

THREE ARTICLES ON  
STRATEGY AND  
TACTICS  
JOSEPH STALIN

RED REBEL PRESS

Joseph Stalin

**Three Articles on Strategy and Tactics**

Red Rebel Press

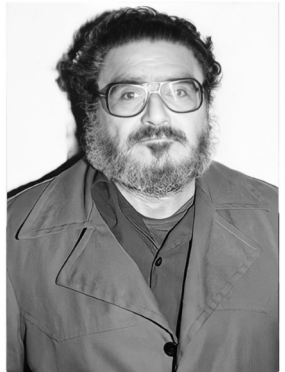
148 x 210 mm – 62 pgs

First Edition, August 2023



This book is under license Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>



## CONTENTS

**1 | Strategy and Tactics (from *Foundations of Leninism*)**

**18 | The Political Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists**

**40 | Concerning the Question of the Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists**



## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

From this theme I take six questions:

- a) strategy and tactics as the science of leadership in the class struggle of the proletariat;
- b) stages of the revolution, and strategy;
- c) the flow and ebb of the movement, and tactics;
- d) strategic leadership;
- e) tactical leadership;
- f) reformism and revolutionism.

**1) Strategy and tactics as the science of leadership in the class struggle of the proletariat.** The period of the domination of the Second International was mainly a period of the formation and training of the proletarian political armies under conditions of more or less peaceful development. It was the period of parliamentarism as the predominant form of the class struggle. Questions of great class conflicts, of preparing the proletariat for revolutionary clashes, of the means of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, did not seem to be on the order of the day at that time. The task was confined to utilising all means of legal development for the purpose of forming and training the proletarian armies, to utilising parliamentarism in conformity with the conditions under which the status of the proletariat remained, and, as it seemed, had to remain, that of an opposition. It scarcely needs proof that in such a period and with such a conception of the tasks of the proletariat there could be neither an integral strategy nor any elaborated tactics. There were fragmentary and detached ideas about tactics and strategy, but no tactics or strategy as such.

---

“Strategy and Tactics” is an excerpt from Stalin’s 1924 pamphlet *The Foundations of Leninism*. It was adapted from lectures he gave at the Sverdlov Workers’ and Peasants’ Communist University, which taught Bolshevik activists in agitation and propaganda.

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The mortal sin of the Second International was not that it pursued at that time the tactics of utilising parliamentary forms of struggle, but that it overestimated the importance of these forms, that it considered them virtually the only forms; and that when the period of open revolutionary battles set in and the question of extra-parliamentary forms of struggle came to the fore, the parties of the Second International turned their backs on these new tasks, refused to shoulder them.

Only in the subsequent period, the period of direct action by the proletariat, the period of proletarian revolution, when the question of overthrowing the bourgeoisie became a question of immediate practical action; when the question of the reserves of the proletariat (strategy) became one of the most burning questions; when all forms of struggle and of organisation, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary (tactics), had quite clearly manifested themselves—only in this period could an integral strategy and elaborated tactics for the struggle of the proletariat be worked out. It was precisely in this period that Lenin brought out into the light of day the brilliant ideas of Marx and Engels on tactics and strategy that been suppressed by the opportunists of the Second International. But Lenin did not confine himself to restoring particular tactical propositions of Marx and Engels. He developed them further and supplemented them with new ideas and propositions, combining them all into a system of rules and guiding principles for the leadership of the class struggle of the proletariat. Lenin's pamphlets, such as *What Is To Be Done?*, *Two Tactics*, *Imperialism*, *The State and Revolution*, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, *"Left Wing" Communism*, undoubtedly constitute priceless contributions to the general treasury of Marxism, to its revolutionary arsenal. The strategy and tactics of Leninism constitute the science of leadership in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

**2) Stages of the revolution, and strategy.** Strategy is the determination of the direction of the main blow of the proletariat at a given stage of the revolution, the elaboration of a corresponding plan for the disposition of the revolutionary forces (main and secondary reserves),

## THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

the fight to carry out this plan throughout the given stage of the revolution.

Our revolution had already passed through two stages, and after the October Revolution it entered a third one. Our strategy changed accordingly.

**First stage.** 1903 to February 1917. Objective: to overthrow tsarism and completely wipe out the survivals of medievalism. The main force of the revolution: the proletariat. Immediate reserves: the peasantry. Direction of the main blow: the isolation of the liberal-monarchist bourgeoisie, which was striving to win over the peasantry and liquidate the revolution by a *compromise* with tsarism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the working class with the peasantry. "The proletariat must carry to completion the democratic revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and to paralyse the instability of the bourgeoisie": (see Lenin, *Two Tactics*, Ch. 12)

**Second stage.** March 1917 to October 1917. Objective: to overthrow imperialism in Russia and to withdraw from the imperialist war. The main force of the revolution: the proletariat. Immediate reserves: the poor peasantry. The proletariat of neighbouring countries as probable reserves. The protracted war and the crisis of imperialism as a favourable factor. Direction of the main blow: isolation of the petty-bourgeois democrats (Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries), who were striving to win over the toiling masses of the peasantry and to put an end to the revolution by a *compromise* with imperialism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the proletariat with the poor peasantry. "The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the semi-proletarian elements of the population in order to crush by force the resistance of the bourgeoisie and to paralyse the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie" (*ibid.*).

**Third stage.** Began after the October Revolution. Objective: to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, using it as a base for the defeat of imperialism in all countries. The revolution spreads beyond the confines of one country; the epoch of world revolu-



## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

tion has begun. The main force of the revolution: the dictatorship of the proletariat in one country, the revolutionary movement of the proletariat in all countries. Main reserves: the semi-proletarian and small-peasant masses in the developed countries, the liberation movement of the colonies and dependent countries. Direction of the main blow: isolation of the petty-bourgeois democrats, isolation of the parties of the Second International, which constitute the main support of the policy of *compromise* with imperialism. Plan for the disposition of forces: alliance of the proletarian revolution with the liberation movement in the colonies and the dependent countries.

Strategy deals with the main forces of the revolution and their reserves. It changes with the passing of the revolution from one stage to another, but remains basically unchanged throughout a given stage.

**3) The flow and ebb of the movement, and tactics.** Tactics are the determination of the line of conduct of the proletariat in the comparatively short period of the flow or ebb of the movement, of the rise or decline of the revolution, the fight to carry out this line by means of replacing old forms of struggle and organisation by new ones, old slogans by new ones, by combining these forms, etc. While the object of strategy is to win the war against tsarism, let us say, or against the bourgeoisie, to carry through the struggle against tsarism or against the bourgeoisie to its end, tactics pursue less important objects, for their aim is not the winning of the war as a whole, but the winning of some particular engagements or some particular battles, the carrying through successfully of some particular campaigns or actions corresponding to the concrete circumstances in the given period of rise or decline of the revolution. Tactics are a part of strategy, subordinate to it and serving it.

Tactics change according to flow and ebb. While the strategic plan remained unchanged during the first stage of the revolution (1903 to February 1917), tactics changed several times during that period. In the period from 1903 to 1905 the Party pursued offensive tactics, for the tide of the revolution was rising, the movement was on the upgrade, and tactics had to proceed from this fact. Accordingly, the forms of struggle were revolutionary, corresponding to the requirements of the rising tide

## THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

of the revolution. Local political strikes, political demonstrations, the general political strike, boycott of the Duma, uprising, revolutionary fighting slogans—such were the successive forms of the struggle during that period. These changes in the forms of struggle were accomplished by corresponding changes in the forms of organisation. Factory committees, revolutionary peasant committees, strike committees, Soviets of workers' deputies, a workers' party operating more or less openly—such were the forms of organisation during that period.

In the period from 1907 to 1912 the Party was compelled to resort to tactics of retreat; for we then experienced a decline in the revolutionary movement, the ebb of the revolution, and tactics necessarily had to take this fact into consideration. The forms of struggle, as well as the forms of organisation, changed accordingly: instead of the boycott of the Duma—participation in the Duma; instead of open revolutionary actions outside the Duma—actions and work in the Duma; instead of general political strikes—partial economic strikes, or simply a lull in activities. Of course, the Party had to go underground during that period, while the revolutionary mass organisations were replaced by cultural, educational, co-operative, insurance and other legal organisations.

The same must be said of the second and third stages of the revolution, during which tactics changed dozens of times, whereas the strategic plans remained unchanged.

Tactics deal with the forms of struggle and the forms of organisation of the proletariat, with their changes and combinations. During a given stage of the revolution tactics may change several times, depending on the flow or ebb, the rise or decline of the revolution.

**4) Strategic leadership.** The reserves of the revolution can be:

**Direct:** a) the peasantry and in general the intermediate strata of the population within the country; b) the proletariat of neighbouring countries; c) the revolutionary movement in the colonies and dependent countries; d) the conquests and gains of the dictatorship of the proletariat—part of which the proletariat may give up temporarily, while retaining superiority of forces, in order to buy off a powerful enemy and gain a respite; and

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

**Indirect:** a) the contradictions and conflicts among the non-proletarian classes within the country, which can be utilised by the proletariat to weaken the enemy and to strengthen its own reserves; b) contradictions, conflicts and wars (the imperialist war, for instance) among the bourgeois states hostile to the proletarian state, which can be utilised by the proletariat in its offensive or in maneuvering in the event of a forced retreat.

There is no need to speak at length about the reserves of the first category, as their significance is clear to everyone. As for the reserves of the second category, whose significance is not clear, it must be said that sometimes they are of prime importance for the progress of the revolution. One can hardly deny the enormous importance, for example, of the conflicts between the petty-bourgeois democrats (Socialist-Revolutionaries) and the liberal-monarchists bourgeoisie (the Cadets) during and after the first revolution, which undoubtedly played its part in freeing the peasantry from the influence of the bourgeoisie. Still less reason is there for denying the colossal importance of the fact that the principal groups of imperialists were engaged in a deadly war during the period of the October Revolution, when the imperialists, engrossed in war among themselves, were unable to concentrate their forces against the young Soviet power, and the proletariat, for this very reason, was able to get down to work of organising its forces and consolidating its power, and to prepare the rout of Kolchak and Denikin. It must be presumed that now, when the contradictions among the imperialist groups are becoming more and more profound, and when a new war among them is becoming inevitable, reserves of this description will assume ever greater importance for the proletariat.

The task of strategic leadership is to make proper use of all these reserves for the achievement of the main object of the revolution at the given stage of its development.

What does making proper use of reserves mean?

