

The Crisis of Power

Alexander Schapiro

September 1917

The last scenes of the first act of the crisis of power are playing themselves out at a feverish pace. And there is only one possible outcome: the removal of the *bourgeoisie* from any interference in the affairs of the working class. This is now the principal condition for achieving fundamental social changes in the life of the country, the more so as the *bourgeoisie* is marching openly and defiantly hand in hand with the Kornilovs and other conspirators against the revolution.

But we must not close our eyes to the approaching second act, when Russia must decide whether to introduce a socialist government, as demanded by the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies. If this should happen, the *form* of power would doubtless be different, but the root of the evil, the *essence*, would stay the same. For as long as power exists, a small circle of men will have in their hands the right to decide the fate of the whole people; and even if these rulers are socialists of the most decent and honourable sort, a clash between them and the people is unavoidable, and their relations after each conflict will grow more and more intense and antagonistic. The new authority will use as much force as the present authority against its enemies, and the struggle for socialism, the struggle for the rights of man, the struggle for liberty, equality and fraternity, will be as ferocious as it has been until now.

Anticipating this new crisis of socialist power, we come to the conclusion that there is only one way out: the removal of all governmental interference in the affairs of the toiling masses. There must first occur a fundamental decentralization of power to the point of its final disappearance as a factor in the life of the Russian people. The people must not allow themselves to be muzzled again – not even with the muzzle of socialist production – so that they will have to fight once more for the elementary rights of free men.

The transfer of authority to the hands of a Central Executive Committee is not the answer to the crisis of power. It can only slow down the development of this crisis, not resolve it. The only way out of the present situation is to transfer administrative tasks to local organizations – in other words, complete decentralization and the broadest self-direction of local organizations. In this work the local soviets of workers' and peasants' deputies can and must play an important role in regulating the course of everyday life and guaranteeing the local population the widest development of freedom.

Only the spread of self-determination and local self-rule will definitively resolve the crisis of power.

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