

# V. I. Lenin

**Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.) March 18-23, 1919**

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## **Report Of The Central Committee**

**March 18**

*(Stormy prolonged applause. Cries of “Long live Ilyich!” “Long live Comrade Lenin!”)*

Comrades, permit me to begin with the political report of the Central Committee. To present a report on the Central Committee’s political activities since the last Congress is tantamount to presenting a report on the whole of our revolution; and I think that everybody will agree that not only is it impossible for one individual to perform such a task in so short a time, but that it is, in general, beyond the powers of one individual. I have therefore decided to confine myself to those points which, in my opinion, are particularly important in the history of what our Party was called upon to do during this period and in the light of our present tasks. I must say that at a time like this I find it beyond my powers to devote myself exclusively to history, to reviewing the past without bearing in mind the present and the future.

To begin with foreign policy, it goes without saying that the outstanding features here were our relations with German imperialism and the Brest peace. I think it is worth while dwelling on this question, because its importance is not merely historical. I think that the proposal the Soviet government made to the Allied powers, or, to put it more correctly, our government’s consent to the well-known proposal for a conference to be held on Princes Islands<sup>[2]</sup> I think that this proposal, and our reply, reflect, in some respects, and in important respects at that, the relations with imperialism that we established at the time of the Brest peace. That is why I think it important to deal with the history of this matter in view of the rapidity with which events are occurring.

When the Brest peace was decided on, the Soviet system and even Party development were still in the initial stages. You know that at that time our Party as a whole still possessed too little experience to determine, even approximately, how fast we should travel the path we had chosen. The chaotic conditions that, as you know, we had to take over from the past made it extremely difficult at that time to survey events and

obtain an exact picture of what was going on. Moreover, our extreme isolation from Western Europe and all other countries deprived us of the objective material necessary to assess the possible rapidity or the ways in which the proletarian revolution in the West would develop. This complex situation made the question of the Brest peace a matter of no little dissension in the ranks of our Party.

But events have proved that this enforced retreat before German imperialism, which had taken cover behind an extremely oppressive, outrageous and predatory peace, was the only correct move in the relations between the young socialist republic and world imperialism (one half of world imperialism). At that time we, who had just overthrown the landowners and the bourgeoisie in Russia, had absolutely no choice but to retreat before the forces of world imperialism. Those who condemned this retreat from the point of view of a revolutionary were actually supporting a fundamentally wrong and non-Marxist position. They had forgotten the conditions, the long and strenuous process of development of the Kerensky period, and the enormous preparatory work done in the Soviets before we reached the stage when, in October, after the severe July defeats, after the Kornilov revolt, the vast mass of working people was at last ready and determined to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and when the organised material forces necessary for this purpose had become available. Naturally, anything like this was then out of the question on an international scale. In view of this, the fight against world imperialism had this aim—to continue the work of disintegrating imperialism and of enlightening and uniting the working class, which had everywhere begun to stir, but whose actions have still not become completely definite.

Hence, the only correct policy was the one we adopted in respect of the Brest peace, although, of course, at the time, that policy intensified the enmity of a number of petty-bourgeois elements, who are not by any means necessarily hostile to socialism under all conditions, or in all countries. In this respect history offered us a lesson which we must learn thoroughly, for there can be no doubt that we shall often be called upon to apply it. This lesson is that the attitude the party of the proletariat should adopt towards the petty-bourgeois democratic parties, towards those elements, strata, groups and classes which are particularly strong and numerous in Russia, and which exist in all countries, constitutes an extremely complex and difficult problem. Petty-bourgeois elements vacillate between the old society and the new. They cannot be the motive force of either the old society, or the new. On the other hand, they are not bound to the old society to the same degree as the landowners and the bourgeoisie. Patriotism is a sentiment bound up with the economic conditions of life of precisely the small proprietors. The bourgeoisie is more international than the small proprietors. We came up against this fact during the period of the Brest peace, when the Soviet government set a higher value on the world dictatorship of the proletariat and the

world revolution than on all national sacrifices, burdensome as they were. This compelled us to enter into a violent and ruthless clash with the petty-bourgeois elements. At that time a number of those elements joined forces with the bourgeoisie and the landowners against us, although, subsequently, they began to waver.

