation of all the land before? Why, until recently, did it speak only about confiscating the "otrezki" 1 ?

Because, gentlemen, in 1903, when the Party talked about the "otrezki," the Russian peasantry had not yet been drawn into the movement. It was the Party's duty to carry into the countryside a slogan that would fire the peasants' hearts and rouse them against the remnants of serfdom. Confiscate the "otrezki" was precisely such a slogan, because the "otrezki" vividly reminded the Russian peasants of the injustice of the remnants of serfdom.

But times have changed. The peasant movement has grown. It is no longer necessary to call it into being—it is already in full swing. The question today is not how to get the peasants moving, but what the peasants who are already moving should demand. Clearly, here definite demands are what is needed, and so the Party tells the peasants that they ought to demand the confiscation of all landlord and government lands.

This shows that everything has its time and place, and this applies to the "otrezki" as well as to the confiscation of all the land.

II

We have seen that the present movement in the countryside is a movement for the emancipation of the peasants, we have also seen that to emancipate the peasants it is necessary to abolish the remnants of serfdom, and to abolish these remnants it is necessary to confiscate all landlord and government land, so as to clear the road for the new way of life, for the free development of capitalism.

Let us assume that all this has been done. How should this land be subsequently distributed? Into whose ownership should it be transferred?

Some say that the confiscated land should be granted to each village as common property; that the private ownership of land must be abolished forthwith, that each village should become complete owner of the land and then itself divide the land among the peasants in equal "allotments," and in this way socialism will be introduced in the countryside forthwith—instead of wage-labour there will be equal land tenure.

This is called "socialisation of the land," the Socialist-Revolutionaries tell us.

Is this solution acceptable for us? Let us examine it. Let us first deal with the point that in introducing socialism, the Socialist-Revolutionaries want to begin with the countryside. Is this possible? Everybody knows that the town is more developed than the countryside, that the town is the leader of the countryside, and, consequently, every activity for socialism must begin in the town. The Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, want to convert the countryside into the leader of the town and to compel the countryside to begin introducing socialism, which of course is impossible owing to the backwardness of the countryside. Hence, it is obvious that the "socialism" of the Socialist-Revolutionaries will be stillborn socialism.

Let us now pass to the point that they want to introduce socialism in the countryside forthwith. Introducing socialism means abolishing commodity production, abolishing the money system, razing capitalism to its foundations and socialising all the means of production. The Socialist-Revolutionaries, however, want to leave all this intact and to socialise only the land, which is absolutely impossible. If commodity production remains intact, the land, too, will become a commodity and will come on to the market any day, and the "socialism" of the Socialist-Revolutionaries will be blown sky-high. Clearly, they want to introduce socialism within the framework of capitalism, which, of course, is inconceivable. That is exactly why it is said that the "socialism" of the Socialist-Revolutionaries is bourgeois socialism.

As regards equal land tenure, it must be said that this is merely an empty phrase. Equal land tenure needs equality of property, but among the peasantry inequality of property prevails, and this the present democratic revolution cannot abolish. Is it conceivable that the owner of eight pair of oxen will make the same use of the land as one who owns no oxen at all? And yet the Socialist-Revolutionaries believe that "equal land tenure" will lead to the abolition of wage-labour, and that it will stop the development of capital, which, of course, is absurd. Evidently, the Socialist-Revolutionaries want to combat the further development of capitalism and turn back the wheel of history—in this they seek salvation. Science, however, tells us that the victory of socialism depends upon the development of capitalism, and whoever combats this development is combating socialism. That is why the Socialist-Revolutionaries are also called Socialist-Reactionaries.

We shall not dwell on the fact that the peasants want to fight to abolish feudal property not in opposition to bourgeois property, but on the basis of bourgeois property—they want to divide the confiscated land among themselves as private property and will not be satisfied with "socialisation of the land."

Hence you see that "socialisation of the land" is unacceptable.

