

the elected peasant committees. While the government and moderates tried to delay resolution of the land question until the convening of the Constituent Assembly, peasants simply took matters into their own hands and created their own economic and political system, a rough, localized democracy, in the vast spaces outside of the cities.

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A congress of peasants of the Vil'na guberniia and part of Novoaleksandrovsk uezd, administratively joined to it, was called by the guberniia commissar in the city of Disna, Vil'na guberniia, on June 4. Approximately 400 delegates, peacefully disposed peasants, assembled. Speakers of the most extreme left-wing parties (Socialist Revolutionaries) spoke at the congress. And they stirred up the entire assembly [by the following appeals]: All land is yours, and now you can, in accordance with the resolutions of the *volost'* committees, take everything you need—fields, meadows, forests, lakes, pastures, and so forth. And in order to legalize all this and not regard it as seizure, you must pay, not to the owner but to the *volost'* committees, at least a minimum price per *desiatina*. They advised that all foresters be replaced by their own men in privately owned and government forests. The fixed price for milling the grain is most insignificant, and the millers, unwilling to suffer further losses, refuse to mill at this price. The mills are consequently to be taken over by the *volost'* committees and placed at their disposal. All waterways, lakes, and rivers are to be placed at once at the disposal of *volost'* committees, which are preparing to seize them and draw up new agreements, discontinuing old tenants. Private owners are given only up to July 10 to gather in the hay necessary for their own needs. And the owners are to gather in the hay themselves and not with the aid of hired hands. In a word, private owners and tenants are, in accordance with the resolutions of this congress, completely denied the management of their lands. Everything passes into the hands of *volost'* and village committees. Persons are elected to the *volost'*, not on the basis of fitness for their posts, but because they promise the peasants to confiscate at once the privately owned lands and turn them over to the peasants. Private owners have a right only to the land they can cultivate themselves. Prior to this resolution of the congress I was able, although with difficulty, to restrain the peasants in the Novoaleksandrovsk uezd, entrusted to me, from extensive seizures, damages to fields caused by cattle, felling of trees, etc. At present, however, I am powerless [to do anything]. Because, after their return from the congress, the peasant deputies, discussing the speeches they have heard, pay no attention to my reasonings; they say that they have heard something entirely different at the congress. Two days after the congress I received the following telegram: "I request you to take personally and through the *volost'* executive committees the strictest measures to prevent seizures, damages to and destruction of meadows and fields, regardless of whom they may belong to. No. 10129. Vil'na-Kovno Guberniia Commissar, Balai." I was confused by this telegram. At the congress in the city of Disna, Mr. Balai and other speakers were saying something entirely different. And on the heels of [those speeches] they authorize me to restrain the population from seizures. I was the more confused because at the congress the role of the uezd commissars and uezd executive committees was reduced to zero. Not once was it suggested that [the people] refer to the uezd commissar for any explanations. And all resolutions of the *volost'* committees were passed with no participation whatsoever of the uezd commissar. Consequently, on re-

ceipt of the above-mentioned telegram, I made the following telegraphic inquiry: "To the Vil'na Guberniia Commissar. Disna. In compliance with the protocol of the peasant congress in Disna on June 4, the *volost'* and village committees remove the owners, take charge of privately owned meadows, forests, pastures, etc., as if they were their own property. They hire laborers, issue permits to individuals, as well as to troop units and organizations for grazing of cattle in meadows, on fields of mowed clover, and other places. Notify me how to act. Novoaleksandrovsk Uezd Commissar Montvil'." This telegram was prompted by the fact that members of the village committee of Ozhovsk *volost'*, on their return from Disna, came to the landowner of the estate of Mekian, Mr. Bortkevich, and announced that they had rented the mowed clover to the army to graze the horses. One hundred horses were sent out to graze and only after strenuous efforts in the headquarters of the regiment did Mr. Bortkevich succeed in having the horses removed. Moreover, they came to the estate, told the workers to leave, and those who wished to remain had to be paid by the *pomeshchik* [landlord] at the rate of not less than 5 rubles a day. Several such complaints about the actions of *volost'* and village committees come to me daily. And I am powerless to restrain [the offenders] since they refer to the resolutions of the congress and the addresses of the speakers in Disna. The role of the elected uezd commissars is extremely difficult. At the *volost'* meetings, in answer to my efforts to restrain the peasants from seizures and my explanations of the evil [consequences] of such [acts], they shout: "We elected you, and if you won't go with us, we will throw you out." Moreover, each *volost'* committee, in passing any kind of resolution, does not submit it for approval by the uezd commissar. And the resolutions are immediately carried out. I request the Ministry to make public as soon as possible the rights and obligations of the *volost'* executive committees; [I further request] that no resolution of the *volost'* committee be made effective without the approval of the uezd commissar or uezd committee. All money for confiscated lands go for safekeeping to the *volost'* committees, so that the private owners are even unable to pay for the labor of their workers. Army units are forced to pay the *volost'* committees for the [use of] pastures of private owners. According to them, the money will be held in safekeeping by the committee, pending the decision of the Constituent Assembly.

