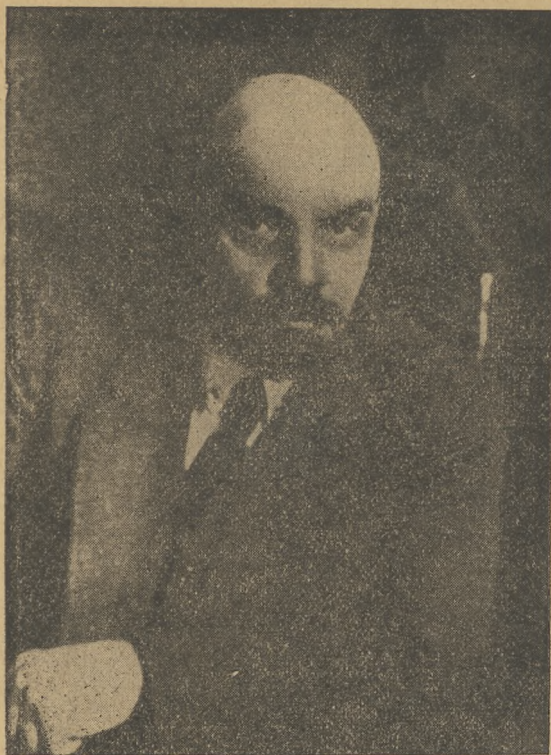


II 127.754



N. LENIN

about the
co-operative societies.



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Allgemeiner Genossenschafts-Verlag G. m. b. H.
Berlin W57

3088



PUBLISHED
BY
THE EXHIBITION COMMITTEE OF THE RUSSIAN
CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES.

1953 CD 317 / 11

I.

It appears to me that we pay all too little attention to the co-operative. Not all of all realise that now, since the October revolution and not at all impaired by the new economic policy (on the contrary, we must say—just because of the new economic policy), co-operation has attained dominating importance among us. There is much phantasy in the day-dreams of the old co-operators. They are often a ridiculously phantastic folk. To what is their phantastic nature due? To the circumstance that these people do not understand the fundamental importance of the political fight of the working-class for the overthrow of the exploiters' rule. For us this overthrow has taken place and now much of what was phantastic or even impossibly romantic in the dreams of the old co-operators has become the most naked reality.

Among us, where the state power is in the hands of the working-class, and where all the means of production belong to this state power, the only problem which remained was the actual co-operative amalgamation of the population. Under the premise of the maximal co-operative organisation of the population this socialism has as a matter of course attained its goals, which formerly were regarded with a justifiable smile of indulgence by those who were — rightly enough — convinced of the necessity of the class struggle and of the fight for political power. And now all our comrades do not give themselves account of the illimitable importance which the co-operative organisation of Russia assumed for us. In the new economic policy we made concessions to the peasant, the merchant, and the principle of private trade; precisely out of that there arises (contrary to the usual opinion) the tremendous importance of co-operation. At bottom all that we require is to organise the Russian population co-operatively in sufficient degree during the period of the new economic policy, for we have now reached such a degree of union of private interest, private trading interests, and their inspection and control by the state and their subordination to the common weal a union which formerly was the stumbling-block for so many Socialists. Is then in reality the control by the state of all the more important means of production, the state power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with millions of small peasants, the assured leadership of the peasantry by the proletariat, etc., is this not all that is necessary to attain the building of the Socialist society from co-operation, from co-operation alone, which we formerly considered pedantry and which we

in certain respects may treat as such now under the new economic policy as well? That is not yet the building of the Socialist society but is all that is necessary for the building of this society.

Precisely this circumstance has been underestimated by many of our practical officials. Co-operation receives negligent treatment at our hands. We do not realise of what extraordinary importance co-operation is; firstly, as a principle (the means of production as state property); and secondly, with regard to the transition to a new order **in the simplest, easiest, an (for the peasants) most attainable manner.**

And that is the kernel of the matter. It is one thing to romance over the building up of Socialism in all sorts of workers' societies and it another to learn how this Socialism should be practically so developed that each small peasant can take part in this development. We have already reached this stage. It is beyond doubt that now, after having reached it, we are making all too little use of it.

