

14. THE EFFORT WHICH WAS MADE THROUGH STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE PEACE AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

GAINING A RESPITE TO CONSOLIDATE SOVIET POWER

After the victory of the October Revolution the Bolsheviks carried out a tense and arduous struggle to consolidate the Soviet power. Internally, the old state machine had to be destroyed, the landlord and capitalist system of private ownership had to be abolished, and the resistance offered by the exploiting classes suppressed. Externally, the war had to be brought to an immediate end and peace established.

On November 8, the day after the victory of the revolution, the Second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, presided over by Lenin, adopted the Decree on Land, which proclaimed the abolition without compensation of private landownership and announced that all land reverted to the state, to be distributed to the working people for their use. The congress also adopted the Decree on Peace which called upon the peoples and governments of all the belligerent nations to start immediately negotiations for a just and democratic peace, in order to bring about peace without territorial concessions or indemnities. The Decree stated:

The government considers that it would be the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war for the purpose of dividing up among the strong and rich nations the feeble nationalities seized by them, and solemnly declares its determination to sign immediately conditions of peace terminating this war on the conditions indicated, which are equally just for all peoples without exception.¹

Appealing to the proletariat of all countries, especially to the class-conscious workers of Britain, France and Germany, the Decree said:

... the workers of the countries mentioned will understand the duty that now lies upon them of emancipating mankind from the horrors of war and its consequences. For these workers, by comprehensive, determined, and supremely energetic action, can help us to bring to a successful conclusion the cause of peace, and at the same time the cause of the emancipation of the toiling and exploited masses of the population from all forms of slavery and all forms of exploitation.²

In explaining this Decree, Lenin pointed out the necessity to help the peoples to interfere in the question of war and peace. He strongly believed that "the workers' movement will triumph and will lay the path to peace and to socialism".³

After the promulgation of the Decree on Peace, Lenin said:

¹ "The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 6, p. 402.

² *Ibid.*, p. 403.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

... now the struggle for peace has begun. This struggle is a hard one. Whoever thought that peace could be achieved easily, that one need only hint at peace and the bourgeoisie would present it to us on a platter, is a completely naive person. Whoever ascribed this view to the Bolsheviks was practising deception. The capitalists have locked themselves in a life-and-death struggle, in order to divide the booty. It is clear: to destroy war — means to defeat capital, and in this sense the Soviet power has begun the struggle.¹

He also said, "We have never promised that war could be ended at one stroke, by sticking the bayonets into the ground."²

The Soviet government's peace proposal was rejected by Britain, France and the U.S.A. The Soviet government therefore decided to start negotiations with Germany and Austria. They began in December 1917 at Brest-Litovsk. The German government put forward harsh terms in the negotiations, demanding territorial concessions and the payment of an indemnity. By that time the old army had collapsed and could not continue fighting. The work of creating a socialist workers' and peasants' army which was really dependable and ideologically strong was still in its early stages. The shortage of grain was worse than it had ever been before. Utterly worn out and in extreme distress, the people were very anxious to end the war and no other country had yet risen in revolution. Lenin con-

¹ "Speech at the First All-Russian Naval Congress", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 26, p. 310.

² "Speech at the Meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies Jointly with the Representatives of the Front", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 26, p. 260.

sidered that in these circumstances the continuation of the war would give the imperialists a chance to destroy the new-born Soviet Republic. He therefore favoured the immediate signing of a peace treaty. The Russian workers and peasants had to accept the harsh terms of peace and retreat before the German imperialists, the most dangerous marauders at the time, in order to gain a respite in which to create a new army, the Red Army, able to defend their Soviet fatherland and resist imperialist aggression. But Bukharin, Trotsky and others opposed Lenin's policy. They stood for the continuation of the war, or for a policy of "neither war nor peace". When Germany announced its ultimatum, Trotsky, the chairman of the Soviet delegation, refused to sign the peace treaty. At the same time he declared that the Soviet Republic would continue to demobilize the army and would not fight. Thereupon, on February 18, 1918, the German troops began attacking along the whole front, seizing enormous stretches of Soviet territory and threatening Petrograd. Lenin sounded the alarm, "The socialist fatherland is in danger!" He called on the people to defend their Soviet homeland, to speed the formation of the people's armed forces and to resist the German offensive. The new-born revolutionary army offered heroic resistance to the German marauders who were armed to the teeth. Meanwhile, Lenin combated Bukharin and Trotsky and succeeded in persuading the majority of the Party's Central Committee to send a telegram in the name of the People's Commissariat notifying the German government of their willingness to sign the peace treaty in accordance with the terms put forward at Brest-Litovsk. The German government then put forward even harsher terms, demanding still greater territorial con-

cessions. The Soviet government could not but accept the humiliating terms, and on March 3, 1918 peace was concluded.

