

The Spanish Revolution and the Russian Experience

Pjotr Arshinov

4 June 1931

Some comrades have asked me as a militant in the Russian social revolution to spell out my view of the recent happenings in Spain.

The Russian revolution, carried out by the Russian workers and peasants, is indeed an event of huge importance and with very far-ranging implications for the international proletariat. Failing to take the experience of the Russian revolutionary experience into account and to draw inspiration from it would, as far as the workers from countries ripe for revolution are concerned, be tantamount to running the risk of making a series of mistakes that might prove fatal for that revolution and the proletariat. Which is why, cognizant of my responsibility, I have taken up the invitation extended by my comrades.

The essential character of the Russian revolution resides in the fact that the working class operated as an autonomous force and, despite protracted propaganda from bourgeois and socialist ideologies tending to demonstrate that a bourgeois revolution was the only one that could be carried out in Russia and that the working class's role consisted of toppling the tsarist regime and establishing a self-styled democratic regime, after which the great toiling masses of workers and peasants shrugged off both tsarism and the bourgeoisie. The summons to social revolution issuing from the anarchists was also a help but not a decisive one.

The chief factor that spurred the proletariat into social revolution was the persistent and clear-cut revelation of the aggravation and exacerbation of the irreconcilable class antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Having brought down the tsarist government in 1917 thanks to assistance from the opposition bourgeoisie, the Russian workers and primarily the peasants and revolutionary proletariat embarked upon a titanic struggle against their main enemies: the agrarian and industrial capitalists who were strangling the labouring classes' freedom and labour force. The peasant class set about sharing out the holdings of the State and big landowners over the course of the first months of the revolution.

To no avail the provisional government had ordered the peasants to wait for the convening of the Constituent Assembly, which, second only to it, was endowed with the right to resolve the agrarian question; the socialist minister of that government, Avksentieff had vainly had the members of the agrarian committee arrested, which is to say, the peasants seizing the estates

from the big landlords. The peasants' elemental force had shattered the moulds of the old agrarian regime and conjured up a brand-new one. During the spring of 1917, meaning prior to the October revolution, the Russian peasants had effected a thoroughgoing agrarian revolution, rendering the social revolution of October 1917 feasible. During the very same period the peasants [misprint]

That was the revolutionary proletariat's first step in establishing itself as the master of production.

The next step was to mount a general attack on the machinery of the capitalist state, with an eye to securing control of industry for the working class. That attack came in October 1917. The characteristic trait of the Russian social revolution was the emergence of brand-new organs of proletarian struggle, the councils of worker factory delegates. Every factory, every workshop set up a workers' council representing and unifying all the workforce of the factories and companies, and performing the role of combat organ against the capitalist system.

The council members were chosen from among the members of the various political groups and bodies, affording the council a measure of universality. At all times, though, the councils had but one purpose: to liberate the working class from the capitalist yoke. Unified and backed by the entire working class in the country, the councils had to stand up to all the forces of the capitalist world.

The issue was plain: either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. Thereafter only one of those two forces could exist and there was no way of one's flanking the other.

Social revolution was latently and permanently on the agenda. With the entire working class of one mind and with help from the revolutionary peasants, the revolution was carried out brilliantly opening up wide horizons and broad new paths for the Russian and world proletariat.

A similar revolutionary process is now inevitable in every country. It is our belief that that course, that path will be followed and pursued in the carrying out of the worker and peasant revolution in Spain where, for many decades, the working class has been displaying its ardour through a series of revolutionary general strikes as well as manifesting and also demonstrating its determination to carve out a position of its own, an autonomous position within the revolutionary movement. So what is the next step facing the working class in Spain and its vanguard as it advances under the colours of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism! In our view, the Spanish proletariat must first conjure up a system of workers' factory councils. The system of councils of workers' delegates would equip the proletariat with the effective tool for rattling, and shaking off the capitalist world and for the construction of a brand-new proletarian world.

Let the bourgeois parties and bourgeois capitalists band together around Parliament and other institutions of the bourgeois state. The working class will stick to organizing around its revolutionary class combat organ and will shape its brand-new destinies with its own resources.

