

The means of struggle of the social revolution

By Henriette Roland Holst-Van der Schalk

Content

Foreword to the 2023 Dutch republication	1
1. Purpose and means of the revolution	3
2. The mass demonstration	5
3. The armed violence as a revolutionary factor	10
4. Mental violence and actual violence	13
5. The cult of violence in imperialism	17
6. Proletarian revolution and violence	22
7. The mass strike; the great means of struggle and violence of the proletarian revolution	26
8. The chances of the revolutionary strike during and after the world war	29
9. The military strike (mass refusal of service)	35
10. Two methods (the evolution of revolution)	42

Foreword to the 2023 Dutch republication

Henriette Roland Holst's widely recognized masterpiece, "[Revolutionary Mass Action](#)," after years of work finally appeared as a 430-page bound book in 1918. For most revolutionary workers, this book was unaffordable. In the same year it did appear as a cheap brochure "The Means of Struggle of the Social Revolution," Amsterdam (Bos Publishers). This hardly findable brochure now becomes available.¹

This brochure is especially significant for understanding the tactics of mass demonstration and mass strike for the proletarian liberation struggle against imperialist war and for world revolution. Its emphasis is on moral factors in the class struggle. H. Roland-Holst draws particularly on the chapters of "Revolutionary Mass Action" on Chartism and the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 in Russia.

The verbiage of H. Roland Holst - at that time, Lenin denounced her over-use of "sacrifice" - demonstrates her heavy influence by Christianity. Physical violence evokes such intense emotions in her that political analysis suffers. This remains to be seen by psychologists. What concerns us here, are some contradictions in her argument and related attempts at reconciliation. She has rightly been accused of taking a "centrist" attitude in politics, both in the struggle that led to the small SDP of Gorter and Pannekoek splitting off from the Dutch reformist SDAP, and around the Zimmerwald and

¹ A PDF of the original can be found on Google Books. For the following reissue, in 2023 the language has been converted to modern Dutch. In the process, the author's poetic, religious, idealistic, moralistic and gynecological verbiage and elided style have been retained as much as possible. In addition to the author's notes, some notes and explanations have been added in square brackets.

Kienthal conferences. The same attitude led her - despite already predicting the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party in this volume - to support it and the CP of Holland until Stalin came to power. In Ch. 6 and 8, H. Roland Holst attaches to revolutionaries (in fact Bolsheviks such as Trotsky and Lenin) rather caricatured views on the use of violence in revolution, which she refutes "point by point." In the next chapter, on the mass strike, she can then step on a "middle ground" between the social pacifism of the SDAP and Bolshevik views. Here, the mass strike of Russian Revolution of 1905 then serves her as a model, while she ignores the virtually victimless armed revolution of October 1917, in which the views of Lenin and Trotsky criticized by her were confirmed. Then, in the closing chapters, physical violence equal to that of imperialism once again appears in defense of the Soviet republic as "historically inevitable."

The derailing of Bolshevism was not so much the result of its conceptions of proletarian violence around 1918, but of the totally mistaken idea that the proletarian revolution in Russia, in its isolation, could only continue as a bourgeois revolution - including the Terror and the "military export of the revolution" - led by their own minority organization that had become the ruling party. Or, as someone once said: the Bolsheviks decided to make their *Thermidor* (counter-revolution in the French bourgeois revolution) themselves. H. Roland Holst supported in this booklet, and throughout her life, the idea of bourgeois revolution. In contrast, she shows no sympathy for the suffering of the Russian workers under the continued existence of capitalist relations of production, and even the intensified exploitation and oppression under Bolshevik terror. She calls the workers who do not follow the idealistic slogans of Bolsheviks the "fanatical shears of the hungry rabble." The masses, she agrees with the Bolsheviks, were victims of "their own shortcomings, their selfishness and their rampantness." Entirely idealistic and voluntaristic, she justifies the party dictatorship: "Will and insight must now anticipate circumstances, they must help accomplish the miracle to remake capitalist society into socialist." But the "miracle" that occurred was that of an internal counter-revolution.

H. Roland-Holst also supported the bourgeois revolution-related concept of "national ('liberation') wars," despite indicating that these must inevitably use the same means of violence as imperialist war. Her frequent use of the word "people" in these "national wars" includes the bourgeoisie of these nations. It was her former fellow fighter of the "Dutch Marxist school" in the SDAP, Anton Pannekoek, who developed a critique of these "national" wars in his [Class struggle and nation](#) (1912), as did, incidentally, her great friend Rosa Luxemburg.

H. Roland-Holst was certainly not a council communist. Repeatedly she reports - incorrectly - that the Russian mass struggle was disorganized. She barely mentions workers' councils in this volume (she does so in her "Revolutionary Mass Action"). According to her, it was up to the state to organize the economy, an idea Pannekoek rejected even before 1914. As for her contrast of mass struggle and armed insurrection, already when she wrote this booklet the proletarian October Revolution in Russia had proved that mass struggle is not opposed to armed insurrection, but that it culminates in insurrection organized by the workers' and soldiers' councils.

These and other weaknesses do not diminish the significance of this historical document for anyone wishing to study the moral and tactical problems raised by the struggle against imperialist war and by the revolution in Russia.

Fredo Corvo, August 2023

1. Purpose and means of the revolution

Society is pregnant with a new birthing. Socialism must be born, the new form of organization of production, in which no longer the profit of a few but the fulfillment of the needs of all will be the goal of labor.

With the introduction of the socialist mode of production - the basis of which will be the common possession of all the important means of labor - the antecedent history of mankind will be closed, according to Marx's combative word. That is, from that moment on, men will no longer be governed by the forces and relations they have created but they will control them. They will organize their social existence, guided by reasonable, moral will, that is, *in freedom*.

Because the socialist mode of production will usher in the era of human freedom, of human empowerment, its coming into being represents an enormous step forward in the evolution of humanity; a step that opens glorious possibilities both for the enrichment and elevation of each human personality, and for the fusion of all these personalities into a higher unity.

How, in what way, by what means, will the new community be born?

Historical experience makes it possible to answer this question.

History teaches us, that every new stage in social evolution, every higher form of human society² came about through struggle, struggle of the disinherited exploited masses against the exploiting classes, of the oppressed majority against the ruling minorities. When the state forms and institutions of the ruling class had survived, the prolonged continuance of their power meant degeneration and ruin for the generality, then the oppressed masses - in which new productive forces, new ideas and new social ideals had come to maturity raised themselves to the struggle for the liberation of humanity. In panting effort, at the cost of countless sacrifices without number, they overthrew the old rulers, destroyed the moldy social institutions and laid the foundations of new ones. This time, it will happen the same way: the new order of property and production has as its condition the fall of big capital, which rules the world. If the popular masses are to fulfill their historic task, they must fight the big capitalists and of their helpers - that is, all those who, either out of self-interest or out of stupidity, drudgery or slavishness, rally around the plutocracy, around the big bankers and manufacturers, the big shipping and mining magnates, the big merchants and plantation owners - until complete victory.³ They must destroy the imperialist state, just as then the rising bourgeoisie destroyed the feudal-absolutist state.⁴

² We call a higher form of society one that rests more than the previous one on the control of natural forces by man and thereby brings closer the possibility of the *freedom* and *unity* of all mankind. With progress in scientific-technical terms may very well go backward in other respects (art, morality, philosophy).

³ H. Roland Holst's opposition between big capital on the one hand and the "people" of small capitalists, petty bourgeois in the broader sense and workers on the other anticipates all kinds of front formation of the working class with parts of the bourgeoisie that the Comintern proposed in the interests of Russian foreign policy.

⁴ As Marx and Engels argued after the Commune of 1871: the bourgeois revolution *has taken over* the feudal state and converted it to its bourgeois class interests. In contrast, the proletarian revolution *destroys* the bourgeois state and *replaces* it with the dictatorship of the proletarian masses. In the proletarian revolution in Russia, the workers' and soldiers' councils destroyed the bourgeois state in Oct. 1917. But the power of the councils was soon eroded in favor of the "councils"-government that drew more and more power to itself and became the instrument of the unchanged capitalist relations of production. The dictatorship of the proletariat thus turned into a bourgeois dictatorship over the proletariat. (F.C.)

A long, bitter struggle begins, in constant ebb and flow - a struggle such as many have waged on earth, but none will have to be waged again when this one is decided - a struggle of the small against the great, of the oppressed against the oppressors, of the exploited against the exploiters. Only this struggle can bring to humanity the well-being, peace, freedom and prosperity it craves. Only this struggle can put an end to the appalling physical and moral torments which imperialism pours out on peoples, avert the terrible coarsening and degeneration with which it threatens them, break the shackles of the new slavery into which it strikes them; only it can deliver humanity from the diabolical methods of coercion and exploitation introduced by the imperialist classes.

Revolutionary socialism calls to battle for the redemption of humanity! The task is arduous, but the goal is glorious and great.

By what means will the masses be able to overthrow imperialism?

Will they continue, like the foremen of the petty-bourgeois-national social democrats, to proclaim that they can achieve their goal by using the peaceful methods of the pre-imperialist era? Will the masses by the ballot paper be able to destroy the capitalist system? Will the trade unions, through systematic improvement of working conditions and participation in profit, gradually be able to put an end to capitalist exploitation? Will it disappear along the "gradual path"? Will the deputies of the masses in parliament and municipal council, through minor reforms, introduced with the approval and support of the bourgeoisie, push through the liberation of the masses, and will union officials obtain it through a policy of compromise and treaty, a system of conciliatory institutions and collective contracts? Will indirect action, proceeding along the courses drawn by the bourgeois law and avoiding any clash with the bourgeois order, action not waged by the masses themselves, but essentially by their foremen, be able to overthrow imperialism?

All the facts, all the experiences - not only of these four years of war, these years, when imperialism fully revealed its inner being, but also already of the years before, the era of growth and bundling of its forces - prove otherwise. Through the indirect activity of the masses, through the legitimate peaceful methods of ballot⁵ and partial strike, through the politics of agreement and compromise, imperialism can never be overthrown. The petty-bourgeois nationalist Social Democrats and the modern trade unionists - insofar as they are still fighting! - continue to fight in ways and by means, which a quarter of a century ago could force capital and the bourgeois state to make concessions, but which now cannot even stop the increasing impoverishment and addiction of the masses, let alone lead these masses to victory. Indirect methods are powerless in the face of imperialism. The revolutionary socialists of all shades: revolutionary Marxists, syndicalists, Christian socialists, communist anarchists - they all cry out to the masses, "*you yourselves must throw yourselves into the struggle, you must bring about your own welfare, push through your own redemption!*"

Like the petty-bourgeois-nationalist social democrats and moderns, we revolutionary socialists arouse the masses to organization. It is indispensable, to defeat the tremendously strongly organized capital. But unlike all non-revolutionaries, we say to the masses: organization in itself is not yet a key to power, not a road to freedom. It leads nowhere else but to slavery and opens nothing else but destruction, when not used as a tool in the class struggle. The proletarian organizations included many millions of

⁵ That does have great propagandistic value.

workers in 1914. But when the greatest political crisis of the modern centuries sailed across the countries like a whirlwind, the social-patriots throughout West Central Europe put these millions-organizations at the disposal of the imperialist classes. Not least through the proletarian organizations and the proletarian press, imperialism succeeded in placing all the economic and spiritual forces of the peoples in the service of war, that is, to militarize the peoples, gag them, starve them and make them slaughter each other. A thousand times better no proletarian organization than one abused for such purposes!

Therefore, organization *in itself is* not the source of well-being - we also challenge the Social-Democratic dogma that the unorganized masses are not capable of anything good. Even masses, which due to historical circumstances have lagged in organizational terms, can show great strength in the struggle for freedom when they are animated by revolutionary enthusiasm, forged together by one will and one spirit. Against the terrifying example of the German working class in 1914, which placed its entire admirable organizational apparatus in the service of German imperialism, and against the no less reprehensible act of the American workers' aristocracy, which in 1917 in the same way offered Anglo-American capitalism its strong trade union center - we set the heroic masses of the Russian proletariat, which, unorganized as they were, overthrew Tsarism and dethroned the bourgeoisie in two revolutions.

Proletarian organization, unfortunately, does not mean struggle for socialism in all cases. But struggle for socialism does mean organizational activity in all cases. The new organization which the proletariat needs to crush imperialism can only be born in this struggle of the masses.

But how will the masses fight? What means of power do they possess that can stand up to the might of the imperialist state? What forces dwell in them to which the awesome power of their rulers will have to bow? Do they possess such power?

"Yes," the revolutionaries answer, the masses possess such a force. In the great final struggle for freedom, three main means are available to them, namely: the demonstration, the strike and the armed insurrection, actual violence. Using these means, the proletarian social revolution will prevail.

We now want to take a closer look at these various means of struggle available to the masses, analyze them in their essence and see how they relate to the purposes of the revolution.

2. The mass demonstration

The mass demonstration has as its condition the accumulation of considerable popular masses in the cities, industrial areas, mining districts and port towns of a country. The greater that accumulation, the stronger is the pressure, which the popular masses can exert on government and ruling classes through demonstrations.

Thus, the mass demonstration was already an important factor in the English revolution of 1643, since London already had half a million inhabitants around this time. It became infinitely more important in the French revolution of 1789-1793. The demonstrations of the huge popular crowds, which streamed from the outskirts of Paris into the city during the years of the development of the revolution, at moments when political tension and social ferment were at their height, generally formed the introduction to the decisive clashes between the revolutionary masses and the defenders of the

old regime, clashes in which the latter was repeatedly pushed back. In both the English and French revolutions, the demonstrating masses were composed of various social elements - petty bourgeois, artisans, intellectuals and industrial-proletarians - whose union constituted the "revolutionary people."

An entirely different, sharp class character carried the mass demonstrations of Chartism (1835-'43). They were the main form of the rebellious movement of the young English factory proletariat, which had been created by the technical inventions of the third quarter of the 18th century and had grown incredibly fast since then.

When the era of the wars against Napoleon came to an end, hundreds of thousands of textile workers were already huddled together in the factory districts; one and the same current of feeling and thought carried through all these miserable, disenfranchised and trampled human beings one and the same insistence of burning hatred against their exploiters and tormentors, of wild urge for redemption.

When these masses under blaring battle chants or in somber-threatening silence moved their processions forward through the drab smoky streets of the factory towns, or when their groups gathered like innumerable rays from a circumference of many miles into some central point, and formed an impassable plain, then the English bourgeoisie realized that a new social power was rising hostile to its power, and it shuddered.

With admirable tenacity, Chartism continued for years on end those demonstrations in which millions of workers participated and which were its strongest means of struggle. They filled the bourgeois classes with fear, drew incessant attention to the unbearable fate of the masses; they imposed themselves on the consciousness of the social reformers and on the imagination of the artists. But although they were among the foremost among the forces forcing weighty concessions, first and foremost the 10-Hour Law, on the ruling classes, they did not achieve their real goal: a change in the constitution that placed political power in the hands of the masses. For that, even more powerful means of struggle than the demonstration would have been necessary, but those more powerful means of struggle, the English proletariat did not possess.

From 1848, mechanical industry gradually invaded all European countries, and soon began its triumphal march across the vast territory of the United States of North America. Everywhere, here faster, there slower, the industrial revolution took place, everywhere *the fourth class* arose, the dispossessed proletariat, disenfranchised and exploited, the masses whose labor sustained and enriched society, but who themselves suffered eternal misery, eternal life uncertainty. And wherever it awoke to resistance and rose up in anger and indignation against its tormentors and oppressors, there everywhere the demonstration became the first means of struggle of the unpracticed, unorganized masses, against both political oppression and economic exploitation. By means of the demonstration mainly, the vanguard of the Belgian and Dutch proletariat in the 1880s and 1890s, under the leadership of social democracy, fought valiantly for universal suffrage, and by means of the demonstration the French and English proletariat, ravaged by unemployment, demanded work and bread from the ruling class at the time. In the demonstration the newly awakened strength of the masses flowed out freely, the realization of their irreconcilable opposition to capitalist society, the realization of their unity of will, interests and ideals.

But even before the end of the century, the character of the demonstrations led by social democracy and the modern trade union movement began to change. This

change was related to the emergence of a new tactic, the reformist-opportunist, which in turn was a product of social development. Unnoticed since the beginning of the 1890s, capitalism had entered a new phase, the one, the tendencies of which we are accustomed to summarizing in the one word: imperialism. The disastrous effects of imperialism on the working class were not all immediately apparent; on the contrary, it seemed that, if the resilience which rejuvenated capitalism appeared to possess removed all chance of its imminent collapse, this rejuvenated capitalism would at least lead to somewhat more bearable living conditions for the proletariat.

The terrible unemployment and general misery of the 1870s and 1880s had been followed by an era of economic boom; work was plentiful, and wages were rising, while the prices of the main foods remained at one level or even fell. The socialist upheaval with its great high aims disappeared into a distant horizon, the will of the masses became directed toward small, immediately attainable benefits; the leaders encouraged it in this will and chased it in the direction of exclusively practical activity, directed mostly toward small ends. The labor movement rapidly increased in size, but its fighting spirit and militancy declined. The error was spread that a modest and orderly action of the masses, combined with moderation of their demands offered the best chances for the realization of socialism. For by such action the bourgeoisie, reassured about the peaceful character of the proletarian movement, would cooperate in the realization of the minimum socialist program and finally, defeated by the ballot paper, relinquish power in state and society.

Thus, gradually the class struggle, "tempered" by settlement, compromise and treaty; and at times even replaced by the "cooperation of the classes."

It could not be otherwise, or in such an epoch the untamed force, to which the earlier spontaneous mass demonstrations had testified, had to diminish, and disappear. More and more conducted in quiet, peaceful lawful channels, the demonstrations of the working class for universal suffrage, etc., became beautiful spectacles, impressive by their size and by the astonishing self-discipline of the masses, but in which the bourgeoisie no longer felt the ferocious, unbridled energy vibrating, of which the first manifestations had so much terrified it. And as the bureaucratic, opportunistic character of the leadership increased, the character of the proletarian demonstrations degenerated more and more into that of mere displays, staged primarily to make the masses themselves believe that they were engaged in a struggle which the leaders no longer actually wanted. Quietly the workers' associations trudged through the streets of the cities at predetermined days and hours, along a predetermined route, with their insignia and banners; the bourgeois authorities, satisfied and reassured, no longer opposed these "demonstrations," but, on the contrary, benevolently placed their own police force at their disposal, and the bourgeois press sent out warm eulogies about the impeccable order and clean discipline of the demonstrating masses.