Others say that the confiscated land should be transferred to a democratic state, and that the peasants should be only the tenants of this state.

This is called "nationalisation of the land."

Is the nationalisation of the land acceptable? If we bear in mind that the future state, however democratic it may be, will nevertheless be a bourgeois state, that the transfer of the land to such a state will enhance the political strength of the bourgeoisie, which would be greatly to the disadvantage of the rural and urban proletariat; if we also bear in mind that the peasants themselves will be opposed to "nationalisation of the land" and will not be satisfied with being merely tenants—it will be self-evident that "nationalisation of the land" is not in the interest of the present-day movement.

Consequently, "nationalisation of the land" is also unacceptable.

Still others say that the land should be transferred to local government bodies, and that the peasants should be the tenants of these bodies.

This is called "municipalisation of the land."

Is the municipalisation of the land acceptable? What does "municipalisation of the land" mean? It means, firstly, that the peasants will not receive as their property the land which they confiscate from the landlords and the government in the course of the struggle. How will the peasants look upon this? The peasants want to receive land as their property; the peasants want to divide the confiscated land among themselves; they dream of this land as their property, and when they are told that this land is to be transferred not to them but to the local government bodies, they will certainly disagree with the advocates of "municipalisation." We must not forget this.

Moreover, what will happen if in their revolutionary ardour the peasants take possession of all the confiscated land and leave nothing for the local government bodies? We cannot stand in their way and say: Halt! This land must be transferred to the local government bodies and not to you, it will be quite enough for you to be tenants!

Secondly, if we accept the "municipalisation" slogan we must at once raise it among the people and at once explain to the peasants that the land for which they are fighting, which they want to seize, is not to become their property, but the property of local government bodies. Of course, if the Party enjoys great influence among the peasants they may agree with it, but, needless to say, the peasants will no longer fight with their previous ardour, and this will be extremely harmful for the present revolution. If, however, the Party does not enjoy great influence among the peasants, the latter will desert the Party and turn their backs upon it, and this will cause a conflict between the peasants and the Party and greatly weaken the forces of the revolution.

We shall be told: often the wishes of the peasantry run counter to the course of development; we cannot ignore the course of history and always follow the wishes of the peasants—the Party should have its own principles. That is gospel truth! The Party must be guided by its principles. But the party which rejected all the above-mentioned strivings of the peasantry would betray its principles. If the peasants' desire to seize the landlords' lands and to divide them among themselves does not run counter to the course of history; if, on the contrary, these strivings spring entirely from the present democratic revolution, if a real struggle against feudal property can be waged only on the basis of bourgeois property, and if the strivings of the peasants express precisely this trend—then it is self-evident that the Party cannot reject these demands of the peasants, for refusal to back these demands would mean refusing to develop the revolution. On the other hand, if the Party has principles, if it does not wish to become a brake upon the revolution, it must help the peasants to achieve what they are striving for. And what they are striving for totally contradicts the "municipalisation of the land"!

As you see, "municipalisation of the land" is also unacceptable.

III

We have seen that neither "socialisation," nor "nationalisation," nor "municipalisation" can properly meet the interests of the present revolution.

How should the confiscated land be distributed? Into whose ownership should it be transferred?

Clearly, the land which the peasants confiscate should be transferred to the peasants to enable them to divide this land among themselves. This is how the question raised above should be settled. The division of the land will call forth the mobilisation of property. The poor will sell their land and take the path of proletarianisation; the wealthy will acquire additional land and proceed to improve their methods of cultivation; the rural population will split up into classes; an acute class struggle will flare up, and in this way the foundation for the further development of capitalism will be laid.

As you see, the division of the land follows logically from present-day economic development.

On the other hand, the slogan "The land to the peasants, only to the peasants and to nobody else" will encourage the peasantry, infuse new strength into them, and help the incipient revolutionary movement in the countryside to achieve its aim.

As you see, the course of the present revolution also points to the necessity of dividing the land.

