

## CHAPTER XIV

### FORCE AND VIOLENCE \*

It is obvious to everyone that the capitalist system is breaking down, that millions of people are condemned to a life of slow starvation because the capitalists can profitably operate only a small part of the existing means of production. But it would be a fatal mistake to conclude that the capitalist social order will simply collapse of its own weight, or that the capitalists will peacefully surrender their present power and then all of us will join together in the building of a new social system. No ruling class group has ever behaved in such peaceful fashion. As the crisis becomes worse, the more desperately will the capitalists cling to their property

\* At the Ninth Convention of the Communist Party, held June 24-28, 1936, the following resolution was adopted:

"The Communist Party must use the opportunity of this election campaign to smash once and for all the superstition, which has been embodied in a maze of court decisions having the force of law, that our Party is an advocate of force and violence, that it is subject to laws (Federal immigration laws, state 'criminal syndicalism' laws) directed against such advocacy. The Communist Party is not a conspirative organization, it is an open revolutionary party, continuing the traditions of 1776 and 1861; it is the only organization that is really entitled by its program and work to designate itself as 'sons and daughters of the American revolution'. Communists are not anarchists, not terrorists. The Communist Party is a legal party and defends its legality. Prohibition of advocacy of force and violence does not apply to the Communist Party; it is properly applied only to the Black Legion, the Ku Klux Klan, and other fascist groupings, and to the strike-breaking agencies and the open-shop employers who use them against the working class, who are responsible for the terrible toll of violence which shames our country."

and their power, the more murderous will become their attacks on the masses of the people. It must be emphasized that capitalism will not simply come to an end; it can only be ended by the organized actions of the working class in collaboration with its allies from other sections of the population.

The revolution does not simply *happen*; it must be *made*. This does not imply that the Communist Party "makes" the revolution. The socialist revolution is carried out by the great masses of toilers. The Communist Party, as the vanguard of the most conscious toilers, acts as their organizer and guide. It gives the masses political awareness of their problems, a realistic program that will solve these problems; the heightened class consciousness of the workers leads them to follow the Communist Party.

The transfer of state power from the capitalists to the working class, which begins the social revolution, can be accomplished only under certain conditions which have an objective existence independent of the desires of the struggling classes. There must be what we Communists call "a revolutionary situation". Such a situation develops when the ruling class can no longer dominate society in the old way; when the economic system breaks down and can no longer feed the masses; when the middle classes are wavering and a considerable part have turned against the rulers; when the capitalists themselves have lost confidence in their ability to solve their own problems; and when capitalist control of the armed forces of the state has been undermined and shaken.

Under such circumstances the revolutionary will-to-power of the workers, their heroism, their self-sacrifice, their enthusiasm to struggle for a new order, strike telling blows against a ruling class which is already shaken and conscious of its own doom. In this revolutionary situation, the Com-

munist Party, which has won the active support of the majority of the working class and of the decisive sections of the other exploited classes, wins some of the armed forces to its side, and leads the effective majority of the population to the seizure of state power. There can be no such first step if there is no revolutionary situation, or if the Communist Party has failed to rally the support of the majority of the population. After this first step of taking state power has been realized, the workers make use of the state power to take possession of the instruments of production. Then the new government, at the head of the masses, reorganizes the entire national economy of the country in an organized and planned manner, along socialist lines.

So long as the capitalists retain complete control of the armed forces and their deadly weapons, they can defeat the revolt of the masses. In a revolutionary situation, however, the capitalists lose their former complete control of the armed forces. Capitalists do not fight their own battles; we have seen that they are but a tiny fraction of the population. To maintain their rule they need the support of sections of the population whom they bribe or dope with demagoguery. Above all, they need the armed forces. But soldiers and sailors come from the ranks of the workers. They can be, and must be, won for the revolution. *All revolutions have been made with weapons which the overthrown rulers had relied on for their protection.*

We must dispose of the false notion that Communists believe that a revolutionary situation can only arise out of a second world war. Communists are opposed to another imperialist war and strive to organize the workers to defeat the plans of the warmongers. It is the uncompromising fight against war, not the imperialist war as such, which leads to revolution. Revolution arises out of imperialist war, not be-

cause revolutionists "welcome the war", but because they fight against the war before it comes with all their power, and if this is insufficient to stop the war, they lead the masses in struggles for peace that transform the imperialist war into a civil war against the oppressing class. It must be pointed out that a revolutionary situation could arise independently of whether an international war was being fought or not. At the same time, any large scale imperialist war, under the present conditions of capitalist decline, will inevitably bring about a revolutionary situation.