The question that several comrades have raised here as to our attitude towards the petty-bourgeois parties is dealt with extensively in our programme and will, in fact, crop up in the discussion of every point of the agenda. In the course of our revolution this question has ceased to be an abstract and general one, and has become concrete. At the time of the Brest peace our duty as internationalists was at all costs to help the proletarian elements to strengthen and consolidate their positions and this drove the petty-bourgeois parties away from us. After the German revolution, as we know, the petty-bourgeois elements again began to vacillate. Those events opened the eyes of many who, as the proletarian revolution was maturing, had assessed the situation from the point of view of the old type of patriotism, and had assessed it not only in a non-socialist way, but, in general, incorrectly. At the present time, owing to the difficult food situation and the war which we are still waging against the Entente, a wave of vacillation is again sweeping through the petty-bourgeois democrats. We have been obliged to reckon with these vacillations before; but now we must all learn a tremendously important lesson, namely, that situations never repeat themselves in exactly the same form. The new situation is far more complex. It can be properly assessed, and our policy will be correct, if we draw on the experience of the Brest peace. When we consented to the proposal for a conference on Princes Islands we knew that we were consenting to an extremely harsh peace. On the other hand, however, we now know better how the tide of proletarian revolution is rising in Western Europe, how unrest is changing into conscious discontent, and how the latter is giving rise to a world, Soviet, proletarian movement. At that time we were groping, guessing when the revolution in Europe might break out—we presumed, on the basis of our theoretical conviction, that the revolution must take place—but today we have a number of facts showing how the revolution is maturing in other countries and how the movement began. That is why, in relation to Western Europe, in relation to the Entente countries, we have, or shall have, to repeat a good deal of what we did at the time of the Brest peace. It will be much easier for us to do this now that we have the experience of Brest. When our Central Committee discussed the question of participating in a conference on Princes Islands together with the Whites—which in fact amounted to the annexation of all the territory the Whites then occupied—this question of an armistice did not evoke a single voice of protest among the proletariat; and that also was the attitude of our Party. At any rate, I did not hear of any dissatisfaction, or indignation, from any quarter. The reason for this was that our lesson in international politics had borne fruit.

Insofar as concerns the petty-bourgeois elements, the problem facing the Party has not yet been fully solved. On a number of questions, in fact on all the questions on the agenda, we have, during the past year, laid the foundation for a correct solution of this problem, particularly in relation to the middle peasants. In theory we agree that the middle peasants are not our enemies, that they need special treatment, and that in their case the situations will vary in accordance with numerous circumstances attending the revolution, in particular, the answer to the question "For or against patriotism?" For us such questions are of second rate importance, even of third-rate importance; but the petty bourgeoisie is completely blinded by them. Furthermore, all these elements waver in the struggle and become absolutely spineless. They do not know what they want, and are incapable of defending their position. Here we need extremely flexible and extremely cautious tactics, for sometimes it is necessary to give with one hand and take away with the other. The petty-bourgeois elements and not we are to blame for this, for they cannot make up their minds. We can see this in practice now. Only today we read in the newspapers what the German Independents,<sup>[3]</sup> who possess such strong forces as Kautsky and Hilferding, have set out to attain. You know that they wanted to incorporate the workers' councils in the constitution of the German democratic republic, i.e., marry the Constituent Assembly to the dictatorship of the proletariat. From our point of view this is such a mockery of common sense in our revolution, the German Revolution, the Hungarian revolution and the maturing Polish revolution, that we can only express our amazement. It must be said that such vacillating elements are to be found in the most advanced countries. Educated, well-informed, intelligent people, even in such an advanced capitalist country as Germany, are sometimes a hundred times more muddle-headed and hysterical than our backward petty bourgeoisie. In this there is a lesson for Russia in respect of the petty-bourgeois parties and the middle peasants. For a long time we shall have a difficult, double problem. For a long time these parties are bound to take one step forward and two steps back because their economic status compels them to do so, and because their acceptance of socialism is not due to a definite conviction that the bourgeois system is worthless. We cannot expect them to be loyal to socialism, and it would be absurd to rely on their socialist convictions. They will support socialism only when they are convinced that there is no other way out, when the bourgeoisie is finally defeated and smashed.