Our opponents say to us accusingly that in that way we shall regenerate the petty bourgeoisie, and that this radically contradicts the doctrines of Marx. This is what *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* 2 writes:

"By helping the peasantry to expropriate the landlords you are unconsciously helping to install petty-bourgeois farming on the ruins of the already more or less developed forms of capitalist farming. Is this not a 'step backwards' from the point of view of orthodox Marxism?" (See *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*, No. 75.)

I must say that Messieurs the "Critics" have mixed up the facts. They have forgotten that landlord farming is not capitalist farming, that it is a survival of feudal farming, and, consequently, the expropriation of the landlords will destroy the remnants of feudal farming and not capitalist farming. They have also forgotten that from the point of view of Marxism, capitalist farming has never followed directly after feudal farming, nor can it do so—between them stands petty-bourgeois farming, which supersedes feudal farming and subsequently develops into capitalist farming. Karl Marx said in Volume III of *Capital* that historically feudal farming was followed by petty-bourgeois farming and that large-scale capitalist farming developed only after that—there was no direct leap from one to the other, nor could there be. And yet these strange "critics" tell us that to take away the landlords' lands and to divide them up means retrogression from the point of view of Marxism! Soon they will say to us accusingly that "the abolition of serfdom" was also retrogression from the point of view of Marxism, because at that time too some of the land was "taken away" from the landlords and transferred to small owners—the peasants! What funny people they are! They do not understand that Marxism looks at everything from the historical point of view, that from the point of view of Marxism, petty-bourgeois farming is progressive compared with feudal farming, that, the destruction of feudal farming and the introduction of petty-bourgeois farming are essential conditions for the development of capitalism, which will subsequently eliminate petty-bourgeois farming. . . .

But let us leave these "critics" in peace.

The point is that the transfer of the land to the peasants and the division of these lands will sap the foundations of the survivals of serfdom, prepare the ground for the development of

capitalist farming, give a great impetus to the revolutionary upsurge, and precisely for these reasons those measures are acceptable to the Social-Democratic Party.

Thus, to abolish the remnants of serfdom it is necessary to confiscate all the land of the landlords, and then the peasants must take this land as their property and divide it up among themselves in conformity with their interests.

That is the basis on which the Party's agrarian programme must be built.

We shall be told: All this applies to the peasants, but what do you intend to do with the rural proletarians? To this we reply that for the peasants we need a democratic agrarian programme, but for the rural and urban proletarians we have a socialist programme, which expresses their class interests. Their current interests are provided for in the sixteen points of our minimum programme dealing with the improvement of conditions of labour (see the Party's programme that was adopted at the Second Congress). Meanwhile, the Party's direct socialist activities consist in conducting socialist propaganda among the rural proletarians, in uniting them in their own socialist organisations, and merging them with the urban proletarians in a separate political party. The Party is in constant touch with this section of the peasantry and says to them: In so far as you are bringing about a democratic revolution you must maintain contact with the militant peasants and fight the landlords, but in so far as you are marching towards socialism, then resolutely unite with the urban proletarians and fight relentlessly against every bourgeois, be he peasant or landlord. Together with the peasants for a democratic republic! Together with the workers for socialism!—that is what the Party says to the rural proletarians. The proletarian movement and its socialist programme fan the flames of the class struggle in order to abolish the whole class system forever; for their part the peasant movement and its democratic agrarian programme fan the flames of the struggle between the social estates in the countryside in order to eradicate the whole social estate system.

P.S. In concluding this article we cannot refrain from commenting on a letter we have received from a reader who writes us the following: "After all, your first article failed to satisfy me. Was not the Party opposed to the confiscation of all the land? If it was, why did it not say so?"