But not the entire proletarian masses blindly followed the leadership of the modern workers' movement, and even that part of it which generally did so sometimes jumped out of line. Some groups and layers of the proletariat: the syndicalists, the unorganized workers, the mass of women, were not included in the reformist current; they were not taught to systematically suppress all spontaneous expressions of impatience and indignation, of desire and passion. There were also moments, when certain events, political or economic, aroused in the whole masses, whether organized or unorganized, a powerful feeling of solidarity, of their general opposition to the ruling class, beyond all conflicts in their own ranks. At such moments it sometimes came to spontaneous

demonstrations, in which the strong, impetuous heartbeat of the whole proletariat was audible as before and which overthrew all the calculations of cunning politicians and of sedate trade union officials.

Thus, even in the years of socialist decline before the beginning of the World War, the regulated demonstration, held under sanction of the bourgeois government (as a type of which the May celebration can count) was never the only form of proletarian demonstration, any more than the partial, purely economic strike was ever the only form of strike.

Then came the World War: with one blow it overthrew all the obsolete conceptions of the possibility of peaceful evolution towards socialism - conceptions, in the minds of by far the majority of the leaders of the Second International and of many of their followers, hardened into dogmas. And he urged upon the masses - as self-defense against the extreme necessity, in the struggle for naked life - the direct methods of struggle again, which the leaders in their imagined wisdom had declared obsolete.

Even now, at the end of the fourth year of war, the regulated demonstration under sanction of the bourgeois authorities has not disappeared, but it has become the hypocritical gesture behind which the social-patriots of all countries try to hide their betrayal of the working class and humanity. Where now demonstrations take place, not only tolerated but even protected by the ruling class, there one can be sure, that these demonstrations serve the interests of capital and that their hidden purpose is to keep the masses from real struggle. For where today either the masses, or the courageous revolutionary vanguard which in most countries by self-sacrificing advocacy seeks to stir the masses, wishes to demonstrate in public its abhorrence of war, its savage hatred of executioners and usurers, its burning desire for bread, freedom and peace, there the violence of the rulers immediately disperses it. The saber hews and the gun fires, as in the half-forgotten early days of the social-democratic movement. Because the demonstration has again changed its nature; it has again and now to a much greater extent than before become an acute danger to the possessing class. In her the psychic mass force breaks forth again, the one fierce desire, the great will of the masses, the will which, driven by the stimulus of anonymous misery, nourished by indignation and anger, winged by the high wind of social-idealism, is preparing for a life and death struggle against imperialism. The mass demonstrations, pushed forward during these years by the revolutionary vanguard of all countries, are the prelude to the great rush of the disinherited masses against the imperialist state; they precede as the first threatening squalls the social hurricane, which will soon erupt over Europe and America. The rulers know this: hence the inhuman roughness and cruelty, with which even seemingly weak, puny demonstrations are now suppressed.

The special significance of the demonstration as a proletarian means of struggle lies primarily in the fact that with one stroke it unites the working class, now split into all sorts of groups and sections, in a single moment into a single whole, makes its cohesion visible and thereby makes clear to both the working class itself and its opponents the deepest foundations of the power of the proletariat: its numbers and its unity. Men and women, the educated and the uneducated, the employed and the unemployed, the organized and the unorganized can participate in it, preparation it can do without; those who felt themselves as powerless scattered loners or as isolated groups with special interests, suddenly feel themselves absorbed by it into the glowing crucible of the general class feeling and are fused therein into a new powerful body, from which new, effervescent strength rises. The demonstration recreates the dead waters of the

lifeless loners in the sloshing, turbulent sea of the actively imposing crowd, which experiences, amazed and delighted, its own unlimited desire, its unlimited power and daring. Hence the boundless self-confidence, the defiant audacity, the elated intoxication with which spontaneous mass demonstrations usually fill their participants. It then seems to the loner as if if the power of all had dangers in his own head and body.

Yet the rulers of our day have every reason to fear the demonstrations of the masses! Not the dull, cunning advertising parades staged by the government socialists, from which their leaders have disciplined away all spirit and daring, all spontaneous resistance and fervor, but the demonstrations of the unskilled workers, of the "black masses," as they are called in Russia, whose strong unadulterated class instincts are now whipped up to bitter excitement by need and pressure. The demonstrations of the women, in whom the natural drive of motherly love now wins out over timidity and shyness, over her conservatism and ingrained petty-bourgeois decency, and drives them into the streets in masses, to demand bread for their little ones. The demonstrations of the boys and girls, in whom the voice and example of the heroes of the revolutionary proletariat in our days have awakened the urge to prove their loyalty to international solidarity. Those demonstrations the ruling classes fear, and they fear them with good reason, for they are all omens and harbingers of the coming storm.

And just as the ruling class has reason to fear these demonstrations, so the revolutionaries have reason to want to carry them through, almost at any cost. To the utmost the right to demonstrate must now be defended! With this right stands or falls the freedom of movement of the proletariat. If the masses cannot, in the moments when they realize it as necessary, make their unity visible and demonstrate its strength threateningly to the bourgeoisie, then they lack the freedom of movement, which is an indispensable condition for any direct, mass action.

And when, in such moments, the masses yield to the demonstration prohibition of the national or urban government, when, without further struggle, they allow themselves to be fragmented into atoms again and reduced to the concealment of their shabby dwellings, they thereby prove a lack of courage, of insight and of sacrificial spirit, which testify to the weakness of the movement, that is, to its political and moral immaturity.

Of course: continuing the demonstrations against the government's prohibition will often not be possible at the present stage of the movement. For that purpose, the means of violence are still too powerful at the present disposal of the ruling class; that is, discipline in the army is still too strong, the soldiers are still too fearful and too ignorant. But if the workers, *fearing these means of power*, immediately give in, refrain from further demonstrations, then they have been forced back one step, and a certain episode in the awesome struggle has been decided to their disadvantage; their self-confidence has diminished, the movement has fallen into a wave valley, and it always takes some time before the collapse is overcome.

If, on the other hand, the workers do not give in, if they try to continue the demonstrations against the will of the government, then they become the introduction to further struggles in new, fiercer forms. *To be the introduction to even sharper forms of struggle was, in fact, always the essence of the demonstration in revolutionary epochs.* But rarely, under particularly favorable conditions, does the power of the masses reveal itself in it in such a powerful way that it forces those in power to make great concessions. Even more rarely is it able to bring about important shifts in the power positions of the contending classes; never, if ever, does a regime or government fall through demonstrations alone, never have the decisive clashes in the class struggle been

fought through demonstrations. They strengthen the spirit of resistance of which they are an expression, multiply the political tension which they generate, awaken the sluggish, the indifferent and the backward from their sleep, make them join the animated, active revolutionary nucleus. Through demonstrations, even today the whole proletarian mass gathers its forces and exercises itself in their use.

When the demonstrations by their intensity and expansion reach a point where they become dangerous for the ruling class, their ban follows. Now one of two things happens: either the masses obey, the movement fades away and comes to a halt, or they persevere. If they previously decided on the latter, the masses had no other option but to defy the violence of the ruling class. Then there were clashes with the police and the army: unarmed or semi-armed men, women and children (usually those who had nothing to do with the struggle) were wounded or killed, which further agitated the masses and drove them to self-defense; the streets were broken up, stones and everything that was at hand or could be dragged along were used to build barricades. Thus, in earlier revolutionary eras, the attempts, to prevent the demonstrations of the crowd, always led to street and barricade fights, to the armed uprising. While the at best hastily and inadequately armed people tried to protect themselves as best they could behind their improvised barricades from the bullets of the soldiers, they also tried to persuade them by cries, exhortations, entreaties, threats, to take the side of the revolt. The outcome of these attempts decided their further fate.

This is how it was countless times in the bourgeois revolution. In the proletarian class struggle, however, the demonstration has many times been the prelude to a means of struggle other than armed violence, namely the political-revolutionary mass strike. When the mass demonstration gives rise to the mass strike, or when the proletariat responds to a ban on demonstration by the mass strike, this means that a means of struggle, which by its nature is ephemeral and of limited force, is replaced by another whose force is almost infinite, whose duration can be almost unlimited. It means, therefore, as much as the growth of the demonstration into the armed insurrection, a climax in the struggle.

We now want to consider these two means of struggle, these new phases of struggle to which the demonstration can develop. We shall begin with the means which played an extremely important role in all earlier revolutionary struggles, and which again played this role today in the Russian revolution: actual violence, armed insurrection.

3. The armed violence as a revolutionary factor

The struggle for a new legal order, new political forms, new relations of production and ownership was always fought as a struggle for power. And in this struggle armed violence was always a factor. By armed violence the ruling classes tried to maintain their power, by armed violence the emerging classes tried to drive the old rulers from their positions of power.

Never in the course of history did a ruling class voluntarily relinquish power, always clinging to it to the utmost. Nor did it ever succumb to the burden of hatred, indignation and contempt, which its coercion, its cruelty, its rapacity, its moral degeneration and its cynicism had created against it. Moral forces both of holy wrath and indignation and of holy love and self-confidence, as they tend to animate the fighters for a new order of society, such moral forces in themselves and their spiritual manifestations were never capable of overthrowing the old rulers, though they prepared their fall. It was

always necessary for them to materialize in actual violence.

Violence was the test which, in the struggle between the decaying and the rising classes, showed on which side the supremacy lay, not by a single clash, of course, but in a protracted struggle, interrupted by intervals of preparation, repeatedly restarted. Many times, the storm troops of the revolution had to pound against the coercive strongholds of the old authority before they succeeded in overthrowing them; many times the "premature" resistance of a brave vanguard was broken before it had grown into an army of irresistible strength. And when they finally succeeded in overthrowing the former rulers, the battle was not yet over: they quietly reorganized their forces and soon began the counterattack.

In the era of the bourgeois revolution, the violence of the revolutionary class generally took the form of the armed revolt of people against army. When the extreme tension of political and social contradictions led to clashes, the rebellious people found themselves facing the armed defenders of the old regime. In most cases, however, these did not form a similar mass. In the great French upheaval, for example, they consisted of very different categories: the foreign mercenaries (Swiss, who formed the king's bodyguard), noblemen in military service (the officer corps and the so-called aristocratic regiments) and the ordinary infantry troops. Needless to say, these distinct elements were very different from the revolutionary movement. While the Swiss and the aristocrats, out of tradition, class interest and class morality, were devoted with heart and soul to the royal house and regarded the revolutionary people as a band of criminals, whom they shot without hesitation, the deep dissatisfaction that lived in the people had also penetrated the mass of the ordinary soldiers. A riotous mood had arisen in the plebeian infantry regiments. Though the composition of the armies of the old regime was a different one from that of the present armies of general conscription, though the long duration of service made them much more of an out-of-society caste, a body in its own right, but more powerful than all the barriers, which separated the mass of the army from the mass of the people, proved the equality of descent, of social interests and aspirations. Above the imprinted obedience, above the dressage of military discipline, the class feeling continued triumphantly, drove ever larger sections of the army to apostasy from the old authority and to support the revolutionary movement.

Already at the famous storm on the Bastille, which is generally regarded as the starting point of the great French upheaval, soldiers of the regiment of the "Gardes Françaises" helped the crowd, which had penetrated to the castle square, to bring cannons into position against the castle. And while part of the occupation, consisting of Swiss mercenaries, ruthlessly shot the attackers from their safe shelters in the castle, the French invaders who were also among them soon refused to continue this murderous work: they forced the governor of the fortress to capitulate.

This completely different action of certain sections of the army repeated itself again and again, and since the plebeian and French elements in the army naturally formed the overwhelming majority, the military supremacy of the revolution in the internal struggle was assured in the long run.

A further weighty factor in the armed struggle of the bourgeois revolutionary era were the vigilantes (national guard), established by the French bourgeoisie immediately at the beginning of the struggle as an instrument of power, directed both against the old regime and its supporters and against the working class. These vigilantes, who acted as more or less permanent institutions throughout this era and were of course much

more immediately connected with bourgeois society than the army, also reflected back much more directly its moods. Above all, the sentiments and moods of the middle class were reflected in the vigilante movement; after all, it was primarily from them that they were recruited. If the middle class was dissatisfied with the government and inclined to help overthrow it, then the days of such a regime were numbered. For as soon as it then came to an insurrectionary outburst of the people, the vigilantes defected in their entirety to the insurgents, and their example also dragged along large parts of the army. Thus, in the French February Revolution of 1848, the "bourgeois king" Louis Philip lost his throne by disloyalty to the National Guard. The anger of the petty bourgeoisie against the depraved oligarchy that was systematically plundering France had led it to side with the rebellious popular masses. However, when, in the months following the February Revolution, the mood of the Parisian petty bourgeoisie turned again as a result of a number of circumstances, when concern for their property, hatred for the "revolutionary slammers, who controlled Paris," drove it to reconciliation with the great bourgeoisie, whose main program point was the "protection of the bourgeois order against the Communists," then a spirit of reaction pervaded both the National Guard and the army. Soon both became once again a tool in the hands of the big-capitalist clique and the high military. The proletariat, abandoned by all, cornered from all sides like a hunted animal, was overwhelmed by a thousandfold force in the June uprising - the desperate act of a desperate mob.

In his introduction to the reprint of Marx's "Class Struggle in France,"⁶ Engels has masterfully shown how the armed insurrection and barricade struggles in the various phases of the bourgeois revolution were never overcome by purely military supremacy and as a result of an exclusively-military victory. The goal of the insurgents was not so much to militarily destroy the troops facing them as to "soften them by moral influences, which do not come into play, or at least to a much lesser extent, in the struggle between two army forces." In other words, this aim was to make the soldiers unwilling, to allow themselves to be used as instruments of power of the ruling classes, to arouse in them the mood which drove them to throw down their arms or even to defect to the rebellious people. To this end, it was necessary to make the soldiers realize their own *real* disposition which was still latent, that is, hidden from themselves, to stimulate their class solidarity and their human feelings to such an extent that these feelings broke through the thick crust of military discipline.

Engels then goes on to show how the main material means of violence, by means of which this moral reversal was achieved, was the barricade. Its purpose was to hold up the troops who had to disperse the excited crowds, to hinder them in their task, to dissolve the connection between the various army divisions and to destroy discipline. The barricade gave the revolutionary fighters the opportunity, by word and deed, to influence the soldiers and set new strings vibrating in their minds. The hindrance to their advance gave the soldiers time to come to their senses and ask themselves for whom and for what they were actually fighting; they were given time to understand what it meant, when they fired their rifles at those brave men, these women and young people, who, a few meters away, generally inadequately armed, defied death, animated by pure ideals of freedom and brotherhood. Thus, the barricades, to speak with Engels, "worked more morally than materially even in the classic era of street fights." Those fights were the touchstone, by which the hidden rebellious disposition of the troops discovered itself. They were the means, to carry that disposition up from the

⁶ See [Engels' 1895 Introduction to Marx's Class Struggles in France](#) (F.C.)

dark depths of the mind into the bright irrevocable atmosphere of action.

In no way, therefore, in the bourgeois revolution has the force of arms in itself, the exclusively material supremacy of the number or of the technique of the instruments of destruction and murder, ever been the decisive force for victory. On the contrary: as a rule, at least in the early stages of each new struggle, this supremacy was on the side of the old rulers. The emerging classes won despite their weakness in this respect, despite the inferiority of their means of violence, thanks to their majority of moral strength; the revolution triumphed because of the fearlessness, sacrifice, eagerness and death contempt of its supporters.

However, all these moral forces necessarily needed the violence to manifest, just as, for example, the spirit of music needs the material tool for its manifestations.

Moral violence could not achieve victory without the help of actual violence; irrevocably, at a certain stage of the struggle, the former turned into the latter.

This close connection between moral or spiritual and actual violence and the relationship, in which they stand to each other, we want to examine in more detail in the next section.

4. Mental violence and actual violence

By spiritual violence we mean here any attempt by contending masses to achieve their beliefs or ideal by moral and intellectual (including organizational) means.

By actual violence we mean the desire to replace or strengthen these means by the superiority of weapons. In the war between different peoples, the superiority of arms (that is, the technical-mechanical-organizational superiority) can become a decisive element in which spiritual factors sink into insignificance. Think, for example, of the colonial expeditions of the white races against economically backward peoples⁷ : despite their contempt for death, their heroism and their fanaticism, the latter are always overwhelmed in the end. In the class struggle, and in the revolutionary war (as the wars of liberation of oppressed nationalities were amongst others), on the other hand, spiritual factors carry much more weight.

The use of spiritual violence always strengthens the moral powers of those who apply it; it purifies and nobles their powers. The use of actual violence in all its forms is morally very dangerous to those who apply it, and inevitably works coarsening, no matter for what purposes used; it leads fatally to indifference to the suffering of others, to cruelty and bloodlust, it arouses the anti-social urges and bloody instincts in the human animal.

A more or less clear awareness of this has made it so that when the antagonisms between the classes reached the point where they unloaded themselves in great outbursts, the revolutionaries - at least a part of them - at first often hesitated to use violence, while among the defenders of the old order there was never any such hesitation. The former were filled with social idealism, they intuitively felt the contradiction between the highest aspirations of their mind and feeling, and the use of instruments of murder, while the old rulers, long accustomed to ruling, that is to be coercing and overpowering, were hardened in inflicting suffering on their fellow men. There are no

⁷ H. Roland Holst here articulates a racist-nationalist position rather than the class position that colonialism and imperialism are the work of the capitalist classes. (F.C.)

examples, we believe, that the servants of reaction have had principled objections - well, of course, sometimes opportunistic ones - to the use of violent means. On the contrary, there have always been revolutionary fighters for whom the use of actual violence against their fellow men was so repugnant that they rejected it as contrary to the highest inner law. Others accepted it, either for reasons of principle or for reasons of utility; differences of opinion in this respect are a fixed trait in every revolutionary movement. We find them among the Anabaptists (the representatives of the revolutionary-proletarian currents in the Reformation), among the English Chartists, who debated endlessly in their press and at their congresses the preferability of "moral force" or "physical force," we find them in the Belgian suffrage movement of the years 1885-1892, among the Russian fighters of 1905, and among the revolutionaries of our own day.

