

V. I. Lenin

Speech To Propagandists On Their Way To The Provinces

January 23 (February 5), 1918

Newspaper Report

Delivered: 23 January, 1918

First Published: 6 February, 1918, *Pravda* No. 18/ Published according to the text in *Pravda*.

Source: Lenin's *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, Volume 26, 1972, pp. 512-516

Translated: Yuri Sdobnikov and George Hanna, Edited by George Hanna

Transcription & HTML Markup: Charles Farrell and David Walters

Online Version: [Lenin Internet Archive](https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/jan/23.htm) November, 2000

Comrades, you all know that Soviet power has been recognised by the majority of the workers, soldiers and peasants of the Russian nation and of other nations which in the old days were part of Russia by compulsion and are now parts of the free Russian Republic. We now have before us a short struggle against the pathetic remnants of Kaledin's counter-revolutionary troops, who, it seems, has to save himself from the revolutionary Cossacks in his home Don area.

Now that the last bastion of the counter-revolution is about to collapse it is safe to say that Soviet power is growing stronger and it will be consolidated. Everyone can understand this, for there is compelling proof that only this power—the workers, soldiers and peasants in their Soviets— can lead Russia to a free working people's community.

We are confronted with two powerful enemies, the first of which is international

capital. There it stands raging at the consolidation of Soviet power it hates. There is no doubt that these multi-millionaires must wage war over an extra piece of the pie grabbed from someone else. There is no doubt either that they are as yet stronger than the Soviet Republic.

But it turns out that although the capitalists are stronger than we are, they have already been sending their men to our Commissars, and might even recognise Soviet power and, what is more, our repudiation of the loans, which for these tightwads would really be a most painful and terrible blow. The fact that the agents of the international financial oligarchy have broached the subject shows that the capitalists of the world have reached an impasse. They would love to extricate themselves from the war and throw their full force against the hated Soviet Republic, which has started a conflagration all over Europe and America, but they cannot.

Our revolution sprang from the war: but for the war, we would find the capitalists of the world banded and ranged against us. Their only worry is to prevent the sparks of our fire from falling on their roofs. But you can't throw up a Chinese Wall around Russia. We have yet to hear of a workers' organisation anywhere in the world that is not elated at our decrees on land, nationalisation of the banks, etc.

We may be faced with a stiff fight in the future, but you should never forget, comrades, that in most countries the workers, oppressed by their capitalists, are already awakening, and the Kaledinites of all countries, no matter how they rave, will never be able to consolidate their positions, even if they manage to get in a blow at Russia. Upon the other hand, our position is sound because we have the workers of all countries behind us. (Applause.)

Chaos is our other enemy. It has to be fought with greater vigour now that the position of the Soviets has become stronger. That struggle, comrades, is one you must promote. Great importance now attaches to your trip, the trip of propagandists from both government parties now at the head of Soviet power. I believe that in the backwoods you will derive a great deal of satisfaction from persistent efforts to build up Soviet power and spread revolutionary ideas in the villages, eliminate the chaos and liberate the toiling peasants from the village kulaks.

We are faced with some very hard work in healing the wounds of war-The bourgeoisie of other European countries had made better preparations than ours did. Over there they had a correct distribution of foodstuffs, which is why they

now have it easier; they also had a system of rotating the soldiers at the front. Nothing of the sort had been done by the tsarist regime or by the Kerensky government, which was a vacillating, conciliating bourgeois regime.

That is why Russia now finds herself in such dire straits. To lay the foundation of socialist society on the ruins she must solve the tasks of organisation and struggle against those who are war-weary and against the criminal elements who play up the chaos for their own benefit.