No, dear reader, the Party was never opposed to such confiscation. Already at the Second Congress, at the very congress which adopted the point on the "otrezki"—at that congress (in 1903) the Party, through the mouth of Plekhanov and Lenin, said that we would back the peasants if they demanded the confiscation of all the land.³ Two years later (1905) the two groups in the Party, the "Bolsheviks" at the Third Congress, and the "Mensheviks" at the First Conference, unanimously stated that they would whole-heartedly back the peasants on the question of confiscating all the land.⁴ Then the newspapers of both Party trends, *Iskra* and *Proletary*, as well as *Novaya Zhizn* ⁵ and *Nachalo*, ⁶ repeatedly called upon the peasantry to confiscate all the land. . . . As you see, from the very outset the Party has stood for the confiscation of all the land and, consequently, you have no grounds for thinking that the Party has dragged at the tail of the peasant movement. The peasant movement had not really started yet, the peasants were not yet demanding even the "otrezki," but already at its Second Congress the Party was speaking about confiscating all the land.

If, nevertheless, you ask us why we did not, in 1903, introduce the demand for the confiscation of all the land in our programme, we shall answer by putting another question: Why did not the Socialist-Revolutionaries, in 1900, introduce in their programme the demand for a democratic republic? Were they opposed to this demand? ⁷ Why did they at that time talk only about nationalisation, and why are they now dinning socialisation into our ears? Today we say nothing in our minimum programme about a seven-hour day, but does that mean that we are opposed to this? What is the point then? Only that in 1903, when the

movement had not yet taken root, the demand for the confiscation of all the land would merely have remained on paper, the still feeble movement would not have been able to cope with this demand, and that is why the demand for the "otrezki" was more suitable for that period. But subsequently, when the movement grew and put forward practical questions, the Party had to show that the movement could not, and must not, stop at the "otrezki"; that the confiscation of all the land was necessary.

Such are the facts.

And finally, a few words about Tsnobis Purtseli 8 (see No. 3033). This newspaper printed a lot of nonsense about "fashions" and "principles," and asserted that at one time the Party elevated "otrezki" to a principle. From what has been said above the reader can see that this is a lie, that the Party publicly recognised the confiscation of all the land in principle from the very outset. The fact that Tsnobis Purtseli cannot distinguish between principles and practical questions need not worry us—it will grow up and learn to distinguish between them.⁹

Notes

1. Literally "cuts." The plots of land the landlords took from the peasants when serfdom was abolished in Russia in 1861.—Tr.
2. *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia)—the organ of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, published from the end of 1900 to 1905. At first it was published by the League of Socialist-Revolutionaries, but in January 1902 it became the central organ of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.
3. See Minutes of the Second Congress.
4. See Minutes of the Third Congress and "The First Conference."
5. *Novaya Zhizn* (New Life)—the first legal Bolshevik newspaper, published in St. Petersburg from October 27 to December 3, 1905. When V. I. Lenin arrived from abroad, *Novaya Zhizn* began to appear under his personal direction. An active part in the publication of the newspaper was taken by Maxim Gorky. On the appearance of No. 27 of *Novaya Zhizn* the paper was suppressed by the authorities. No. 28, the last number to be published, came out illegally.
6. *Nachalo* (The Beginning)—a legal daily newspaper published in St. Petersburg by the Mensheviks from November 13 to December 2, 1905.
7. See *Our Tasks*, published by the League of Socialist-Revolutionaries, 1900.
8. *Tsnobis Purtseli* (News Bulletin)—a daily Georgian newspaper published in Tiflis from 1896 to 1906. At the end of 1900 it became the mouthpiece of the Georgian nationalists, and in 1904 became the organ of the Georgian Social-Federalists.
9. *Tsnobis Purtseli* "heard" somewhere that the "Russian Social-Democrats . . . have adopted a new agrarian programme by virtue of which . . . they support the municipalisation of the land." I must say that the Russian Social-Democrats have adopted no such programme. The adoption of a programme is the function of a congress, but no congress has been held yet. Clearly, *Tsnobis Purtseli* has been misled by somebody or something. *Tsnobis Purtseli* would do well if it stopped stuffing its readers with rumours.