Of course, the differences in this respect, as in other questions of tactics, must be explained in part by social causes. Thus, both among the Chartists and in the Belgian suffrage movement, in particular, the terribly exploited and neglected proletarians of industry and of the mines were supporters of actual violence. But the influence of personal disposition, especially where the leaders are concerned, should not be overlooked either. And this disposition in turn influences the masses through the *education they receive from their leaders*. What is particularly striking in the discussions of revolutionary groups about physical and moral violence is the tendency to set them in opposition to each other as irreconcilable, mutually exclusive contrasts between which one must irrevocably choose. The advocates of either form of violence are unwilling or unable to see that they are inseparably connected, that they arise from each other and merge into each other. When the moral violence, that is when the hatred and love, the furious indignation at the misdeeds of the rulers and the noble desire to order society according to a new, better principle have reached their highest intensity, then the opposition that this violence finds makes it necessary at some point to discharge into actual violence, just as the dark swollen thundercloud discharges into pouring rain. The awesome psychic tension of the masses is a force of nature and *acts* like a force of nature: no reasoning, no admonitions to calm and caution, no fear even of the rulers' menacingly accumulated means of violence, hold back its eruption. However, it is not only prepared by countless manifestations of moral force: it is also accompanied and carried by the manifestations of this force. Therefore, when actual violence occurs in the revolutionary struggle, the spiritual does not disappear from the scene: on the contrary, it always remains the artery, the animating breath of every great action of the masses; it is only possible, inspired by moral motives and carried by moral force.⁸

One of the most striking examples of the intimate entanglement of moral and physical violence in the Revolution is the famous march of the Parisian women to Versailles (Oct. 5-6, 1789). Its general background is the political-social unrest aroused by the contraction of several aristocratic regiments at Versailles, by the provocative actions of their officers and by the refusal of the king to sign the "Declaration of Human Rights."

The lack of food supplies in the capital, the sharp rise in bread prices due to the disgraceful practices of usurers and purchasers, these are the immediate incentives that set the people in motion. When revolutionary agitators threw into the masses the idea of marching to Versailles themselves in order to bring the King and his family back to Paris and thus escape the influence of reactionary advisers, this idea caught on,

⁸ But compare this with what is on the first page of this chapter and keep that in mind. [Probably meant the third paragraph. F.C.].

especially among women, then - as in our own days - whose family love and duties were most affected by the food shortage. On the afternoon of October 5, thousands of them set out: tired, hungry, soaked with rain, they arrive at Versailles at night after a long journey. They persuade the soldiers to admit them to the royal palace and the building of the People's Assembly; exhausted, they fall on the benches there, asking for bread. If during a skirmish with a small section of soldiers some women are wounded, this makes a great impression on the soldiers; more and more the bonds of discipline are broken, more and more intimately troops and people fraternize. Meanwhile, new parades, now including men, arrived at Versailles from Paris; they were soon followed by the National Guard, led by the popular General Lafayette. Now the king no longer dared to resist the will of the people: he signed the "Declaration of Human Rights" and had himself and his men led back to Paris.

Only by moral strength, it seems, had the women overcome. The rifles, brought from Paris by some of them, they had, long before reaching Versailles, discarded out of fatigue. The sacrifice of their hours of marching in the pouring autumn rain, the contempt for death with which they defied the bayonets of the soldiers: these were the weapons by which they conquered. Their poor, weary faces, gray from hunger and overexertion, their voices, now pleading for bread, then again begging the troops to let them pass, spoke a language that the sons of the people could not resist. Their example, the spirited deployment of their whole personality, awakened in the soldiers the human and social feeling much faster and stronger, than the action of armed crowds could have done so.

Yet it should not be overlooked that behind this moral violence were ready the actual means of power of the revolution. The riotous mood, aroused by the action of the women among the troops, made it likely that they would refuse to fight against the national guard. Fear of the consequences of such a refusal forced the old rulers to make concessions; absolutism gave in, not because it was affected by the devotion of the women, but only because it felt, how its own means of power were rapidly sinking and those of its opponents growing.

This example shows how moral and physical violence can be so closely related that it is often difficult to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. However, one also sees what an enormous stimulating and recruiting power pure moral violence can have in certain circumstances.

The steadfast courage, which does not shun sacrifice and is not frightened by danger, which does not take others' lives but springs from social idealism, which stakes its own life out of love for its comrades, this courage is a historical moving force of the first order. More than any other force, at the beginning of a revolutionary epoch, it can tear away from that regime those who, out of stupidity, cowardice or drudgery, still allow themselves to be found defending a regime when they have no interest in its continued existence. Therefore, the sacrifices made by individuals or groups, who have no other means of violence than moral ones, for the revolutionary cause, that is the cause of the evolution of humanity, have always been extremely fruitful. Their suffering brought forth a rich harvest of new deeds, from their downfall were born hordes of new fighters.

No more striking example of the crucified moral violence in the history of the proletarian class struggle than the sacrificial death their thousands of unarmed workers and laborers, shot by the troops at Petrograd on January 22, 1905, in their attempt to penetrate the Tsar's winter palace, to offer "Father" their entreaty. No more glorious resurrection of these crucified people than the great strike movement, which broke out

throughout Russia immediately after the barbaric act of autocracy.

It goes without saying that the actual violence in the revolutionary struggle is often carried by the same spirit of sacrificial courage as the moral. It therefore has the same inciting and recruiting effects among the indifferent and slow, the backward and enslaved. The greater thereby appears the difference in means of power between the ruling class and the revolutionary Gideons gang, the purer and more poignant appears the martyrdom of the latter. And it is precisely this martyrdom, not the material outcome of the violence used, that sows the seeds for later victories in the same way that the martyrdom of combatants who have no means of actual violence often does.⁹ Therefore, as long as the fighters for a new society are a minority, the actual violence in their hands as well as the moral is a *means of arousal and propaganda*. Once their strength has increased so much that the struggle enters a decisive stage, that the struggle for power begins, then violence can become a *testing ground*. It demonstrates the moral energy generated in the masses; it shows from which side the greatest amount of exalted soul power can be found. Extremely rare were the cases, in which revolutionaries surpassed or even equaled their opponents in military-technical terms; the military apparatus of the former was as a rule inferior and almost always improvised. If the decision in revolutionary struggle depended primarily on the quality and quantity of military armament and organization, such a struggle would almost always have failed. But fortunately, on the contrary, the decision depended mainly on spiritual-moral factors; even in those cases in which the force of arms seemed to be the decisive factor, the whole complex of moral forces from which it arose was of far greater importance.

Therefore, the application of historical experience to the proletarian revolution leads us to the following conclusions: in the general spiritual education of the proletariat, in the strengthening of its spiritual means of violence, that is of its insight, its idealistic coherence, its courage, its conviction, its sacrificial spirit, in this education lies the most effective preparation for victory.

Neglect of the material-technical resources is far less serious than neglect of the spiritual forces, and this is precisely because the former are merely tools of the latter. When actual violence forces its way into the revolutionary struggle, it always finds ways and means to persevere, although its weakness may first be a source of setbacks. But if the revolutionaries do not possess great spiritual moral superiority, their struggle is doomed to failure.

Revolutionaries, who in our time would focus their efforts primarily on the arming and military exercise of the masses for civil war, would fall into a similar error as the reformists of the previous era, who believed that the expansion and technical perfection of their organizations would definitely lead the proletariat to victory.

The *underestimation* in the labor movement of idea, insight, courage, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, in short, of spiritual moral factors, and the *overestimation* of technical-mechanical forces and means have taken bitter revenge.

Again, circumstances promote the overestimation of the mechanical tools in the

⁹ This is as true of the revolutionary war as it is of the class struggle. The heroic self-sacrifice e.g. of the small band of heroes who in June 1849 defended the Roman republic against the supremacy of the French, Naples, Austrian and Spanish armies and the famous retreat of Garibaldi and his followers after the fall of the city, scattered the idea of the national freedom and unity of Italy in tens of thousands of hearts and thus prepared the victory of the 1860 revolt.

struggle of the proletariat. But at the present stage of this struggle, it is no longer the *bureaucratic*, but the *violent* tools that are in danger of being overestimated. Organized violence, raised to almost infinite power and perfection by imperialism, rules the world, and the appearance arises whether any resistance to it must necessarily use equal weapons if it is not to be crushed. It is necessary for the masses to learn to see through the falsity of this appearance if they are not to be lured back to dead-end paths.

5. The cult of violence in imperialism

Naked, brutal violence rules the world today, and those who wield it pride themselves on it.

There was a time in the history of the bourgeois class when it was different; it denied that its power rested on violence, it boasted of having founded it in treaties. The "bourgeois rule of law" - a fiction, as any true justice must be in a society whose basis is economic inequality, economic exploitation - was the hypocritical form through which the bourgeois class state sought to render its essence of coercion and oppression unrecognizable; that fiction fitted into the thinking of liberalism, into the whole system of the young bourgeoisie.

In the age when the bourgeoisie raised the banner, on which was written in brilliant letters "Peace, Freedom, Free Trade," bourgeois thinkers asserted again and again, and no doubt many of them believed it too, that violence had expired, and coercion belonged to the past. Through the spread of knowledge and the expansion of democracy, the inequalities between the different classes would gradually diminish, the relations between the states would be regulated by reasonable justice and law: thus a new, better order would be born.

Soon these bourgeois illusions also began to affect social democracy, especially after the proletariat had won political rights. It imagined that by gradual reform it could make the class state socialist, that the constant expansion of democratic institutions and its own uninterrupted growth would enable it to take control of state power without violent shocks to use it for its purposes.

This was the epoch, in which the labor movement developed peacefully, and in that peaceful development found its fame and its importance; the epoch in which throughout Western Europe working-class multitudes repeated with conviction the lines of verse: "not with the weapons of the barbarians, the spiritual sword only do we wield".¹⁰

¹⁰ H. Roland-Holst probably quotes the [Socialistenmars](#), one of the most popular socialist struggle songs in the first half of the twentieth century. The song was written in 1898 and often performed on VARA radio and at meetings of the SDAP. From the context of the quoted, the song's social-pacifist tendency is evident:

"Not with the weapons of barbarians.
With neither powder nor sword do we struggle.
The spirit sword of freedom fighters,
Brings only the blessing to their side
Not with the weapons of barbarians,
With neither powder nor sword do we struggle.
The spirit sword of freedom fighters,
Brings only victory to their side"

For comparison, see [Roland Holst's text of the battle song The Internationale](#). (F.C.)

But it was also the age in which the awareness of the necessity of boundless sacrifice in the service of the movement faded, in which it seemed as if quiet perseverance and punctual rigor in organizational work, infinite diligence and patience in the "little work" were the forces that could lift the world of man up to freedom and unity. The organization in party and trade union, the membership fee and the ballot paper, all external, mechanical aids in the struggle for a new society - were increasingly conceived as the essential forces, which would bring this struggle to a successful conclusion. Also, its center of gravity was increasingly shifted from the masses to the leaders, whose skill, wit, cunning and eloquence seemed to be the miracle forces that would deliver the masses from distress and pressure.

The hurricane of the World War blew away all these chimeras and illusions: both the bourgeois ones of the new "rule of law" and "international law," and the social-democratic ones of a "gradual evolution towards socialism," and a victory, fought exclusively with politico-spiritual weapons.

Now it has become perfectly clear how the ruling classes of all countries rely solely on violence in their struggle against each other and against the popular masses. In the place of the earlier - often pretended and at best weak and half-hearted attempts - to regulate relations between classes and peoples by legal norms, in the place of the glorification of "human rights" and peoples' rights", has come the open glorification of the right of the strongest. The imperialist behemoths, straining their forces to the limit in the awesome struggle for world power, seek to achieve their goal by accumulation and application of the most terrible and the most sophisticated means of violence, which science and technology produce through the complete reorganization of the economy in the service of war. Well, of course, the rulers also try to fill the masses who have to produce and use these means of violence, through the poison of the nationalist-imperialist lie propaganda, with hatred for the enemy and with patriotic intoxication - without the human will and the human spirit, all the miracles of anti-production are dead and powerless - but the achievement of technical, mechanical organizational supremacy, is nevertheless considered, without doubt, to be the most important thing of all. For the masters can use their slaves, if necessary, even without their enthusiasm for "victory"; they rely on the long education in obedience and submission, on the cowardly fear, the fragmentation, the lack of unity of the masses.

The struggle of the ruling classes against the internal enemy - whether animated by revolutionary-nationalist or revolutionary-socialist ideals, or whether only hunger drives him to revolt - is conducted in the same spirit and by the same means as the struggle for world power, just as unhesitatingly, just as hard and cruel. For the imperialist classes can enjoy the fruits of world power only so long as the masses of their own people toil in mute subjugation and suffer this idly. Therefore, the ruling classes everywhere have put their strongest men at the helm, and all the low and cruel methods of oppression of the old pre-civilian police state: espionage, provocation, bribery, censorship, preventive prison, persecution of word and press, disciplinary house, noose and bullet, they have risen from the dead and revived in full force. The state of popular liberties and rights has been reduced in ferocious speed to deep below the pre-1848 level.

The orgies of bloodthirsty violence that have been terrifying mankind for four years exert a horrible suggestion. The absolute contempt for the body and soul of fellow man, for his rights and the fruits of his labor, that gross, brutal contempt, proven daily in countless acts, in countless ways, pervades everywhere like a pestilence. The

violent disposition spreads from top to bottom through all strata of society, just as the unrestrained greed for profit, the immoderate desire for money, won without labor, pervades all social strata and in a few years has destroyed the old-bourgeois moral standards of decency, honesty, rectitude, and good faith.

Fueled with all the juices of the social body, equipped with all the powers at the disposal of human ingenuity, violence appears today, as ruthlessly brutal and at the same time as awe-inspiring as never before it appears as the single deciding factor, determining fate and life of hundreds of millions. How could it be otherwise, or it must impose itself on those millions as the only real force of re-creation of society? How can it be otherwise, unless, in their dreams of social transformation, they see violence appearing as the iron hand whose grip alone can break the cruel power of their masters?

No wonder, therefore, that the glorification of violence - a glorification propagated by the ruling classes in furtherance of their hegemonic ends, and indeed indispensable for the realization of those ends - is spreading also among those who have completely other ends to realize: among the masses of the disenfranchised and disinherited. In the mood in which these masses now find themselves, brought to despair by misery and oppression, by the appalling blood sacrifices, now demanded of them for four years, the cult of violence *must* exert irresistible attraction on them. They all, who would like to fly at the throats of their tormentors, find in that cult the a priori justification of all cruel bloody acts, to be committed in their own struggle.

Thus, armed violence, the method by which the imperialist behemoths fight their battle for world power, threatens to be accepted also by the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat as the means of struggle against imperialism par excellence. Among this vanguard the voices are becoming more frequent and louder, which consider armed violence as a means, which in the proletarian revolution will prove to be of at least equal value and importance as the mass strike, destined to complete what it begins.¹¹

The increasing weight, attributed on the revolutionary side to armed violence as a means in the class struggle, also means that the demand for "popular armament" is now made with much greater emphasis and fiercer conviction than before. The general oppression, degradation and gagging of the proletariat during the war years give this demand almost the meaning of a revolutionary battle cry. "Armament" is the word, which spontaneously rises to the lips, where impotent indignation must look on and impotent anger must tolerate, how women and children are stabbed and shot, because they ask for bread, men thrown into prison, because they demand peace and freedom.

The more the proletariat raises itself to the truly international disposition, in which the struggle against domestic and foreign imperialism appears as one and the same struggle - the disposition in which it no longer knows any other enemy than big capital, the tormentor and oppressor of mankind - the more convinced it becomes, that the general arming and exercise in arms of its supporters is indispensable for its salvation and that it has to carry through this arming itself, where the bourgeoisie has not yet fully

¹¹ Already during World War I, revolutionaries differed on the question of armed struggle and conscription. See Lenin, [The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution](#) (1916) for a rebuttal by Lenin to the antimilitarism of H. Roland Holst and others. The question of the military defense of the Soviet republic against the attacks of imperialism, discussed further in this chapter, calls for an analysis of the degeneration of the revolution in Russia, some outlines of which were outlined in the introduction. H. Roland Holst does give valid arguments against a military export of the revolution as later in the Polish campaign, which failed miserably due to the presence of landowning peasants beyond the "Danzig-Trieste line" mentioned by H. Gorter. (F.C.)

introduced it. The Bolsheviks, the heroes of internationalist socialism, the fighting vanguard of the world proletariat, they organize, as far as their power goes, the "red army" of the Soviet republic as a means of struggle against the imperialist classes of all countries. And in all countries the revolutionaries prepare to follow that example, arouse the masses of soldiers, to turn their arms against their oppressors, and agitate also for the arming of the whole proletariat.

So utterly excluded seems any possibility of defeating imperialism other than by force of arms that anyone who refuses to accept the force of arms as the principal means or one of the principal means of the proletarian revolution is today accused by the revolutionaries of guilty weakness and half-heartedness.

But if the working mass counts primarily on the power of arms to overcome imperialism, it will have to emulate it in its methods and adopt its practices. Imperialism has both intensively strengthened militarism to the highest degree and extensively expanded it to the highest degree. If revolutionary socialism accepts the imperialist means of violence, then of course it cannot fall back in their application behind the degree of development achieved by imperialism. If, to give an example, the Russian Soviet republic wishes to free itself by the force of arms from the iron grip of German imperialism and to force it by force of arms to remove its claw from the Russian border states, it must devote itself to the creation of a military organization superior to that of the German empire, and from now on devote itself with all its strength to the preparation for a life and death struggle. Then she must again take the millions of demobilized peasants and workers from the fields, from the factories and workshops to drill them in the army camps for human murder. Then she must again withdraw millions of women and older workers from productive labor to put them in the steel and ammunition factories to manufacture cannons and guns, of highly explosive grenades and hand bombs, of poisonous gases and barbed wire. Then it must immediately put warships in all yards; day and night the workshops must resound with the hammering and pounding of the tools, the droning of the mighty machines; uninterrupted labor must continue, the shifts must alternate. For this is how it happens in all imperialist states. And the Soviet government cannot want the revolutionary Russian workers and peasants to face the reactionary armies of imperialism with inferior weapons and insufficiently trained. Tsarism wasted millions and millions of human lives; it could do so because it had nothing but contempt for the life and limb of the oppressed, overexploited "gray masses." But now that those masses have freed themselves from their oppressors and extortionists, now it is simply impossible for the executors of the popular will to set them up as targets for the German or Anglo-American guns. If one wants to prevent this from happening and still fight imperialism with its own weapons, there is only one way: to raise Russia's military power as high as possible.