It means fulfilling certain necessary conditions, of which the following must be regarded as the principal ones:

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

**Firstly.** The concentration of the main forces of the revolution at the enemy's most vulnerable spot at the decisive moment, when the revolution has already become ripe, when the offensive is going full-steam ahead, when insurrection is knocking at the door, and when bringing the reserves up to the vanguard is the decisive condition of success. The party's strategy during the period from April to October 1917 can be taken as an example of this manner of utilising reserves. Undoubtedly, the enemy's most vulnerable spot at that time was the war. Undoubtedly, it was on this question, as the fundamental one, that the Party rallied the broadest masses of the population around the proletarian vanguard. The Party's strategy during that period was, while training the vanguard for street action by means of manifestations and demonstrations, to bring the reserves up to the vanguard through the medium of Soviets in the rear and the soldiers' committees at the front. The outcome of the revolution has shown that the reserves were properly utilised.

Here is what Lenin, paraphrasing the well-known theses of Marx and Engels on insurrection, says about this condition of the strategic utilisation of the forces of the revolution:

“1) Never *play* with insurrection, but when beginning it firmly realise that you must *go to the end*.

“2) Concentrate a *great superiority of forces* at the decisive point, at the decisive moment, otherwise the enemy, who has the advantage of better preparation and organisation, will destroy the insurgents.

“3) Once the insurrection has begun, you must act with the greatest *determination*, and by all means, without fail, take the *offensive*. ‘The defensive is the death of every armed uprising.’

“4) You must try to take the enemy by surprise and seize the moment when his forces are scattered.

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

“5) You must strive for *daily* success, even if small (one might say hourly, if it is the case of one town), and at all costs retain the ‘*moral ascendancy*’” (see *Advice of an Onlooker*, vol. 26)

**Secondly.** The selection of the moment for the decisive blow, of the moment for starting the insurrection, so timed as to coincide with the moment when the crisis has reached its climax, when it is already the case that the vanguard is prepared to fight to the end, the reserves are prepared to support the vanguard, and maximum consternation reigns in the ranks of the enemy.

The decisive battle, says Lenin, may be deemed to have fully matured if “(1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength”; if “(2) all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements—the petty bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois democrats as distinct from the bourgeoisie—have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy”; if “(3) among the proletariat a mass sentiment in favour of supporting the most determined, supremely bold, revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow. Then revolution is indeed ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated above [...] and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured.” (see “*Left-Wing*” *Communism, an Infantile Disorder*)

The manner in which the October uprising was carried out may be taken as a model of such strategy.

Failure to observe this condition leads to a dangerous error called “loss of tempo,” when the Party lags behind the movement or runs far ahead of it, courting the danger of failure. An example of such

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

“loss of tempo,” of how the moment for an uprising should not be chosen, may be seen in the attempt made by a section of our comrades to begin the uprising by arresting the Democratic Conference in September 1917, when wavering was still apparent in the Soviets, when the armies at the front were still at the crossroads, when the reserves had not yet been brought up to the vanguard.

**Thirdly.** Undeviating pursuit of the course adopted, no matter what difficulties and complications are encountered on the road towards the goal; this is necessary in order that the vanguard may not lose sight of the main goal of the struggle and that the masses may not stray from the road while marching towards that goal and striving to rally around the vanguard. Failure to observe this condition leads to a grave error, well known to sailors as “losing one’s bearings.” As an example of this “losing one’s bearings,” we may take the erroneous conduct of our Party when, immediately after the Democratic Conference, it adopted a resolution to participate in the Pre-parliament. For the moment the Party, as it were, forgot that the Pre-parliament was an attempt of the bourgeoisie to switch the country from the path of the Soviets to the path of bourgeois parliamentarism, that the Party’s participation in such a body might result in mixing everything up and confusing the workers and peasants, who were waging a revolutionary struggle under the slogan: “All Power to the Soviets.” This mistake was rectified by the withdrawal of the Bolsheviks from the Pre-parliament.

**Fourthly.** Maneuvering the reserves with a view to effecting a proper retreat when the enemy is strong, when retreat is inevitable, when to accept battle forced upon us by the enemy is obviously disadvantageous, when, with the given relation of forces, retreat becomes the only way to escape a blow against the vanguard and to retain the reserves for the latter.

“The revolutionary parties,” says Lenin, “must complete their education. They have learned to attack. Now they have to realise that this knowledge must be supplemented with the knowledge how to retreat properly. They have to realise—and the revolu-

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

tionary class is taught to realise it by its own bitter experience—that victory is impossible unless they have learned both how to attack and how to retreat properly” (*ibid.*)

The object of this strategy is to gain time to disrupt the enemy, and to accumulate forces in order to later assume the offensive.

The signing of the Brest Peace may be taken as a model of this strategy, for it enabled the Party to gain time, to take advantage of the conflicts in the camp of the imperialists, to disrupt the forces of the enemy, to retain the support of the peasantry, and to accumulate forces in preparation for the offensive against Kolchak and Denikin.

“In concluding a separate peace,” said Lenin at that time, “we free ourselves as much *as it is possible at the present moment* from both warring imperialist groups, we take advantage of their mutual enmity and warfare, which hinder them from making a deal against us, and for a certain period have our hands free to advance and to consolidate the socialist revolution” (see *On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace*, vol. 26).

“Now even the biggest fool,” said Lenin three years after the Brest Peace, can see “that the ‘Brest Peace’ was a concession that strengthened us and broke up the forces of international imperialism” (see *New Times and Old Mistakes in a New Guise*, vol. 33).

Such are the principal conditions which ensure correct strategic leadership.

**5) Tactical leadership.** Tactical leadership is a part of strategic leadership, subordinated to the tasks and the requirements of the latter. The task of tactical leadership is to master all forms of struggle and organisation of the proletariat and to ensure that they are used properly so

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

as to achieve, with the given relations of forces, the maximum results necessary to prepare for strategic success.

What is meant by making proper use of the forms of struggle and organisation of the proletariat?

It means fulfilling certain necessary conditions, of which the following must be regarded as the principal ones:

**Firstly.** To put in the forefront precisely those forms of struggle and organisation which are best suited to the conditions prevailing during the flow or ebb of the movement at a given moment, and which therefore can facilitate and ensure the bringing of the masses to the revolutionary positions, the bringing of the millions to the revolutionary front, and their disposition at the revolutionary front.

The point here is not that the vanguard should realise the impossibility of preserving the old regime and the inevitability of its overthrow. The point is that the masses, the million should understand this inevitability and display their readiness to support the vanguard. But the masses can understand this only from their own experience. The task is to enable the vast masses to realise from their own experience the inevitability of the overthrow of the old regime, to promote such methods of struggle and forms of organisations as will make it easier for the masses to realise from experience the correctness of the revolutionary slogans.

The vanguard would have become detached from the working class, and the working class would have lost contact with the masses, if the Party had not decided at the time to participate in the Duma, if it had not decided to concentrate its forces on work in the Duma and to develop a struggle on the basis of this work, in order to make it easier for the masses to realise from their own experience the futility of the Duma, the falsity of the promises of the Cadets, the impossibility of compromise with tsarism, and the inevitability of an alliance between the peasantry and the working class. Had the masses not gained their experience during the period of the Duma, the exposure of the Cadets and the hegemony of the proletariat would have been impossible.



## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The danger of the “Otzovist” tactics was that they threatened to detach the vanguard from the millions of its reserves.

The Party would have become detached from the working class, and the working class would have lost its influence among the broad masses of the peasants and soldiers, if the proletariat had followed the “Left” Communists, who called for an uprising in April 1917, when the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had not yet exposed themselves as advocates of war and imperialism, when the masses had not yet realized from their own experience the falsity of speeches of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries about peace, land and freedom. Had the masses not gained this experience during the Kerensky period, the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries would not have been isolated and the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been impossible. Therefore, the tactics of “patiently explaining” the mistakes of the petty-bourgeois parties and of open struggle in the Soviets were the only correct tactics.

The danger of the tactics of the “Left” Communists was that they threatened to transform the Party from the leader of the proletarian revolution into a handful of futile conspirators with no ground to stand on.

“Victory cannot be won with the vanguard alone,” says Lenin. “To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle, before the whole class, before the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it [...] would be not merely folly but a crime. And in order that actually the whole class, that actually the broad masses of the working people and those oppressed by capital may take up such a position, propaganda and agitation alone are not enough. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, now confirmed with astonishing force and vividness not only in Russia but also in Germany. Not only the uncultured, often illiterate masses of Russia, but the highly cul-

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

tured, entirely literate masses of Germany had to realise through their own painful experience the absolute impotence and spinelessness, the absolute helplessness and servility to the bourgeoisie, the utter vileness, of the government of the knights of the Second International, the absolute inevitability of a dictatorship of the extreme reactionaries (Kornilov in Russia, Kapp and Co. in Germany) as the only alternatives to a dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to turn resolutely towards communism." (see *"Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder*).

**Secondly.** To locate at any given moment the particular link in the chain of processes which, if grasped, will enable us to keep hold of the whole chain and to prepare the conditions for achieving strategic success.

The point here is to single out from all the tasks confronting the Party the particular immediate task, the fulfillment of which constitutes the central point, and the accomplishment of which ensures the successful fulfillment of the other immediate tasks.

The importance of this thesis may be illustrated by two examples, one of which could be taken from the remote past (the period of the formation of the Party) and the other from the immediate present (the period of the NEP).

In the period of the formation of the Party, when the innumerable circles and organizations had not yet been linked together, when amateurishness and the parochial outlook of the circles were corroding the Party from top to bottom, when ideological confusion was the characteristic feature of the internal life of the Party, the main link and the main task in the chain of links and in the chain of tasks then confronting the Party proved to be the establishment of an all-Russian illegal newspaper (*Iskra*). Why? Because, under the conditions then prevailing, only by means of an all-Russian illegal newspaper was it possible to create a solid core of the Party capable to create a solid core of the Party capable of uniting the innumerable circles and organisations into

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

one whole, to prepare the conditions for ideological and tactical unity, and thus to build the foundations for the formation of a real party.

During the period of transition from war to economic construction, when industry was vegetating in the grip of disruption and agriculture was suffering from a shortage of urban manufactured goods, when the establishment of a bond between state industry and peasant economy became the fundamental condition for successful socialist construction—in that period it turned out that the main link in the chain of processes, the main task among a number of tasks, was to develop trade. Why? Because under the conditions of the NEP the bond between industry and peasant economy cannot be established except through trade; because under the conditions of the NEP production without sale is fatal for industry; because industry can be expanded only by the expansion of sales as a result of developing trade; because only after we have consolidated our position in the sphere of trade, only after we have secured control of trade, only after we have secured this link can there be any hope of linking industry with the peasant market and successfully fulfilling the other immediate tasks in order to create the conditions for building the foundations of socialist economy.

“It is not enough to be a revolutionary and an adherent of socialism or a Communist in general,” says Lenin. “One must be able at each particular moment to find the particular link in the chain which one must grasp with all one’s might in order to keep hold of the whole chain and to prepare firmly for the transition to the next link.”