Lenin criticized the bombastic talk of the "Leftists" about waging a revolutionary war at once, and he explained the realistic significance of consolidating Soviet power by concluding peace.

He pointed out that the high-sounding talk of the "Left Communists" like Bukharin and Radek was smart and attractive but had no basis whatever. Further military attacks by the imperialist states on the Soviet Republic were inevitable. But taking the balance of forces and the material factors into account, the continuation of the war would stake the fate of Soviet power on a single adventure. The British and French imperialists as well as the Russian bourgeoisie were hoping that Soviet Russia would continue fighting so that Soviet power might collapse. To continue the war would have been to walk straight into the imperialists' net; it would have doomed the socialist revolution.

Lenin said that in concluding the peace treaty at Brest-Litovsk,

*... we free ourselves as much as is possible at the present moment from both hostile imperialist groups, we take advantage of their mutual enmity and warfare which hamper concerted action on their part against us, and for a certain period have our hands free to advance and to consolidate the socialist revolution.*¹

The Soviet power signed the peace, "not in order to 'capitulate' before imperialism, but in order to learn and

¹"On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 1, pp. 392-93.

prepare to battle against it in a serious and businesslike way".¹ He repeatedly stressed the absolute necessity of preparing for revolutionary war, of building up a regular, popular and powerful army, and of conserving strength persistently and patiently in order to prepare for a comeback. "To the work of organization, organization and organization! The future, despite all ordeals, is ours," he said.²

Later events confirmed Lenin's statements. With the conclusion of peace Soviet power gained a respite in which to organize the Red Army, to begin to establish socialist order in the economic life of the country, and to pave the way for the defeat of armed intervention by foreign states and the counter-revolutionary rebellions within the country.

The signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty by the Bolsheviks was a compromise, but it was a compromise favourable to the revolution. By this compromise they "sacrificed subsidiary interests and preserved the fundamental interests".³ It was absolutely correct.

In order that the opportunists should have no room for malicious misinterpretation, Lenin used many similes to show the fundamental difference between the two kinds of compromise. He said:

Workers who lose a strike and sign terms for the resumption of work which are unfavourable to them and favourable to the capitalists, do not betray Social-

¹ "An Onerous, but Necessary Lesson", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 27, p. 43.

² "An Unhappy Peace", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 27, p. 32.

³ "Speech Delivered at a Meeting of Nuclei Secretaries of the Moscow Organization of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 8, p. 281.

ism. Only those betray Socialism who secure advantages for a section of the workers in exchange for advantages to the capitalists; only such agreements are impermissible in principle.¹

He said again:

One must learn to distinguish between a man who gave the bandits money and firearms in order to lessen the damage they can do and facilitate their capture and execution, and a man who gives bandits money and firearms in order to share in the loot.²

Lenin made clear the indisputable historical fact that the Bolshevik Party always adhered to the revolutionary line. He pointed out that it "yielded to the violence of the Brest-Litovsk robbers only after the Anglo-French imperialists had frustrated the conclusion of a peace, and after the Bolsheviks had done everything humanly possible to hasten the revolution in Germany and other countries". He added that "such a compromise, entered into by such a party in such a situation, was absolutely correct".³ At the same time he exposed the shameful history of the opportunist leaders of the Second International, and of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries of Russia, in their practice of treachery and apostasy. He said that "from beginning to end, *their* compromise with the bandits of imperialism lay in the fact that they made themselves *accomplices* in imperialist banditry".⁴ Lenin

¹ "On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace", *op. cit.*, p. 388.

² "'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 360.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 360-61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

said that Marxists must be able to distinguish between compromises beneficial to the revolution, and treacherous compromises, and to know when compromises are admissible and when they are not.