But in that case the Russian people will have to accept the dire economic and personal burdens of present militarism. It will have to sacrifice its newly acquired political freedom to the demands of military discipline, reorganize its battered production for the sake of war, that is of anti-production, destruction and annihilation.

It is no different with the preparation for war than with the war itself. A belligerent state does not freely determine the method of warfare or the expansion of the war zone; both are imposed on it by military necessity.

In our days the nations have merged into the armies: from their awesome magnitude follows a proportionate extension of the devastation and suffering brought about by war. The stupendous quantity and almost boundless power of the instruments of

murder work in equal measure, the flower of youth goes into the grave, the popular power is shaken for a long time. The infernal race in devising stronger means of destruction continues without pause, and every improvement means more wounded and dead, more mutilated bodies and distraught minds. No belligerent party can in the long run refrain from using certain means of destruction, and putting into practice certain methods of warfare, used by the opposing side, without weakening its military strength. It is illogical to believe, that it will do this for humanitarian reasons. If a socialist government wants to wage war, it will have to try as much as an imperialist government to subdue its opponents by firebombs and gas bombs, by poison gases and flamethrowers, by attacks by planes on cities behind the front, by starving the enemy population. It will have to use in defense of its socialist institutions the same means that imperialism uses to confirm and maintain its power over the masses of its own people or of other peoples. Not even bourgeois pacifists today believe in the possibility of "humanizing" war. Shall we who call ourselves "realists" believe in it? The goal of warfare - the military specialists of the belligerent powers have been repeating it ad nauseam for four years - is the "destruction of the enemy forces." And because the peoples have been absorbed into the armies, whole popular power placed in the service of politico-military ends, that goal has now become even grander, even wider than before: not only the destruction of the enemy *forces*, but that of the enemy *peoples* is sought. Not their *physical* destruction it is true - this would be an impossibility - but their economic, commercial destruction, their utter exhaustion and thus their destruction as competitors and contenders for world power.

A socialist community, taking up arms against foreign imperialism, is forced to accept this goal in all its hideous consequences.

We have chosen here the example of socialist armed violence against the imperialism of another state, firstly because in the present international, political relations it imposes itself automatically, secondly because it speaks in so strong clear colors. However, there is no *essential* difference between the consequences of armed violence in this case and the other, that it is systematically used against the ruling classes of one's own country. Even then, the revolutionary organization wishing to carry out the struggle by military means will have to make them as powerful and effective as possible, and even then, the possible rejection of the most repugnant inhuman weapons or methods would have the fatal consequence that the revolutionary scissors against the military power of reaction were at a disadvantage. Even if revolutionary socialism wishes to overwhelm its own bourgeoisie, domestic imperialism by force of arms, it must be prepared to emulate the technique and methods of imperialist war in civil war. In that case, too, it faces consequences towards people and things, from which it cannot escape.

Any policy which seeks to achieve its ends by violence is incompatible with democracy and freedom; it cannot spare the rights of the individual in any respect. If the proletariat wants to conquer by force of arms and maintain itself by force of arms in the literal sense of the word whether against domestic or foreign imperialism, it must abolish freedom of expression, of speech and of the press, it must severely punish those who refuse military service or labor in the service of warfare, just as the capitalist governments do. It must rule by means of martial law - "by which any ass can rule" - and reinstate capital punishment. In a word, it must again strike down popular freedom, which it just instituted and confirmed, for either gun violence must kill freedom, or freedom must kill gun violence, together they cannot exist. Certainly, the regulation of production, traffic, etc. is also impossible without discipline, but this discipline can bear

a purely democratic character, as it did in the ancient marches and medieval guilds. Such discipline is very compatible with free discussion, consultation between leaders and executors, the making of binding decisions only by the majority or even by the whole community of those involved. But in a military organization (even, if it bears the name of "people's army" or "people's arms") all this is impossible; in it immediate, unconditional obedience is required; any dissent, and more so, any resistance, must be inexorably suppressed. Not brotherhood, but hierarchy, ranking, is the life principle of military organization. In the long run, none escapes becoming an instrument in the hands of the ringleader, a pedestal for the dictator.

While thus freedom cannot exist in a military organization, such an organization also outwardly becomes irrevocably an instrument that threatens or attacks the freedom of the masses.

All reasons, we believe, for revolutionary socialism, not only to vigorously combat militarism in its present form, but to reject any military organization. But in that case it must completely and utterly detach itself from the belief in armed violence as one of the means that will have to lead the popular masses to victory, it must utterly break with the cult of violence!

6. Proletarian revolution and violence

With a few exceptions¹² the revolutionary socialists hold the expectation, without the power of arms, to be utopian, if not nonsensical. They are convinced, both that in the struggle for power the proletariat will have to use the force of arms, and that after its initial victory, during the era of the so-called proletarian dictatorship, it will have to apply terror. And they have no doubt that the struggling and victorious proletariat will surpass the imperialist bourgeoisie as much in military terms as in the organization of production and distribution. They do not deny that the use of violence has drawbacks in political and moral terms, but they believe that if ever then in this case the end justifies the means and that the violence of arms with all its consequences must be accepted because it is simply *indispensable* for victory. We will examine and refute these claims point by point.

Struggling socialism could match and even surpass the imperialist bourgeoisie in means of violence. We hold this to be ruled out for the following reasons. As long as the bourgeoisie is in power, the proletariat naturally has no opportunity for general arming and training of its supporters, that is, for the creation of a powerful military organization. The main means of violence are always in the hands of the rulers and the highest that an underlying class can achieve is the creation of smaller or larger volunteer corps, as has been done e.g. in Ireland. These corps will, of course, always be very behind the regular armies in technical military strength. As long as they remain a tool in the hands of their owners, there can be no question of victory. Otherwise, when a large part of the army is won over to the revolutionary idea. Then, under certain circumstances, the actions of such corps can cause the psychological shock which leads the soldiers to refuse service in mass and to defect to the revolutionaries, just as, we saw,¹³ happened every time in the civil revolution. In that case, the violence of arms is comparable to a gust of wind that knocks down a building, which is outwardly

¹² One finds them mainly among the Christian Socialists. But even among them are convinced advocates of violence.

¹³ On this, see the reflections in Chapters III and IV.

still intact, but internally already moldy and decayed. For the probability of inflicting such a blow, not the strength of the revolutionary-military organization, but the entire situation and especially the mood of the popular masses is decisive. Even without or almost without arms, a mass will be able to throw the punch if only the dissolution of the old regime has progressed far enough and the spirit of resistance in the army is widespread enough. Thus, the revolt of the unarmed working masses in Petrograd in February 1917 dealt the autocratic regime the final blow, because part of the army refused to shoot at the people immediately at the beginning of the disturbances and took sides against the tsarist police before that. Soon his example aroused several regiments to defect to the provisional government; after a struggle of several days with the few army divisions, which remained loyal to the old rulers, all of Petrograd was in the hands of the revolutionaries.

Similarly, we believe, in the proletarian revolution violence will still repeatedly be the touchstone by which the rot of the institutions and of the whole apparatus of power of the old ruling class becomes public. But it is then never more than a brief episode in the general flow of revolutionary events, made inevitable by the military organization of the old rulers, not prepared in a planned way by the organs of the revolutionary class. And this makes an awesome distinction. It is quite another thing, to recognize that violence in certain situations, when a revolutionary climax is reached, will be able to become the spark that ignites moral forces like bundles of straw - or to regard it as the main factor to victory and prepare systematically for it.

Even in the transitional period, usually referred to by the name of proletarian dictatorship, after the initial¹⁴ victory of the proletarian masses, the organization and use of armed force will not, in our opinion, be the strong but the weak side of the new class government. We want to illustrate this again on the basis of the struggle against *foreign* imperialism, that is, a war in the ordinary sense of the word, because this example is the most telling. In the struggle against *domestic* imperialism, civil war, the situation is essentially the same, only the technical-organizational factors are of even less, the psychic ones of even greater weight.

The sacrifices, which the preparation for war and the war itself require of nations in our day, are so immoderately great and so unbearably heavy, that they deprive life of much of its value. A nation that prepares for war or wages war with all its might cannot be a prosperous nation. It is compelled to reduce its material and spiritual needs to the utmost, to neglect all institutions of civilization and hygiene, in short, all the works of life, to waste its material resources and its spiritual powers on the organization of the works of death.

A free people cannot want all this; it CANNOT, to defend freedom or bring it to others, give up everything it imagined it would achieve by the conquest of freedom. The masses fighting for socialism sacrifice themselves in this struggle, animated by the hope, that when they have defeated the ruling class, they will *live happily* in a socialist society, free from worries and afflictions, free from distress, pressure, and excessive labor. To fatten with the fruits of their labor the insatiable monster militarism, - to impose on themselves the oppressive yoke of military service, - to renounce their political rights, the democracy finally achieved, to transfer the authority they themselves exercise to a few, so that the latter will as of old arbitrarily decide the lives and destinies of

¹⁴ We say initial, because we believe it is likely that the first period of proletarian dictatorship will be followed by another epoch of reaction (or even some such epochs will do so), just as 1815 followed 1789 and 1851 followed 1848.

the many - the masses will not be in favor of all this. *The present military machinery can only be built, and function based on the power of the imperialist class; with this it collapses, and all attempts made on the revolutionary proletarian side to re-establish it in its former strength will end in relative failure.*¹⁵

Even more than in the *preparation for*, a socialist regime will lag behind the imperialist adversary in the *application of force of arms*. Demonstrating this, we will also fight the argument that the end justifies the means.

The revolutionary socialists want to make the organization of labor for the community by free and equal people the foundation of society. They want the cooperation of all peoples and of all races in one world alliance, which will grow as the social revolution spreads and the popular masses achieve victory in several countries.

The spirit which animates this attempt directly contradicts the spirit of imperialist militarism. The latter blindly destroys productive forces and products of human labor as soon as such destruction is necessary for power purposes. Why should it stop there? For its aim is not to secure to all men the material and spiritual goods of life, but to squeeze out of the labor of the oppressed masses as much of these goods as possible and monopolize them for the ruling classes. No matter how many people perish, there will always be enough left to work;¹⁶ and how many countries and cities are destroyed, how many products of human labor are destroyed, if only the labor screws are tightened strongly enough, the possessors of capital will never have to deny themselves anything.

This is the spirit of imperialist militarism. Now set against it that of revolutionary socialism.

It regards all productive forces and all the proceeds of human labor all over the earth as the heritage of humanity. To it they are sacred, because they will benefit humanity; destruction of lives, destruction of countries, destruction of goods, they are extremely antagonistic to revolutionary socialism for economic-social reasons.

Imperialism regards man as the fertilizer which must fertilize the fields of its power, as the lime and stones with which the building of its power is founded. It accepts without conscience to make suffer, to ruin millions, it has no hesitation out of humanity, out of sense of being one with others, when bloodshed and cruelty are necessary to confirm or maintain its power. War aggravates this contempt for human life: it may in the past have been a powerful means of strengthening social urges, of solidarity, loyalty, sacrifice, but today it reinforces to a much greater degree anti-social instincts such as cruelty, the lust for plunder, murder, bloodlust, sadistic lust for tormenting and hurting one's fellow man, etc.

Just the opposite as imperialism, revolutionary socialism realizes and honors in each human being a part of humanity, the great common mother; it feels or foresees its

¹⁵ While the Soviet government has achieved admirable results in the political and economic reconstruction of Russia, despite overwhelming difficulties, it has so far failed to raise a "red army" of real significance (that is, in proportion to the vastness and resources of the republic). The enemies of the Soviet government accuse it of self-power; that may be true in numerous minor matters, in the great vital interests of the people it faithfully carries out the popular will and this is the reason why the people remain loyal to it. Thus, despite the worst provocations of the German robbers, she persists in her attitude of: no war with Germany, while *all the* bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties insist on the resumption of the war. The masses want to *preserve* peace at all costs.

¹⁶ When the whites are used up, the colored races by the thousands are already being imported to France, for example, to work in the fields and factories.

coming real unity; it fights, suffers, works, makes sacrifices to realize it. This is why revolutionary socialism feels that insulting, hurting and killing people is something repulsive. Thus, moral motives also mean that in the application of violence it will always be weaker than the servants of imperialism. Reason and spirit keep it from numerous measures, from espionage and bribery, from revenge and terrorism which the ruling class regularly applies without hesitation.¹⁷ The struggling and conquering proletariat cannot apply them without self-abasement and self-reproach, without coming into conflict with its own principles, its own supreme will. Communist awareness, the will to bring about the economic and spiritual unity of humanity, the consciousness that this is the historical task of the proletariat: this awareness and this will prepare a higher stage of human evolution. And for this very reason they are incompatible with consistent and vigorous application of methods and means of struggle, stemming from a much lower level of economic and moral development of humanity. The socialist proletariat, in the highest potentialities of its feeling, thinking and will, has already outgrown the blind *rage* of armed violence, the deliberate infliction of physical and mental suffering out of lust to make suffer. Without this *rage* and lust, however, it is not possible, to compete with imperialist warfare.

That the end justifies the means was perfectly true for the Jesuits, just as it is perfectly true today for the imperialist classes. In order to achieve and confirm the evil ends of oppression and exploitation, all means are good; all means are good for those who despise man and wish to use him as a beast of burden and slave; for them, indeed, in the face of the enemy everything is permissible, but for the revolutionary proletariat the matter is different, its aim is: to unify mankind, to lead it upward to brotherhood and freedom. And it can exercise its greatest power only when it *strives toward this end by means which are consistent with it*. Violence and cruelty are not among these means, nor are outrageous schemes (espionage, bribery, etc.).

That systematic armed violence does not fit the essence of revolutionary socialism is also shown by the fact that it cannot apply this violence without injuring, maiming or killing those who are its natural allies, that is without weakening itself. It is common knowledge, how, when the current rulers want to restore order during disturbances, usually the "wrong ones" are hit. In the civil war, the revolutionaries will also tragically hit the wrongdoers; they will direct their weapons not against the financial and industrial oligarchy, but against the sons of the toiling people, against the members of the oppressed classes, against workers, farmers' sons, petty clerks, dispossessed intellectuals, all of whom in fact, according to their social interests, belong to the side of socialism, but who through stupidity, cowardice, stupidity, slavishness and drudgery become the defenders of a society which offers them nothing but a drab, monotonous existence of toil, insecurity and misery. The revolutionary proletariat has better arguments to convince them all their error, than bayonets and bullets.

When the proletariat wants to fight a foreign imperialism by force of arms, it is compelled to strike immediately and in the most drastic way the international proletarian solidarity in the heart, which it pretends to serve as a sacred principle. It is forced to

¹⁷ Thus, the Socialist government, which briefly ruled Finland, gave orders during the civil war to spare the lives of captured White Guard troops in *any case*, that is, even if the other side continued to shoot captured Red Guard members. This socialist government thus proved to be the *only one* in Europe that did not apply the principle of retaliation, of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, during the war. Of course, this was no reason for the Whites, when they had achieved victory with the help of Prussian bayonets, not to "execute" members of the Red Guard by the hundreds and hundreds. Thus a socialist regime will always lag behind a capitalist one in cruel inhumanity - fortunately!

persecute and destroy the oppressed proletarians of another country or another nationality's still chained brothers like wild animals: in addition to the pressure of their own bourgeoisie, these still get to feel the armored fist of the foreign comrades, who pretend to want to liberate them. Will the consciousness of fighting proletarians have an offensive effect on the fervor of the revolutionary army? And will the working class of those countries, where it has not yet possessed courage or lucidity enough to revolt against capital, regard those who come to attack it with fire and iron as liberators? Neither one nor the other seems likely.

From whichever side we look at the matter, we always conclude *that the revolutionary proletariat will inevitably be inferior to the imperialist bourgeoisie in the preparation, organization and application of armed violence* (and in general of all coercive and frightening measures). Economic, political, and moral motives cause this minority: it derives from the superiority of the proletariat, from the higher goals it sets for itself, from the fact that its struggle wants to establish a society in which raw violence will no longer exist. Only when the proletariat itself has come to complete clarity about this, only when it itself believes only in the means appropriate to its vocation, will it be able to develop its full strength. And then it too will itself be amazed at that strength.

"But" reply those who still cling to the old ideas of civil war, etc., "without armed struggle, the mass of the people cannot expel the imperialist bourgeoisie from its position of power, it cannot repel the counterattacks of reaction. The armed violence of the ruling class can only be broken by armed violence on our part. When the class struggle has reached the degree of intensity and expansion that we have called social revolution, the masses have no choice but to be slaughtered by the henchmen and paid tools of the rulers, or armed struggle. They are forced to do this: "necessity breaks the law." To this we reply all this was true for the earlier, the bourgeois revolution. Our present society, however, by its character and composition, gives the working masses a new means of struggle, which largely replaces the old means of coercion and violence and opens almost infinite possibilities. That means is the mass strike movement.

7. The mass strike; the great means of struggle and violence of the proletarian revolution

From the unparalleled growth of the means of production, from the upheaval of technology and transport, from the enormous composition and extreme sensitivity of the social organism, from the accumulation of immense masses of people in the great cities and industrial districts, from the essence in short of highly developed capitalism, arise the *socio-economic*, that is, the *passive* conditions of the politico-revolutionary mass strike. Its *active, socio-psychic* conditions are:

- The collective self-consciousness of the workers and their sense of solidarity, cultivated by the cooperation of hundreds of thousands both in the centers of industry, mining and shipping and in the enterprises (railroads, post and telegraph) linked across a whole country.
- The awareness awakened in these masses of their social indispensability.
- The unity of will, instilled in them both by the production process and by propaganda and organization and finally the spirit of resistance to economic exploitation and political oppression, the will to fight for the realization of socialist ideals, awakened by half a century of socialist agitation.

