
CONGRESS OF PEASANTS' DEPUTIES

A Congress of representatives of peasants' organisations and Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, who have met to draw up regulations for the convocation of an All-Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies and to set up similar local Soviets, has been in session in the Taurida Palace since April 13.

According to *Dyelo Naroda*, representatives from more than 20 gubernias are attending the Congress.

Resolutions have been adopted urging the need for the speediest organisation of the "peasantry" from bottom to "top". "Soviets of Peasants' Deputies functioning in the various areas" have been declared to be the "best form of organisation of the peasantry".

Bykhovsky, a member of the provisional bureau for the convocation of the present Congress, has pointed out that a decision to organise the peasantry by setting up an All-Russia Soviet of Peasants' Deputies had been taken by the Moscow Co-operative Congress, representing an organised membership of twelve million, or fifty million of the population.

This is an undertaking of tremendous importance, which must be given every support. If it is carried out without delay, if the peasantry, in spite of Shingaryov, takes over all the land immediately by a majority decision and not by "voluntary agreement" with the landowners⁴² as he would have it, then not only the soldiers, who would receive more bread and meat, but also the cause of freedom would gain by it.

For the organisation of the peasants, carried out from below without the officials and without the "control and

supervision" of the landowners and their hangers-on, is the only reliable pledge of success for the revolution, for freedom, for the liberation of Russia from the yoke and bondage of the landowners.

There is no doubt that all members of our Party, all class-conscious workers, will do their utmost to support the organisation of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, will see to it that their numbers are increased and their strength consolidated, and will exert every effort to work inside these Soviets along consistent and strictly proletarian class lines.

To carry on this work, it is necessary to organise separately the proletarian elements (agricultural labourers, day-labourers, etc.) *within* the general peasant Soviets, or (sometimes *and*) set up separate Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies.

Our object is not to scatter forces; on the contrary, in order to strengthen and broaden the movement, we must arouse the "*lowest*"—to use the terminology of the landowners and capitalists—section of society, or, more correctly, class.

To build up the movement, we must free it from the influence of the bourgeoisie; we must try to rid it of the inevitable weaknesses, vacillations, and mistakes of the petty bourgeoisie.

This work must be done by means of friendly persuasion, without anticipating events, without hurrying to "consolidate" organisationally that which the representatives of the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians have not yet fully realised, thought out, and digested for *themselves*. But it must be done, and a start must be made at once everywhere.

The practical demands and slogans, or, more properly, the proposals that have to be made to gain the *attention* of the peasants, should be based on vital and urgent issues.

The first issue is that of the land. The rural proletarians will be for the complete and immediate transfer of *all* the land without exception to the whole people, and for its being taken over immediately by the local committees. But

you cannot eat land. The millions of households that have no horses, implements, or seeds will gain nothing from the transfer of the land to the "people".

The question of continuing to run the big farms, wherever at all possible, as large-scale enterprises, directed by agricultural experts and the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and using the best machines, seeds, and most efficient farming methods, must be discussed and practical measures taken without delay.

We cannot conceal from the peasants, least of all from the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, that small-scale farming under commodity economy and capitalism *cannot* rid humanity of mass poverty, that it is necessary to *think* about going over to large-scale farming conducted on public lines and to *tackle this job at once* by teaching the masses, and in turn *learning from the masses*, the practical expedient measures for bringing about such a transition.

Another vital and pressing issue is that of the organisation and administration of the state. It is not enough to preach democracy, not enough to proclaim it and decree it, not enough to entrust the people's "representatives" in representative institutions with its implementation. Democracy must be *built* at once, from below, through the initiative of the masses themselves, through their effective participation *in all* fields of state activity, without "supervision" from above, without the bureaucracy.

Replacement of the police, the bureaucracy, and the standing army by the universal arming of the whole people, by a universal *militia* of the entire people, women included, is a practical job that can and should be tackled immediately. The more initiative, variety, daring and creativeness the masses contribute to this, the better. Not only the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, but nine-tenths of the peasantry probably will follow us if we explain our proposals clearly, simply, and intelligibly by demonstrating examples and lessons from real life. Our proposals are:

—not to allow the restoration of the police;

—not to allow the restoration of the absolute powers of

officials who, in effect, are undisplaceable and who belong to the landowner or capitalist class;

—not to allow the restoration of a standing army separated from the people, for such an army is the surest guarantee that attempts of all kinds will be made to stamp out freedom and restore the monarchy;

—to teach the people, down to the very bottom, the art of government not only in theory but in practice, by beginning to make immediate use everywhere of the experience of the masses.

Democracy from below, democracy without an officialdom, without a police, without a standing army; voluntary social duty by a *militia* formed from a universally armed people—this is a guarantee of freedom which no tsars, no swash-buckling generals, and no capitalists can take away.

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