“At the present time [...] this link is the revival of internal trade under proper state regulation (direction). Trade—that is the ‘link’ in the historical chain of events, in the transitional forms of our socialist construction in 1921-22, *‘which we must grasp with all our might’* [...]” (see *The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism*, vol. 33).

## THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Such are the principal conditions which ensure correct tactical leadership.

**6) Reformism and revolutionism.** What is the difference between revolutionary tactics and reformist tactics?

Some think that Leninism is opposed to reforms, opposed to compromises and to agreements in general. This is absolutely wrong. Bolsheviks know as well as anybody else that in a certain sense “every little helps,” that under certain conditions reforms in general, and compromises and agreements in particular, are necessary and useful.

“To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie,” says Lenin, “a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted, and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to refuse beforehand to maneuver, to utilise the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among one's enemies, to reject agreements and compromises with possible (even though temporary, unstable, vacillating and conditional) allies—is not this ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not as though, when making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain, we were to refuse beforehand ever to move in zigzags, ever to retrace our steps, ever to abandon the course once selected and to try others?” (see *“Left-Wing” Communism, an Infantile Disorder*).

Obviously, therefore, it is not a matter of reforms or of compromises and agreements, but of the use people make of reforms and agreements.

To a reformist, reforms are everything, while revolutionary work is something incidental, something just to talk about, mere eye-wash. That is why, with reformist tactics under the conditions of bourgeois rule, reforms are inevitably transformed into an instrument for strengthening that rule, an instrument for disintegrating the revolution.

To a revolutionary, on the contrary, the main thing is revolutionary work and not reforms; to him reforms are a by-product of the

## STRATEGY AND TACTICS

revolution. That is why, with revolutionary tactics under the conditions of bourgeois rule, reforms are naturally transformed into an instrument for strengthening the revolution, into a strongpoint for the further development of the revolutionary movement.

The revolutionary will accept a reform in order to use it as an aid in combining legal work with illegal work to intensify, under its cover, the illegal work for the revolutionary preparation of the masses for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

*That* is the essence of making revolutionary use of reforms and agreements under the conditions of imperialism.

The reformist, on the contrary, will accept reforms in order to renounce all illegal work, to thwart the preparation of the masses for the revolution and to rest in the shade of “bestowed” reforms.

*That* is the essence of reformist tactics.

Such is the position in regard to reforms and agreements under the conditions of imperialism.

The situation changes somewhat, however, after the overthrow of imperialism, under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under certain conditions, in a certain situation, the proletarian power may find itself compelled temporarily to leave the path of the revolutionary reconstruction of the existing order of things and to take the path of its gradual transformation, the “reformist path,” as Lenin says in his well-known article “The Importance of Gold,” the path of flanking movements, of reforms and concessions to the non-proletarian classes—in order to disintegrate these classes, to give the revolution a respite, to recuperate one’s forces and prepare the conditions for a new offensive. It cannot be denied that in a sense this is a “reformist” path. But it must be borne in mind that there is a fundamental distinction here, which consists in the fact that in this case the reform emanates from the proletarian power, it strengthens the proletarian power, it procures for it a necessary respite, its purpose is to disintegrate, not the revolution, but the non-proletarian classes.

Under such conditions a reform is thus transformed into its opposite.

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The proletarian power is able to adopt such a policy because, and only because, the sweep of the revolution in the preceding period was great enough and therefore provided a sufficiently wide expanse within which to retreat, substituting for offensive tactics the tactics of temporary retreat, the tactics of flanking movements.

Thus, while formerly, under bourgeois rule, reforms were a by-product of revolution, now under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the source of reforms is the revolutionary gains of the proletariat, the reserves accumulated in the hands of the proletariat consisting of these gains.

“Only Marxism,” says Lenin, “has precisely and correctly defined the relation of reforms to revolution. However, Marx was able to see this relation only from one aspect, namely, under the conditions preceding the first to any extant permanent and lasting victory of the proletariat, if only in a single country. Under those conditions, the basis of the proper relations was: reforms are a by-product of the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat. [...] After the victory of the proletariat, if only in a single country, something new enters into the relation between reforms and revolution. In principle, it is the same as before, but a change in form takes place, which Marx himself could not foresee, but which can be appreciated only on the basis of the philosophy and politics of Marxism. [...] After the victory (while still remaining a ‘by-product’ on an international scale) they (i.e., reforms —*J. St.*) are, in addition, for the country in which victory has been achieved, a necessary and legitimate respite in those cases when, after the utmost exertion of effort, it becomes obvious that sufficient strength is lacking for the revolutionary accomplishment of this or that transition. Victory creates such a ‘reserve of strength’ that it is possible to hold out even in a forced retreat, to hold out both materially and morally” (see *The Importance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism*, vol. 33).



## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

### I. Definition of Terms and Subject of Investigation

1) *The limits of operation of political strategy and tactics, their field of application.* If it is granted that the proletarian movement has two sides, objective and subjective, then the field of operation of strategy and tactics is undoubtedly limited to the subjective side of the movement. The objective side comprises the processes of development which take place outside of and around the proletariat independently of its will and of the will of its party, processes which, in the final analysis, determine the development of the whole of society. The subjective side comprises the processes which take place within the proletariat as the reflection in the consciousness of the proletariat of the objective processes, accelerating or retarding the latter, but not determining them.

2) The Marxist *theory*, which primarily studies objective processes in their development and decline, defines the trend of development and points to the class or classes which are inevitably rising to power, or are inevitably falling, which must fall.

3) The Marxist *programme*, based on deductions from the theory, defines the aim of the movement of the rising class, in the present case the proletariat, during a certain period in the development of capitalism, or during the whole of the capitalist period (the minimum programme and the maximum programme).

4) *Strategy*, guided by the programme, and based on a calculation of the contending forces, internal (national) and international, defines the *general route, the general direction*, in which the revolutionary proletarian movement must be guided with a view to achieving the greatest results under the incipient and developing relation of forces. In conformity with this it outlines a plan of the disposition of the forces of

---

*The Political Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists* is a synopsis of a pamphlet written by Stalin in 1921.



the proletariat and of its allies on the social front (*general disposition*). “Outlining a plan of the disposition of forces” must not be confused with the actual (concrete and practical) operation of disposing, allocating the forces, which is carried out jointly by tactics and strategy. That does not mean that strategy is limited to defining the route and outlining a plan of the disposition of the fighting forces in the proletarian camp; on the contrary, it directs the struggle and introduces corrections in current tactics during the whole period of a turn, making skillful use of the available reserves, and maneuvering with the object of supporting the tactics.

5) *Tactics*, guided by strategy and by the experience of the revolutionary movement at home and in neighbouring countries, taking into account at every given moment the state of forces within the proletariat and its allies (higher or lower level of culture, higher or lower degree of organisation and political consciousness, existing traditions, forms of the movement, forms of organisation, *main* and *auxiliary*), and also in the enemy’s camp, taking advantage of disharmony or any confusion in the enemy’s camp—indicate such *definite ways* of winning the broad masses to the side of the revolutionary proletariat and of placing them in their fighting positions on the social front (in fulfillment of the plan for the disposition of forces outlined in the strategic plan) as will most surely prepare the success of strategy. In conformity with this, they issue or change the Party’s slogans and directives.

6) *Strategy* alters at turns, radical changes, in history; it embraces the period from one turn (radical change) to another. Hence, it directs the movement towards the general objective that covers the interests of the proletariat during the whole of this period. Its aim is to *win the war* of classes that is waged during the whole of this period and, therefore, it remains unchanged during this period.

*Tactics*, on the other hand, are determined by the flows and ebbs on the basis of the given turn, the given strategic period, by the relation of the contending forces, by the forms of the struggle (movement), by the *tempo* of the movement, by the arena of the struggle at each given moment, in each given district. And since these factors

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

change in conformity with the conditions of place and time during the period from one turn to another, tactics, which do not cover the whole war, but only individual battles, that lead to the winning or loss of the war, change (may change) several times in the course of the strategic period. A strategic period is longer than a tactical period. Tactics are subordinate to the interests of strategy. Speaking generally, tactical successes prepare for strategic successes. The function of tactics is to lead the masses into the struggle in such a way, to issue such slogans, to lead the masses to new positions in such a way, that the struggle should, in sum, result in the winning of the war, i.e., in strategic success. But cases occur when a tactical success frustrates, or postpones, strategic success. In view of this, it is necessary, in such cases, to forgo tactical successes.

Example. The agitation against the war that we conducted among the workers and soldiers at the beginning of 1917, under Krensky, undoubtedly resulted in a tactical setback, for the masses dragged our speakers off the platforms, beat them up, and sometimes tore them limb from limb; instead of the masses being drawn into the Party, they drew away from it. But in spite of the tactical setback, this agitation brought nearer a big strategic success, for the masses soon realised that we were right in agitating against the war, and later this hastened and facilitated their going over to the side of the Party. Or again. The Comintern's demand for a dissociation from the Reformists and Centrists in conformity with the twenty-one conditions,<sup>1</sup> undoubtedly involves a certain tactical setback for it deliberately reduces the number of "supporters" of the Comintern and temporarily weakens the latter; but it leads to a big strategic gain by ridding the Comintern of unreliable elements, which will undoubtedly strengthen the Comintern, will weld its ranks more closely, i.e., will enhance its power generally.

7) *Agitation slogan* and *action slogan*. These must not be confused. It is dangerous to do so. In the period from April to October 1917,

---

1 This refers to the twenty-one conditions of affiliation to the Communist International laid down by the Second Congress of the Comintern on August 6, 1920.

the slogan “All power to the Soviets” was an *agitation* slogan; in October it became an *action* slogan—after the Central Committee of the Party, at the beginning of October (October 10), adopted the decision on the “seizure of power.” In its action in Petrograd in April, the Bagdatyev group was guilty of such a confusion of slogans.

8) *Directive* (general) is a direct call for action, at a *certain time* and in a *certain place*, binding upon the Party. The slogan “All power to the Soviets” was a propaganda slogan at the beginning of April (the “theses”<sup>2</sup>); in June it became an *agitation* slogan; in October (October 10) it became an *action* slogan; but at the end of October it became an immediate *directive*. I am speaking of a general directive for the whole Party, having in mind that there must also be local directives detailing the general directive.

9) *Vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie* especially during intensification of political crises (in Germany during the Reichstag elections, in Russia under Kerensky in April, in June and in August, and again in Russia during the Kronstadt events, 1921<sup>3</sup>); this must be carefully studied, taken advantage of, taken into account, but to yield to it would be dangerous, fatal to the cause of the proletariat. Agitation slogans must not be changed because of such vacillation, but it is permissible, and sometimes necessary, to change or postpone a particular *directive*, and, perhaps, also a slogan (*of action*). Changing tactics “overnight” means precisely changing a *directive*, or even an *action slogan*, but not an agitation slogan. (Cf. the calling off of the demonstration on June 9, 1917, and similar facts.)