History does not show a single example in which state power was transferred from one class to another by peaceful means, whether in the form of voting or some other method of formal democracy. We have seen that the United States was able to win its independence only after a fierce and costly war. The elimination of chattel slavery in the South and the subsequent opening up of the entire country to the unchecked development of capitalism required four years of bloody civil war. These American examples can be duplicated in every country. We have seen how, in Italy and Germany, when capitalism faced the danger of the growing revolt of the masses, fascism emerged right out of the womb of bourgeois democracy. Fascism is truly the enemy of democracy, which it devours in the most bestial fashion the world has ever seen. Wherever capitalism is confronted with a life-and-death crisis, it turns to fascist force and violence to destroy the civil liberties of the masses. It is the capitalist who utilizes unlimited violence against the toilers; it is the fascists who raise mass sadism to a ruling principle.

Communists, despite what their enemies say, do not advocate or idealize violence. A violent struggle with the capitalists is by no means our choice or preference. We know only too well the terrible price workers have to pay as the result of

the violence employed by the capitalists against them every day. We would be only too delighted if the capitalists would voluntarily scrap the deadly weapons which they use against the population at home, and which they are piling up in unprecedented quantities for a second world war. But we would be more than fools, we would be criminals, if we did not warn the toilers that capitalists will not peacefully submit to the dictates of history. They will not allow the human race to move smoothly to a new and better society. We know that rather than turn over control to the workers they would first destroy all of civilization.

The more that capitalism disintegrates the more desperate will be its actions against the masses of the people, the more fiercely will it use unrestrained violence to keep down rising discontent, and the more frantically will it destroy those formal democratic rights that once it granted when it felt itself strong and secure. Here in the United States, the classic land of bourgeois democracy, the most authoritative spokesmen for the ruling class have openly declared that they will abolish all civil liberties and establish a fascist dictatorship, rather than allow any fundamental change in the economic system. Under the Roosevelt administration big strides in this direction were taken. The martial law and terror used against strikers throughout the strike wave of 1933-35 gave a pretty good sample of what the capitalist class has in store for the workers. Would even the most optimistic pacifist pretend that the white landlords in the South will ever peacefully grant democratic rights to the Negroes, not to speak of land? Would the mine operators, the textile mill owners, and all the capitalists who have murdered their workers in cold blood when they merely asked for union recognition, ever turn over their mines, mills and factories to the workers without a struggle?

The workers are permitted democratic rights only so long as they do not employ them against capitalism. The moment they begin to use these limited democratic rights to better their economic conditions, then the capitalists immediately move against these democratic rights. That is why it is so necessary for the anti-fascist movement in the present situation in the United States to fight for the democratic rights of the toilers.

But for the workers to win a real democracy for themselves they must organize the dictatorship of the proletariat against the capitalists. Just as the capitalists enjoy democracy among themselves by suppressing the toilers, so can the latter enjoy democracy only by suppressing the capitalist class. The decisive question is democracy for whom, and dictatorship against whom. We Communists propose to reverse the present situation, to provide democracy for all the toilers and dictatorship against the bankers, monopolists and other capitalist racketeers.

If bourgeois property is to be maintained under the present conditions of capitalist crisis, then the ruling class says there must be the destruction of surplus goods and productive forces accompanied by the most brutal suppression of the suffering masses. If the productive forces and accumulated wealth of society are to be preserved and further developed, the property rights of the capitalists and the institutions by which they are maintained must be abolished, and the exploiting minority and its agents suppressed. Thus, some form of violence is unavoidable. There is no possible choice between violence and non-violence. The only choice is between the two sides of the class struggle.

If the capitalists should win the immediate fight, it will not mean a solution of the problems of the capitalist crisis. All the antagonisms which brought on the decline of capi-

talism will be intensified many-fold and a new and more violent crisis will develop. But if the progressive forces in society can overcome the violence of the capitalists, then mankind will be able to leap forward to a new and higher stage of history. The planned utilization of all productive possibilities will for the first time release humanity from the tyranny of man over man, and the subjection of mankind to the whims of nature. As Engels said, mankind will then be able to go from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.