The mass strike, in the hands of the proletariat, is a means of coercion against its

social opponents, as powerful, as never before has been at the service of an oppressed class in the struggle for its liberation. For, never before had an oppressed class been so much more numerous than its oppressors, and also by the nature of production had it acquired such close and intimate cohesion. Never before has there been a system of production in which the stagnation of labor in the main enterprises so completely disrupted the power of the economic organs of the ruling classes (namely: stock exchange and bank), paralyzed its main means of authority (namely: police, judiciary and army) to such a high degree.

The revolutionary mass strike is undoubtedly a means of violence or coercion. Every strike, insofar as it is not merely protest or demonstration of power (and even in that case the principle of coercion is *latent*) wants to act as a coercive tool. The limited, exclusively economic professional strike for improvement of working conditions wants this as much as the tumultuous million-dollar strike for revolutionary purposes. But while the former directs its coercive force only against a particular entrepreneur or business organization, the latter attacks capitalist society itself. Both its *aim* and its *extension* and its *methods* (cessation of traffic and transportation, of post and telegraph, of mines and factories, of light and water supplies) give it the character of an attack on the state, that is of actual violence. If it wants to exercise its full effects on social life, it must not hesitate to go beyond the limits of the law and take up the struggle against state power. The very fact, that strikes in the enterprises whose progress is indispensable for the regular functioning of the social organism and the political power apparatus of the ruling classes are immediately responded to by the latter with coercive measures such as mobilization [labor coercion; F.C.] of the strikers, arrest of the leaders, takeover of labor by military forces, etc., this fact alone has the effect, that every revolutionary mass strike worthy of the name leads to breaking of the law, to sharp conflicts with state power, and often to acts of violence. In revolutionary eras, its leaders will not be allowed to shy away from committing acts of sabotage (damaging or destroying property) nor from individually frightening those who oppose its expansion. Its aims: the subversion of the capitalist mode of production and the disruption of the capitalist state, are incompatible with obedience to the law and with absolute respect for property and personal freedom.

It is clear, however, that such acts of violence in the strike are not chief but secondary, - tools to which the workers need resort less, the more complete their unity, the stronger, the more general their revolutionary élan is. The most awe-inspiring revolutionary strike movement yet to emerge from the proletarian class struggle: the Russian October strike of 1905, however revolutionary in its aims - for it sought to destroy the autocratic system of government - was relatively peaceful in its forms. Actual violence was in her a secondary factor compared to the socio-moral, to the irresistible urge that animated more than a million people and drove them to the same act.¹⁸

That the essence of mass strike is not violence in the former sense (as, e.g., the essence of armed insurrection) is obvious. Striking masses do not take their social opponents' lives. They do not want to injure or maim them; neither do they want, either as an exception, to damage or destroy the property of these opponents. Not against the bodies of the members of the possessing class do they direct their attacks, but exclusively against its social institutions, its social power. Their confidence of victory is not rooted in the hope of bringing the capitalists into subjection through starvation - for long before this result was achieved, the proletariat itself would have starved to

¹⁸ For further details on the Russian October Strike, see my work on Revolutionary Mass Action, [Chapter V](#).

death - but of fatally striking them in their economic and political institutions of power: the stock exchange, the bank, the state itself.

The proletarian masses have long intuitively realized that - if only their cohesion is strong enough, their solidarity alive enough, their spiritual-political independence great enough - they can achieve this result without bloodshed, without cruelty and almost without outward violence. The more steadfast the unity of the combatants, the more the strike will be able to unfold its irresistible force in an atmosphere of serene calm, which contrasts as strongly as possible with the eventful being of the earlier bourgeois revolution. The pensive, controlled being of the specifically proletarian coercive force will contrast brilliantly with the cruel, blood-stained means of power of imperialism. And this contrast will do no little to bring to the side of the proletariat the members of the intermediate classes (small peasants, small citizens, intellectuals) who have no interest in the survival of the capitalist system, but who are nevertheless incapable of revolutionary initiative against it, and to isolate big capital and its supporters. Of such a generally revolutionary and yet peaceful strike all the Chartists dreamed, when, in the era of the first great independent struggle of the proletariat, they spread the idea of the "Holy Month" in the world of raw violence, harsh repression and bitter struggle in which they lived. The time for the realization of that idea was not then: the maturity and unity of the proletariat were not nearly great enough. Nor is that time now. Yes, it even seems that we are further from that unity than ever. But several mass strikes that have taken place since the beginning of the new century in Russia, in Italy, in France, in England, in Sweden, in the United States, have already been embodiments - albeit partial and flawed incarnations - of the Chartist idea. The proletariat is growing toward the international-general, comprehensive revolutionary strike.

Of course, the absolutely peaceful revolutionary strike, entirely without violence, is an ideal. But as the proletariat grows in class consciousness, in endurance, in sacrifice, in self-control and reflection, as its unity grows, these ideal approaches its realization. The further the working class has advanced in socialist insight and socialist disposition, the more powerfully it can wield the weapon of the mass revolutionary strike. And the more vigorously it wields it, the more the actual violence in the strike diminishes to an insignificant side effect, a relic of old forms of struggle in earlier eras. Its victory depends not on crude, physical, but on social and moral violence, that is, it wins through complete cohesion, greater moral courage, stronger élan, more unshakable perseverance, deeper sacrificial spirit among its participants, than those possessed by the opponent. In the strike, historical evolution brings forth a means of struggle in the class struggle, in which the actual physical violence has been almost completely replaced by the social and moral. And how could socialist society be the outcome, other than of a struggle, in which the proletariat fought with higher means, in a more human way than its opponents? In which it did not infuse the struggle as much as possible with the new principle of human unity?

All past social revolutionary movements by necessity used actual violence. Without this violence, no popular movement could achieve its aims. And this also means that it could not do it without arousing at the same time as the most beautiful social drives and virtues, the most heroic feelings, also the dark, bloody instincts, which are always waiting in the hidden depths of the human animal for an opportunity to break free.

Certainly, the atrocities and excesses committed by revolutionary crowds in the heat of the struggle, excesses usually grossly exaggerated by bourgeois historians and moralists, are dwarfed by the endless series of bestialities committed by the ruling

classes in defense of their privileges. As a rule, the humanity and magnanimity of the revolutionary fighters, animated by social idealism and comradeship, contrasted nicely with the inhuman methods of oppression of the rulers. And the proletariat can boast of having demonstrated humanity and magnanimity to a greater extent than any former fighting class. It owes this not least to its socialist disposition, which teaches it to realize the human being even in the opponent.

The more completely the proletariat renounces the old means of violence, which arouse animal lusts and bloodthirsty tendencies in man - the more it abandons the thought of revenge and retaliation, which are intimately connected with the use of these means, - and the more vigorously it simultaneously answers all measures of violence and repression of the rulers with passive resistance, which no violence can break, no repression can crush, - the more it learns to trust completely in the economic-social magic which it possesses in this passive resistance and with which it can crush capitalist power, as soon as it wants to do so in unison, the more brilliantly its task as the savior and renewer of society generally appears. The evolution of the revolution will be the prelude to the revolution of society.

8. The chances of the revolutionary strike during and after the world war

The power of the mass strike is no longer a question: it has already been demonstrated many times.

Mass strikes demolished the fortress of the Russian autocracy and made the all-powerful money kings of the United States of America tremble. By mass strikes the English transport workers forced the internationally organized shipping capital to make concessions. By mass strikes the poor Italian agricultural workers lifted themselves from their appalling degradation. In almost all capitalist countries the mass strike has forced reforms, overthrown governments, made the hard heads of multimillionaires bow, made the impossible possible. The mass strike has continued even where its preparation and organization could not take place, where freedom of speech and press, of association and assembly were lacking. No state of war, no state of siege can prevent it, no abdications of power, no violence of tyrannical governments can prevent the proletariat from wielding the weapon which arises from its position in the process of production and grows in strength as the proletariat itself grows in importance.

And yet now, under the influence of the war, doubts are again being expressed about the strength and appropriateness of the mass strike in the conditions created by the war. This doubt is being raised from two very different sides. First, of course, by the reformists of all shades, the social-patriotic traitors of the proletarian revolution, the allies of the bourgeoisie. In their advice to the workers, they begin by making a polite bow to the *idea* of the mass revolutionary strike, only to reject its practice with all the more insistence. In an undetermined future, in entirely changed circumstances, yes then the mass strike might be useful and necessary. But now, in this time of world food shortage, of reduced production and lack of goods, it would be nonsensical and criminal. So reasoned Vliegen and Polak and Troelstra, so reasoned all the reformists, all the overt or covert backers of the bourgeoisie. So reason the social-patriots in the neutral and in the belligerent countries.

Comprehensive strikes, say the social-patriots in the neutral countries, will now only have the effect of aggravating the suffering of the masses by increasing the problems

in the food supply. Probably, in those enterprises where production is struggling with all kinds of problems, they would be a welcome reason for many entrepreneurs to close their factories indefinitely. Disturbances in traffic and transportation, with economic life everywhere already highly disrupted and dislocated, will also add to distress and misery. Thus, by launching strikes now, the proletariat harms first of all itself and the petty bourgeoisie, whose living conditions are almost more difficult than its own.¹⁹

Had the revolutionary classes previously listened to such advice, it would never have come to an insurrectionary movement in world history. Had the Russian proletariat refrained from revolutionary-political strikes on such grounds, it would still today be groaning under the rule of the knot!

Revolutionary movements (and a strike movement, as we mean it here, is nothing but the *form of the proletarian revolution*), revolutionary movements do not usually break out in times of abundance of work and food. It is precisely the aggravation of distress, the sharpening of class conflicts that cause fermentation among the toiling masses, which finally unloads itself in riotous movements. Certainly, the social dislocation accompanying the political and social revolution can temporarily aggravate the suffering of the masses, but just as certainly it leads in the long run to changes, which will put an end to that distress.

The revolutionary strike movement, to which the revolutionary socialists are now arousing the masses everywhere, is aimed, as far as immediate practice is concerned, at ending the war. Forcing the governments to do this is now the first goal of any revolutionary mass action. And the proletariat of the neutral countries can also contribute to this. If it succeeds in pushing through its demands for food supplies, restoration of civil liberties and demobilization in a revolutionary manner, this means a defeat for the imperialist classes in general, and it leads to a strengthening of the revolutionary currents in the belligerent states. And if these succeed in gaining the upper hand, if peace is enforced by the masses along paths of struggle, then imperialism is shaken to its foundations and the road to further revolutionary development is open.

Every movement, every struggle, every strike must now aim both at immediate practical goals (closing of borders, seizure of food supplies, demobilization, etc.) and at general revolutionary goals. And when, for the sake of the latter, the proletariat must take upon itself new burdens, endure new sufferings, it must be prepared to do so, for without taking upon itself burdens and sufferings of all kinds, without making innumerable sacrifices, socialism will never be acquired.

To oppose a strike movement in these times because it would add a few more bitter drops to the sea of misery, which the masses are now going through - it is an expression of the usual short-sighted reformist politics, which pays attention only to the immediate and small interest, never to the great historical task of the working class.

A political strike, the reformists go on to say, would be a slap in the face at a time when there is great unemployment in so many companies. It would benefit only the employers. If this were so, one would not have to worry so much about the disruption of economic life as the fatal consequence of the strike! But the reformists know very well that it is not so; they know that there are certain enterprises - one can compare them to the vein network and the nervous system of the human organism - enterprises such as land and water transportation, the postal service, telegraph, telephone, municipal services in the big cities, in which unemployment makes little or no impact. Extensive

¹⁹ Limited, purely economic strikes in certain professions are, of course, not included here.

strikes in those enterprises will always greatly disrupt economic life and paralyze the functioning of the government apparatus.

As for Holland, it is out of the question that a revolutionary strike which does not include these companies could exert a somewhat strong pressure on the government, the stock exchange and public opinion. But if it did include them, the fact that a high percentage of unemployed workers were present in several company tasks would weaken its force only slightly. Of course, it is desirable that the workers of *all* companies participate in a revolutionary-political strike: the *number of* strikers is also a factor of the impression it makes, of the coercion it can exert. But the *main factor* does not lie in the number: the participation of the workers of the construction trades, the metal industry, etc., would here have mainly *demonstrative* significance. The coercive force of a strike depends for our country even in normal times, but now more than ever primarily on the cessation of traffic and transportation. That is why revolutionary propaganda must above all try to reach all categories of workers involved in the transportation of people, goods and messages (railroad and tramway workers, boatmen, dock workers, seamen, postal, telegraph and telephone personnel) and bring them to an awareness of their honorable task in the struggle against imperialism.

Certainly, that education is difficult. A large part of the workers in the transportation industry is highly politicized; they expect everything from the ballot paper, the parliamentary struggle and legislation; the ties, with which the unfortunate coercive laws of 1903 have now bound them for fifteen years, have turned them into slaves, who dare not think of actual resistance. Another part still thinks and feels entirely petty bourgeois; it looks down on the mass of manual workers as on people of inferiority. The dissatisfaction among the postal and telegraph workers, for example, is great, the need has risen to their lips, but it expresses itself only in motions, petitions, and protests. To start the revolutionary struggle together with the mass of the workers, to break with routine and decency: to go on strike - it does not yet occur to the minds.

But the great teacher: need, and propaganda, together they will change this. Delusion and prejudice, dregs of the past, will be overcome by the forces of social development. The technically trained transport workers, the men of the port and of the shipping industry, will come to realize the power that they can exercise, especially in alliance with the miners. They will come to see that their united efforts can strike the capitalist state in the heart.

In the warring countries, of course, it is the workers of the war industries - first and foremost of the munitions factories who should spearhead a revolutionary struggle for peace. A strike in those industries, international, general, and vigorously maintained, with its awesome workings on the millions of soldiers at the front, could undoubtedly put an end to the war. It would initiate the first company of the international proletarian revolution. It is true that time and time again - in France, in England, in Germany and Austria during the last few years strikes have broken out in the munitions factories, but they did not yet grow into the one great fire of resistance, which only the fire of world war could devour.

For that the courage is too small, the élan too weak, the spiritual independence of the millions of workers in the munition works too weak, the cowardice, drudgery, slavishness and selfishness too great, the nationalist delusion too strong which holds them captive. Only psychological factors - lack of insight, of character, of confidence - stop

the rising of the cleansing hurricane, which could wipe out the imperialist pestilence. No weapons are needed for the strike; preparation and organization Russia has proved can be missed, if need be, if only the spirit of resistance rises strongly enough in the masses, if only the spark of revolutionary passion strikes in them.

The reformists, the obedient servants of capital, know this; that is why they fear that spirit above all else, that is why they kick out that spark wherever they can.

It is not only on the reformist side that the strike idea is now constantly attacked. Its usefulness is contested, its power denied as long as the war rages, or even as long as its workings make themselves felt. Even in the revolutionary camp there are socialists who doubt, whether in the transitional era after the war, the strike can be a powerful weapon in the hands of the masses. Armed insurrection, they believe, will be of much greater weight. In other words, by force of arms in the first place, the proletariat will have to fight for the freedom of mankind. The economic weapon will be virtually powerless, for raw materials will be scarce, there will be lack of work, hundreds of thousands will be unemployed. Then what power can the strike exercise?

We do not share this doubt about the strength of the strike after the war. Certainly, there will be a shortage of raw materials, but for this very reason all the efforts of capital will be aimed at promoting their production. Huge numbers of workers will be put to work in the mines, blast furnaces, etc. Day and night will be worked, the exploitation of labor will exceed all measure; the workers will *have to* strike, already in self-defense. In all these enterprises - that is, in the production of means of production, which is the basis of all further production - the strike will have lost nothing of its force. Nor will it in transportation. From the overseas countries, the tropical and subtropical regions, enormous quantities of raw materials and foodstuffs (cotton, rice, cocoa, coffee, tea, petroleum, etc.) will be shipped to emaciated Europe. If the port workers and sailors want to use their power, not in imperialist but in socialist spirit, not to keep certain peoples from world power and undermine their economic existence, but to weaken capital, they will have every opportunity to do so. Even the means of transportation in the various countries themselves will be taxed to the limit, the goods produced as well as the raw materials imported will have to be further transported and distributed as soon as possible.²⁰ Capital will have reason to fear strikes on the railroads and waterways! And as with the quantity of raw materials and means of production produced, the production of means of consumption also increases, the opportunities become more favorable for the workers, to weaken capital by strike. Provided that they do not lend an ear to the advice of the reformists, who will of course try to make them believe that the uninterrupted progress of production, the formation of new stocks, is as much in proletarian as capitalist interest in these circumstances and strikes at that time would again be nonsensical and criminal.

Unfortunately, however, we must fear, that many workers will rather believe this. The main factor, which will hinder the use of the strike as a means of struggle against foreign²¹ as well as against domestic imperialism after the war - as it is doing now during the war - is not to be sought in the power of circumstances, but in the disposition

²⁰ One thinks, for example, of the transit trade from the Netherlands to Germany and vice versa, for which capital is already preparing.

²¹ For example, now (end of July) the railroad workers in Ukraine are on strike, a strike directed both against the German rulers and against the Ukrainian government which is their instrument.

of the people. The lack of unity of the masses, the cowardly slavish spirit among the unions of the educated, the inbred collective selfishness, which makes their members regularly subordinate the general interests of the class to those of their own group, the prestige of the leaders, all this will stop the free outflow of the power which the proletariat possesses in the strike. The heroic attempts of the minorities, to bring the masses along by its example, will still often fail. All this will again give rise to bitter disputes in the proletariat, and to fierce struggles of the striking minority against the workers of all kinds. Violence of the workers against each other will flourish, as will violence of capital against the revolutionaries.

But finally, the "new tactics"²² of incessant, direct mass action will prevail. The old reluctant leaders will lose their power. The old methods of settlement and comparison, of collective contracts and arbitration courts will become uncommon. The forms of struggle will continue, which the social forces in imperialism produce - they will continue despite all the resistance of the past.