10) The art of the *strategist* and *tactician* lies in skillfully and opportunely transforming an agitation slogan into an action slogan, and

---

2 This refers to Lenin’s famous April Theses, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution,” read by him at two meetings of the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, on April 4, 1917.

3 This refers to the counter-revolutionary mutiny in Kronstadt in March 1921 (see *History of the CPSU(B) Short Course*, Ch. 9).

in molding, also opportunely and skillfully, an action slogan into definite, concrete, *directives*.

## II. Historic Turns in the Development of Russia

1) *The turn in 1904-05* (the Russo-Japanese war revealed the utter instability of the autocracy on the one hand, and the might of the proletarian and peasant movement, on the other) and Lenin's book *Two Tactics* as the strategic plan of the Marxists corresponding to this turn. A turn towards the bourgeois-democratic revolution (*this was the essence of the turn*). Not a bourgeois-liberal deal with tsarism under the hegemony of the Cadets, but a bourgeois-democratic revolution under the hegemony of the proletariat. (*This was the essence of the strategic plan.*) This plan took as its starting point that the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia would give an impetus to the socialist movement in the West, would unleash revolution there and help Russia to pass from the bourgeois to the socialist revolution (see also Minutes of the Third Party Congress, Lenin's speeches at the congress, 5 and also his analysis of the concept of dictatorship both at the congress and in the pamphlet *The Victory of the Cadets*). *A calculation of the contending forces, internal and international, and, in general, an analysis of the economics and politics of the period of the turn are essential.* The February Revolution marked the culmination of this period by carrying out at least two-thirds of the strategic plan outlined in *Two Tactics*.

2) *The turn in February-March 1917 towards the Soviet revolution* (the imperialist war, which swept away the autocratic regime, revealed the utter bankruptcy of capitalism and showed that a socialist revolution was absolutely inevitable as the only way out of the crisis).

Difference between the "glorious" February Revolution brought about by the people, the bourgeoisie and Anglo-French capital (this revolution, since it transferred power to the Cadets, caused no changes of any importance in the international situation, for it was a continuation of the policy of Anglo-French capital), and the October Revolution, which overturned everything.

*Lenin's "Theses"*—as the strategic plan corresponding to the new turn. Dictatorship of the proletariat as the way out. This plan took as its starting point that *"we shall begin the socialist revolution in Russia, overthrow our own bourgeoisie and in this way unleash the revolution in the West, and then the Western comrades will help us to complete our revolution."* It is essential to analyse the internal and international economics and politics of this turning-point period (the period of "dual power," coalition combinations, the Kornilov revolt as a symptom of the death of the Kerensky regime, unrest in Western countries due to discontent with the war).

3) *The turn in October 1917* (a turn not only in Russian, but in world history), establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in Russia (October-November-December 1917, and first half of 1918), *as a breach of the international social front, against world imperialism, which caused a turn towards the liquidation of capitalism and the establishment of the socialist order on a world scale*, and as opening the era of civil war in place of imperialist war (the Decree on Peace, the Decree on Land, the Decree on the Nationalities, publication of the secret treaties, programme of construction, Lenin's speeches at the Second Congress of Soviets, Lenin's pamphlet *The Tasks of the Soviet Power*, economic construction).

Make an all-round analysis of the difference between the strategy and tactics of communism when not in power, when in opposition and the strategy and tactics of communism when in power.

International situation: continuation of the war between the two imperialist cliques as a favourable condition (after the conclusion of the Brest Peace) for the existence and development of Soviet power in Russia.

4) *The course towards military operations against the interventionists (summer of 1918 to end of 1920)*, which began after the brief period of peaceful construction, i.e., after the Brest Peace. This course began after the Brest Peace, which reflected Soviet Russia's military weakness and emphasized the necessity of creating a Red Army in Russia to serve as the chief bulwark of the Soviet revolution. The hostile action of

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

the Czechoslovaks, the occupation of Murmansk, Archangel, Vladivostok and Baku by Entente troops, and the Entente's declaration of war against Soviet Russia—all this definitely marked *the turn from incipient peaceful construction to military operations, to defence of the centre of the world revolution from attacks by internal and external enemies*. (Lenin's speeches on the Brest Peace, etc.) Since the social revolution was a long time coming and we were left to our own resources, especially after the occupation of the above-mentioned districts, which met with no serious protest on the part of the proletarians of the West, we were obliged to conclude the indecent Brest Peace in order to obtain a respite during which to build our Red Army and defend the Soviet Republic by our own efforts.

*"All for the front, all for the defence of the Republic."* Hence, *the setting up of the Council of Defence*, etc. This was the war period, which left its impress upon the whole of Russia's internal and external life.

5) *The course towards peaceful construction from the beginning of 1921*, after the defeat of Wrangel, peace with a number of bourgeois states, the treaty with Britain, etc.

The war is over, but as the Western Socialists are not yet able to help us to restore our economy, we, being economically encircled by industrially more developed bourgeois states, are compelled to grant concessions, to conclude trade agreements with individual bourgeois states and concession agreements with individual capitalist groups; in this (economic) sphere also we are left to our own resources, we are obliged to maneuver. *All for the restoration of the national economy*. (See Lenin's well-known speeches and pamphlets.) The Council of Defence is transformed into the Council of Labour and Defence.

6) The stages in the Party's development up to 1917:

## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

a) *Welding of the main core, especially the “Iskra” group, and so forth. Fight against Economism. The Credo.*<sup>4</sup>

b) *Formation of Party cadres as the basis of the future workers’ party on an all-Russian scale (1895-1903). The Second Party Congress.*

c) *The expansion of the cadres into a workers’ party and its reinforcement with new Party workers recruited in the course of the proletarian movement (1903-04). The Third Party Congress.*

d) *The fight of the Mensheviks against the Party cadres with the object of dissolving the latter among the nonparty masses (the “Labour Congress”) and the fight of the Bolsheviks to preserve the Party cadres as the basis of the Party. The London Congress and defeat of the advocates of a Labour Congress.*

e) *Liquidators and Party Supporters. Defeat of the Liquidators (1908-10).*

f) 1908-16 inclusive. *The period of the combination of illegal and legal forms of activity and the growth of the Party organisations in all spheres of activity.*

7) The Communist Party as a sort of *Order of Knights of the Sword*<sup>5</sup> within the Soviet state, directing the organs of the latter and inspiring their activities.

---

4 The “Credo” was the manifesto issued by the “Economist” group. See Lenin’s *A Protest by Russian Social-Democrats*, vol. 4.

5 The *Knights of the Sword* were a German religious order of knights founded in 1202 by Bishop Albert of Riga in Livonia. Serving the Catholic Church, their purpose was to convert and subjugate the pagans of Livonia.

## THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The importance of the *old guard* within this powerful Order. *Reinforcement of the old guard* with new forces who have been steeled during the past three or four years.

Was Lenin right in waging an *uncompromising struggle against the conciliators*? Yes, for had he not done so, the Party would have been diluted and would have been not an organism, but a conglomeration of heterogeneous elements; it would not have been so welded and united internally; it would not have possessed that unexampled discipline and unprecedented flexibility without which it, and the Soviet state which it guides, could not have withstood world imperialism. "*The Party becomes strong by purging itself*," rightly said Lassalle. Quality first and then quantity.

8) The question whether a proletarian party is needed or not, and of the role of the latter. The Party constitutes the officer corps and general staff of the proletariat, who direct the struggle of the latter in all its forms and in all spheres without exception, and combine the diverse forms of the struggle into one whole. To say that a Communist Party is not needed is equivalent to saying that the proletariat must fight without a general staff, without a leading core, who make a special study of the conditions of the struggle and work out the methods of fighting; it is equivalent to saying that it is better to fight without a general staff than with one, which is stupid.

### III. Questions

1) *The role of the autocracy before and after the Russo-Japanese war*. The Russo-Japanese war exposed the utter rottenness and weakness of the Russian autocracy. The successful general political strike in October 1905 made this weakness absolutely clear (a colossus with feet of clay). Further, 1905 not only exposed the weakness of the autocracy, the feebleness of the liberal bourgeoisie and the might of the Russian proletariat, but also refuted the formerly current opinion that the Russian autocracy was the gendarme of Europe, that it was *strong enough to be* the gendarme of Europe. The facts showed that the Russian autocracy



## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

was unable to cope even with its own working class, without the aid of European capital. The Russian autocracy was, indeed, able to be the gendarme of Europe as long as the working class of Russia was dormant and as long as the Russian peasantry was quiescent, continuing to have faith in the Little Father, the tsar; but 1905, and above all the shooting on January 9, 1905, roused the Russian proletariat; and the agrarian movement in the same year undermined the muzhik's faith in the tsar. The centre of gravity of European counterrevolution shifted from the Russian landlords to the Anglo-French bankers and imperialists. The German Social-Democrats who tried to justify their betrayal of the proletariat in 1914 on the plea that the war was a progressive war against the Russian autocracy as the gendarme of Europe were actually making play with a shadow of the past, and playing dishonestly, of course, for the real gendarmes of Europe, who had sufficient forces and funds at their command to be gendarmes, were not in Petrograd, but in Berlin, Paris and London.

It now became clear to everybody that Europe was introducing into Russia not only socialism, but also counter-revolution in the shape of loans to the tsar, etc., whereas, in addition to political emigres, Russia was introducing revolution into Europe. (At all events, in 1905 Russia introduced the general strike into Europe as a weapon in the proletarian struggle.)

2) "*Ripeness of the fruit.*" How is it possible to determine when the moment for revolutionary upheavals has arrived?

When is it possible to say that the "fruit is ripe," that the period of preparation has ended and that action can begin?

a) When the revolutionary temper of the masses is brimming over and our *action slogans* and *directives* lag behind the movement of the masses (see Lenin's *For Going Into the Duma*, the period before October 1905), when we restrain the masses with difficulty and not always successfully, for example, the Putilov workers and machine-gunners at the time of the July demon-

## THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

strations in 1917 (see Lenin's book "*Left-Wing" Communism., an Infantile Disorder*);

b) When uncertainty and confusion, decay and disintegration in the enemy's camp have reached a climax; when the number of deserters and renegades from the enemy's camp grows by leaps and bounds; when the so-called neutral elements, the vast mass of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, are beginning definitely to turn away from the enemy (from the autocracy or the bourgeoisie) and are seeking an alliance with the proletariat; when, as a result of all this, the enemy's organs of administration, together with the organs of suppression, cease to function, become paralysed and useless, etc., thus leaving the road open for the proletariat to exercise its right to seize power;

c) When both these factors (points a and b) coincide in time, which, actually, is what usually happens. Some people think that it is enough to note the *objective* process of extinction of the class in power in order to launch the attack. But that is wrong. In addition to this, the *subjective* conditions necessary for a successful attack must have been prepared. It is precisely the task of strategy and tactics skillfully and opportunely to make the preparation of the subjective conditions for attacks fit in with the objective processes of the extinction of the power of the ruling class.