I am unable to give you a systematic summary of the experience of the past year and have glanced at the past only in the light of what is required for our policy tomorrow and the day after. The chief lesson is that we must be extremely cautious in our attitude towards the middle peasants and the petty bourgeoisie., The experience of the past demands it, we know it from the experience of Brest. We shall have to change our line of conduct very often, and this may appear strange and incomprehensible to the casual observer. "How is that?" he will say. "Yesterday you were making

promises to the petty bourgeoisie, while today Dzerzhinsky announces that the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks will be stood against the wall. What a contradiction!" Yes, it is a contradiction. But the conduct of the petty-bourgeois democrats themselves is contradictory: they do not know where to sit, and try to sit between two stools, jump from one to the other and fall now to the right and now to the left. We have changed our tactics towards them, and whenever they turn towards us we say "Welcome" to them. We have not the slightest intention of expropriating the middle peasants; we certainly do not want to use force against the petty-bourgeois democrats. We say to them, "You are not a serious enemy. Our enemy is the bourgeoisie. But if you join forces with them, we shall be obliged to apply the measures of the proletarian dictatorship to you, too."

I shall now deal with questions of internal development, briefly touch on the main features which characterise our political experience and sum up the political activities of the Central Committee during this period. These political activities of the Central Committee manifested themselves daily in questions of immense importance. Were it not for the fact that we worked together so well and so harmoniously, as I have already told you, we would not have been able to act as we did, we would not have been able to solve these urgent problems. As to the question of the Red Army, which is now rousing so much discussion, and which stands as a special item on the agenda of this Congress, we adopted a host of minor, individual decisions which the Central Committee of our Party submitted to and got carried in the Council of People's Commissars and the All-Russia Central Executive Committee. A still larger number of important individual assignments were made by the respective People's Commissars, all of which systematically and consistently pursued one common line.

The organisation of a Red Army was an entirely new question which had never been dealt with before, even theoretically. Marx once said that it is to the credit of the Paris Communards that they carried into effect decisions which were not borrowed from some preconceived theories, but were dictated by actual necessity.<sup>[4]</sup> Marx said this about the Communards in a somewhat ironical vein because there were two predominant trends in the Commune—the Blanquists and the Proudhonists—and both were compelled to act contrary to their doctrines. We, however, acted in conformity with the tenets of Marxism. At the same time, the political activities of the Central Committee in each concrete case were determined entirely by what was absolutely indispensable. We were often obliged to feel our way. This will be strongly emphasised by any historian capable of presenting an integrated picture of the activities of the Central Committee of the Party and of the Soviet government during the past year. This fact becomes all the more striking when we try to embrace our past experience in a single glance. But this did not deter us in the least even on October 10, 1917, when the question of seizing power was decided. We did not doubt that we

should have to experiment, as Comrade Trotsky expressed it. We undertook a task which nobody in the world has ever attempted on so large a scale.

This is also true of the Red Army. When the war drew to a close the army began to break up, and many people thought at the time that this was a purely Russian phenomenon. But we see that the Russian revolution was in fact the dress rehearsal, or one of the rehearsals, for the world proletarian revolution. When we discussed the Treaty of Brest, when the question of peace arose early in January 1918, we did not yet know when, and in which other countries, armies would begin to disintegrate. We proceeded from experiment to experiment; we endeavoured to create a volunteer army, feeling our way, testing the ground and experimenting to find a solution to the problem in the given situation. And the nature of the problem was clear. Unless we defended the socialist republic by force of arms, we could not exist. A ruling class would never surrender its power to an oppressed class. And the latter would have to prove in practice that it is capable not only of overthrowing the exploiters, but also of organising its self-defence and of staking everything on it. We have always said that there are different kinds of wars. We condemned the *imperialist* war, but we did not reject *war in general*. Those who accused us of being militarists were hopelessly muddled. And when in the report of the Berne Conference of yellow socialists I read that Kautsky had said that the Bolsheviks had introduced not socialism but militarism, I smiled and shrugged my shoulders. As if there was ever a big revolution in history that was not connected with war! Of course not! We are living not merely in a state, but in a system of states, and it is inconceivable for the Soviet Republic to exist alongside of the imperialist states for any length of time. One or the other must triumph in the end. And before that end comes there will have to be a series of frightful collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states. If the ruling class, the proletariat, wants to hold power, it must, therefore, prove its ability to do so by its military organisation. How was a class which had hitherto served as cannon-fodder for the military commanders of the ruling imperialist class to create its own commanders? How was it to solve the problem of combining the enthusiasm, the new revolutionary creative spirit of the oppressed and the employment of the store of the bourgeois science and technology of militarism in their worst forms without which this class would not be able to master modern technology and modern methods of warfare?

