

We are printing below three passages on the revolutionary situation. Section II of *The Collapse of the Second International* (1915) and excerpts from "Letter to Comrades" (1917) are both by V.I. Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Party and the Russian October Socialist Revolution. The third passage is excerpts from "The Political Report to the Fourth Plenary of the CWP Central Committee," by CWP General Secretary Jerry Tung.

In the first passage (contained in the collection *Against Revisionism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow), Lenin outlines some characteristics of the revolutionary situation in connection with the revisionist line of the Second International. At that time all the principal leaders of the working class abandoned revolution in favor of supporting their respective bourgeoisie in World War I. They justified this with sophistry, claiming that Marxism said revolution would follow in the heels of the war, and that, since revolution did not occur, one should not fight for it.

Lenin refuted this vulgarization of Marxism, pointing out that it made no such claim and only showed what the necessary objective conditions were for revolution to occur. After proving that these conditions were present, he further stated that, while they were necessary, they were not sufficient. These objective conditions must be accompanied by a change in the revolutionary class' subjective factor. Criticizing the Second International Revisionists for abandoning the revolutionary struggle, he said that the communist party must act resolutely and carry out its duty to bring about the change in the workers' subjective factor.

"Letter to Comrades" (contained in the collection *Between the Two Revolutions*, Progress Publishers, Moscow), written less than a week before the October Revolution, deepened Lenin's conception of the revolutionary situation and the nationwide

revolutionary crisis. "Letter to Comrades" states the facts of the Russian nationwide crisis, the facts of the class struggle and the alignment of all class forces, analyzes them squarely and, based on this, placed before the Russian communists the immediate task of seizing state power.

This letter is a polemic against Kamanev and Zinoviev, two leaders of the Bolshevik Party who, out of fear for the bourgeoisie and lack of confidence in the workers, spoke out against seizing power at the crucial moment. Fearing the difficulties of revolution and socialist construction, these renegades later denounced socialism and became traitors. The quote at the beginning of the passage is their argument against seizing power.

Of course, there is no nationwide crisis in U.S. yet. What is of value in this passage from "Letter to Comrades" — and in the excerpt from the Party's Political Report — is the characterization of the revolutionary situation and the nationwide crisis and the Party's tasks in relation to them.

Jerry Tung, in his Political Report (excerpts appear in *Workers Viewpoint* Sept. 2 & 9), analyzed all classes and various political forces in the U.S. Applying Lenin's sketch of a revolutionary situation to present conditions, he showed why we need a broad, and not a narrow, interpretation. He shows that there is a considerable increase in the masses' activity, and that the main problem of revolution at this time is not this, but that the "various activities cancel each other out because of a lack of unity and lack of strategic plans, orientation, and leadership..." The Political Report puts before the Party different aspects of developing the subjective factor.

The three passages together give us strategic orientation in the present situation and help to give us a sober assessment of the class struggle today.

Collapse of the Second International

But perhaps sincere socialists supported the Basle resolution in the anticipation that war would create a revolutionary situation, the events rebutting them, as revolution has proved impossible?

It is by means of sophistry like this that Cunow (in a pamphlet *Collapse of the Party?* and a series of articles) has tried to justify his desertion to the camp of the bourgeoisie. The writings of nearly all the other social-chauvinists, headed by Kautsky, hint at similar "arguments". Hopes for a revolution have proved illusory, and it is not the business of a Marxist to fight for illusions, Cunow argues. This Struvist, however, does not say a word about "illusions" that were shared by all signatories to the Basle Manifesto. Like a most upright man, he would put the blame on the extreme Leftists, such as Pannekoek and Radek!

Let us consider the substance of the argument that the authors of the Basle Manifesto sincerely expected the advent of a revolution, but were rebutted by the events. The Basle Manifesto says: (1) that war will create an economic and political crisis; (2) that the workers will regard their participation in war as a crime, and as criminal any "shooting each other down for the profit of the capitalists, for the sake of dynastic honour and of diplomatic secret treaties", and that war will evoke "indignation and revolt" in the workers; (3) that it is the duty of socialists to take advantage of this crisis and of the workers' temper so as to "rouse the people and hasten the downfall of capitalism"; (4) that all "governments" without exception can start a war only at "their own peril"; (5) that governments "are afraid of a proletarian revolution"; (6) that governments "should remember" the Paris Commune (i.e., civil war), the 1905 Revolution in Russia, etc. All these are perfectly clear ideas; they do not guarantee that revolution will take place, but lay stress on a precise characterisation of facts and trends. Whoever declares, with regard to these ideas and arguments, that the anticipated revolution has proved illusory, is displaying not a Marxist but a Struvist and police-renegade attitude towards revolution.