3) *Choice of the moment.* Correct choice of the moment, in so far as the moment to strike is really chosen by the Party and not imposed by events, presupposes the existence of two conditions: a) "ripeness of the fruit," and b) some glaring event, action by the government or some spontaneous outburst of a local character that can serve as a *suitable reason*, obvious to the broad masses, for striking the first blow, for beginning the attack. Failure to observe these two conditions may mean that the blow will not only fail to serve as the starting point

## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

for general attacks of increasing scale and intensity upon the enemy, will not only fail to grow into a thundering, crushing blow (and that is precisely the meaning and purpose of the proper choice of the moment), but, on the contrary, may degenerate into a ludicrous putsch, which the government, and the enemy generally, will welcome and exploit to raise their prestige, and which may become a pretext and starting point for wrecking the Party, or in any case, for demoralising it. For example, the proposal made by a section of the Central Committee to arrest the Democratic Conference,<sup>6</sup> but rejected by the Central Committee because it failed to comply (*totally* failed to comply) with the second requirement (see above), was inappropriate from the standpoint of choice of the moment.

In general, care must be taken that the first blow (choice of the moment) does not turn into a putsch. To prevent this, it is essential that the two conditions indicated above are strictly observed.

4) "*Trial of strength.*" Sometimes the Party, having made preparations for decisive actions and having accumulated, as it thinks, sufficient reserves, considers it expedient to undertake a trial action, to test the enemy's strength and to ascertain whether its own forces are ready for action. Such a trial of strength may be undertaken by the Party deliberately, by its own choice (the demonstration that it was proposed to hold on June 10, 1917, but was later called off and replaced by the demon-

---

6 The Democratic Conference was held in Petrograd, September 14-22, 1917. It was convened by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary leaders of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and of the Executive Committee of the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, and attended by representatives of the socialist parties, compromising Soviets, trade unions, Zemstvos, commercial and industrial circles and military units. The conference set up a Pre-parliament (The Provisional Council of the Republic) as an advisory body to the Provisional Government. With the assistance of the Pre-parliament the compromisers hoped to halt the revolution and to divert the country from the path of a Soviet revolution to the path of bourgeois constitutional development.

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

stration on June 18), or may be forced upon it by circumstances, by premature action by the opposing side, or, in general, by some unforeseen event (the Kornilov revolt in August 1917 and the Communist Party's counteraction which served as a splendid trial of strength). A "trial of strength" must not be regarded merely as a demonstration, like a May Day demonstration; therefore, it must not be described merely as a *calculation of forces*; as regards its importance and possible results it is undoubtedly more than an ordinary demonstration, although less than an uprising—it is something between a demonstration and an uprising or a general strike. Under favourable circumstances it may develop into the first blow (choice of the moment), into an uprising (our Party's action at the end of October); under unfavourable circumstances it may put the Party in immediate danger of being wrecked (the demonstration of July 3-4, 1917). It is therefore most expedient to undertake a trial of strength when the "fruit is ripe," when the enemy's camp is sufficiently demoralised, when the Party has accumulated a certain number of reserves; briefly: when the Party is ready for an offensive, when the Party is not daunted by the possibility that circumstances may cause the trial of strength to become the first blow and then to become a general offensive against the enemy. When undertaking a trial of strength the Party must be ready for all contingencies.

5) "*Calculation of forces.*" Calculation of forces is simply a demonstration which can be undertaken in almost any situation (for example, a May Day demonstration, with or without a strike). If a calculation of forces is not undertaken on the eve of an open upheaval, but at a more or less "peaceful" time, it can end at most in a skirmish with the government's police or troops, without involving heavy casualties for the Party or for the enemy. If, however, it is undertaken in the white-hot atmosphere of impending upheavals, it may involve the Party in a premature decisive collision with the enemy, and if the Party is still weak and unready for such collisions, the enemy can take advantage of such a "calculation of forces" to crush the proletarian forces (hence the Party's repeated appeals in September 1917: "don't allow yourselves to be provoked"). Therefore, in applying the method of a calculation of forces in

the atmosphere of an already ripe revolutionary crisis, it is necessary to be very careful, and it must be borne in mind that if the Party is weak, the enemy can convert such a calculation into a weapon with which to defeat the proletariat, or at least, to weaken it seriously. And, on the other hand, if the Party is ready for action, and the enemy's ranks are obviously demoralised, then, having begun a "calculation of forces," the opportunity must not be lost to pass on to a "trial of strength" (assuming that the conditions for this are favourable—"ripeness of fruit," etc.) and then to launch the general assault.

6) *Offensive tactics* (tactics of wars of liberation, when the proletariat has already taken power).

7) *Tactics of orderly retreat*. How skillfully to retreat into the interior in face of obviously superior enemy forces in order to save if not most of the army, then at least its cadres (see Lenin's book "*Left-Wing Communism...*"). How we were the last to retreat, for example, during the boycott of the Witte-Dubasov Duma. The difference between tactics of retreat and "tactics" of flight (compare the Mensheviks).

8) *Defence tactics*, as a necessary means of preserving cadres and accumulating forces in anticipation of future battles. They impose on the Party the duty of taking up positions on all fields of the struggle without exception, of bringing all kinds of weapon, i.e., all forms of organisation, into proper order, not neglecting a single one of them, even the seemingly most insignificant, for nobody can tell in advance which field will be the first arena of battle, or which form of the movement, or form of organisation, will be the starting point and tangible weapon of the proletariat when the decisive battles open. In other words: in the period of defence and accumulation of forces, the Party must make itself fully prepared in anticipation of decisive battles. *In anticipation* of battles... But this does not mean that the Party must wait with folded arms and become an idle spectator, degenerating from a revolutionary party (if it is in the opposition) into a wait-and-see party—no, in such a period it must avoid battles, not accept battle, *if it* has not yet accumulated the necessary amount of forces or if the situation is unfavourable for it, but *it must not miss a single opportunity*, under favourable conditions, of

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

course, to force a battle upon the enemy when that is to the enemy's disadvantage, to keep the enemy in a constant state of tension, step by step to disorganise and demoralise his forces, step by step to exercise the proletarian forces in battles affecting the everyday interests of the proletariat, and in this way increase its own forces.

Only if this is done can defence be really *active* defence and the Party preserve all the attributes of a real *party of action* and not of a contemplative, wait-and-see party; only then will the Party avoid missing, overlooking, the moment for decisive action, avoid being taken unawares by events. The case of Kautsky and Co. overlooking the moment for the proletarian revolution in the West owing to their “wise” contemplative waiting tactics and still “wiser” passivity is a direct warning. Or again: the case of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries missing the opportunity to take power owing to their tactics of endless waiting on the questions of peace and land should also serve as a warning. On the other hand, it is also obvious that the tactics of active defence, the tactics of action, must not be abused, for that would create the danger of the Communist Party's tactics of revolutionary action being converted into tactics of “revolutionary” gymnastics, i.e., into tactics that lead not to the accumulating the forces of the proletariat and to their increased readiness for action, hence, not to the acceleration of the revolution, but to the dissipation of the proletarian forces, to the deterioration of their readiness for action, and hence, to retarding the cause of the revolution.

9) The general principles of communist strategy and tactics. There are three such principles:

a) The adoption, as a basis, of the conclusion, arrived at by Marxist theory and confirmed by revolutionary practice, that in capitalist countries the proletariat is the only completely revolutionary class, which is interested in the complete emancipation of mankind from capitalism and whose mission it is, therefore, to be the leader of all the oppressed and exploited masses in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Consequently, all work

## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

must be directed towards the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

b) The adoption, as a basis, of the conclusion, arrived at by Marxist theory and confirmed by revolutionary practice, that the *strategy and tactics of the Communist Party of any country* can be correct only if they are not confined to the interests of “their own” country, “their own” fatherland, “their own” proletariat, but, on the contrary, if, while taking into account the conditions and situation in their own country, they make the interests of the international proletariat, the interests of the revolution in other countries, the corner-stone, i.e., if, in essence, in spirit, they are internationalist, if they do “the utmost possible in one (their own) country for the development, support and awakening of the revolution *in all countries*” (see Lenin's book *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*).

c) The adoption, as a starting point, of the repudiation of all doctrinairism (Right and Left) when changing strategy and tactics, when working out new strategic plans and tactical lines (Kautsky, Axelrod, Bogdanov, Bukharin), repudiation of the contemplative method and the method of quoting texts and drawing historical parallels, artificial plans and lifeless formulas (Axelrod, Plekhanov); recognition that it is necessary to stand by the point of view of Marxism, not to “lie down on it,” that it is necessary to “change” the world, not “merely to interpret” it, that it is necessary to lead the proletariat and be the conscious expression of the unconscious process, and not “contemplate the proletariat's rear” and drag at the tail of events (see Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* and the well-known passage in Marx's *Communist Manifesto* to the effect that the Communists are the most far-sighted and advanced section of the proletariat).

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Illustrate each of these principles with facts from the revolutionary movement in Russia and in the West, *especially the second principle, and the third.*

10) *Tasks:*

a) *To win the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism* (i.e., build up cadres, create a Communist Party, work out the programme, the principles of tactics). Propaganda as the chief form of activity.

b) *To win the broad masses of the workers and of the toilers generally to the side of the vanguard* (to bring the masses up to the fighting positions). Chief form of activity—practical action by the masses as a prelude to decisive battles.

11) *Rules:*

a) *Master all forms of organisation of the proletariat without exception and all forms (fields) of the movement, of the struggle.* (Forms of the movement: parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, legal and illegal.)

b) *Learn to adapt oneself to rapid changes from some forms of the movement to others,* or to supplement some forms with others; learn to combine legal forms with illegal, parliamentary with extra-parliamentary forms (example: the Bolsheviks' rapid transition from legal to illegal forms in July 1917; combination of the extra-parliamentary movement with action in the Duma during the Lena events).

12) *The Communist Party's strategy and tactics before and after taking power.* Four specific features.



a) *The most important* feature of the situation that arose in Europe in general, and in Russia in particular, after the October Revolution was the *breach of the international social front* (as a result of the victory over the Russian bourgeoisie) *in the region* of Russia carried out by the Russian proletariat (*rupture* with imperialism, *publication* of the secret treaties, civil war instead of imperialist war, the call to the troops to fraternise, the call to the workers to rise against their governments). That breach marked a *turn in world history*, for it directly menaced the entire edifice of international imperialism and radically changed the relation of the contending forces in the West in favour of the working class of Europe. This meant that the Russian proletariat and its Party changed from a *national* into an *international* force, and their former task of overthrowing their own national bourgeoisie was superseded by the new task of overthrowing the international bourgeoisie. Since the international bourgeoisie, sensing mortal danger, set itself the immediate task of *closing the Russian breach* and concentrated its unengaged forces (reserves) against Soviet Russia, the latter could not, in her turn, refrain from concentrating all her forces for defence, and was obliged to draw the main blow of the international bourgeoisie upon herself. All this greatly facilitated the struggle the Western proletarians were waging against their own bourgeoisie and increased tenfold their sympathy with the Russian proletariat as the *vanguard fighter of the international proletariat*.