Nevertheless, opportunists of all brands use the Brest-Litovsk peace as a pretext for making treacherous compromises. They say that if it was permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, it is permissible for them to compromise too. They try to depict Lenin as a man who would agree to compromise in any circumstances. These highly dishonourable efforts of theirs are quite futile.

THERE ARE NO OBSTACLES ON OUR SIDE
TO PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

The respite gained by the Soviet state as a result of the Brest-Litovsk peace was very brief. In the first half of 1918 the armed interventionists of foreign states, in alliance with the counter-revolutionary forces within Russia, began a war against the Soviet state. The Bolsheviks led the people in a heroic struggle for more than two years. By the end of 1920 they finally smashed the main forces of the foreign armed interventionists and the Russian counter-revolutionaries. The Soviet state then entered an era of peaceful construction. The facts proved that the Bolsheviks not only made good use of the Brest-Litovsk peace to gain a respite, but had enough courage to take up arms and wage a revolutionary war against the foreign armed intervention. During the complex and tortuous struggle against the capitalist countries Lenin explained how a socialist state should correctly handle its relations with capitalist countries.

Lenin repeatedly declared that the socialist state was willing to co-exist peacefully with all nations and devote its energies to building up its own country. During the period of foreign armed intervention the Soviet government many times proposed armistice negotiations and declared that it would persist in its policy of struggling for peace. However, the foreign armed interventionists always obstructed the realization of peace. In answering the questions of an American reporter, Lenin said: "Let the U.S. capitalists refrain from touching us. We won't touch them."¹ With regard to the obstacle to peaceful co-existence Lenin said, "From our side, there is none. From the side of the American (and all the other) capitalists, it is imperialism."²

The land of socialism was willing to have normal trade relations with the capitalist countries. In replying to questions put by British and American correspondents, Lenin expressed willingness to develop trade with such capitalist countries as Britain, France and the U.S.A. In April 1922 Britain and France sponsored an international economic conference in Genoa and the Soviet government sent a delegation. Lenin said, "We are going to Genoa with the practical object of expanding trade and of creating conditions under which it could successfully develop on the widest scale."³ In the Draft Resolution

¹ "Reply to Questions by the Correspondent of the American Newspaper *New York Evening Journal*", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 30, p. 340.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Political Report of the Central Committee to the Eleventh Congress of the R.C.P. (B.)", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 9, p. 325.

of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on the Report of the Delegation to the Genoa Conference, Lenin said:

The delegation of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee has correctly fulfilled its tasks in defending the complete sovereignty of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic — having fought against attempts at enslavement and the restoration of private property, and having concluded a treaty with Germany.¹

In certain conditions and at certain times it is possible for a socialist country to reach certain kinds of peaceful agreements with the capitalist countries, though the agreements have to be reached through struggle. Lenin said, "That is always the case: when you beat the enemy he wants to come to terms."² This was precisely what happened. After receiving a severe beating from the Soviet people the foreign armed interventionists had to call off their armed intervention for the time being. After a time they gradually, one after another, established trade and diplomatic relations with the Soviet state. However, this was also due to the support given by the people's revolutionary movement in the capitalist countries and by the national-liberation movement in the colonial and dependent countries. Lenin said:

The opposition to the war on Soviet Russia has greatly gained in strength in all capitalist countries;

¹ "Draft Resolution of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on the Report of the Delegation to the Genoa Conference", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 33, p. 319.

² "Speech Delivered at the First All-Russian Conference on Work in the Rural Districts", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 8, p. 192.

it is adding fuel to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and extending to very wide sections of the petty-bourgeois democracy. The conflict of interests between the various imperialist countries has become acute, and is growing more acute every day. The revolutionary movement among the hundreds of millions of oppressed peoples of the East is growing with remarkable vigour. The result of all these conditions is that international imperialism has proved itself unable to strangle Soviet Russia, although it is far stronger than she is, and has been obliged for the time being to grant her recognition, or semi-recognition, and to conclude trade agreements with her.