Here we were faced with a problem which a year's experience has now summed up for us. When we included the question of bourgeois specialists in the revolutionary programme of our Party, we summed up the Party's practical experience in one of the most important questions. As far as I remember the earlier teachers of socialism, who foresaw a great deal of what would take place in the future socialist revolution and discerned many of its features, never expressed an opinion on this question. It did

not exist for them, for it arose only when we proceeded to create a Red Army. That meant creating an army filled with enthusiasm out of an oppressed class which had been used as mere cannon-fodder, and it meant compelling that army to utilise all that was most coercive and abhorrent in what we had inherited from capitalism.

This contradiction, with which we are faced in connection with the Red Army, faces us in every organisational field. Take the question which engaged our attention most of all, namely, the transition from workers' control to workers' management in industry. Following the decrees and decisions passed by the Council of People's Commissars and local Soviet authorities—all of which contributed to our political experience in this field—actually the only thing left for the Central Committee to do was to sum up. In a matter like this it was scarcely able to give a lead in the true sense of the word. One has only to recall how clumsy, immature and casual were our first decrees and decisions on the subject of workers' control of industry. We thought that it was an easy matter; practice showed that it was necessary to build, but we gave no answer whatever to the question as to *how* to build. Every nationalised factory, every branch of nationalised industry, transport, and particularly railway transport—that most striking example of highly centralised capitalist machinery built on the basis of large-scale engineering, and most vital for the state—all embodied the concentrated experience of capitalism, and created immense difficulties for us.

We are still far from having overcome these difficulties. At first we regarded them in an entirely abstract way, like revolutionary preachers, who had absolutely no idea of how to set to work. There were lots of people, of course, who accused us—and all the socialists and Social-Democrats are accusing us today—of having undertaken this task without knowing how to finish it. But these accusations are ridiculous, made by people who lack the spark of life. As if one can set out to make a great revolution and know beforehand how it is to be completed! Such knowledge cannot be derived from books and our decision could spring only from the experience of the masses. And I say that it is to our credit that amidst incredible difficulties we undertook to solve a problem with which until then we were only half familiar, that we inspired the proletarian masses to display their own initiative, that we nationalised the industrial enterprises, and so forth. I remember that in Smolny we passed as many as ten or twelve decrees at one sitting. That was an expression of our determination and desire to stimulate the spirit of experiment and initiative among the proletarian masses. We now have experience. Now; we have passed, or are about to pass, from workers' control to workers' management of industry. Instead of being absolutely helpless as we were before, we are now armed with experience, and as far as this is possible, we have summed it up in our programme. We shall have to discuss this in detail when we deal with the question of organisation. We would not have been able to do this work

had we not had the assistance and collaboration of the comrades from the trade unions.

In Western Europe the situation is different. There our comrades regard the trade unions as an evil, because they are commanded so completely by yellow representatives of the old type of socialism that the Communists do not see that much advantage is to be gained from their support. Many West-European Communists; even Rosa Luxemburg, are advocating the dissolution of the trade unions.<sup>[5]</sup> That shows how much more difficult this problem is in Western Europe. In this country we could not have held out for a single month had it not been for the support of the trade unions. In this we have the experience of a vast amount of practical work, which enables us to set to work to solve extremely difficult problems.