Thus, the accomplishment of the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie in one country led to the new task of fighting on an international scale, of fighting on a different plane—to a fight waged by the proletarian state against hostile capitalist states; and the Russian proletariat, which hitherto had been one of the detachments of the international proletariat, henceforth be-

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

came the advanced detachment, the vanguard, of the international proletariat.

Thus, the task of unleashing revolution in the West in order to make it easier for her, i.e., Russia, to complete her revolution, was transformed from a wish into a purely practical task of the day. This change in relations (particularly in international relations) brought about by October is *entirely* due to October. The February Revolution did not affect international relations in the least.

b) *The second important feature* of the situation that arose in Russia after October was the change in the position both of the proletariat and its Party within Russia. Formerly, before October, the proletariat's main concern was to organise all the fighting forces for overthrowing the bourgeoisie, i.e., its task was chiefly of a critical and destructive character. Now, after October, when the bourgeoisie is no longer in power, and the state has become proletarian, the old task has dropped out; its place has been taken by *the new task of organising all the working people* of Russia (the peasants, artisans, handicraftsmen, intellectuals, the backward nationalities in the R.S.F.S.R.) *for building the new Soviet Russia*, her economic and military organisations, on the one hand, and for crushing the resistance of the overthrown, but not yet completely crushed, bourgeoisie, on the other hand.<sup>7</sup>

---

7 Correspondingly, some of the old forms of the movement have dropped out, such as strikes, uprisings, etc., and, correspondingly, the character and forms (functions) of the working-class organisations (the Party, Soviets, trade unions, co-operatives, cultural and educational institutions) have also changed.

c) Corresponding to the change in the proletariat's position within Russia, and in conformity with the new task, *a change has taken place in the policy of the proletariat in relation to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois groups* and strata of the population of Russia. Formerly (on the eve of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) the proletariat refused to enter into individual agreements with bourgeois groups, for such a policy would have strengthened the bourgeoisie, which was in power. Now, however, the proletariat is in favour of individual agreements, for they strengthen its power, cause disintegration among the bourgeoisie, help the proletariat to tame, to assimilate, individual groups of the bourgeoisie. The difference between “*reformism*” and *the policy of individual agreements* (the former absolutely rejects the method of revolutionary action, the latter does not, and when revolutionaries do employ it, they base it on the revolutionary method; the former is narrower, the latter is wider in scope). (See “*reformism*” and “*agreements policy*.”)

d) Corresponding to the colossal growth of the strength and resources of the proletariat and the Communist Party, *the scope of the Communist Party's strategic activities increased*. Formerly the strategy of the Communist Party was limited to the drawing up of the strategic plan, to maneuvering between the different forms of the movement and of proletarian organisations, and also between the different demands of the movement (slogans), advancing some, changing others, employing the scanty reserves in the shape of the contradictions between the different classes. As a rule, the scope and possibility of employing these reserves were restricted to narrow limits owing to the weakness of the Party. Now, however, after October, firstly, *the reserves have grown* (contradictions between the social groups in Russia, contradictions between classes and nationalities in the surrounding states, contradictions between the surrounding states, the growing socialist revolution in the West, the growing

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

revolutionary movement in the East and in the colonies generally, etc.); secondly, the means and *possibilities of maneuvering have increased* (the old means have been supplemented with new ones in the shape, for example, of diplomatic activity, establishment of more effective connections both with the Western socialist movement and with the Eastern revolutionary movement); thirdly, *new and wider possibilities have arisen for employing reserves* owing to the increase of the strength and resources of the proletariat which, in Russia, has become the dominant *political force*, possessing its own armed forces, and in the international field has become the vanguard of the world revolutionary movement.

13) *Special*: a) the question of the *tempo* of the movement and its role in determining strategy and tactics; b) the question of *reformism*, of the policy of *agreements*, and the relation between them.

14) “*Reformism*” (“compromise”), “*policy of agreements*” and “*individual agreements*” are *three different things* (write about each separately). *Agreements* as concluded by the Mensheviks are unacceptable because they are based on *reformism*, i.e., on the *repudiation of revolutionary action*, whereas *agreements* as concluded by the Bolsheviks are based on the requirements of revolutionary action. For that very reason agreements as concluded by the Mensheviks become converted into a system, into a *policy of agreements*, whereas the Bolsheviks are only for individual, concrete agreements, and do not make them into a special policy of agreements.

15) *Three periods in the development of the Communist Party of Russia*:

a) *the period of the formation of the vanguard (i.e., the party) of the proletariat, the period of mustering the Party's cadres* (in this period the Party was weak; it had a programme and general principles of tactics, but as a party of mass action it was weak);

## THE POLITICAL STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

b) *the period of revolutionary mass struggle* under the leadership of the Communist Party. In this period the Party was transformed *from an organisation for mass agitation* into an organisation for mass action; the period of *preparation* was superseded by the period of *revolutionary action*;

c) *the period after taking power, after the Communist Party had become the government party.*

16) *The political strength of the Russian proletarian revolution* lies in that the peasant agrarian revolution (overthrow of feudalism) took place here *under the leadership of the proletariat* (and not of the bourgeoisie), and, *as a consequence of this*, the bourgeois-democratic revolution served as the prologue of the proletarian revolution; in that the *connection* between the labouring elements of the peasantry and the proletariat, and the *support* the latter rendered the former, were not only ensured politically, but consolidated organisationally in the Soviets, and this aroused for the proletariat the sympathy of the vast majority of the population (and that is why it does not matter if the proletariat itself does not constitute the majority in the country).

*The weakness of the proletarian revolutions in Europe* (the continent) lies in that there the proletariat lacks *this* connection with and this support of the countryside; *there*, the peasants were *emancipated* from feudalism under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and not of the proletariat, which was weak at the time), and this, combined with the indifference Social-Democracy displayed towards the interests of the countryside, for a long time ensured the bourgeoisie the sympathy of the majority of the peasants.

# ІРИБАВКУ ПАВКА

СЕМЬЯМ СОЛДАТЪ  
ЗАЩИТНИКАМЪ СВОБОДЫ  
И НАРОДНОГО МІРА.



## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE RUSSIAN COMMUNISTS

This article is based on the lectures “On the Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists” that I delivered at different times at the workers’ club in the Presnya District and to the Communist group at the Sverdlov University. I have decided to publish it not only because I think it is my duty to meet the wishes of the Presnya and Sverdlov comrades, but also because it seems to me that the article itself will be of some use for our new generation of Party workers. I consider it necessary to say, however, that this article does not claim to present anything new in substance compared with what has already been said several times in the Russian Party press by our leading comrades. The present article must be regarded as a condensed and schematic exposition of the fundamental views of Comrade Lenin.

### I. Preliminary Concepts

1) *Two aspects of the working-class movement.* Political strategy, as well as tactics, is concerned with the working-class movement. But the working-class movement itself consists of two elements: the objective or spontaneous element, and the subjective or conscious element. The objective, spontaneous element is the group of processes that take place independently of the conscious and regulating will of the proletariat. The economic development of the country, the development of capitalism, the disintegration of the old regime, the spontaneous movements of the proletariat and of the classes around it, the conflict of classes, etc.—all these are phenomena whose development does not depend on the will of the proletariat. That is the objective side of the

---

*Concerning the Question of the Strategy and Tactics of the Russian Communists* is an article by Stalin published in the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* on March 14, 1923. It was dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

movement. Strategy has nothing to do with those processes, for it can neither stop nor alter them; it can only take them into account and proceed from them. That is a field which has to be studied by the theory of Marxism and the programme of Marxism.

But the movement has also a subjective, conscious side. The subjective side of the movement is the reflection in the minds of the workers of the spontaneous processes of the movement; it is the conscious and systematic movement of the proletariat towards a definite goal. It is this side of the movement that interests us because, unlike the objective side, it is entirely subject to the directing influence of strategy and tactics. Whereas strategy is unable to cause any change in the course of the objective processes of the movement, here, on the contrary, on the subjective, conscious side of the movement, the field of application of strategy is broad and varied, because strategy can accelerate or retard the movement, direct it along the shortest path or divert it to a more difficult and painful path, depending on the perfections or shortcomings of strategy itself.

To accelerate or retard the movement, facilitate or hinder it—such is the field and the limits within which political strategy and tactics can be applied.

2) *The theory and programme of Marxism.* Strategy itself does not study the objective processes of the movement. Nevertheless, it must know them and take them into account correctly if gross and fatal errors in the leadership of the movement are to be avoided. The objective processes of the movement are studied, in the first place, by the theory of Marxism and also by the programme of Marxism. Hence, strategy must base itself entirely on the data provided by the theory and programme of Marxism.

From a study of the objective processes of capitalism in their development and decline, the theory of Marxism arrives at the conclusion that the fall of the bourgeoisie and the seizure of power by the proletariat are inevitable, that capitalism must inevitably give way to socialism. Proletarian strategy can be called truly Marxist only when its oper-



## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

ations are based on this fundamental conclusion of the theory of Marxism.

Proceeding from the data of theory, the programme of Marxism determines the aims of the proletarian movement, which are scientifically formulated in the points of the programme. The programme may be designed to cover the whole period of capitalist development and have in view the overthrow of capitalism and the organisation of socialist production, or only one definite phase of the development of capitalism, for instance, the overthrow of the survivals of the feudal-absolutist system and the creation of conditions for the free development of capitalism. Accordingly, the programme may consist of two parts: a maximum and a minimum. It goes without saying that strategy designed for the minimum part of the programme is bound to differ from strategy designed for the maximum part; and strategy can be called truly Marxist only when it is guided in its operations by the aims of the movement as formulated in the programme of Marxism.

3) *Strategy*. The most important function of strategy is to determine the main direction which ought to be taken by the working-class movement, and along which the proletariat can most advantageously deliver the main blow at its enemy in order to achieve the aims formulated in the programme. A strategic plan is a plan of the organisation of the decisive blow in the direction in which the blow is most likely to achieve the maximum results.