To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution. What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the "upper class," a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable"

to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above cause, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in "peace time," but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the "upper classes" themselves into independent historical action.

Without these objective changes, which are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible. The totality of all these objective changes is called a revolutionary situation. Such a situation existed in 1905 in Russia, and in all revolutionary periods in the West; it also existed in Germany in the sixties of the last century, and in Russia in 1859-61 and 1879-80, although no revolution occurred in these instances. Why was that? It was because it is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, "falls." if it is not toppled over.

Such are the Marxist views on revolution, views that have been developed many, many times, have been accepted as indisputable by all Marxists, and for us, Russians, were corroborated in a particularly striking fashion by the experience of 1905. What, then, did the Basle Manifesto assume in this respect in 1912, and what took place in 1914-15?

It is assumed that a revolutionary situation, which it briefly described as "an economic and political crisis," would arise. Has such a situation arisen? Undoubtedly, it has. The social-chauvinist Lensch, who defends chauvinism more candidly, publicly and honestly than the hypocrites Cunow, Kautsky, Plekhanov and Co. do, has gone so far as to say: "What we are passing through is a kind of revolution" (p. 6 of his pamphlet, *German Social-Democracy and the War*, Berlin, 1915). A political crisis exists; no government is sure of the morrow, not one is secure against the danger of financial collapse, loss of territory, expulsion from its country (in the way the Belgian Government was expelled). All governments are sleeping on a volcano; all are themselves calling for the masses to display initiative and heroism. The entire political regime of Europe has been shaken, and hardly anybody will deny that we have entered (and are entering ever deeper — I write this on the day of Italy's declaration of war) a period of immense political upheavals. When, two months after the declaration of war, Kautsky wrote (October 2, 1914, in *Die Neue Zeit*) that "never is

STUDY MARXISM

government so strong, never are parties so weak as at the outbreak of a war," this was a sample of the falsification of historical science which Kautsky has perpetrated to please the Sudekums and other opportunists. In the first place, never do governments stand in such need of agreement with all the parties of the ruling classes, or of the "peaceful" submission of the oppressed classes to the rule, as in the time of war. Secondly, even though "at the beginning of a war," and especially in a country that expects a speedy victory, the government seems all-powerful, nobody in the world has ever linked expectations of a revolutionary situation exclusively with the "beginning" of a war, and still less has anybody ever identified the "seeming" with the actual.

It was generally known, seen and admitted that a European war would be more severe than any war in the past. This is being borne out in ever greater measure by the experience of the war. The conflagration is spreading; the political foundations of Europe are being shaken more and more; the sufferings of the masses are appalling, the efforts of governments, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists to hush up these sufferings proving ever more futile. The war profits being obtained by certain groups of capitalists are monstrously high, and contradictions are growing extremely acute. The smouldering indignation of the masses, the vague yearning of society's downtrodden and ignorant strata for a kindly ("democratic") peace, the beginning of discontent among the "lower classes" — all these are facts. The longer the war drags on and the more acute it becomes, the more the governments themselves foster — and must foster — the activity of the masses, whom they call upon to make extraordinary effort and self-sacrifice. The experience of the war, like the experience of any crisis in history, of any great calamity and any sudden turn in human life, stuns and breaks some people, but enlightens and tempers others. Taken by and large, and considering the history of the world as a whole, the number and strength of the second kind of people have — with the exception of individual cases of the decline and fall of one state or another — proved greater than those of the former kind.

Far from "immediately" ending all these sufferings and all this enhancement of contradictions, the conclusion of peace will, in many respects, make those sufferings more keenly and immediately felt by the most backward masses of the population.

In a word, a revolutionary situation obtains in most of the advanced countries and the Great Powers of Europe. In this respect, the prediction of the Basle Manifesto has been fully confirmed. To deny this truth, directly or indirectly, or to ignore it, as Cunow, Plekhanov, Kautsky and Co. have done, means telling a big lie, deceiving the working class, and serving the bourgeoisie. In *Sotsial-Demokrat* (Nos. 34, 40 and 41) we cited facts which prove that those who fear revolution petty-bourgeois Christian parsons, the General Staffs and millionaires' newspapers — are compelled to admit that symptoms of a revolutionary situation exist in Europe.