Comrades, you have before you some very difficult but, as I have said, satisfying work which boils down to getting the rural economy running and building up Soviet power. But you have assistants, for we know that every worker and peasant earning his own livelihood feels, deep down in his heart, that there is no salvation from famine and ruin but in Soviet power. We can save Russia. There is every indication that Russia has the grain, and it would have been available if we had taken stock of it in good time and distributed it fairly. Cast your mind's eye over the boundless expanses of Russia and her disrupted railways and you will realise that we need to tighten up the control and distribution of grain, if this famine is not to be the end of us all. This can be done only on one condition, which is that each worker, each peasant and each citizen must understand that he has no one to look to but himself. Comrades, no one is going to help you. All the bourgeoisie, the civil servants, the saboteurs are against you, for they know that if the people manage to share out among themselves this national wealth which had been in the hands of the capitalists and kulaks, they will rid Russia of the chaff and the drones. That is why they have mustered against the working people all their forces, ranging from Kaledin and Dutov to the saboteurs, the bribed vagrants and those who are simply weary and are habitually unable to put up any resistance because they are mesmerised by the exploiting bourgeoisie. One day they bribe ignorant soldiers to raid wine and spirit warehouses; the next day they get railway officials to hold up freights or shipowners to hold up grain barges, etc., on their way to the capital. But when the people come to realise that organisation alone will bring cohesion and the conscious discipline of equals, they need have no fear of any tricks on the part of the bourgeoisie.

That is the job you have, that is where you must work to unite, organise and establish Soviet power. Out there in the countryside, you will come across "bourgeois" peasants, the kulaks, who will try to upset Soviet power. It will be easy to fight them because the mass will be on your side. They will see that it is not punitive expeditions but propagandists that are sent from the centre to

bring light to the countryside, to unite those in every village who earn their own livelihood and have never lived at the expense of others.

Take the question of land: it has been declared public property and all types of private property are being abolished. This marks a great step towards the elimination of exploitation.

There will be a struggle between the rich and the working peasants, and it is not bookish help that the poor need but experience and actual participation in the struggle. We did not take away the land from the landowners to let the rich peasants and the kulaks get it. It is for the poor. This will win you the sympathies of the poor peasants.

You must see to it that farm implements and machines do not remain in the hands of the kulaks and rich peasants. They must belong to Soviet power and be temporarily allotted to the working peasants for their use, through the volost committees. They themselves must see to it that these machines are not used to enrich the kulaks but to cultivate their own land.

Every peasant will help you in this difficult task. You must explain to the people in the villages that the kulaks and sharks must be pulled up short. There is need for an even distribution of products so that the working people can enjoy the fruits of the people's labour. Ten working people must stand up against every rich man who stretches out his avaricious paw towards public property.

The Soviets have a revenue of 8,000 million and an expenditure of 28,000 million. With such a state of affairs we are naturally going to fail, unless we manage to pull the state chariot out of the bog into which the tsarist regime drove it.

The external war is over or nearly so. There is no doubt on that score. It is an internal war that is now before us. The bourgeoisie, its plundered goods hidden in its chests, is not worried and thinks: "We shall sit this out." The people must ferret out the sharks and make them disgorge. This is your task in the localities. If we are not to collapse, we must get at them in their hideouts. It is not the police who must make them disgorge—the police are dead and buried—the people themselves must do this, and there is no other way of fighting them.

One old Bolshevik gave a correct explanation of Bolshevism to a

Cossack.

The Cossack asked him: "Is it true that you Bolsheviks plunder?" "Yes, indeed," said the old man, "we plunder the plunder." [The reference is to the fact cited in a report to the Third Congress of Soviets on January 16 (29), 1918, by a participant in the Cossack Congress in Kamenskaya.]

We shall sink in this sea unless we manage to extract from those coffers all that is stored in them, all that has been amassed through plunder over the years of ruthless criminal exploitation.

We in the Central Executive Committee will soon adopt a law on a new tax on the property holders, but it is up to you to put this through in the localities and get the working people to lay their hands on all the hundred ruble notes tucked away since the war. But this should not be done by force of arms: the shooting war is over but this one is ahead of us.

Our revolution will not be overthrown by the force of the exploiters, if we go about this business efficiently, because the world proletariat is on our side.

Collected Works Volume 26
Collected Works Table of Contents
Lenin Works Archive