

Vladimir Lenin, The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky (1918)

Bourgeois And Proletarian Democracy

If we are not to mock at common sense and history, it is obvious that we cannot speak of pure democracy” as long as different classes exist; we can only speak of class democracy. (Let us say in parenthesis that “pure democracy” is not only an ignorant phrase, revealing a lack of understanding both of the class struggle and of the nature of the state, but also a thrice-empty phrase, since in communist society democracy will wither away in the process of changing and becoming a habit, but will never e “pure” democracy.)

“Pure democracy” is the mendacious phrase of a liberal who wants to fool the workers. History knows of bourgeois democracy which takes the place of feudalism, and of proletarian democracy which takes the place of bourgeois democracy. [...]

Bourgeois democracy, although a great historical advance in comparison with medievalism, always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain, restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor. [...]

Take the fundamental laws of modern states, take their administration, take freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, or “equality of all citizens before the law,” and you will see at every turn evidence of the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy with which every honest and class-conscious worker is familiar. There is not a single state, however democratic, which has no loopholes or reservations in its constitution guaranteeing the bourgeoisie the possibility of dispatching troops against the workers, of proclaiming martial law, and so forth, in case of a “violation of public order,” and actually in case the exploited class “violates” its position of slavery and tries to behave in a non-slavish manner. [...]

Even in the most democratic bourgeois state the oppressed people at every step encounter the crying contradiction between the formal equality proclaimed by the “democracy” of the capitalists and the thousands of real limitations and subterfuges which turn the proletarians into wage-slaves. It is precisely this contradiction that is opening the eyes of the people to the rottenness, mendacity and hypocrisy of capitalism. It is this contradiction that the agitators and propagandists of socialism are constantly exposing to the people, in order to prepare them for revolution! [...]

Proletarian democracy, of which Soviet government is one of the forms, has brought a development and expansion of democracy unprecedented in the world, for the vast majority of the population, for the exploited and working people. [...]

The working people are barred from participation in bourgeois parliaments (they never decide important questions under bourgeois democracy, which are

decided by the stock exchange and the banks) by thousands of obstacles, and the workers know and feel, see and realise perfectly well that the bourgeois parliaments are institutions alien to them, instruments for the oppression of the workers by the bourgeoisie, institutions of a hostile class, of the exploiting minority. [...]

Proletarian democracy is a million times more democratic than any bourgeois democracy; Soviet power is a million times more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois republic.

To fail to see this one must either deliberately serve the bourgeoisie, or be politically as dead as a doornail, unable to see real life from behind the dusty pages of bourgeois books, be thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices, and thereby objectively convert oneself into a lackey of the bourgeoisie.

source:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/democracy.htm>