We acted too hastily when we went over to the new economic policy, not in the sense that we allowed the principle of private industry and of free trade too much elbow-room, but that we forgot to think of co-operation, that we now underestimate co-operation, and that are beginning to forget the overwhelming importance of co-operation in connection with the above mentioned two sides of this question.

I now want to discuss with the reader what now can and must be practically done when one starts out from this „co-operative“ principle. With what means can and must we set to work to develop this „co-operative“ principle so that its Socialist importance becomes apparent to everybody?

Politically, the question of co-operation must be so put that co-operation in general everywhere receive a certain relief, and furthermore that this relief be a purely financial one. (The bank interest rate, etc.) Co-operation must be lent state funds to an amount that exceeds, when only by little, the funds lent to private enterprises or even heavy industry, etc.

Each system of society arises through the financial support of a certain class. It is superfluous to call to mind the hundreds upon hundreds of millions of roubles which the birth of „free“ capitalism cost. We must now realise that and in practice keep in mind that the system of society which we must support above the average is a co-operative system. But we must support it in the real sense of the word, i. e., it does not suffice to understand by this the support of all co-operative intercourse. As this support we must understand the support of co-operative intercourse **in which real masses participate.** Granting a premium to the peasant who takes part in co-operative intercourse is doubtless correct. But this participation must be tested for its consciousness and its quality — and that is the heart of the question. When the co-operator comes to a village and there opens a co-operative store, the inhabitants, rigidly speaking, take no part therein. But impelled by their own profit, they will however hasten to participate in the venture.

The matter has thus another aspect as well. From the standpoint of the „civilised“ (above all the literate) European, we need but very little to move everyone to participation in the co-operatives, and not only

passive but also active participation. In fact, we "only" need to make our population so „civilised“ that it realises all the advantages of personal participation in the co-operatives and consummates this participation. „Only“ so much. We need no other sophistry now in order to make the transition to Socialism. But in order to realise this "only" a complete change, an entire stage in the cultural development of the whole mass of the people is necessary. Our rule must therefore be: as little philosophising as possible, as little foolery as possible. The new economic policy is in this connection insofar a step forward as it is adapted to the level of the average peasant and does not demand from him anything higher. An entire historical epoch is necessary to move the entire population, each and everyone, through the new economical policy to participation in the co-operatives. We can cover this epoch in one or two decades. But nonetheless it will be a special historical epoch, and without this historical epoch, without having everyone able to read and write, without a certain circumspection, without educating the population to a certain degree to the use of books, and without having created the necessary material fundaments, without a certain security against, let us say, crop failure and famine — without all this we cannot attain our goal. Everything now depends upon our ability to supplement the revolutionary élan and enthusiasm we have often enough displayed with — I would like to say — with the ability of judicious and experienced dealers, which is fully sufficient for a good co-operator. This should be taken to heart by those Russians or simple peasants who think that when they once do some trading, they have proven their ability as merchants. That is entirely wrong. They are doing business but that is very far indeed from being able to say that they are cultured merchants. They are now trading in an Asiatic manner; they must know how to trade as Europeans. They are still an entire epoch from the latter goal.

I conclude — a number of economic, financial and banking privileges for the co-operatives, that must represent the support of the new principle of organisation by our Socialist state. But the problem is thus only roughly sketched out, for the whole content of this problem has not been described here in detail; i. e., we must find the form of "premium" (and the conditions of its grant) with which we can satisfactorily assist the co-operatives, the form of premium offer which will aid us to educate civilised co-operative members. And the order of civilised co-operators in connection with the common ownership of the means of production based upon the class victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie — is the order of Socialism.

II.

As long as I wrote upon the new economic policy I continually referred to my article on state capitalism written in 1919. This has not infrequently given rise to doubt among some of our younger comrades, but their doubts were primarily of an abstract, political nature.

They thought that a system in which the means of production and the state power belong to the working class cannot be called a state capitalistic system. They do not notice that I employed the term "state capitalism" firstly in order to establish the historical connection of our present position with that in my polemic against the so-called "Left"

Communists. At that time I already pointed out that state capitalism would be a higher stage than our present economic system. It was important for me to point out the hereditary link between usual state capitalism and the unusual, very unusual state capitalism of which I spoke as I introduced the reader to the new economic policy. Secondly, for me the practical goal was always important. And the practical goal of our new economic policy was — the obtaining of concessions. Under our conditions however these concessions would represent the pure type of state capitalism. That was the basis of my comment on state capitalism.