Montvil', Novoaleksandrovsk Uezd Commissar

M. Martynov, "Agrarnoe dvizhenie v 1917 godu po dokumentam Glavnogo Zemel'nogo Komiteta," *Krasnyi arkhiv*, XIV (1926), pp. 225–226; translated and reprinted in *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: Documents*, selected and edited by Robert Paul Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky, vol. II (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 587–588.

== V. I. Lenin, "Letter to Central Committee Members" ==

October 24, (November 6), 1917

Though Lenin's place in the history of the revolution has often been exaggerated, as if he alone were responsible for the radicalization of workers, soldiers, and peasants, one of the moments when his personal intervention was particularly important occurred in the weeks before the October insurrection, when he urged his followers to seize power. By early September, the Bolsheviks had majorities in both the Petrograd and Moscow soviets and, along with their allies, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, were likely to dominate the forthcoming Second All-

Russian Congress of Soviets due to open in late October. With workers and soldiers evidently moving increasingly toward support of Soviet power and voting for the Bolsheviks, many Bolsheviks believed that an armed seizure of power was unnecessary. Among Lenin's chief lieutenants, Lev Trotsky advocated waiting for the opening of the Congress, which would confer legitimacy on a new Soviet government. When the party's Central Committee voted to launch an insurrection (October 10), Lev Kamenev and Grigori Zinoviev went further and revealed the Bolshevik intentions to the press. Lenin was outraged and called for their expulsion from the party. Fearing that Kerenskii would act first and carry out his own action against the Bolsheviks, Lenin pressed ever harder for decisive action. On the very eve of the insurrection, as the delegates to the Congress of Soviets gathered in the capital, Lenin wrote this frantic letter to the Central Committee.

Comrades,

I am writing these lines on the evening of the 24th. The situation is critical in the extreme. In fact it is now absolutely clear that to delay the uprising would be fatal.

With all my might I urge comrades to realize that everything now hangs by a thread; that we are confronted by problems which are not to be solved by conferences or congresses (even congresses of soviets), but exclusively by peoples, by the masses, by the struggle of the armed people.

The bourgeois onslaught of the Kornilovites and the removal of Verkhovskiy show that we must not wait. We must at all costs, this very evening, this very night, arrest the government, having first disarmed the officer cadets (defeating them, if they resist), and so on.¹

We must not wait! We may lose everything!

The value of the immediate seizure of power will be the defense of the people (not of the congress, but of the people, the army and the peasants in the first place) from the Kornilovite government, which has driven out Verkhovskiy and has hatched a second Kornilov plot.

Who must take power?

That is not important at present. Let the Military-Revolutionary Committee do it, or "some other institution" which will declare that it will relinquish power only to the true representatives of the interests of the people, the interests of the army (the immediate proposal of peace), the interests of the peasants (the land to be taken immediately and private property abolished), the interests of the starving.²

All districts, all regiments, all forces must be mobilized at once and must immediately send their delegations to the Military-Revolutionary Committee and to the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks with the insistent demand that under no cir-

1. Kornilovites refers to those who supported the military mutiny and march on Petrograd of the authoritarian General Lavr Kornilov in August 1917. General Aleksandr Verkhovskii was the Minister of War in Kerenskii's so-called "Directory," a short-lived government from September 1 to 25, and in his Third, and last, Coalition. On October 20, Verkhovskii stated that the army was not capable of fighting the Germans. Two days later, he took a leave of absence after being publicly accused of advocating a separate peace with the Germans.

2. The Military-Revolutionary Committee was formed by the Petrograd soviet to defend the city, but in the second half of October it effectively took over the Petrograd garrison and held de facto power in the city. Headed by Lev Trotsky, then chairman of the Petrograd soviet, the Committee was the general headquarters of the military effort to overthrow the Provisional Government.

cumstances should power be left in the hands of Kerensky and Co. until the 25th—not under any circumstances; the matter must be decided without fail this very evening, or this very night.

History will not forgive revolutionaries for procrastinating when they could be victorious today (and they certainly *will* be victorious today), while they risk losing much tomorrow, in fact, they risk losing everything.

If we seize power today, we seize it not in opposition to the soviets but on their behalf.

The seizure of power is the business of the uprising; its political purpose will become clear after the seizure.

It would be a disaster, or a sheer formality, to await the wavering vote of October 25. The people have the right and are in duty bound to decide such questions not by a vote, but by force; in critical moments of revolution, the people have the right and are in duty bound to give directions to their representatives, even their best representatives, and not to wait for them.

This is proved by the history of all revolutions; and it would be an infinite crime on the part of the revolutionaries were they to let the chance slip, knowing that the *salvation of the revolution*, the offer of peace, the salvation of Petrograd, salvation from famine, the transfer of the land to the peasants depend upon them.

The government is tottering. It must be *given the deathblow* at all costs.

To delay action is fatal.

This letter was first published in 1921. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, XXVI (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), pp. 234–235.