The principal features of political strategy could easily be described by drawing an analogy with military strategy: for instance, in the fight against Denikin during the Civil War. Everybody remembers the end of 1919, when Denikin's forces were standing near Tula. At that time an interesting dispute arose among our military men about the point from which the decisive blow at Denikin's armies should be delivered. Some military men proposed that the line Tsaritsyn-Novorossiisk be chosen for the main direction of the blow. Others, on the contrary, proposed that the decisive blow be delivered along the line Voronezh-Rostov, to proceed along this line and thus cut Denikin's armies in two and then crush each part separately. The first plan undoubtedly had its mer-

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

its in that it provided for the capture of Novorossiisk, which would have cut off the retreat of Denikin's armies. But, on the one hand, it was faulty because it assumed our advance through districts (the Don Region) which were hostile to Soviet power, and thus would have involved heavy casualties; on the other hand, it was dangerous because it opened for Denikin's armies the road to Moscow via Tula and Serpukhov. The only correct plan for the main blow was the second one, because, on the one hand, it assumed the advance of our main group through districts (Voronezh Gubernia-Donets Basin) which were friendly towards Soviet power and, therefore, would not involve any considerable casualties; on the other hand, it would disrupt the operations of Denikin's main group of forces which were moving towards Moscow. The majority of the military men declared in favour of the second plan, and this determined the fate of the war against Denikin.

In other words, determining the direction of the main blow means deciding in advance the nature of operations during the whole period of the war, i.e., deciding in advance, to the extent of nine-tenths, the fate of the whole war. That is the function of strategy.

The same must be said about political strategy. The first serious, collision between the political leaders of the Russian proletariat on the question of the main direction of the proletarian movement took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, during the Russo-Japanese war. At that time, as we know, one section of our Party (the Mensheviks) held the view that the main direction of the proletarian movement in its struggle against tsarism should be along the line of a bloc between the proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie; the peasantry was omitted, or almost entirely omitted from the plan as a major revolutionary factor, while the leading role in the general revolutionary movement was assigned to the liberal bourgeoisie. The other section of the Party (the Bolsheviks) maintained, on the contrary, that the main blow should proceed along the line of a bloc between the proletariat and the peasantry, and that the leading role in the general revolutionary movement should be assigned to the proletariat, while the liberal bourgeoisie should be neutralised.

## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

If, by analogy with the war against Denikin, we depict our whole revolutionary movement, from the beginning of this century to the February Revolution in 1917, as a war waged by the workers and peasants against tsarism and the landlords, it will be clear that the fate of tsarism and of the landlords largely depended upon which of the two strategic plans (the Menshevik or the Bolshevik) would be adopted, and upon which direction would be chosen as the main direction of the revolutionary movement.

Just as during the war against Denikin military strategy, by deciding the main direction of the blow, determined to the extent of nine-tenths the character of all subsequent operations, including the liquidation of Denikin's armies, so here, in the sphere of the revolutionary struggle against tsarism, our political strategy, by deciding that the main direction of the revolutionary movement should follow the Bolshevik plan, determined the character of our Party's work during the whole period of the open struggle against tsarism, from the time of the Russo-Japanese war down to the February Revolution in 1917.

The function of political strategy is, primarily, on the basis of the data provided by the theory and programme of Marxism, and taking into account the experience of the revolutionary struggle of the workers of all countries, correctly to determine the main direction of the proletarian movement of the given country in the given historical period.

4) *Tactics*. Tactics are a part of strategy, subordinated to and serving it. Tactics are not concerned with the war as a whole, but with its individual episodes, with battles and engagements. Strategy strives to win the war, or to carry through the struggle, against tsarism let us say, to the end; tactics, on the contrary, strive to win particular engagements and battles, to conduct particular campaigns successfully, or particular operations, that are more or less appropriate to the concrete situation of the struggle at each given moment.

A most important function of tactics is to determine the ways and means, the forms and methods of fighting that are most appropriate to the concrete situation at the given moment and are most certain to prepare the way for strategic success. Consequently, the operation and

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

results of tactics must be regarded not in isolation, not from the point of view of their immediate effect, but from the point of view of the aims and possibilities of strategy.

There are times when tactical successes facilitate the achievement of strategic aims. Such was the case, for instance, on the Denikin front at the end of 1919, when our troops liberated Orel and Voronezh, when the successes of our cavalry at Voronezh and of our infantry at Orel created a situation favourable for delivering the blow at Rostov. Such was the case in August 1917 in Russia, when the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets came over to the side of the Bolsheviks and thereby created a new political situation, which subsequently facilitated the blow delivered by our Party in October.

There are also times when tactical successes, brilliant from the point of view of their immediate effect but not corresponding to the strategic possibilities, create an "unexpected" situation, fatal to the whole campaign. Such was the case with Denikin at the end of 1919 when, carried away by the easy success of a rapid and striking advance on Moscow, he stretched his front from the Volga to the Dnieper, and thereby prepared the way for the defeat of his armies. Such was the case in 1920, during the war against the Poles, when, under-estimating the strength of the national factor in Poland, and carried away by the easy success of a striking advance, we undertook a task that was beyond our strength, the task of breaking into Europe via Warsaw, which rallied the vast majority of the Polish population against the Soviet forces and so created a situation which nullified the successes of the Soviet forces at Minsk and Zhitomir and damaged the Soviet Government's prestige in the West.

Lastly, there are also times when a tactical success must be ignored and when tactical losses and reverses must be deliberately incurred in order to ensure future strategic gains. This often happens in time of war, when one side, wishing to save its army cadres and to withdraw them from the onslaught of superior enemy forces, begins a systematic retreat and surrenders whole cities and regions without a fight in order to gain time and to muster its forces for new decisive battles in

## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

the future. Such was the case in Russia in 1918, during the German offensive, when our Party was forced to accept the Brest Peace, which was a tremendous setback from the point of view of the immediate political effect at that moment, in order to preserve the alliance with the peasants, who were thirsting for peace, to obtain a respite, to create a new army and thereby ensure strategic gains in the future.

In other words, tactics must not be subordinated to the transient interests of the moment, they must not be guided by considerations of immediate political effect, still less must they desert firm ground and build castles in the air. Tactics must be devised in accordance with the aims and possibilities of strategy.

The function of tactics is primarily to determine—in accordance with the requirements of strategy, and taking into account the experience of the workers' revolutionary struggle in all countries—the forms and methods of fighting most appropriate to the concrete situation of the struggle at each given moment.

5) *Forms of struggle.* The methods of warfare, the forms of war, are not always the same. They change in accordance with the conditions of development, primarily, in accordance with the development of production. In the time of Genghis Khan the methods of warfare were different from those in the time of Napoleon III; in the twentieth century they are different from those in the nineteenth century.

The art of war under modern conditions consists in mastering all forms of warfare and all the achievements of science in this sphere, utilising them intelligently, combining them skillfully, or making timely use of one or another of these forms as circumstances require.

The same must be said about the forms of struggle in the political sphere. The forms of struggle in the political sphere are even more varied than the forms of warfare. They change in accordance with the development of economic life, social life and culture, with the condition of classes, the relation of the contending forces, the kind of government and, finally, with international relations, and so forth. The illegal form of struggle under absolutism, combined with partial strikes and workers' demonstrations; the open form of struggle when "legal possibilities"

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

exist, and workers' mass political strikes; the parliamentary form of struggle at the time, say, of the Duma, and extra-parliamentary mass action which sometimes develops into armed uprising; lastly, state forms of struggle, after the proletariat has taken power and obtains the opportunity to utilise all the resources and forces of the state, including the army—such, in general, are the forms of struggle that are brought to the fore by the practical experience of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.

It is the task of the Party to master all forms of struggle, to combine them intelligently on the battlefield and skillfully to intensify the struggle in those forms which are specially suitable in the given situation.

6) *Forms of organisation.* The forms of organisation of armies and the different arms of the service are usually adapted to the forms and methods of warfare. When the latter change, the former change. In a war of maneuver the issue is often decided by massed cavalry. In positional warfare, on the contrary, cavalry plays either no part at all, or plays a subordinate part; heavy artillery and aircraft, gas and tanks decide everything.

The task of the art of war is to ensure having all arms of the service, bring them to perfection and skillfully combine their operations.

The same can be said about the forms of organisation in the political sphere. Here, as in the military sphere, the forms of organisation are adapted to the forms of the struggle. Secret organisations of professional revolutionaries in the period of absolutism; educational, trade-union, co-operative and parliamentary organisations (the Duma group, etc.) in the period of the Duma; factory and workshop committees, peasant committees, strike committees, Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, revolutionary military committees, and a broad proletarian party which unites all these forms of organisation, in the period of mass action and insurrection; finally, the state form of organisation of the proletariat in the period when power is concentrated in the hands of the working class—such, in general, are the forms of organisation on which,

## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

under certain conditions, the proletariat can and must rely in its struggle against the bourgeoisie.

The task of the Party is to master all these forms of organisation, bring them to perfection and skillfully combine their operations at each given moment.

7) *The slogan. The directive.* Skillfully formulated decisions which express the aims of the war, or of individual engagements, and which are popular among the troops, are sometimes of decisive importance at the front as a means of inspiring the army to action, of maintaining its morale, and so forth. Appropriate orders, slogans, or appeals to the troops are as important for the whole course of a war as first-class heavy artillery, or first-class fast-moving tanks.

Slogans are still more important in the political sphere, when one has to deal with tens and hundreds of millions of the population, with their diverse demands and requirements.

A slogan is a concise and clear formulation of the aims of the struggle, near or remote, given by the leading group, let us say, of the proletariat, by its party. Slogans vary in accordance with the different aims of the struggle, aims embracing either a whole historical period or individual stages and episodes of the given historical period. The slogan “Down with the autocracy” which was first advanced by the “Emancipation of Labour” group<sup>8</sup> in the ‘eighties of the last century, was a *propaganda* slogan, since its aim was to win over to the Party individuals and groups of the most steadfast and sturdy fighters. In the period of the Russo-Japanese war, when the instability of the autocracy became more or less evident to large sections of the working class, this slogan became an *agitation* slogan, for it was designed to win over vast masses of the toilers. In the period just before the February Revolution of 1917, when tsarism had already become completely discredited in the eyes of the

---

8 The “Emancipation of Labour” group—the first Russian Marxist group, formed in Geneva, in 1883, by G. V. Plekhanov. (Concerning the activities of this group and the historical role it played, see *History of the CPSU(B), Short Course*, Ch. 1).

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

masses, the slogan “Down with the autocracy” was transformed from an agitation slogan into an *action* slogan, since it was designed to move vast masses into the assault on tsarism. During the February Revolution this slogan became a Party *directive*, i.e., a direct call to seize certain institutions and certain positions of the tsarist system on a definite date, for it was already a matter of overthrowing and destroying tsarism. A directive is the Party's direct call for action, at a certain time and in a certain place, binding upon all members of the Party and, if the call correctly and aptly formulates the demands of the masses, and if the time is really ripe for it, it is usually taken up by the broad masses of the toilers.