Will this situation last long? How much more acute will it become? Will it lead to revolution? This is something we do not know, and nobody can know. The answer can be provided only by the experience gained during the development of revolutionary sentiment and the transition to revolutionary action by the advanced class, the proletariat. There can be no talk in this connection about "illusions" or their repudiation, since no socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today's revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow's) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists — that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organisations suited to the revolutionary situation.

No influential or responsible socialist has ever dared to feel doubt that this is the duty of the socialist parties. Without spreading or harbouring the least "illusions," the Basle Manifesto spoke specifically of this duty of the socialists — to rouse and to stir up the people (and not to lull them with chauvinism, as Plekhanov, Axelrod and Kautsky have done), to take advantage of the crisis so as to hasten the downfall of capitalism, and to be guided by the examples of the Commune and of October-December 1905. The present parties' failure to perform that duty meant treachery, political death, renunciation of their own role and desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie.

The Revolutionary Situation

Letter to Comrades

... "As everybody reports, the masses are not in a mood that would drive them into the streets. Among the signs justifying pessimism may be mentioned the greatly increasing circulation of the pogromist and Black-Hundred press."

When people allow themselves to be frightened by the bourgeoisie, all objects and phenomena naturally appear yellow to them. First, they substitute an impressionist, intellectualist criterion for the Marxist criterion of the movement; they *substitute* subjective impressions of moods for a political analysis of the development of the class struggle and of the course of events in the entire country against the entire international background. They "conveniently" forget, of course, that a firm party line, its unyielding resolve, is also a mood-creating factor, particularly at the sharpest revolutionary moments. It is sometimes very "convenient" for people to forget that the responsible leaders, by their vacillations and by their readiness to burn their yesterday's idols, cause the most unbecoming vacillations in the mood of certain strata of the masses.

Secondly — and this is at present the main thing — in speaking about the mood of the masses, the spineless people forget to add:

that "everybody" reports it as a tense and expectant mood;

that "everybody" agrees that, called upon by the Soviets for the defence of the Soviets, the workers will rise to a man;

that "everybody" agrees that the workers are greatly dissatisfied with the indecision of the centres concerning the "last decisive struggle," the inevitability of which they clearly recognise;

that "everybody" unanimously characterises the mood of the broadest masses as close to desperation and points to the anarchy developing therefrom;

that "everybody" also recognises that there is among the class-conscious workers a definite unwillingness to go out into the streets *only* for demonstrations, *only* for partial struggles, since a general and not a partial struggle is in the air, while the hopelessness of individual strikes, demonstrations and acts to influence the authorities has been seen and is fully realised.

And so forth.

If we approach this characterisation of the mass mood from the point of view of the entire development of the class and political struggle and of the entire course of events during the six months of our revolution, it will become clear to us how people frightened by the bourgeoisie are distorting the question. Things are not as they were before April 20-21, June 9, July 3, for then it was a matter of *spontaneous excitement* which we, as a party, either failed to comprehend (April 20) or held back and shaped in-

to a peaceful demonstration (June 9 and July 3), for we knew very well at that time that the Soviets were *not yet* ours, that the peasants *still* trusted the Lieberdan-Chernov and not the Bolshevik course (uprising), that consequently we could not have the majority of the people behind us, and that consequently the uprising would be premature.

At that time the majority of the class-conscious workers did *not* raise the question of the last decisive struggle at all; not one of all our Party units would have raised it at that time. As for the unenlightened and very broad masses, there was neither a concerted effort nor the resolve born out of despair; there was only a spontaneous *excitement* with the naive hope of "influencing" Kerensky and the bourgeoisie by "action," by a demonstration pure and simple.

What is needed for an uprising is not this, but, on the one hand, a conscious, firm and unswerving resolve on the part of the class-conscious elements to fight to the end; and on the other, a mood of despair among the broad masses who *feel* that nothing can now be saved by half-measures; that you cannot "influence" anybody; that the hungry will "smash everything, destroy everything, even anarchically," *if* the Bolsheviks are not able to lead them in a decisive battle.

The development of the revolution has in practice brought *both* the workers *and* the peasantry to precisely this combination of a tense mood resulting from experience among the class-conscious and a mood of hatred towards those using the lockout weapon and the capitalists that is close to despair among the broadest masses.

We can also understand the "success" on this very soil of the scoundrels of the reactionary press who imitate Bolshevism. The malicious glee of the reactionaries at the approach of a decisive battle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has been observed in all revolutions without exception; it has always been so, and it is absolutely unavoidable. And if you allow yourselves to be frightened by *this* circumstance, then you have to renounce not only the uprising but the proletarian revolution in general. For in a capitalist society this revolution *cannot* mature *without* being accompanied by malicious glee on the part of the reactionaries and by hopes that they would be able to feather their nest in this way.