Take the question of the specialists which faces us at every turn, which arises in connection with every appointment, and which the leaders of our economy, and the Central Committee of the Party, are continually having to face. Under existing conditions the Central Committee of the Party cannot perform its functions if it adheres to hard and fast forms. If we could not appoint comrades able to work independently in their particular fields, we should be unable to function at all. It was only thanks to the fact that we had organisers like Yakov Sverdlov that we were able to work under war conditions without a single conflict worth noting. And in this work we were obliged to accept the assistance offered us by people who possessed knowledge acquired in the past.

In particular, take the administration of the War Department. We could not have solved that problem had we not trusted the General Staff and the big specialists in organisation. There were differences of opinion among us on particular questions, but fundamentally, there was no room for doubt. We availed ourselves of the assistance of bourgeois experts who were thoroughly imbued with the bourgeois mentality, who were disloyal to us, and will remain disloyal to us for many years to come. Nevertheless, the idea that we can build communism with the aid of pure Communists, without the assistance of bourgeois experts, is childish. We have been steeled in the struggle, we have the forces, and we are united; and we must proceed with our organisational work, making use of the knowledge and experience of those experts. This is an indispensable condition, without which socialism cannot be built. Socialism cannot be built unless we utilise the heritage of capitalist culture. The only material we have to build communism with is what has been left us by capitalism.

We must now build in a practical way, and we have to build communist society with the aid of our enemies. This looks like a contradiction, an irreconcilable contradiction, perhaps. As a matter of fact, this is the only way the problem of building communism can be solved. And reviewing our experience, glancing at the way this problem

confronts us every day, surveying the practical activities of the Central Committee, it seems to me that, in the main, our Party has found a solution to this problem. We have encountered immense difficulties, but this was the only way the problem could be solved. The bourgeois experts must be hemmed in by our organised, constructive and united activities so that they will be compelled to fall in line with the proletariat, no matter how much they resist and fight at every step. We must set them to work as a technical and cultural force so as to preserve them and to transform an uncultured and barbarian capitalist country into a cultured, communist country. And it seems to me that during the past year we have learned how to build, that we have taken the right road, and shall not now be diverted from this road.

I should also like to deal briefly with the food question and the question of the countryside. Food has always been our most difficult problem. In a country where the proletariat could only assume power with the aid of the peasantry, where the proletariat had to serve as the agent of a petty-bourgeois revolution, our revolution was largely a bourgeois revolution until the Poor Peasants' Committees were set up, i.e., until the summer and even the autumn of 1918. We are not afraid to admit that. We accomplished the October Revolution so easily because the peasants as a whole supported us and fought the landowners for they saw that as far as they were concerned we would go the limit, because we were giving legal effect to what the Socialist-Revolutionary newspapers had been printing, to that which the cowardly petty bourgeoisie had promised, but could not carry out. But from the moment the Poor Peasants' Committees began to be organised, our revolution became a *proletarian* revolution. We were faced with a problem which even now has not been fully solved, and it is extremely important that we have put it on a practical footing. The Poor Peasants' Committees were a transition stage. The first decree on their organisation was passed by the Soviet government on the recommendation of Comrade Tsyurupa, who at that time was in charge of food affairs. We have to save the non-agricultural population that was tormented by hunger. That could be done only with the aid of Poor Peasants' Committees, which were proletarian organisations. And only when the October Revolution began to spread to the rural districts and was consummated, in the summer of 1918, did we acquire a real proletarian base; only then did our revolution *become a proletarian revolution in fact*, and not merely in our proclamations, promises and declarations.

We have not yet solved the problem that faces our Party of creating the necessary forms of organisation of the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat. Recently I visited Petrograd and attended the First Congress of Farm Labourers of Petrograd Gubernia.<sup>[6]</sup> I then saw how we were feeling our way in this matter, but I think that progress will undoubtedly be made. I must say that the principal lesson we learned from our work of political leadership in the past year was that we must find

organisational support in this field. We took a step in this direction when we formed the Poor Peasants' Committees, held new elections to the Soviets and revised our food policy, where we had encountered immense difficulties. In those outlying parts of Russia which are now becoming Soviet—the Ukraine and the Don region—this policy may have to be modified. It would be a mistake to draw up stereotyped decrees for all parts of Russia; it would be a mistake for the Bolshevik Communists, the Soviet officials in the Ukraine and the Don, to apply these decrees to other regions wholesale, without discrimination. We shall meet with no few peculiar situations; we shall under no circumstances bind ourselves to uniform patterns; we shall not decide once and for all that our experience, the experience of Central Russia, must be applied in its entirety to every region. We have only just taken up the problems of real development; we are only just taking the first steps in this direction. An immense field of work is opening before us.

