

Reading Guide

# **Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**

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## **1. In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution**

1. What is the main purpose of the first section?
2. Why does Lenin include the excerpt from Kautsky?

## **2. An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success**

3. What two reasons does Lenin give for the Bolsheviks' success (their retention of state power)?
4. What three answers does Lenin give to the question: How is the discipline of the revolutionary party maintained, tested, and reinforced?
5. At what point does revolutionary theory assume its final shape?

## **3. The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism**

6. In this section Lenin divides the 15 years of "practical history" the Bolsheviks went through that allowed them to succeed. What are they?

## **4. The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength and Become Steeled**

7. Why were the “Left” Bolsheviks expelled from the Party in 1908?
8. What about the 1906, 1907, and 1908 boycotts of the Duma (the national legislature)? Were these correct? Why or why not?
9. Other than social-chauvinism, what was the Bolshevik’s other enemy within the working-class movement?
10. What were the Bolsheviks’ three critiques of the Socialist-Revolutionaries?

## **5. Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions**

11. Where does Lenin say communists must absolutely work?
12. Could the proletariat develop without unions, and what role do they play in the development of class consciousness and a revolutionary movement?
13. What example of working in a reactionary union does Lenin give?

## **6. Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?**

14. What is the difference between parliament being obsolete in a propaganda (political) sense vs. the practical sense?
15. How did the Bolsheviks relate to the Constituent Assembly before and after the October Revolution?

## 7. No Compromises?

16. What are two kinds of compromises that Lenin distinguishes between?

17. Between 1903-1912, what compromise did the Bolsheviks make? How did they approach that compromise in practice? Let's review one quote at length:

*Since 1905 [the Bolsheviks] have systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the Socialist Revolutionaries, the bourgeois-revolutionary peasant party, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who have falsely described themselves as socialists. During the Duma elections of 1907, the Bolsheviks entered briefly into a formal political bloc with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Between 1903 and 1912, there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single Social-Democratic Party, but we never stopped our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence on the proletariat.*

18. During the October Revolution the Bolsheviks entered into another compromise. What was this, and how did they approach it in practice?

## 8. “Left-Wing” Communism in Great Britain

19. Lenin gives a shortened formula for what is required for a revolutionary crisis. What is it? What does this have to do with the point of the pamphlet?

## 9. Several Conclusions

20. Is propaganda alone enough to bring about a revolution? If not, what else is needed?

21. What makes for such a real revolutionary possibility?

22. What is “the fundamental law of all great revolutions?”

23. Lenin identifies “only one thing” the communist movement is lacking (at this time, the early 1920s) to make progress towards revolution. What is it?

24. What are the main 3 lessons you draw from this text as it relates to you?