The class-conscious workers know perfectly well that the Black Hundreds work hand in hand with the bourgeoisie, and that a decisive victory of the workers (in which the petty bourgeoisie do not believe, which the capitalists are afraid of, which the Black Hundreds sometimes wish for out of sheer malice, convinced as they are that the Bolsheviks cannot retain power) — that this victory will completely

crush the Black Hundreds, that the Bolsheviks *will be able* to retain power firmly and to the greatest advantage of all humanity tortured and tormented by the war.

Indeed, is there anybody in his senses who can doubt that the *Rodzyankos* and *Suvorins* are acting in concert, that the roles have been distributed among them?

Has it not been proved by facts that Kerensky acts on *Rodzyanko's* orders, while the State Printing Press of the Russian Republic (don't laugh!) prints the Black-Hundred speeches of reactionaries in the "Duma" at the expense of the state? Has not this fact been exposed *even* by the lackeys from *Dyelo Naroda*, who serve "their own mannikin?" Has not the experience of *all* elections proved that the Cadet lists were fully supported by *Novoye Vremya*, which is a venal paper controlled by the "interests" of the tsarist landowners?

Did we not read yesterday that commercial and industrial capitalists (non-partisan capitalists, of course; oh, non-partisan capitalists, to be sure, for the *Vikhlayevs* and *Rakitnikovs*, the *Gvozdyovs* and *Nikitins* are not in coalition with the Cadets — God forbid — but with *non-partisan* commercial and industrial circles!) have donated the goodly sum of 300,000 rubles to the Cadets?

The whole Black-Hundred press, if we look at things from a class and not a sentimental point of view, is a *branch* of the firm "Ryabushinsky, Milyukov, and Co.". Capitalists buy, on the one hand, the *Milyukovs*, *Zaslavskys*, *Potresovs*, and so on; on the other, the Black Hundreds.

The *victory of the proletariat* is the only means of putting an end to this most hideous poisoning of the people by the cheap Black-Hundred venom.

Is it any wonder that the crowd, tired out and made wretched by hunger and the prolongation of the war, clutches at the Black-Hundred poison? Can one imagine a capitalist society on the eve of collapse in which the oppressed masses are *not* desperate? Is there any doubt that the desperation of the masses, a large part of whom are still ignorant, *will* express itself in the increased consumption of all *sorts* of poison?

Those who, in arguing about the mood of the masses, blame the masses for their own personal spinelessness, are in a hopeless position. The masses are divided into those who are consciously biding their time and those who unconsciously are ready to sink into despair; but the masses of the oppressed and the hungry are *not* spineless. □

Political Report to the 4th Plenary of the CWP Central Committee

... The real question, the main question that we have to deal with in practice, is how to aid the development of a nationwide crisis, that is, how to develop the subjective factor: to raise the consciousness of the masses, to encourage and influence the spontaneous organization of the masses, and to extend the leading role of the Party, and of its strategy and tactics, to act as a lever on the existing spontaneous sentiments and organizations.

For this reason I disagree with any ... narrow interpretation of Lenin's third criterion in his definition of a revolution (see *The Collapse of the Second International* above-ed.) ...

... I disagree with the view that there is not now "considerable activity" of the masses. In terms of spontaneous actions, there has been a qualitative leap since Reagan's election ... We must draw the conclusion that we are already entering a period of "considerable increase" of mass activities. Moreover we cannot just evaluate the mass motion only in terms of the progressive activities, but also in terms of the motions gravitating towards the right ...

... The main problem has been that these various activities cancel each other out because of a lack of unity and a lack of strategic plans, orientation, and leadership ... In an advanced capitalist country,

even when there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, as long as there is a lack of subjective factor to pull it together and to lead it, the different motions will cancel each other out ...

... But the point is that this is a time of polarization. People can no longer live in the same way. And they are going to go in one direction or in the other. There is dealignment going on, and there can be realignment either way very easily. We must inject our subjective factor, our correct interpretation of what is going on in this country, and show the masses who are their real enemies. We must try to crystallize some of the sentiments into organizational forms, so that when it aligns, it will align our way. That is the main thing right now. The masses at this point are afraid to take a lot of militant actions when there is no strong organization because the risks at this point are too great ...