I said that the first decisive step the Soviet government took was to create the Poor Peasants' Committees. This measure was carried out by our food supply officials and was dictated by necessity. But in order to complete our tasks we must have something more than temporary organisations like these Committees. Alongside the Soviets we have the trade unions, which we are using as a school for training the backward masses. The top layer of workers who actually administered Russia during the past year, who bore the brunt of the work in carrying out our policy, and who were our mainstay—this layer in Russia is an extremely thin one. We have become convinced of that, we are feeling it. If a future historian ever collects information on the groups which administered Russia during these seventeen months, on how many hundreds, or how many thousands of individuals were engaged in this work and bore the entire, incredible burden of administering the country—nobody will believe that it was done by so few people. The number was so small because there were so few intelligent, educated and capable political leaders in Russia. This layer was a thin one in Russia, and in the course of the recent struggle it overtaxed its strength, became overworked, did more than its strength allowed. I think that at this Congress we shall devise practical means of utilising ever new forces on a mass scale in industry and—what is more important—in the rural districts, of enlisting in Soviet activities workers and peasants who are on, or even below, the average level. Without their assistance on a mass scale further activities, I think, will be impossible.

Since my time has almost expired, I want to say only a few words about our attitude towards the middle peasants. The attitude we should take towards the middle peasants was, in principle, quite clear to us even before the revolution. The task that faced us was to *neutralise* them. At a meeting in Moscow where the question of our attitude towards petty-bourgeois parties was discussed, I quoted the exact words of Engels, who not only pointed out that the middle peasants were our allies, but also expressed

the view that it would be possible, perhaps, to dispense with coercion, with repressive measures even as regards the big peasants.<sup>[7]</sup> In Russia, this assumption did not prove correct; we were, are, and will be, in a state of open civil war with the kulaks. This is inevitable. We have seen it in practice. But owing to the inexperience of our Soviet officials and to the difficulties of the problem, the blows which were intended for the kulaks very frequently fell on the middle peasants. In this respect we have sinned a great deal, but the experience we have gained will enable us to do every thing to avoid this in future. Such is the problem that now faces us not theoretically but practically. You are well aware that the problem is a difficult one. We have no advantages to offer the middle peasant; he is a materialist, a practical man, who demands definite material advantages, which at present we are not in a position to offer and which the country will have to dispense with for, perhaps, many months of a severe struggle that now promises to end in complete victory. But there is a good deal we can do in our practical administrative work—we can improve our administrative machinery and eliminate a host of abuses. The line of our Party, which has not done enough to form a bloc, an alliance, an agreement with the middle peasants, can and must be corrected.

This, in brief, is all I can say at present about the economic and political work of the Central Committee during the past year. I must now very briefly deal with the second part of the duty entrusted to me by the Central Committee—to make the Central Committee report on organisation. This duty could have been performed in the way it should really be performed only by Yakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov, who had been appointed to make the report on this question on behalf of the Central Committee. His unbelievably phenomenal memory, in which he retained the greater part of his report, and his personal acquaintance with the work of organisation in the various localities would have made it possible for him to deliver this report better than anybody else. I am unable to replace him even in one-hundredth part, for in this work we were obliged to rely, and were absolutely justified in relying, entirely on Comrade Sverdlov, who very often adopted decisions on his own responsibility.

I can give you short excerpts from the written reports now available. The Secretariat of the Central Committee, which was unable to complete its work in time, has most definitely promised that the written reports will be ready for printing next week, that they will be mimeographed and distributed to the Congress delegates. They will supplement the brief, fragmentary remarks which I can make here. In the material of the report available at present in writing, we find, first of all figures relating to the number of incoming documents: 1,483 in December 1918, 1,537 in January 1919 and 1,840 in February. The distribution of these documents in percentages is given, but I will take the liberty of not reading this. Comrades who are interested will see from the report when distributed that, for instance, 490 persons visited the Secretariat in November. And the comrades who handed me the report say it can be only half the

number of visitors the Secretariat dealt with, because dozens of delegates were received daily by Comrade Sverdlov, and more than half of these were probably not Soviet but Party officials.