But there is still another field in which we can employ state capitalism or at least something analogous thereto. That is the problem of co-operation.

No doubt co-operation is in the capitalistic state a collective capitalistic institution. It is also beyond the shadow of a doubt that under the conditions of our present economic reality, where we have private capitalistic enterprises — but only upon publicly owned land and only under the control of the state power, which belongs to the working class — side by side with enterprises of consistently Socialist nature (in which the means of production as well as the land upon which the enterprise stands and for that matter the enterprise itself belong to the state), that here the question of a third form of enterprise arises, which in the past was of no independent importance, the question of the co-operative enterprise. Under private capitalism, the co-operative enterprises differed from the capitalistic enterprises in that they were collective undertakings. Under state capitalism, the difference between co-operative and state capitalistic enterprises is that they are firstly private enterprises and in the second place collective. In our present system, as collective enterprises, the co-operative differ from the private capitalistic enterprises, but there is no difference between them and Socialist enterprises when they stand on the basis of state ownership, i. e., the ownership of the working class, of the land and of the means of production.

We do not attach sufficient importance to this circumstance, when we speak of co-operation. We forget that, due to the peculiarity of our state system, co-operation has for us absolutely dominating importance. Aside from the concessions, which, in passing, attained no especially widespread development, co-operation coincided under our conditions with Socialism.

I will explain that. What is phantastic in the plans of the old co-operators, beginning with Robert Owen? The fact that they dreamt of a peaceable transformation of present society into a Socialist one, without considering such fundamental problems as the class struggle, the conquest of political power by the working class, and the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class. And we were therefore justified when we found this „co-operative“ Socialism to be nothing but an insipid, romantic phantasy, day-dreams upon how the class enemy could be transformed into the class collaborator, and the class war into class peace (the so-called civil peace) by means of a simple co-operative organisation of the population.

There is no doubt that from the point of view of the basic problem of the present day we were right, for without the class struggle and the political power in the state Socialism can not be realised.

But let us now consider how the question has changed since the power of the state is already in the hands of the working class, since the political

power of the exploiters has been overthrown, and all the means of production (with the exception of those which the workers' state voluntarily and conditionally leaves in the hands of the exploiters under concession) belong to the working class.

We now are justified in saying that for us co-operation is (with the abovementioned "little" exception) synonymous with the growth of Socialism. At the same time we must admit a fundamental change in our entire standpoint with respect to Socialism. This fundamental change is that we formerly laid — and had to lay — chief emphasis upon the political struggle, the revolution, the seizure of power, whereas the primary emphasis must now be placed upon peaceful, organisational. "cultural" work. I should like to say that the center of gravity has moved to the cultural work for us, aside international relations, where chief emphasis lies upon the duty of defending our positions on an international scale. But aside from that, when we limit ourselves to domestic economic affairs, the center of gravity of our work lies in cultural activity.

Two great, epochmaking tasks stand before us. Firstly, the reorganisation of our apparatus, which is worth almost nothing, and which we took over in toto from the previous epoch. During the five years of struggle we did not succeed and could not succeed in obtaining tangible results in this field. Our second task is our cultural work among the peasantry. And this cultural work among the peasants as an economic goal will be taken care of by the co-operatives. Under the conditions of complete co-operative organisation we would already stand with both feet upon Socialist ground. But these conditions of complete co-operative organisation presuppose such a cultural level of the peasantry (especially the peasantry as a huge mass) that complete co-operation is impossible with a cultural revolution.

Our opponents have often told us that we have thoughtlessly undertaken the job of realising Socialism in a country with deficient culture. They make a mistake however when they think they can justly blame us for not having begun the work from the point of attack demanded by theory (various pedants). For us the political and social revolution was only the forerunner of the cultural upheaval, the revolution on the threshold of which we nonetheless now stand.