... By "independent historical action of the masses" Lenin meant the masses are aligned in certain ways, their sights are directed in a common direction, and there is a common interpretation of the problems, such as the understanding that the bourgeoisie, the present rulers, have got to go. The manner in which they express their opinions would have to be, in an advanced capitalist country, in a tradi-

tional form, in a safe, legitimate form, and necessarily in a massive form (i.e., majority consensus). That's a prerequisite. That is how political consensus develops, and that is actually the independent historical action of the masses. Only when a political consensus is developed and when the bourgeoisie dares to violate that direction, will *reason be on our side*, so we can take militant action. And only then will the masses stand with us on the most militant actions, including armed struggle ...

... Describing a nationwide crisis, Lenin said that is: "when one, all the class forces hostile towards us have become sufficiently entangled and at loggerheads with each other, and have sufficiently weakened themselves in the struggle which is beyond their strength; that two, all the vacillating and wavering unstable intermediate elements, the petty bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois democrats — as distinct from the bourgeoisie — have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy; and that three, among the proletariat a mass sentiment in favor of supporting the most determined, supremely bold, revolutionary action against

Continued from page 15

STUDY MARXISM

Continued from page 9

the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow. Then revolution is indeed ripe, then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated and briefly outlined above, and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured."

So with that definition of a nationwide crisis, how do we make the transition from a revolutionary situation to a nationwide crisis? It is clear that the first point, "when all the class forces hostile towards us have become sufficiently entangled and at loggerheads with each other," is exactly what is happening now. As I mentioned before, Reagan is far from having a consensus. The bourgeoisie is involved in deep conflict. But how do you know if they are "sufficiently" at loggerheads with each other, "sufficiently" entangled, and in relation to whom? Of course, in relation to the proletariat. So that unless you get the proletariat — unless we get ourselves together and *move* there is no way to know whether or not they are *sufficiently* entangled. Unless the proletariat moves forward through our independent historical actions, there is no way to sufficiently expose the petty bourgeois democrats and labor aristocrats. They are as exposed as they can be now. The main thing is the independent movement of the working class, so that they will be dropped by the wayside. So again, this is dependent upon our scope,

our direct organizing, our subjective factor, rather than on something that will somehow be exposed, like a red light turning green, and then we can move forward with our independent action. It doesn't go like that. Anyone waiting for a green light has got to be tailing and tailing miserably.

Lenin's third point, that "the mass sentiment in favor of supporting actions against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow," also requires our preparation. For example, even now with the social penalty so high, the air traffic controllers are able to defy the government and stand pretty much single-handedly without much support from other sectors of the U.S. working class, at least among the AFL structure. Only AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees) has come out to support them. *No* other international has supported the so-called illegal action. So it is clear that the main thing is the organization. The traffic controllers are able to take such a vanguard action because many of them are vets and have a high sense of organization. It is not because of some mystical quality about the air traffic controllers, that somehow their sentiment is higher or somehow they are different. There is something decisive that makes them militant, and that is their rudimentary organization and leadership. Being government workers they are being pitted against the government. That is only a condition, a circumstance. The postal union backed down recently from any such confrontation because they did not prepare the rank and file for a strike. When the government drew the line, the union wouldn't cross it. The membership would not follow the leadership because the leadership did not prepare them or actually even lead them. The leadership and organizational preparations are the spontaneous factors which make the difference

whether or not the working class is "in favor of supporting action against the bourgeoisie," whether the mass sentiment "vigorously grows" or fizzles out. So again the crucial difference is the subjective factor.

That is where the Party and various left forces together can have a tremendous effect if we are able to unite, if we are able to win over many more of the left forces into the Party, and if we have a strategy and tactical plan on how to deal with the coming period. So I want to speak against the view of waiting for the "considerable increase in the activity of the masses," the view that somehow or other, more oppression and more exploitation and qualitatively higher unemployment will lead to a point where the masses can't take it any more and then are cornered and have to fight back, thus initiating a "snowballing" effect. I think that is an absolutist, ahistorical view of the masses' sentiments and movements. For that reason I lean towards taking the position that the objective revolutionary situation exists right now. The crucial task is to aid the development of a nationwide crisis. And there is no great wall between a revolutionary situation and a nationwide crisis. The bridge is the subjective factor □

Study Questions

1. *What are some of the features of a revolutionary situation? What other elements are necessary for this to develop into a nationwide crisis?*
2. *Why is it not enough to analyze only the masses' activity? Why will this lead to an essentially tailist definition of the Party's tasks?*
3. *What is the falsity of the "masses going to the right"? Explain the similarity between this view and the Kautskyite view that "revolution proved illusory." Why, in this period, does this mean *re-lounging* revolution?*