I must draw attention to the report on the activities of the Federation of Foreign Groups.<sup>[8]</sup> I know something of the work in this field only insofar as I have been able to cast a glance at the material on the foreign groups. At first there were seven such groups, now there are nine. Comrades living in purely Great-Russian districts, who have not had the opportunity of becoming directly acquainted with these groups and who have not seen the reports in the newspapers, will please read the excerpts from the newspapers, which I shall take the liberty of not reading in full. I must say that here we see the real foundation of what we have done for the Third International. The Third International was founded in Moscow at a short congress, and Comrade Zinoviev will make a detailed report on this and on everything proposed by the Central Committee on all questions concerning the International. The fact that we succeeded in doing so much in so short a time at the congress of Communists in Moscow is due to the tremendous preparatory work that was performed by the Central Committee of our Party and by the organiser of the congress, Comrade Sverdlov. Propaganda and agitation were carried on among foreigners in Russia and a number of foreign groups were organised. Dozens of members of these groups were fully acquainted with the main plans and with the guiding lines of general policy. Hundreds of thousands of war prisoners from armies which the imperialists had created solely in their own interests, upon returning to Hungary, Germany and Austria, thoroughly infected those countries with the germs of Bolshevism. And the fact that groups and parties sympathising with us predominate in those countries is due to work which is not visible on the surface and which is only briefly summed up in the report on the organisational activities of the foreign groups in Russia; it constituted one of the most significant features in the activities of the Russian Communist Party as one of the units of the world communist party.

Further, the material handed to me contains data on the reports received by the Central Committee, and the organisations from which they were received. And here our Russian lack of organisational ability stands out in all its shameful wretchedness. Reports were received regularly from organisations in four gubernias, irregularly from fourteen, and isolated reports from sixteen. The gubernias in question are enumerated in the list, which permit me not to read. Of course, this lack of organisational ability, these extreme organisational drawbacks, are very largely, but not entirely, to be explained by the conditions of civil war. Least of all should we use this to hide behind, to excuse and defend ourselves. Organisational activity was never a strong point with the Russians in general, nor with the Bolsheviks in particular; nevertheless the chief problem of the proletarian revolution is *that of organisation*. It is not without

reason that the question of organisation is here assigned a most prominent place. This is a thing we must fight for, and fight for with firmness and determination, using every means at our disposal. We can do nothing here except by prolonged education and re-education. This is a field in which revolutionary violence and dictatorship can be applied only by way of abuse and I make bold to warn you against such abuse. Revolutionary violence and dictatorship are excellent things when applied in the right way and against the right people. But they cannot be applied in the field of organisation. We have by no means solved this problem of education, re-education and prolonged organisational work, and we must tackle it systematically.

We have here a detailed financial report. Of the various items, the largest is in connection with workers' book publishing and with newspapers: 1,000,000, again 1,000,000 and again 1,000,000—3,000,000; Party organisations, 2,800,000; editorial expenses, 3,600,000. More detailed figures are given in this report, which will be duplicated and distributed to all the delegates. Meanwhile the comrades can get their information from the representatives of the groups. Permit me not to read these figures. The comrades who submitted the reports gave in them what is most important and illustrative—the general results of the propaganda work performed in the sphere of publication. The Kommunist Publishing House released sixty-two books. A net profit of 2,000,000 in 1918 was earned by the newspaper *Pravda*, 25,000,000 copies of which were issued during the year. The newspaper *Bednota*<sup>[9]</sup> earned a net profit of 2,370,000 and 33,000,000 copies were issued. The comrades of the Organising Bureau of the Central Committee have promised to rearrange the detailed figures they possess in such a way as to give at least two comparable criteria. It will then be clear what vast educational work is being performed by the Party, which for the first time in history is using modern large-scale capitalist printing equipment in the interests of the workers and peasants and not in the interests of the bourgeoisie. We have been accused thousands and millions of times of having violated the freedom of the press and of having renounced democracy. Our accusers call it democracy when the capitalists can buy out the press and the rich can use the press in their own interests. We call that plutocracy and not democracy. Everything that bourgeois culture has created for the purpose of deceiving the people and defending the capitalists we have taken from them in order to satisfy the political needs of the workers and peasants. And in this respect we have done more than any socialist party has done in a quarter of a century, or in half a century. Nevertheless, we have done far too little of what has to be done.

