
The Demonstration of October 8 and What It Teaches Us

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On October 8 [1919] the New York police thugs proved once more that there is only a difference in name between the “democratic” United States and Tsarist Russia — in reality they are alike.

As a preparative course to the period of “freedom with bullets,” Tsarist Russia used the *nagaika* (cossack’s whip). Here the same “educational-preparative” function is fulfilled by the policeman’s club. This was clearly illustrated on October 8.

About 3,000 workers, mostly members of Russian non-partisan organizations, with banners, upon which there were inscriptions suitable to their purposes, went forth on the streets of New York on that day in order to demonstrate their wish to return to their native land. The wish is a “lawful” one, even from the point of view of the authorities. This demonstration therefore had not the character of a revolutionary outburst, it was an entirely peaceful demonstration. So peaceful that one of the newspapers which announced it — *The Worker and Peasant*, we believe — invited those who sympathize to come to the demonstration even with their families. And many, out of their innocence, accepted this invitation and came to this demonstration as to a holiday promenade, with their children in their arms.

But this peaceful demonstration, which reminded one of a holiday promenade, did not interfere with the work of the New York police. The police unmercifully beat people with their clubs and rode their horses over them — women and children as well as men. Among the wounded a great percentage is made up of women and children — another proof of the peaceful character of the demonstration. Even the arch-reactionary *Herald* notes about this attack: “During more than an hour Washington Square and the sur-

rounding streets were nothing more than scenes from pogroms in Russia.”

This cruel slaughter on the part of armed servants of the capitalist system, of a non-partisan, peaceful, and unprotected workers’ procession demand that we make an analysis of the political lessons of this demonstration.

As we have already stated above, mostly non-partisan organization participated in the demonstration, organizations which did not understand the true character of the demonstration initiated by them, and the inevitable end. The participant organizations only wanted the lifting of the blockade from Russia, and the opening of Russian ports. They thought that on the basis of — to their point of view — non-partisan economic demands the entire Russian colony, without regard to their political program and beliefs, could unite. They did not wish to or could not relate this demand to the general proletarian struggle against the capitalist system; they did not wish, as their representatives said, “to wait” (as if to wait or not to wait depended on them) for the overthrow of capitalism,” or at least a partial victory over capitalism.

“Until the sun rises the dew will eat the eyes away,” they said... They wanted force the world imperialists to stop being imperialists for a moment and to open the ports.

Their illusion of non-partisanship was badly shattered. The order of the day set by the capitalist authorities was the police club, behind which was the entire capitalist government with its police, army, courts, bureaucrats, and other “apparatus of class dominance.” It was very clearly proved to them that the “one who says A must say B,” that one who goes out to fight for the lifting of the blockade from Soviet

Russia must inevitably be drawn into the conflict against the entire existing economic and social-political system — against capitalism and the capitalist state.

And in order that this conflict succeeds, it must be waged in an organized and planned manner — not by scattered, non-partisan organizations not bound with one another, but by an enlightened vanguard — a revolutionary political party of the working class; not by an organization formed only for a temporary aim, but an organization which is an expression of the final end and ideals of the working class, a responsible organization which wages a determined and systematic fight for the realization of the ideals and aims — in short, the Communist Party.

Let us take the question of demonstrations. (This question, let us note in parentheses, was given a great deal of attention in the pages of the illegal revolutionary-socialist press). For an organization of the irresponsible, temporary character [as] that of October 8, the question of demonstrations is “a minor question” — “they went and demonstrated.” And what will happen later? Later “they should worry.”

The Communist Party acts differently. It weighs the meaning of one or another method and tactical step, one or the other line of attack in relation to the general strategic plan of the fight. In terms of the success of its final aims, it reasons the specific value of one or another methods, all its possible good and bad results, and only then decides the question of the nature of a demonstration — how, when, and where to organize it.

And if this revolutionary party — responsible for its work — should decide to organize such a demonstration, it would not organize it in such a manner as the priest Gapon organized the demonstration of January 9, 1905, in Petrograd; it would have invited grown-up, enlightened fighters, who know what they are up to and what they are to expect, prepared and consciously able to stand the responsibility and the results of it.

And before calling workers to an open demonstration the Communist Party would weigh its own strength and preparedness. It would consider whether it is able to carry out its demonstration with the honor

due to a revolutionary organization in the face of an inevitable armed attack on the part of the capitalist enemy. And if the answer to this last question would be in the negative — “no, we are not yet prepared” — then it would rather refuse to demonstrate at that moment, to delay it, justly knowing that the temporary refusal to demonstrate is better than a disorderly procession of several thousand people, lacking any elements of heroism, scattering aimlessly in the face of several scores or even hundreds of police. It would have understood that in the general “economy of the struggle” such an escapade only tends toward demoralization and disorganization. And it would not allow itself to be led away by hysterical outcries of those for whom the “beauty of the gesture” (a doubtful beauty — we are not of the Tolstoy-peasant point of view) is more important than the problems and the success of the struggle..

Such are the lessons taught by the demonstration of October 8th.

Lesson one says: The fight for the lifting of the blockade from Russia is inseparably connected with our general struggle for the victory and the accomplishment of communist (Bolshevik) ideals, for the victory and accomplishment of the ideals of the proletarian-soviet state, for the dictatorship of the proletariat — in Russia and in the entire world.

Lesson two says: A demonstration is a good means of proletarian struggle if it is well prepared and well organized, and if in this preparation there is the possibility (and at times the necessity) of turning it into a higher, wider, and more responsible form of the conflict. If such a preparation is not possible, it is better to substitute a more “mild” protest — meetings, manifestos, etc.

We are certain that the participants in the demonstration of October 8th will learn these bitter lessons of their failure, and as did the Petrograd workers after the demonstration of January 9th, 1905, will understand that the only banners under which the revolutionary proletariat should march to battle against the dark capitalist powers are the red banners of the Communist Party and the Communist International.

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