In the mass strike the proletariat possesses a weapon of unparalleled strength, although of course this strength is not exactly equal at all stages of the economic cycle. Unfavorable or unfavorable economic conditions can reduce the effect of the strike, but not eliminate it. Neither can coercive laws, railroad brigades [of military strike-breakers; F.C.], etc., prevent it, although they sometimes hinder it.

To destroy the power of the mass strike, capital would have to destroy the proletariat itself; it would have to make labor cease to be the foundation of society, it would have to turn back the wheel of economic-social development many turns. But capital cannot do this.

Like the mass demonstration, the mass strike mobilizes the great droves of the proletariat. Genuine revolutionary strikes born of elementary, spontaneous movements of the whole masses erase with one stroke the dividing line between the educated and the uneducated, the organized and the unorganized. Mass strikes of this kind shatter the haughty delusion of workers' aristocracy that it alone constitutes the militant vanguard of the whole class. They awaken the deepest layers of that class from their apathy and stupid resignation, they ignite in the most degraded and trampled slaves of capital the sparks of self-consciousness and self-confidence.

Only through the mass strike is the fighting force of the whole masses involved in production mobilized against capital. In this respect it excels far above the armed insurrection, which hitherto always brought into the fray only a small vanguard of the proletariat.

In yet another respect, the strike wins by far over both the demonstration and the street fight. Both *means of struggle are not amenable to extension in time*. The demonstration can last only a few hours, street fights a few days at best. The power of the demonstration dissipates as soon as those who participated in it disperse. The popular uprising puts everything on the map of a sudden turnaround in the mood of the soldiers; its outcome depends on the favor of the moment. *Only the strike develops in longer time*.

Over weeks, often over months, the strike movements of the workers in imperialism stretch out; now this then another category of workers is at the center of the struggle;

²² The "new tactics" refers to A. Pannekoek, [The Collapse of the International](#) (1914), ch. IV (F.C.).

sometimes it draws all its strength together in those few important enterprises, whose normal functioning for state and society is a matter of life, then again it expands into the immeasurable. The most diverse categories of workers are absorbed in its flow. The strike enables the proletariat to wage an uninterrupted struggle against capitalism, to attack and weaken it unceasingly, although, of course, not all its sections, any more than an army, are constantly engaged in struggle. And the very fact that through the strike the masses themselves are directly and continuously engaged in the struggle against capital and its political central organ, the state, makes it a social and revolutionary means of education with which no other means of struggle can compare.

The strike as a revolutionary method, which makes Stock Exchange and Bank shudder and shakes the strongest governments, also puts the moral superiority of the proletarian mode of struggle over that of its counterpart in the brightest light. Against their blunt oppression, their crude violence, their bayonets and bullets, their fearmongering and their reign of terror, it sets exclusively or almost exclusively its social violence, in which the actual violence has largely dissolved itself into the moral violence, it sets the calm perseverance, the sacrifice, the unity of the masses. As a result of this difference of method, the realization, that the victory of the working class is going to usher in a higher stage of human civilization, increasingly penetrates during the struggle not only that class itself, but also penetrates numerous elements of the intermediate classes. The use of the mass strike as a weapon in the struggle of the masses against imperialism is only in its beginnings; it has yet to grow before it can unfold all its possibilities. It must grow with the national and international consciousness of the proletariat. Unlike the use of the ballot paper, which isolates the proletariat of each state as a political unit from that of all other states, the revolutionary strike during that growth will unite the workers of all capitalist countries and continents. This will happen, first, when the workers of the same corporate sphere, the miners and the seamen, the dockers and the railroad men, uniting their forces together against their exploiters, whether they are joined together in trusts and cartels. But it will also happen when the workers of certain countries rise to come to the aid of their comrades from across the borders who are attacked or threatened by the imperialism of their countries. No proletariat can bring freedom with arms to other proletariats, but the proletariat which answers the hidden or overt imperialist lusts of its ruling classes with the general strike, thus thwarting its plans, throws its strength into the struggle for the general liberation of labor and humanity. Only as an international method will the mass revolutionary strike develop its greatest strength, as an international method it will undermine and finally overthrow world capital. However, the strike can only be applied internationally if the workers, apart from their limited insight, their fear and their passivity, also overcome in themselves every national sensitivity and every little apprehension about their own fate and life; if they throw themselves into the struggle without asking "what will the comrades from across the borders do?" and if their actions are inspired by sublime confidence and boundless sacrifice.

Thus, the extent to which the revolutionary strike is also applied on an international scale also proves to be a measure of the spiritual independence and the moral, political and social maturity of the working class. Only when it as a whole will wield this new weapon with full force will it be ready to throw off the yoke of imperialism and pave the way for a society based both on the higher development of technical and organizational forces and on higher moral values.

Through the strike, the proletariat will both break the power of capital and create the germ of the new social organization. While it strives, as far as possible, to disorganize

the means of production and transportation, it will also seek to reorganize them for the purposes of revolution. Not as a mere-passive crossing of arms, as the anarchists used to dream it, will the revolutionary strike prevail! On the contrary, it will plant the flag of its own activity for the benefit of the masses on every facet of the economic terrain, which it wrests from the enemy. The more the proletariat succeeds in paralyzing the state-political and economic organization of capital, the more it will take over its former economic and political functions.

9. The military strike (mass refusal of service).

There is one wall, against which the strike movement threatens to crash, one obstacle, which its moral-social violence seems incapable of overturning. That wall is the army, the armed force of the ruling class. As long as the soldiers do what is ordered in blind obedience, the army is the strong dam that prevents the power of the capitalists from being washed away by the storm surge of the strike. The actual violence of the rulers cannot prevent the strike by any means, but it can prevent it from developing its full force, its full workings. By mass mobilization and mass arrest of strikers, by preventing their meetings, marches and demonstrations, by provocations to violence, such as the shooting of defenseless strikers, which almost inevitably incite the workers to desperate counter-violence, the capitalist class can in many cases break the power of a strike. With the help of its drilled military slaves it can ensure the progress, even if imperfectly, of the enterprises, the cessation of which represents the worst danger of the disruption of social life. As long as the army is a blind tool in the hands of the ruling class, its violence, the old, crude, physical violence and the new proletarian, the socio-moral [violence], keep each other virtually in balance. The scales of power do not yet tip over to the side of the toiling masses. This requires that the army cease to obey the possessing class, that the soldiers put themselves at the service of the revolutionary struggle and unite their power with that of the working masses (precisely as happened time and again in the bourgeois revolution). Here, however, the advantages offered by the proletarian revolutionary method of the mass strike over the bourgeois method of armed insurrection become particularly clear.

The armed insurrection, the barricade struggle, whose real purpose, we saw, was to uncover and activate the hidden, latent class feeling of the troops, had only a very short time for this work. If the minds of the soldiers were still too caught up in traditional ideas, he failed, and this failure often had the most terrible consequences for the revolutionary classes: they were decimated and so weakened that years passed before they could recover. Also, the struggle with arms was always a dangerous means of maturing the revolutionary consciousness of the soldiers with one stroke. Under the influence of the grueling services required of them and the losses they suffered, the mood of the soldiers sometimes suddenly turned: their instinct of self-preservation was aroused; resentment and anger made them blindly follow the orders of their officers again and attack the insurgents full of bitterness.

With the revolutionary method of the strike, all this is completely different. It may well be suppressed by force in a particular case, but this suppression, which only marginally affects the strength of the proletariat in comparison with a military defeat, does not prevent the recurrence of strikes in the same or other enterprises, in ever new forms and varying sizes. The proletariat can sustain a revolutionary strike movement for years and years on end despite all violent attempts to stifle it. This is proven by the example of the Russian working class, which, with only one major slump between 1907 and 1910 (caused by the confluence of political reaction with economic

exhaustion) actually from 1902 down to 1917 by incessant strikes of all kinds and in all forms: economic, political, demonstrative, revolutionary, limited and general, demolished the strength of the autocracy by undermining its strongest means of power: the army.

The strike, which gives soldiers only the opportunity to win victories over peaceful, unarmed workers, is today a means par excellence of undermining the army. The soldiers, for the most part themselves sons of the working people, cannot but feel sympathy in their hearts for the strikers' demands, whether those demands are of an economic or political nature, i. e., whether the strike is directed against the entrepreneurs or against the state. Their own fathers and mothers, their sisters and brothers, their relatives and friends are also suffering under the general misery which the world war and its consequences has poured over the masses, and when they will soon return to civil society, this misery will also be theirs. Nothing brings the masses of soldiers to a better realization of the disgraceful work they are doing in the "internal war," namely: defending with force of arms the privileges of the rulers, than again the use by the government of the army to terrorize and drive strikers apart, or to take over their work, or to protect underlings from expressions of anger and contempt from the revolutionaries. Revulsion at the service, irritation at their superiors, hatred of the social system that makes all this possible, burning shame at their own cowardice, at the fear of man that makes them obey, they fill the hearts of the soldiers and prepare the eruption of their human feelings in the act of conscientious objection.

The workers have it in their hands to further this process of spiritual-social maturation. The more they respond to the provocations of the military authorities with strict self-restraint and self-discipline, the less they will be lured into acts of violence (whether against police, soldiers or underlings) In a word: in the brighter light the moral superiority of their methods of struggle comes to be contrasted with those of the class state, the faster will progress the dissolution of the army as an instrument of the privileged class, the deeper and more thorough will be its revolutionary rebirth. Obstructed both the one and the other by all roughness, all violence on the part of the strikers. Every stone, thrown from their ranks at the soldiers; every mistreatment of underlings, every attempt at plunder, every wantonness and every outburst, provides an excuse for the crude violence of the ruling classes, seemingly justifies their repressive measures, and makes the moral gulf between their action and that of the revolutionaries appear less obvious. On the other hand, the unwavering steadfastness that makes revolutionaries prefer to die rather than give way to unjust violence, the sacrificial spirit and the ecstasy of freedom, which makes men and women calmly confront "the naked breast and the unarmored heart" in the face of bayonets and machine guns, have proved countless times, both in the class struggle and in the struggles of oppressed nationalities, to be the weapons against which the brutal violence of the rulers deflected helplessly. This is not a Tolstoian fantasy, but historical experience. In Russia, in England, in the United States, in almost all capitalist countries, during major strikes, unarmed popular masses have repeatedly defied the orders of the military authorities to disperse, held parades despite their prohibition, carried on demonstrations, without the military commanders daring to answer their non-violent but determined resistance with bloody violence. They feared that the old drives of passive obedience and slavishness in the troops were already too slack, the new drives of class consciousness and human responsibility too strong, that the answer to their orders would be mass refusal of service. And with the mass refusal of service, with the transition of the soldiers to the revolutionary camp, the power of capitalism lost its last violent fulcrum.

As long as the army does not translate its revolutionary disposition into action, capital also possesses in the police a weapon to perpetuate the regime of oppression by force.

As a rule, the moral forces expressed in the revolutionary strike movement have much less influence on the police than on the army. It is true that in times of heightened distress and social ferment, a certain degree of discontent will occasionally manifest itself even among the police force, but through small concessions the authorities will, as a rule, soon be able to suppress it again. The police force is much more a world unto itself than the army, its members do not return to civil society after a short time, but continue to work in their profession as defenders of the capitalist order. That profession easily has a coarsening influence on many of them, it makes them accessible to all kinds of reactionary indoctrinations and suggestions. Their sense of law is raped, their class consciousness is clouded, false social values are imposed on them, which makes them see in strikers and demonstrators nothing but "a gang of malcontents," in stock exchange lords and authorities, on the other hand, beings of higher order. Even in the now past era of bourgeois liberty, the police force was never and nowhere entirely free from the hated traits of the *gendarmes* of the pre-bourgeois era; now, as the direct struggle of the masses replaces more and more the indirect struggle of the deputies, the police will be trained primarily to, in the event of riots, disturbances, revolutionary actions of every kind, subdue the masses with brute force. The action of the official social-democratic parties, which still have by far the largest proportion of educated workers behind them, helps to foster among the policemen, who often cooperate fraternally with these "socialists" at demonstrations, etc., the opinion that the revolutionaries-of-the-street are on a par with lumpenproletarians and criminals, with the "lowly rabble" against whom any bestiality is permitted.

All this makes comprehensible the passionate hatred, which the revolutionaries in our days again fulfill against the police. While as a rule the masses understand that they are harming themselves by violent action against the soldiers and try to bring them to their side by exhortations, exclamations and entreaties, self-restraint against the provocative action of the police is often beyond their powers.

And yet the revolutionary workers must learn to realize that by answering police violence on their part with violence, they only demean and coarsen themselves, without advancing their just cause. They must realize that even in this case firm consistency, calm perseverance, unswerving steadfastness is the method by which the strength of their numbers and of their higher principle is best manifested. And also, they must remember, that if in clashes with the police they employ themselves to set sticks and stones against the sabers and revolvers of the officers, it will be much more difficult for them to refrain from violence against the troops, than if they assume as a firm rule to avoid it altogether and educate the broad masses in it.

The violent action of the police against the revolutionary workers comes to an end on the day that most of the army sides with the revolution. And that day is hastened by nothing so much as by the self-restraint of the workers and the camaraderie they show the soldiers. The largest, best-drilled and most inveterate police force of the old world: that of the Russian empire - only the United States can match the destroyed half-Asian despotism of the Romanovs in this respect - proved powerless in the March Revolution [February Revolution according to Western calendar; F.C.] of 1917 with one stroke, as soon as the bulk of the Petersburg garrison joined the popular movement. The following day, the police had "disappeared from the streets": dressed and disguised,

the Tsar's coppers sought refuge. One of the first symptoms of the overthrow of the autocracy was that sections of Cossacks took sides with arms with demonstrators, who were dispersed and persecuted by the police.

Of course, the transition *in mass* from the Petrograd garrison to the revolution was preceded by many facts of a similar nature. Already during the strikes of the Russian workers during the World War, it happened time and again that soldiers helped strikers or demonstrators effectively against the police, just as on the other hand sometimes civilians took sides in public with soldiers who were treated roughly, or scornfully, by their superiors. Thus, the generally conscious fraternization of proletariat and army in the workers' and soldiers' councils was preceded and prepared by numerous events. Only when the history of the Russian strike movement in the period 1903-1917 will be written will it become clear what an enormous factor in revolutionizing the army this movement was.

As was already the case in Russia, so everywhere through the revolutionary strike movement the transition of the mass of soldiers to the revolutionary side will be preceded and prepared by the refusal of smaller or larger groups of soldiers to act against the workers. As pioneers of this vanguard, the principled conscientious objectors emerge in turn, whose particularly highly developed social and moral feelings give them the strength, individually, to refuse service.

* *

*

The military strike is only the beginning, the first stage of the revolutionary action of the army. This stage irrevocably leads to another, namely the battle with arms between the revolutionary troops and the troops who, for whatever reasons, remain loyal to the imperialist classes. They are ordered to overwhelm the insurgent soldiers and armed workers: these resist.²³ Civil war in the literal sense of the word, ignites. As the events in Finland proved, all the horrors of ordinary war are matched and exceeded in it. The passions rage more fiercely than in ordinary war, the hatred of the combatants towards each other is fiercer, and this hatred makes them deaf and blind to the commandments of humanity.

Thus, the working class, as part of the military apparatus created by the bourgeoisie and brought to its greatest perfection by imperialism, is once again forced to use barbaric means of struggle which are in the highest degree opposed to it as the bearer of the new social ideals, as the pioneer of the unity of mankind. But just as capitalist society cannot suddenly turn into socialist society, so the bloody violence of arms, which reaches its highest stage of development in imperialism, cannot suddenly be replaced by the unbloody socio-moral violence of labor and conscription. For a time both will coexist. That the revolutionary struggle would henceforth be conducted only in these higher forms would be possible only if the revolutionary disposition among the working masses were already great enough at the beginning of the revolution to make the general strike possible. In addition, this disposition should have been so widespread in the army that the few defenders of capitalist power immediately realized the futility of resistance. But this is unfortunately not the case. On the contrary, everywhere large masses of workers are still on the side of capital; they are not in favor of strike action. And even in the armies countless members of the toiling masses - workers,

²³ The principle of military service refusal in all cases, as *absolute* abstention from force, is likely to continue to be practiced only by a small minority.

small citizens, small farmers, proletarian intellectuals, etc. - are still prepared to defend capitalist power with their blood, although many of them do so with the illusion of defending something completely different. Then there are those who belong to the privileged classes: technicians, aviators, most of the officer corps: Through their greater development, their organization, their education to rule and their prestige, they know how to bind to capital by the means of suggestion and the instigation of fear many who, according to their social interests, belong to the revolutionary side.

The more backward the economic social relations of a country are, the weaker and immature the working class is at the beginning of the social upheaval, the less the other exploited classes recognize it as their natural leader in the struggle against capital, the bloodier the struggle will be between the contending classes, the richer in horrors and barbaric events, the greater also the significance of violence in that struggle, the more frequent its application. Therefore, in the Russian March Revolution, which aimed to replace autocracy with bourgeois rule, the violence of arms could be a brief episode, a final testing of the forces, from which the isolation and powerlessness of autocracy was immediately apparent. All the modern classes had united against Tsarism; the overwhelming majority of the troops either took an active part in the revolution or resigned themselves to its results. Russia was ripe for bourgeois revolution: hence the unity with which it was brought about. But when world-historical development resulted in the Russian proletariat - so weak in numbers, backward in development, in political experience, in democratic discipline, but undoubtedly the most energetic, determined and brave of all the revolutionary classes in Russia - seizing power, then it could not help but be that this unity had to fall to pieces: a long, bitter struggle of all against all began. In Russia, where history has confronted the proletariat with the heroic-tragic task, to begin the social revolution before its conditions have matured²⁴ and before the economically and politically more developed peoples of Central and Western Europe support it - in Russia, precisely because of this social immaturity, the revolution inevitably bears an extremely bloody and gruesome character. The relative weakness of the Soviet government, which faces not only the large landowners and big capital, but also a part of the petty bourgeoisie, of the small peasants and some backward elements among the proletariat itself - this weakness stabilizes the civil war, makes the position of the proletarian vanguard precarious and forces its organs down the road of harsh repressive measures and bloody persecutions, the road of "mass terror."²⁵

Relying solely on their own strength, the ruling classes are also incapable of maintaining their power through violence, even if in the long run they manage to do so through parliamentary means. In one case as in another, this power rests on the fact that a large part of the intermediate classes and more or less numerous groups of the proletariat are still spiritually dependent on the bourgeoisie and follow its spiritual and political leadership. If the great majority of the toiling masses are won over to revolution

²⁴ L.L. Men, in [Two texts for defining the communist program](#) (Hong Kong 1986), argued against this view that World War I demonstrated the maturity of world capitalism for proletarian world revolution. Wherever the world revolution would begin - and will begin - a in high or low industrial developed region, always the locally victorious proletariat will have to begin to reverse the relations of production by abolishing wage labor so that the workers can develop mass communist consciousness. (F.C.)