The result is a state of equilibrium which, although extremely unstable and uncertain, enables the Socialist Republic to exist — not for long, of course — within the capitalist encirclement.¹

THE ONLY ROAD TO LASTING WORLD PEACE

While struggling for peaceful co-existence Lenin never entertained any illusion with regard to imperialism. He repeatedly said by way of admonition that by its nature imperialism could not tolerate co-existence with the socialist system for a long time and that the socialist state should always guard against any conflict the imperialists might provoke to destroy peace. Before the foreign armed intervention began he declared:

¹ "Theses of Report on the Tactics of the Russian Communist Party to the Third Congress of the Communist International (Preliminary Draft)" (June 13, 1921), *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 32, p. 429.

International imperialism, with its mighty capital, its highly organised military technique, which is a real force, a real fortress of international capital, could not under any circumstances, on any condition, live side by side with the Soviet Republic because of its objective position and because of the economic interests of the capitalist class which are embodied in it — it could not because of commercial connections and international financial relations. In this sphere a conflict is inevitable.¹

After foreign armed intervention began Lenin said:

... the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with imperialist states for a long time is unthinkable. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end supervenes, a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states will be inevitable.²

It was on account of this that Lenin repeatedly emphasized, "But the measures we take for peace must be accompanied by most intense military preparations, and in no case must our army be disarmed."³ He said that it was necessary to "guard the defence capability of our

¹ "War and Peace, Report Delivered to the Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) March 7, 1918", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 7, p. 288.

² "Report of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) at the Eighth Party Congress, March 18, 1919", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 8, p. 33.

³ "Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. II, Part 2, p. 328.

country and our Red Army as the apple of your eye".¹ Lenin taught that we must not lightly believe the bourgeoisie's promises of "peace". Even if capitalist countries reach agreement with the socialist country they will tear that agreement to pieces whenever it suits their purpose. He said, "You know what treaties and laws are worth when an international conflict flares up. They are nothing but scraps of paper."² He said further:

... and the first commandment of our policy, the first lesson flowing from our governmental work during the year, the lesson that all workers and peasants must learn is — to be on the alert, to remember that we are surrounded by people, classes and governments which openly express the greatest hatred for us. It is necessary to remember that we are always a hair's breadth from invasion of some kind. We will do everything in our power to prevent such a disaster.³

To gain lasting world peace capitalism-imperialism must be eliminated. Lenin said:

... without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international courts of arbitration, no talk about reducing armaments, no "democratic" reorganisation of the League of Nations will save mankind from new imperialist wars.⁴

¹ "Report on the Internal and External Policy of the Republic at the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets", *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 33, p. 125.

² "The Soviet Foreign Policy", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XXIII, p. 18.

³ "Report on the Internal and External Policy of the Republic at the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets", *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁴ "The Conditions of Affiliation to the Communist International", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 10, pp. 202-03.

The only path is to “throw off the yoke of capitalism by revolutionary means, eliminate the domination of the bourgeoisie and win a socialist society and lasting peace”.¹

To eliminate capitalism-imperialism one must not, like the opportunists, be as timid as a mouse, fearing and yielding to the violence of capitalism-imperialism; one must dare to struggle, to make revolution, and to win victory. That was what Lenin did. In his work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* Lenin formulated the scientific thesis that imperialism is monopolistic, decaying and moribund capitalism. Basing himself on historical materialism and the Russian proletariat’s experience in revolutionary struggle, he firmly believed that it was possible to defeat imperialism, which was seemingly strong. He compared imperialism to “a colossus with feet of clay”, “a bugbear” and “a decrepit, dying, hopelessly sick old man”. In his speech “Two Years of Soviet Rule” Lenin said:

It seemed at that time [two years ago] that world imperialism was such a tremendous and invincible force that it was stupid of the workers of a backward country to attempt an uprising against it. Now, however, as we glance back over the past two years, we see that even our opponents are increasingly admitting that we were right. We see that imperialism, which seemed such an insuperable colossus, has proved before the whole world to be a colossus with feet of clay . . . that all these seemingly huge and invincible forces of international imperialism are unreliable, and

¹ “For Bread and Peace”, *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 26, p. 350.

hold no terrors for us, that at the core they are rotten, that they are making us stronger and stronger, and that this added strength will enable us to win victory on the outer front and to make it a thorough-going one.¹

¹ *Collected Works*, 4th Russian ed., Moscow, Vol. 30, p. 106