The last item in the material handed to me by the Bureau concerns circular letters. Fourteen of these were issued, and the comrades who are not acquainted with them, or who are not sufficiently acquainted with them, are invited to read them. Of course, the Central Committee was far from being as active as it should have been in this respect,

but you must bear in mind the conditions under which we worked, when we were obliged to give political instructions on a number of questions every day, and only in exceptional, even rare, cases were we able to do so through the Political Bureau or the plenary meeting of the Central Committee. Under such circumstances it was impossible for us to send out frequent political circulars.

I repeat that we, as the militant organ of a militant party in time of civil war, cannot work in any other way. If we did, it would be only a half-measure, or a parliament, and in the era of dictatorship questions cannot be settled, nor can the Party, or the Soviet organisations, be directed by parliamentary means. Comrades, now that we have taken over the bourgeois printing-presses and papers the importance of the Central Committee's circular letters is not so great. We send out in the form of circular letters only such instructions as cannot be published, for in our activities, which were conducted publicly in spite of their vast dimensions, underground work nevertheless remained, still remains, and will remain. We were never afraid of being reproached for our underground methods and secrecy, but on the contrary were proud of them. And when we found ourselves in a situation in which, after overthrowing our bourgeoisie, we were faced with the hostility of the European bourgeoisie, secrecy remained a feature of our activities and underground methods a feature of our work.

With this, comrades, I conclude my report. (*Applause.*)

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## Endnotes

[2] The conference to be held on Prinkipo, one of the Princes Islands, was proposed by the Entente powers and was to include representatives of all governments existing on the territory of Russia; its purpose was to establish peace. The Soviet Government did not receive a direct invitation to attend the conference and learned from foreign press reviews transmitted by wireless that since there had been no answer from the Soviet Government the imperialist powers were trying to prove to their peoples that this was a refusal to take part in the conference. The Soviet Government, in order to put a stop to all misrepresentations of its actions, on February 4, 1919 sent a wireless telegram to the governments of Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the U.S.A. consenting to start negotiations immediately and pointing out that it was prepared to make important concessions for the sake of peace. The Entente governments left the Soviet telegram unanswered and the conference did not take place.

[3] This refers to the *Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany*, a Centrist party that was founded in April 1917. At the Halle Congress in October 1920 a split took place and a considerable number of members joined the Communist Party of

Germany in December 1920. Right elements formed a separate party and retained the name of Independent Social-Democratic Party; it continued in existence until 1922.

[4] See Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1962, pp. 481-82.

[5] This refers to Rosa Luxemburg's speech at the Inaugural Congress of the Communist Party of Germany held in Berlin from December 30, 1918 to January 1, 1919. She spoke in support of some of the delegates who favoured the abolition of the trade unions. She was of the opinion that the functions of the trade unions should go to the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and to the Council's of Workers and Clerks at factories.

[6] See pp. 38-46 of this volume: [Session of the First Congress of Farm Laborers of Petrograd Gubernia](#)

[7] See present edition, Vol. 28, pp. 201-24: [Moscow Party Workers' Meeting](#)

[8] *The Federation of Foreign Groups* was organised in May 1918 as the guiding body of foreign Communists for work among prisoners of war in Russia. The Federation was abolished at the beginning of 1920.

[9] *Bednota (Poor Peasants)*—a daily newspaper issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party that appeared in Moscow from March 27, 1918 to January 31, 1931. It was founded by a decision of the Central Committee of the Party to replace the newspaper *Derevenskaya Bednota (Rural Poor)*, *Derevenskaya Pravda (Rural Truth)* and *Soldatskaya Pravda (Soldiers' Truth)*. On February 1, 1931 *Bednota* merged with the newspaper *Sotsialisticheskoye Zemledeliye (Socialist Farming)*.

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Source: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/rcp8th/02.htm>