²⁵ Of course, the intrigues and conspiracies of the Entente against Soviet rule and the violent suppression of the working classes by the German victors in the occupied territories work in the same direction. Anglo-American as well as German-Austrian imperialism both support all counter-revolutionary elements and constantly stoke the civil war.

and socialism, then the army as an instrument of power will fall away from capital, then the last inevitable armed test of strength between its revolutionary and its counterrevolutionary parts can proceed rapidly and need cost only a minimum of blood. Then also the proletarian dictatorship - the form of government of the transitional epoch, in which public power, the state, brings about a thorough reversal of the relations of production and property and thereby creates the social conditions for its own demise will be able to take mild and humane forms.²⁶ For then the enemies of the proletarian regime will be so comparatively few in number and socially so powerless that this regime will be able to afford the luxury of linking its iron coercion in economic affairs with a democratic action that guarantees equality of rights, complete freedom of speech and writing to all, including its political opponents. This "luxury" the revolutionary regime itself and its supporters will understand as an indispensable component of social life. However, the above-mentioned coercion will be felt as such only by the small minority of the expropriated²⁷, the great mass of the population, on the other hand, will greet it as an element of the new freedom.

But the high social development, the far superior spiritual-moral level of the masses, their unparalleled unity, in short, all the qualities and conditions which will make such a course of the final struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat possible, they can only be the *result* of a long struggle, a long evolution, in which people and things become to a great extent different from what they are. In other words, only a long series of struggles, in which the bloody violence still fought along, can force the final victory for the unbloody violence, for general labor and service to imperialism. Here lies the point, where we disagree with those who absolutely, dogmatically reject all violence in the proletarian revolution. We consider violence as a historical category, we know that its disappearance, as well as its rise, is tied to the whole complex of social causes. And we also know that as opposed to the semi-passive belief of the working class in the previous epoch, (the so-called "epoch of legality"), that its leaders would fight victory for it in parliament etc., the new conviction of the revolutionary workers, that they must conquer socialism *with their own bodies*, is a great and fruitful advance. We know that actual violence is now still inevitable, or, if you will, indispensable, because people and things are not yet suited to the exclusively social-moral.

Does all this mean that we must take the historical circumstances as a fate? That the revolutionaries can and must continue to apply bloody and violent means until the great unity of the working elements of all peoples is achieved, which will allow the use of purely moral violence even against opponents? Such a view is not ours; we call it in conflict with neo-Marxism. Of that neo-Marxism, we believe, the belief in the independent power of mind and will is one of its most characteristic features. Our moral consciousness and reasonable will need not be the rearguard of the vanguard of the forces which are now going to war to conquer a new world! For too long they have been in the rearguard! Now they should march in front of those other forces to which they have committed their destiny, to show them the way and to lead them on the paths they have recognized as the right ones. The new insight and attitude, the

²⁶ We refrain here from examining the complications, which follow from the aggressive policies of German-Austrian, Anglo-American and Japanese-Chinese imperialism before the Russian revolution. The impact of their complications is, of course, enormous. It goes without saying that the social revolution in all countries will be thwarted by the attempts of the imperialist classes of other states, to use the domestic confusion and disruption for their own purposes.

²⁷ The "expropriators" are the capitalists, who became owners of the means of production in a generations-long process of expropriation of peasants and petty bourgeois, and of exploitation of the workers. (F.C.)

awareness of the unity of mankind, the aversion to inhuman, barbaric means of struggle, to all cruelty and cruelty, they must and can become a force which, among the other forces of social evolution, contributes to shaping the future.

Simultaneously with the revolutionary, the international stage of the proletarian class struggle began. The Russian revolution immediately confronted the proletariat of the other - primarily belligerent - countries with the question, whether to support it vigorously or to betray it shamefully. All failed, and again, as in 1914, the German-Austrian working class preceded all others on the path of betrayal. The German proletarians in military service, who helped to overwhelm the Red Guards in Finland, to occupy the Ukraine²⁸ and the Baltic provinces, helped to stifle the proletarian revolution in an area encompassing half of the former European Russia. They erected between Europe and the Soviet republic the iron wall of the German armies, preventing the fertilizing winds of revolution from flowing out over those countries, where the social conditions of the revolution are most mature.

Through its political incommensurability, its passivity and its slavishness, the German-Austrian proletariat acted as the accomplice of German imperialism, as the strangler of the Russian proletarian revolution.

And now that in these days the Anglo-French expedition to the Murmansk coast has begun, without - as far as we know - the workers of the Entente countries protesting against it, let alone proceeding to actual resistance, now, unfortunately, we have to conclude, that in the face of the Russian revolution the Entente proletariat is failing no less shamefully than the Central European one.

Thus, due to the lack of revolutionary courage of the European workers, the means of violence of the strongest imperialist states are brought into the field against the Russian revolution, which could have become the motherland of the international revolution - which still could, if the European proletariat realized, that the cause of the Russian Workers' and Peasants' Republic is its own. If it realized, that by answering the attempts of its masters to overwhelm that republic with the mass strike and mass refusal of service, it would prepare the fall of their masters and its own liberation.

The revolution, born of the world war, necessarily bears an international character. The armed action of the counter-revolutionary classes of all countries against the country or countries, where the revolution is strongest, makes, that the revolution will either be stifled or will spread like a blazing fire.

From now on, the imperialist classes of the states, where the revolutionary movement is still weak, will throw themselves every time, under whatever pretext, on the countries where the revolutionary class has conquered power or is about to do so, to kick out the revolutionary flames by force. Thus, for the proletariat, any distinction between the struggle against domestic and foreign imperialism increasingly disappears; the revolution becomes one general struggle, a general world fire, and in its bloody twilight the old society perishes.

And only now do we see the whole scale of the problem of tactics, of the mode of

²⁸ H. Roland Holst fails here to explain that the Bolsheviks, within the framework of the "right of the 'peoples' to self-determination" criticized by Rosa Luxemburg and by Anton Pannekoek, gave this "right" to the Ukrainian bourgeoisie, thus handing over the Ukrainian workers to their "own" bourgeoisie. In gratitude, the Ukrainian bourgeoisie along with German imperialism turned against the Russian council republic, which then recaptured Ukraine in a bloody war. H. Roland Holst was a lifelong supporter of such "national" wars, and took for granted the imperialist explosions of violence on both sides associated with them. (F.C.)

struggle, rising for the working class. This problem now suddenly takes on international forms and dimensions. The question arises, what must the proletariat of the countries where the revolution is strong or becoming strong do to avoid being overwhelmed by the workers-in-war of the countries where the revolution is still weak? Does not its principle compel it to prepare as vigorously as possible for defense? Should not everything else be subordinated to it? Must not the sacred conquests of the revolution be protected by force against counter-revolutionary violence, which threatens the proletariat with destruction of the newly won freedom, with bloody retribution? Should not the revolution arm itself to the teeth, internationally? Should it not turn the countries, where it has conquered, into one great fortified army base? Should it not in turn proclaim violence as the supreme law of life?

10. Two methods (the evolution of revolution).

For the great mass of workers from both camps, the only difference today is between revolutionary-internationalist and reformist-nationalist tactics. The struggle between these two methods dominates the present. But a new difference emerging between the revolutionaries is of infinitely more importance for the future.

The thinking of the revolutionary part of the working class is now filled by a double representation, its inner being moved by a double will.

In one image, the workers imagine the social revolution by analogy with the bourgeois. Actual violence appears to them as the factor which alone can bring their class to power, as was the case with earlier classes. And the will, aroused by this representation, leads them to break the violence of the ruling class and its supporters with similar violence. For this it demands arms, for this it prepares for armed revolt, for this it summons the soldiers: "put your guns and cannons at the disposal of the revolutionary struggle".

In this line of thought, mass strikes and mass refusal of service, however indispensable during revolutionary development, seem more an *introduction* to the revolution than its very essence. The revolutionaries do not yet resort to violence, because and as long as they realize, in the struggle with arms, they are the weakest. But they are convinced that violence is indispensable for the final victory of the revolution. And a consequence of this conviction is, that they direct their thoughts and their will principally to the *subduing*, the *overpowering* of their opponents, the capitalist class and its helpers, which are the still stupid and enslaved workers, small farmers, small citizens, etc.

The basis of the other representation, which today fills the revolutionary part of the proletariat, is the awareness of the significance of the working class to the productive process. This image grows out of the understanding that the labor of the workers with the head and with the hands sustain society. It rests on the clear undoubted certainty, that the economic supremacy of the small clique of money and industrialists breaks to pieces as soon as the working masses refuse to work for them, and that their armed violence collapses as soon as the masses of soldiers refuse to fight for them.

From this representation develops the will which, relying on the unbloody, mainly socio-moral violence of the mass strike and of mass refusal of service, is directed to its constant repetition and uninterrupted generalization. He who is moved by this will not only provisionally renounces the violence of arms out of awareness of his own weakness, but this violence recedes into the background of his consciousness because he

bases victory primarily on other forces.

The effects of social experience, together with those of propaganda and example will, he trusts, in the long run lead ever larger sections of the working masses to refuse labor and service in the face of imperialism, so that it will finally become completely isolated. The community of interests of most of humanity will persevere in the face of the wild beast selfishness of the powerful of the earth. Their power will come to an end through the solidarity of the workers of all nations.

In this representation there is no question of violently oppressing and subjugating the backward petty bourgeoisie, peasants and workers who still support capital. The only necessary thing appears to be to fill the masses with the awareness of their social interests and duties. Isolated capital automatically becomes powerless; its power rests on the fact that large sections of the toiling masses follow its leadership, believe its lies, obey its commands. The victory of socialism requires only their conversion, their revolutionary rebirth. Violence can do nothing here, because violence cannot put an end to the divisions among the working masses that consolidate imperialist power. Just as revolutionaries cannot win the struggle in the economic field by beating underlings with fists, they cannot win in the political field, that is in the struggle against the capitalist state, by working the workers, the small peasants and the small citizens, who follow the leadership of the big bourgeoisie, with bayonets and machine guns. Violence on the part of the revolutionary workers, although directed against capital, affects only or almost only the backward sections of the popular masses themselves. By embittering them, it perpetuates the division of the masses and thus the power of capital. And supposing that the revolutionaries, thanks to special circumstances, could succeed in overwhelming the bourgeois class and its backers, they would still be unable to create viable socialist institutions as long as the vast majority of the people were not on their side. For these institutions - and therein reveals precisely the marvelous progress of socialism over capitalism - cannot be imposed on the masses but must be consciously willed by them. These masses are ripe for socialism only when they cooperate vigorously in its preparation, both through passive resistance to capital (refusal of labor and service) and through active assumption of its political, economic and legal functions (creation of workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils, new regulation of production and distribution²⁹, of property, etc.).

But one must not think that this double representation and this double will live in the revolutionary part of the proletariat in such a way that one group of it would rely exclusively on armed force, another, on the other hand, only on the unbloody coercive means of labor and service refusal. The case stands quite differently: in almost all revolutionaries live simultaneously this double representation and this double will. According to place, time and circumstances, they incline now to this, then to the other tactic, as a rule without themselves noticing how much the two are in conflict. The ambivalence of revolutionary tactics in the small as well as the large, in theory and propaganda as well as in actual practice, must affect everyone whose eyes have been opened to the new problems and whose thinking is not exclusively governed by the oppositions of social-patriotism or internationalism, reformism or revolutionary struggle.

Theoretically-propagandistically, this ambivalence reveals itself in numerous

²⁹ In the 1920s and 1930s, in criticism of the state capitalist views and practices of the Bolsheviks in Russia, the council-communist *Group of International Communists* (GIC) developed its main work, [Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution](#), which focuses on the abolition of wage labor. (F.C.)

expressions in the revolutionary press and revolutionary propaganda as well as in certain program points of the revolutionary parties.

The press and propaganda incessantly incite to mass refusal of labor and service. Incessantly the masses are told how capitalism exists only because of the workers, how labor becomes king of the earth the day it realizes and uses its power. Unceasingly the general solidarity, the great community of interests and aspirations of the toiling masses of all countries is brought into the light, is called for the courageous act in which that solidarity takes flesh: the labor refusal of the munitions and transport workers, whose activity behind the front fuels the fire of war; the service refusal of the soldiers, whether ordered to subdue the hungry masses of their own countrymen, or to slaughter their fellow proletarians of other countries for the sake of the profit and power-seeking of the imperialist classes. In endless variations, the theme returns: "work no longer, for your work brings death and destruction to your comrades; fight no longer, for you kill those who suffer with you under one pressure and live off one hope. Unite all of you workers and soldiers of one country and of all countries, drive out your rulers, take possession of your inheritance, make the new society."

Thus, in revolutionary propaganda, victory is relentlessly dependent on the national and international unity of the toiling masses - not on the violence of one part of these masses against another.

And just as incessantly, this propaganda expresses disgust for the violent methods of imperialism, the inhumanity of the rulers, where it concerns the defense or strengthening of their power. The cruelty is cursed, which makes them waste human blood like water, destroy human lives like noxious insects. The crudity is denounced, which makes them collapse into hideous lumps of stone the most glorious works of genius, the creations in which entire generations have embodied their highest life values. The appalling hypocrisy, which dares to glorify the manifestations of this crudeness and brutality as proofs of culture, of civilization, is vilified and denounced in bitter terms. And in words full of human sympathy the terrible fate of the millions of beings, irreparably maimed, spiritually ruined by war, and the indescribable pain of other millions, stricken in their holiest sympathies, lonely, deprived of everything, dragging on through life, is lamented. In prose and in verse, often in naive-sentimental form, the revolutionary workers' organs express again and again the shuddering horror of the normal human mind at the hideous carnage which imperialism has brought upon Europe. In these expressions speaks the natural pity of people, in whom, because they are not involved in imperialist interests, are not interested in the victory of either Central European or Anglo-American imperialism, this feeling has remained pure and has been strengthened by the terrible experiences of the war. And also in these expressions speaks the aversion of socialists, that is of people in whom the human sense of unity is born, to the barbaric denial of this sense, carried to the extreme in the imperialist war.

But also, in the same journals it is constantly impressed upon the masses that they cannot conquer without armed force, and this force in the hands of the revolutionaries is glorified as a glorious, heroic act. The soldiers are called upon to march against capitalism with rifles and cannons and bring power into the hands of the rebellious people. And it does not seem to occur to anyone that - unless the violence needs to be no more than a final test of strength, a touchstone of the disposition of the vast majority of soldiers - the guns and cannons will be aimed at stupid, slavish, blinded and misguided fellow workers from backward regions or backward countries. Against

one big capitalist who falls, a hundred or a thousand of them will be struck. And no one seems to consider that the far-carrying artillery in the service of the proletariat wreaks as gruesome devastation as in the service of the bourgeoisie, that the bombs thrown by socialist aviators in the social revolution on sleeping cities maim and kill women and children as unerringly as the bombs thrown in the world war; That the suffocating gases poison the delicate tissue of the lungs just as irreparably, the fire of the flamethrowers scorches the flesh just as cruelly, whether these infernal weapons are employed in the service of imperialism or socialism, and that the drumfire in one case as in the other turns just as perfectly thousands of acres of fertile land, made fertile by the labor of many generations, into stony wastelands, destroying flourishing towns and villages to grit and dust. And to no one it seems to penetrate, that the use of modern force of arms in full ruthless harshness and severe consistency is contrary to all the principles, aspirations, opinions, sentiments and purposes of revolutionary socialism, and that therefore, in so far as the latter is based on the use of their means of violence, it will necessarily hesitate, that is to the disadvantage of imperialism.

So much for the contradiction of theory and propaganda, where the revolutionaries are still a small minority among the masses, where there is still no question of mass struggle against imperialism, much less of the overthrow, of the conquest of political power.

We find this contradiction no less striking there, where, for all kinds of reasons, the fierce and passionate struggle we call social revolution has begun, and its volcanic forces have raised up amid the imperialist world influences a new social formation, a social island: socialist Russia.

Among the struggling Russian masses, who despite the national immaturity of the economic and social conditions to socialism were the first of all peoples to shed bourgeois power - which is both the historical glory and the tragic fate of the Russian revolution -, among these masses the ambivalence of revolutionary tactics is now coming to light in all its cutting irreconcilability. In the tempestuous stream of shocking events in which we can scarcely distinguish the individual waves, yet each time we see clearly two powerful principles in conflict. One is the, sometimes scientifically-conscious, more often naively-intuitive realization, that the mass refusal of labor and service are the panaceas, which make the rulers weak and give strength to the slaves, and that the refusal to use force against the oppressed class comrades of other nations, will work the miracle to cure the blindness of their brethren, to spring the chains of their slavery, to break the deadly spell of their passive submission! The other is: confidence in the power of force of arms, of coercion, repression and the instigation of fear to restrain and subdue domestic and foreign enemies, the enemies who, filled with furious hatred of the Soviet republic, now attack her from all sides like wild beasts. Confidence, then, that by force of arms and terrorism Socialist Russia can overcome the cowardly, blind, treacherous workers of Western and Central Europe, who support the aggressive-imperialist policies of their governments, as well as the ignorant, fanatical masses of the small citizens and peasants of Russia itself.