To confuse slogans with directives, or an agitation slogan with an action slogan, is as dangerous as premature or belated action, which is sometimes fatal. In April 1917, the slogan “All power to the Soviets” was an agitation slogan. The well-known demonstration which took place in Petrograd in April 1917 under the slogan “All power to the Soviets,” and which surrounded the Winter Palace, was an attempt, premature and therefore fatal, to convert this slogan into an action slogan.<sup>9</sup> That was a very dangerous example of the confusion of an agitation slogan with an action slogan. The Party was right when it condemned the initiators of this demonstration, for it knew that the conditions necessary for the transformation of this slogan into an action slogan had not yet arisen, and that premature action on the part of the proletariat might result in the defeat of its forces.

On the other hand, there are cases when the Party is faced with the necessity of cancelling or changing “overnight” an adopted slogan (or directive) for which the time is ripe, in order to guard its ranks against a trap set by the enemy, or with the necessity of postponing the

9 During the mass political demonstration in Petrograd on April 20-21, 1917, a group of members of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolshevik Party (Bagdatyev and others), despite the Central Committee's instructions that the demonstration was to be a peaceful one, put forward the slogan of the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government. The Central Committee condemned the action of these “Left” adventurers.



execution of the directive to a more favourable moment. Such a case arose in Petrograd in June 1917, when, because the situation had changed, the Central Committee of our Party “suddenly” cancelled the workers’ and soldiers’ demonstration, which had been carefully prepared and fixed to take place on June 10.

It is the Party’s duty skillfully and opportunely to transform agitation slogans into action slogans, or action slogans into definite and concrete directives, or, if the situation demands it, to display the necessary flexibility and determination to cancel the execution of any given slogan in good time, even if it is popular and the time is ripe for it.

## II. The Strategic Plan

1) *Historic turns. Strategic plans.* The Party’s strategy is not something constant, fixed once and for all. It alters in accordance with the turns in history, with historic changes. These alterations in strategy find expression in the fact that with each separate turn in history a separate strategic plan is drawn up corresponding to that turn, and effective during the whole period from that turn to the next. The strategic plan defines the direction of the main blow to be delivered by the revolutionary forces and the corresponding disposition of the vast masses on the social front. Naturally, a strategic plan suitable for one period of history, which has its own specific features, cannot be suitable for another period of history, which has entirely different specific features. Corresponding to each turn in history is the strategic plan essential for it and adapted to its tasks.

The same may be said about the conduct of war. The strategic plan that was drawn up for the war against Kolchak could not have been suitable for the war against Denikin, which called for a new strategic plan, which, in its turn, would not have been suitable for, say, the war against the Poles in 1920, because the direction of the main blows, as well as the disposition of the main fighting forces, could not but be different in each of these three cases.

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The recent history of Russia knows of three main historic turns, which gave rise to three different strategic plans in the history of our Party. We consider it necessary to describe them briefly in order to show how the Party's strategic plans in general change in conformity with new historic changes.

2) *The first historic turn and the course towards the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia.* This turn began at the beginning of the present century, in the period of the Russo-Japanese war, when the defeat of the tsar's armies and the tremendous political strikes of the Russian workers stirred up all classes of the population and pushed them into the arena of the political struggle. This turn came to an end in the days of the February Revolution in 1917.

During this period two strategic plans were at issue in our Party: the plan of the Mensheviks (Plekhanov-Martov, 1905), and the plan of the Bolsheviks (Comrade Lenin, 1905).

The Menshevik strategy planned the main blow at tsarism along the line of a coalition between the liberal bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Proceeding from the fact that at that time the revolution was regarded as a bourgeois revolution, this plan assigned the hegemony (leadership) of the movement to the liberal bourgeoisie and doomed the proletariat to the role of "extreme left opposition," to the role of "prompter" to the bourgeoisie, while the peasantry, one of the major revolutionary forces, was entirely, or almost entirely, left out of account. It is easy to understand that since this plan left out of account the millions of peasants in a country like Russia it was hopelessly utopian, and since it placed the fate of the revolution in the hands of the liberal bourgeoisie (the hegemony of the bourgeoisie) it was reactionary, for the liberal bourgeoisie was not interested in achieving the complete victory of the revolution.

The Bolshevik strategy (see Comrade Lenin's book *Two Tactics*) planned the revolution's main blow at tsarism along the line of a coalition between the proletariat and the peasantry, while the liberal bourgeoisie was to be neutralised. Proceeding from the fact that the liberal bourgeoisie was not interested in the complete victory of the bourgeois-

## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

democratic revolution, that it preferred a deal with tsarism at the expense of the workers and peasants to the victory of the revolution, this plan assigned the hegemony of the revolutionary movement to the proletariat as the only completely revolutionary class in Russia. This plan was remarkable not only because it took into account correctly the driving forces of the revolution, but also because it contained in embryo the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat (the hegemony of the proletariat), because it brilliantly foresaw the next, higher phase of the revolution in Russia and facilitated the transition to it.

The subsequent development of the revolution right up to February 1917 fully confirmed the correctness of this strategic plan.

3) *The second historic turn and the course towards the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia.* The second turn began with the February Revolution in 1917, after tsarism was overthrown, when the imperialist war had exposed the fatal ulcers of capitalism all over the world; when the liberal bourgeoisie, incapable of taking in its hands the actual government of the country, was compelled to confine itself to holding formal power (the Provisional Government); when the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, after getting actual power into their hands, had neither the experience nor the will to make the necessary use of it; when the soldiers at the front and the workers and peasants in the rear were groaning under the burdens of the war and economic disruption; when the "dual power" and "contact committee"<sup>10</sup> regime, torn by inter-

---

10 The "Contact Committee," consisting of Chkheidze, Steklov, Sukhanov, Filippovsky and Skobelev (and later Chernov and Tsereteli), was set up by the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies on March 7, 1917, for the purpose of establishing contact with the Provisional Government, of "influencing" it and of "supervising" its activities. Actually, the "Contact Committee" helped to carry out the Provisional Government's bourgeois policy and tried to restrain the masses of the workers from waging a revolutionary struggle to transfer all power to the Soviets. The "Contact Committee" existed until May 1917, when representatives of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

nal contradictions and capable neither of waging war nor of bringing about peace, not only failed to find “a way out of the impasse” but confused the situation still more. This period ended with the October Revolution in 1917.

Two strategic plans were at issue in the Soviets at that time: the Menshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary plan, and the Bolshevik plan.

The Menshevik-Socialist-Revolutionary strategy, vacillating at first between the Soviets and the Provisional Government, between revolution and counter-revolution, took final shape at the time of the opening of the Democratic Conference (September 1917). It took the line of the gradual but steady removal of the Soviets from power and the concentration of all power in the country in the hands of the “Pre-parliament,” the prototype of a future bourgeois parliament. The questions of peace and war, the agrarian and labour questions, as well as the national question, were shelved, pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, which, in its turn, was postponed for an indefinite period. “All power to the Constituent Assembly”—this was how the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks formulated their strategic plan. It was a plan for the preparation of a bourgeois dictatorship, a combed and brushed-up, “perfectly democratic” dictatorship it is true, but a bourgeois dictatorship for all that.

The Bolshevik strategy (see Comrade Lenin’s “Theses” published in April 1917) planned the main blow along the line of liquidating the power of the bourgeoisie by the combined forces of the proletariat and the poor peasants, along the line of organising the dictatorship of the proletariat in the shape of a Soviet Republic. Rupture with imperialism and withdrawal from the war; liberation of the oppressed nationalities of the former Russian Empire; expropriation of the landlords and capitalists; preparation of the conditions for organising socialist economy—such were the elements of the Bolsheviks’ strategic plan in that period. “All power to the Soviets”—this was how the Bolsheviks then formulated their strategic plan. This plan was important not only be-

---

actually entered the Provisional Government.

## CONCERNING THE QUESTION OF STRATEGY AND TACTICS

cause it took into account correctly the actual driving forces of the new, proletarian revolution in Russia, but also because it facilitated and accelerated the unleashing of the revolutionary movement in the West.

Subsequent developments right up to the October Revolution fully confirmed the correctness of this strategic plan.

4) *The third historic turn and the course towards the proletarian revolution in Europe.* The third turn began with the October Revolution, when the mortal combat between the two imperialist groups in the West had reached its climax; when the revolutionary crisis in the West was obviously growing; when the bourgeois government in Russia, bankrupt and entangled in contradictions, fell under the blows of the proletarian revolution; when the victorious proletarian revolution broke with imperialism and withdrew from the war, and thereby made bitter enemies in the shape of imperialist coalitions in the West; when the new Soviet Government's decrees on peace, the confiscation of the landlords' land, the expropriation of the capitalists and the liberation of the oppressed nationalities earned for it the confidence of millions of toilers throughout the world. This was a turn on an international scale, because, for the first time, the international front of capital was breached, the question of overthrowing capitalism was for the first time put on a practical footing. This transformed the October Revolution from a national, Russian force into an international force, and the Russian workers from a backward detachment of the international proletariat into its vanguard, which by its devoted struggle rouses the workers of the West and the oppressed countries of the East. This turn has not yet come to the end of its development, for it has not yet developed on an international scale, but its content and general direction are already sufficiently clear.

Two strategic plans were at issue in political circles in Russia at that time: the plan of the counter-revolutionaries, who had drawn into their organisations the active sections of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, and the plan of the Bolsheviks.

The counter-revolutionaries and active Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks planned along the line of uniting in one camp all

### THREE ARTICLES ON STRATEGY AND TACTICS

the discontented elements: the old army officers in the rear and at the front, the bourgeois-nationalist governments in the border regions, the capitalists and landlords who had been expropriated by the revolution, the agents of the Entente who were preparing for intervention, and so forth. They steered a course towards the overthrow of the Soviet Government by means of revolts or foreign intervention, and the restoration of the capitalist order in Russia.

The Bolsheviks, on the contrary, planned along the line of internally strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia and extending the sphere of operation of the proletarian revolution to all countries of the world by combining the efforts of the proletarians of Russia with the efforts of the proletarians of Europe and with the efforts of the oppressed nations of the East against world imperialism. Highly noteworthy is the exact and concise formulation of this strategic plan given by Comrade Lenin in his pamphlet *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, namely: "To do the utmost possible in one country (one's own —*J. St.*) for the development, support and awakening of the revolution in all countries." The value of this strategic plan lies not only in that it took into account correctly the driving forces of the world revolution, but also in that it foresaw and facilitated the subsequent process of transformation of Soviet Russia into the focus of attention of the revolutionary movement throughout the world, into the banner of liberation of the workers in the West and of the colonies in the East.

The subsequent development of the revolution all over the world, and also the five years' existence of Soviet power in Russia, have fully confirmed the correctness of this strategic plan. The fact that the counterrevolutionaries, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, who made several attempts to overthrow the Soviet Government, are now emigres, while the Soviet Government and the international proletarian organisation are becoming the major instruments of the policy of the world proletariat, and other facts of this kind, are obvious testimony in favour of the Bolsheviks' strategic plan.