This cultural revolution will suffice us, in order to become a completely Socialist country. But this cultural revolution demands extraordinary efforts of a cultural (fight against illiteracy) as well as material nature, because a certain development of the material means of production, a certain material basis is necessary for our transformation into a cultural country.

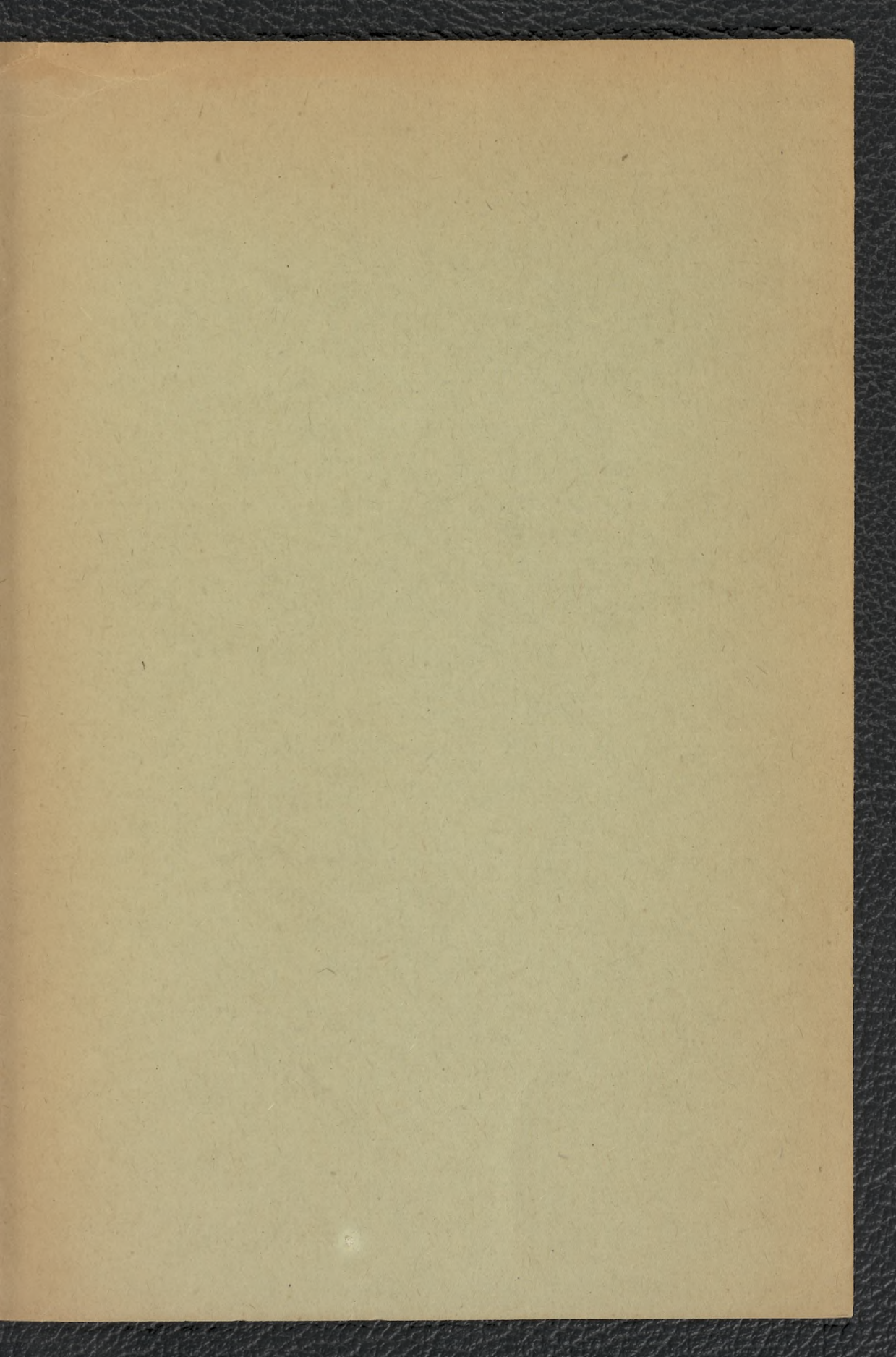


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Druck und Verlag
Allgemeiner Genossenschafts-Verlag,
Berlin W 57



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