This is the most tragic thing in the development of the proletarian revolution, considered as a whole, that the new principle of non-violent violence, of passive, mass resistance to capitalist power, is repeatedly thrown backwards and weakened, because it breaks down against the rigidity and passivity of the backward masses of one's own country or of other countries.

This is the most poignant thing in the long way of the cross, which the disinherited masses have to go in order to achieve the welfare of the fraternal community, that,

disappointed again and again in the outcome of the new weapons which Life brought forth in them, they grasp again and again in despair at the bloody old weapons. And yet development cannot proceed otherwise than in this way; by trial and error the new tactics must continue. As during the social revolution, the unity of the proletariat and its socialist disposition increases, non-bloody violence and conscientiousness will more and more supplant armed violence, but this development, like any other, will go not in a straight line but in an undulating one.

As for the Russian revolution, we should not regret that in it the new method of struggle did not suddenly completely and completely overcome the old, but rejoice in the wonderful brilliance, with which for the first time it made the new principle shine in world history.

In the revolution of 1905, the Russian proletariat demonstrated to the workers of the whole world, how the mass strike is the new weapon of awesome power, with which it socially kills its exploiters and oppressors, that is, breaks their economic and social power, without itself resorting to barbaric means. In the revolution of 1917, the Russian proletariat gave its comrades of all nations an even more glorious example. First it taught them the use of mass refusal of service as a means of overthrowing the classes, which in its own country drive to the imperialist policy of conquest. And having overthrown those classes, it taught its comrades by what means a part of the proletariat that has liberated itself can pursue the liberation of other parts of it.

The foreign policy of the soviets in the months of December 1917 - February 1918 has been the first prelude to the new harmonies, which in the now coming years will resound over the world. This policy was not aimed at military reorganization, at putting into the field a strong revolutionary army, not those were the means by which it hoped to defeat German imperialism and "liberate" the German workers; - no: it was aimed exclusively at awakening in those workers themselves thirst for freedom and revolutionary élan. Mixed with passive war weariness, a wonderful human force was at work among the Russian masses in those days as the driving force of politics, which found its brilliant interpreter in Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk. Loving confidence in the comrades of Central Europe was this strength, noble will, breaking their rigidity by fervent arousal and their own example, filling them with living revolutionary vigor. So great and powerful was this confidence-in-comrades that it illuminated Trotsky's performance at Brest with a triumphant pride, from which the German generals and Austrian diplomats wondered in amazement, where he got it. Didn't Trotsky come to the negotiations as the representative of a militarily powerless state, a defeated nation? But he did not feel that way in the least. As the representative of a great nation, he felt he had thrown off the yoke of capitalist power and called on all nations to follow his example. As the embodiment of a new, awesome, socio-moral force, he felt himself, the living force of the Russian masses, who trusted that they were paving the way for the democratic peace of the peoples against the governments. And that he was right to feel this way that the future will prove. For the future, the proletarian one that is, belongs to a policy, such as the Soviet republic conducted in the first months after the October Revolution.

The Russian Workers' and Peasants' Republic of 1917 did not prepare to bring freedom to other peoples by fire and sword, as the French bourgeois republic of 1792 had done; it knew that every proletariat must acquire it by its own struggle. All her efforts were aimed at arousing the capacity for struggle of the toiling masses of all nations. Already during the peace negotiations, she began to "forge swords into sickles," that is, to replace the production of war tools with that of agricultural tools. Long before the

official demobilization, most of the soldiers had returned to their homes. Thus, all peoples knew that they no longer had to fear violence from the Russian people. Along with this rapid demolition of their own militarism went the massive propaganda of revolutionary ideas among German comrades; millions of pamphlets were distributed in the German armies.

In those days all men, who had not pledged their minds and hearts to imperialism, felt how a new glorious affliction moved them, the shudder of a hope and expectation which they did not yet know. They felt that a new noble force was being born in the world.

And even when the German-Austrian rulers, who saw and could see nothing but the military balance of power, imposed unbearable peace terms on Russia, even then the Soviet government did not allow itself to be diverted from the lines of the new proletarian tactics. Not renewal of the war it decided, but passive resistance, no signing of the peace treaty, no restoration of relations between Russia and Germany. And then the miracle should have happened. Then trust should have inspired confidence, and strength strength, love love love. Then the German-Austrian soldiers should have answered the order, to resume the advance into Russia, with mass refusal of service, with mass rebellion. And the millions of ammunition workers, of the "soldiers behind the front," should have all gone on strike. But the flame of resistance burned too weakly in their hearts, military discipline prevailed, the miracle did not happen. Never was blacker treason committed in the proletarian class struggle! Never betrayal with such disastrous consequences. For that betrayal affected not only the external power, the life and development possibilities of the Russian revolution, but it affected its heart, its purest will, its noblest inspiration, its highest possibilities. Thus, the German proletarians committed the sin against the holy spirit. The beautiful dream collapsed which for a moment had shone for humanity, the golden melody fell silent, which for a moment had refreshed her shaken mind. The war dragged on in endless monotony of slaughter and counter-slaughter. And for the Russian revolution, which had reached an outward and inward culmination at Brest, began an era of increasing benightedness, and with it an era in which increasing repression inwardly went hand in hand with strengthening of the will for military reorganization as a means of maintaining itself outwardly.

All this was inevitable. And it cannot undo that, which for a moment has been reality: a newborn community, a great people who put their trust not in violent, but in socio-moral means of maintaining themselves and recreating others in their image. With this reality, a new light rose over the world.

As has happened in this case, so too in the future the immaturity of the proletariat, considered as a whole, will often still cause it to abandon its revolutionary vanguard. Then the new method, which after all can only succeed if it finds a strong, living echo among the masses of its own country and of other countries, will fail, then that vanguard, in its disappointment and distress, will again resort to the old means of armed violence, repression, terrorism. Then it will seek by these means to achieve results, which can only be achieved through the unity, spiritual independence and deliberate cooperation of the masses, both in the struggle against the imperialist classes and in the re-ordering of society after victory. Just as in the first epoch of the social revolution it is above all the courage, sacrifice and steadfastness of the masses, manifested unceasingly in the mass strike and mass refusal of service, that are the main forces, which lead to victory. Similarly, in the second epoch, that of the proletarian dictatorship (whether or not interrupted by reactionary interludes), the revolutionary incisiveness

of the vanguard and the discipline, community spirit and organizational achievements of the entire proletariat are the forces, through which the new regime endures and anchors itself more and more widely in the masses of the people. If the working class fails, if it proves to lack the virtues and capacities it needs to carry through the reconstruction of society in a socialist spirit, then the inevitable consequences are disappointment among the backward sections of the proletariat and the middle class, discontent, social ferment, growing resistance to the proletarian dictatorship, which is forced to take increasingly harsh forms. The basis of this dictatorship becomes narrower and narrower, more and more it relies on coercion, repression and violence, until finally a large part of the masses, led by the reactionary classes, revolt against it and overthrow it. Then the capitalist regime is restored, a new cycle of proletarian organization and proletarian struggle begins, and so it goes on, again and again, until the proletariat, while fighting, has matured socially and spiritually enough to be able to make society socialist. This is the awesome, people-consuming drama where we are now experiencing the beginning.

Just as in the first epoch of the social revolution, revolutionary socialism must unhesitatingly reduce or stop production at every turn, disrupt the social organism whenever necessary for its purposes, so in the second period, that of dictatorship, it must intervene with a firm hand in the forms of property and relations of production, expropriate the dispossessed, abolish inheritance law, socialize all large enterprises. It must not hesitate to socially destroy the class of the privileged to be able to quickly and significantly improve the living conditions of the broad masses, to elevate their spiritual level and to bind them to the new regime with strong ties. If it succeeds in this, it can quietly let the small group of capitalists and their supporters cry out their anger and hatred and waste their strength in desperate conspiracy adventures. On the spiritual unity, the solid cohesion, the active cooperation of the masses, the impotent attempts of the discontented will rebound like walls of granite.

Of course, the conditions under which the proletariat assumes power are of great weight among the factors that decide whether it will succeed in maintaining itself. How incredibly the generally unparalleled confusion and exhaustion caused by the world war aggravates his task in the era of the proletarian dictatorship, the superhuman effort, with which the Russian Bolsheviks now must fight against hunger and unemployment, against the disruption of traffic, inflation, dilapidation and lack of discipline of the popular masses themselves, testifies to this. The fact, that the Bolsheviks, despite all the circumstances which threatened to drag the ship of their power almost infallibly to the abyss, have now succeeded for nine months in maintaining themselves and to a certain extent in reorganizing production and traffic, this fact proves better than all arguments how far the politico-spiritual maturation process of the revolutionary vanguard in Russia has already progressed.

Part of this general maturation process is the deepening and purification of conceptions about the role of violence, coercion and terrorism in the struggle for socialist society. Revolutionary socialism must overcome the opinion, as if all means, indifferent, can lead it to its goal. The masses must break away from the crude, mechanical conception that it is enough for them to defeat their enemies by force, and take possession of power, to deliver humanity from the hell of imperialism. The rise to power of the proletariat is a necessary condition for the liberation of humanity, but it is not the *only one*. And it is of the utmost importance how, with what means this elevation of power occurs. The revolutionary proletariat wants to use power for purposes for which it has never been used before in history: for the good of all mankind. *The nature of*

these ends must increasingly determine the means of struggle of the proletariat, the closer it approaches them. That nature must already more ennoble his struggle, make morally impossible for him the use of weapons which by their very nature are cruel and arouse cruel, animalistic tendencies. Only when the masses come to feel the brutal means of violence of the rulers of today as utterly unworthy of them, as barbaric and inhuman, - only then is the time of the final victory of the social revolution approaching, only then are its *inner* conditions also fulfilled. Not from the *words* alone of the revolutionaries, from our words of sharp criticism, of indignation and contempt for the dog-like selfishness and animal cruelty of the possessing class, can the glory of the ideal, which animates us, be revealed. Our *deeds*, even our actions as warriors, must reveal the power of this ideal, and they will do so all the more, the more strongly community spirit, sacrifice and humanity are expressed in them. Otherwise, our words are phrases, as hypocritical as those of our opponents.

But again: the tactic that relies exclusively or almost exclusively on moral-social violence cannot be overcome with one stroke. And equally self-evident is, that its application is primarily promoted or impeded by the social environment and social conditions. The years of schooling in insane violence, in treacherous stratagems, in brutal group egoism, in roughness and animality, which tens of millions have gone through in the world war, create an atmosphere, which appears as unfavorable as possible for the opposing moods and methods. Thereby, the workings of war inwardly, the outrageous policy of usury, the harsh oppression, the cold-blooded sacrifice of ever new thousands of flourishing lives for the sake of imperialist interests have raised the anger and hatred of the toiling masses against the capitalist tyrants to the boiling point. In millions of hearts rages wild vindictiveness, hot desire for retribution for the tortures endured. And this vindictiveness is also a strong obstacle to the victory of the cult of violence.

But we do not want to wait to propagate the necessity of that victory until economic, political and social conditions will have become "ripe" for the new tactics. For neither will we wait until they have become so, to fight for the elevation of the power of the working class. We know that socialist society is a new economic-social society-order, which cannot be *realized either until a profound inner change in man has taken place, just as a certain height of technology and of capitalist concentration must be reached.* That order needs certain moral foundations - a powerful, all-embracing sense of human solidarity, a high degree of community spirit, self-discipline and sacrifice, just as much as it needs a high degree of control of natural forces. Because this is so, that is why the great leaders of the Russian Revolution repeatedly put before the masses how its own shortcomings, its selfishness and its rampantness, are no less dangerous enemies of the Soviet republic than the Russian, German, English, French, Japanese and American capitalists, the rich Cossacks and the village usurers.

No, we must not wait for changed circumstances, we do not want to bow down to stupid facts. As revolutionary Marxists, we are convinced that insight and will can intervene independently at certain moments in world events, although their operations are generally bound up with historical, economic and political factors. Will and insight must now anticipate circumstances, they must help accomplish the miracle of recreating capitalist society into socialist one. Our abhorrence of the brutal, animalistic violence, brought to a head by the sophisticated-scientific methods of imperialism, our yearning for a society of peace and brotherhood among men, our clear understanding that its socio-economic conditions are present, they must help us to master the prejudices, the violent tendencies and selfish urges, on which the old tactics rest. Human

unity consciousness must overcome in the working class the instincts of slave blood, which thirsts for revenge and feasts on retaliation, like a predator on bait.

The appearance does prevail now, as if the unbloody social moral violence is powerless against that of the weapons. But this pretense breaks at the same moment that in the working masses internationally the spark of courageous, holy will strikes. At the very moment, when on the railroads, in the mines, in the munitions factories, in the whole "heavy" industries, at the ports and on the ships, the strike breaks out, the bloody violence collapses, overcome by a higher, differently grounded force.

The revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, strongly preoccupied with the strenuous struggle against social patriotism and reaction, still thinks little about the irrevocable workings of bloody violence. It does not realize that these effects are in direct conflict with its highest objectives. The idea that a raging civil war, in which both sides fight with the same cruel weapons and people persecute and destroy each other like devils, can be followed by the kingdom of peace, harmony and brotherly love, which we trust to win by fighting - this idea is undialectical and absurd. Both in nature and in society everything must grow, sudden great transitions are always preceded and prepared by a long time of gradual, inner change. Humanity, that is, the vast majority of hand- and head-workers, who will finally join together in opposition to the small group of the oligarchy, will be able to ground the socialist community only when the qualities and moral forces which it assumes have matured in it, that is, after a long process of self-purification, in which it learns to apply humanity and community spirit towards all.

Quite rightly, Dietzgen, the philosopher of the proletariat, says that as a fighting class it neither can nor should practice the Gospel. We will do good to our enemies only after rendering them defenseless, for only then will we be able to do good to them and to all men. But the way we render them defenseless and draw power to ourselves is a factor of immense weight among the many factors on which the moment of our permanent elevation of power depends. The proletarian dictatorship will be a transition to socialist forms of life and not to a new reactionary interlude only when it distinguishes itself from any previous one in that it relies primarily on moral violence and affirms itself primarily by the superiority of its organizational measures.

Today it sometimes seems as if there is no other choice but that between surrender without struggle to imperialism, or its fight by all means, fire and sword. However, as the masses become more deeply aware of the higher ends for which they are fighting - but against hunger and misery, their struggle is not only against pressure and persecution, not to create a new privileged class in the place of the present privileged class, but for the general human good, - they will come to realize, that their sacred cause can flourish only by sacred means, that the means of struggle must be directed to the ends. Above all, the consciousness that violence on their part inevitably affects first and foremost their fellow proletarians and backward peers, will keep them more and more from using it. Also, however, those backward sections of the proletariat, nationally and internationally, will be driven more and more to revolutionary socialism. Thus, the tragic antagonisms of our days - antagonisms that appear in many forms, from the fists administered by revolutionary strikers to strike breaking "moderns," to the machine guns aimed by the Soviet republic at the fanatical hordes of the hungry rabble - will gradually be abolished. Harmony between ends and means will finally be achieved.

First, the social revolution will perhaps be bloodier and more violent than any previous one. After all, it will emerge immediately - as it has already emerged in Russia - from

the world war, and the appalling coarsening and desensitization it causes will inevitably continue in it for a long time to come. Also, frequently the horrors of war and the horrors of civil war will flourish *simultaneously*, as is already happening in the Ukraine now.³⁰ And perhaps the deep division of the working masses itself is still the strongest factor of the horrific character, which the coming world revolution will first bear. Rampant will be the hatred and wild the retaliation, acts of vengeance and repression will be committed, which will horrify mankind. But gradually the unity will increase, the light will break through, the fruit of socialism will be accomplished in humanity. Of the arduous, complicated task which the proletariat must perform in the social revolution, the *conscious* work of establishing harmony between ends and means is not the least important part. For this work presupposes longing for power, selfishness, curbing cruel and bloody lusts, curbing the natural drives of hatred and revenge. It presupposes acting on the understanding that, in addition to fierce struggle, divine mildness is also necessary, in addition to revolutionary élan also moderation and self-control. It means understanding that revolution too must be revolutionized if the bridge is to be built from bloody past to golden future. It means that revolutionary socialism, without surrendering anything of the economic-social foundations laid by Marxism, - foundations on which the historical law and historical reasonableness of the new property and production relations which it wishes to bring about rest, - is convinced that in the methods of its mode of struggle it must also apply the new higher morality born of its own aims and ideals.

Just as in organic nature progress varies in direction in the different epochs of the earth's history - there have been epochs in which, for example, progress was mainly manifest in the increase of solid calcareous body parts, others in which it was manifest in the increasing strength and size of the organisms, still others in which it was manifest in the increase of their intellectual faculties - so it is also in the history of mankind, i.e., of the classes into which it is still divided today. At present, the progress of the proletariat still reveals itself mainly in the awareness of its irreconcilable antagonisms to the imperialist class and the growing awareness of the necessity of overcoming them by direct mass action. But the epoch is already becoming clear in which this work will be essentially accomplished, and progress will be able to take a new direction: that of rejecting the means of bloody, actual violence in favor of the morally-social. In the first epoch, the proletariat will essentially purge itself of its passivity, its incommensurability, its cowardice and slavishness; in the second (which has already begun in Russia) of its wildness and unruliness, its selfishness and crudity.

This progress, too, must have its pioneers. It too will not come about by itself but must be fought for by struggle. After all, struggle is one of the principles by which Life constantly achieves new goals and climbs to ever higher levels. The other, however, of these principles is Love. The struggle for the unbloody social-moral tactic will also be the struggle for the elevation of Love above hate as the animating principle of struggle.

LAREN, May-July 1918.

³⁰ One compares the following newspaper clipping: "In the village of Krinitschki (Goev. Ekaterinoslaw) it came to a fight between peasants and Ukrainian troops. The entire village went up in flames, more than 2,000 people died in the fight. When the village of Solcgane was disarmed, about 500 Germans and 300 peasants were killed. In the Snamenki district, railroad trains ran only at night, for fear of being raided. Half of Poltawa governorate was in flames. As a result of counterrevolutionary power, mass terror increases. In the Priloesk district, 13 large landowners are murdered. To the violent prevention of the peasant congress in Kiew, came another terrible detail: a steamer with peasant delegates was bored into the ground."