The leaders of the proletarian revolution have already highlighted the vital importance of the agrarian question in Spain and have issued the peasants with a watchword pointing to the short-term revolutionary solution to that question. In fact the peasants must be helped to come up with some new form of agrarian organization.

The latter cannot be anything other than peasant councils at village, hamlet and local levels. If the peasants cannot have their needs met, they cannot carry out their agricultural endeavours and right from the outset of the revolution, it will be in danger of being left high and dry due to the power of inertia, which will be exploited by the enemies of the working class and of the revolution.

Another pressing need is “a stepping-up of the organization of the country’s revolutionary might”.

Close contact and revolutionary collaboration are required between all the producers; organizations and the political organizations which embrace the notion of social revolution and align themselves with the proletariat.

In the absence of such contact, the proletarian revolution’s victory in a country is impossible. We know that certain groups and parties are active and stand ready to form the Revolutionary Labour Confederation, rather than fighting and struggling alongside it for the success of the Social Revolution. Let us cast those groups and parties aside.

Plainly they act that way out of ignorance; they have a childish political outlook and we have a duty to remind them that whilst the Russian social revolution’s victory was due to there having been, in the time of crisis, no internal strife but rather a united front of all working class revolutionary forces against the bourgeoisie. That united front was made up of anarchists, Bolsheviks, communists, maximalists and Left Social Revolutionaries. Elsewhere, the victory of the revolution is not going to be feasible unless there is a united front as in Russia. Indeed, in organizing themselves, the Spanish comrades should keep the sad experiences of anarchists in Russia and in Italy in the forefront of their minds, lest they make the same mistakes. The issue is, above all else, the orientation of the revolution.

In 1917 the Russian anarchists confined themselves to launching broad, vague slogans such as, say, “autonomous activity of the popular masses”, “an anarchist society on the day after the coup against the bourgeois state”.

Thirteen years on from the October revolution, it is obvious today that the anarchists erred cruelly, launching a program rooted in abstractions without troubling themselves about pointing out the ways, the concrete paths whereby the revolution can be developed. The Russian anarchists’ biggest mistake was their not having taken into account, shown no interest in and paid no special attention to the ferocious resistance that the bourgeoisie would put up against the proletariat’s victorious onslaught. Beating the bourgeoisie temporarily is not enough; the important point, above all, is that the victory stays in the hands of the working class. The defeated bourgeoisie does not give in, nor does it accept its fate and it mounts fresh attacks, resorting to every extreme means and procedure in the fight, including the material destruction of the proletariat’s fighting cadres, provocation, duplicity and deceit, bandying around pseudo-socialist watchwords. Native capitalism enjoys and also has the backing of all the capitalists from other countries and the victorious working class then finds itself as isolated as if it was in a stronghold.

Anyone who has observed and studied the history of the Russian revolution will agree with what we are saying.

In those circumstances, or rather, in anticipation of such circumstances, one cannot operate according to the anarchists’ traditional methods which are simply restricted to overthrowing the capitalist bastion and announcing the establishment of an anarchist society. Following that route or something of the same order, would be tantamount to leaving the capitalists a free hand and affording them the opportunity to hang around the necks of the workers, strangling the social revolution.

The example of Italy in 1920, where the anarchists made do with seizing the factories in the hope that the capitalists and bourgeoisie “might then “foreswear” their privileges, is an indication to us of how the anarchists; thinking regarding their power to resist were vacuous and delusional.

The old anarchist approach to the social revolution has failed the eloquent test of the facts.

Life has given that the lie and the Russian working class has not been able to accept it. It has sought out and opted instead for the line of organization, of the rule of the proletarian class over the bourgeoisie and it is well appreciated that the organization of said rule by the proletariat to salvage the interests of the revolution may assume different forms and that the Russian form is mandatory for every country. Relying upon such organization, the Russian working class has beaten off the bourgeoisie's attacks and ferocious onslaughts, stemmed every attempt at a bourgeois capitalist restoration; anarchists would do well never to forget that and steer their revolutionary struggles in that direction.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Pjotr Arshinov
The Spanish Revolution and the Russian Experience
4 June 1931

Retrieved on 29th May 2023 from steimerpress.noblogs.org
Published in *Solidaridad Obrera*, Thursday 4 June 1931, pp. 6–7.

theanarchistlibrary.org