

Documents of the Russian Revolution

The Art of Insurrection

Leon Trotsky
1 November 2017

We are publishing here “The Art of Insurrection,” the sixth chapter in the third volume of Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution in the translation by Max Eastman. It explains the dynamics and significance of a well-organized insurrection in a working class revolution, and offers a powerful description of the mass support among workers and soldiers that the Bolsheviks had for their seizure of power. Trotsky uses the old calendar, in use in Russia during 1917. Therefore, the dates are 13 days behind the calendar that was then in use in the West and is now used internationally. The spelling of a few words and names from the original translation was adjusted to contemporary standards.

People do not make revolution eagerly any more than they do war. There is this difference, however, that in war compulsion plays the decisive rôle, in revolution there is no compulsion except that of circumstances. A revolution takes place only when there is no other way out. And the insurrection, which rises above a revolution like a peak in the mountain chain of its events, can no more be evoked at will than the revolution as a whole. The masses advance and retreat several times before they make up their minds to the final assault.

Conspiracy is ordinarily contrasted to insurrection as the deliberate undertaking of a minority to a spontaneous movement of the majority. And it is true that a victorious insurrection, which can only be the act of a class called to stand at the head of the nation, is widely separated both in method and historic significance from a governmental overturn accomplished by conspirators acting in concealment from the masses.

In every class society there are enough contradictions so that a conspiracy can take root in its cracks. Historic experience proves, however, that a certain degree of social disease is necessary—as in Spain, for instance, or Portugal, or South America—to supply continual nourishment for a régime of conspiracies. A pure conspiracy even when victorious can only replace one clique of the same ruling class by another—or still less, merely alter the governmental personages. Only mass insurrection has ever brought the victory of one social régime over another. Periodical conspiracies are commonly an expression of social stagnation and decay, but popular insurrections on the contrary come usually as a result of some swift growth which has broken down the old equilibrium of the nation. The chronic “revolutions” of the South American republics have nothing in common with the Permanent Revolution; they are in a sense the very opposite thing.

This does not mean, however, that popular insurrection and conspiracy are in all circumstances mutually exclusive. An element of conspiracy almost always enters to some degree into any insurrection. Being historically conditioned by a certain stage in the growth of a revolution, a mass insurrection is never purely spontaneous. Even when it flashes out unexpectedly to a majority of its own participants, it has been fertilized by those ideas in which the insurrectionaries see a way out of the difficulties of existence. But a mass insurrection can be foreseen and prepared. It can be organized in advance. In this case, the conspiracy is subordinate to the insurrection, serves it, smooths its path, hastens its victory. The higher the

political level of a revolutionary movement and the more serious its leadership, the greater will be the place occupied by conspiracy in a popular insurrection.

It is very necessary to understand the relations between insurrection and conspiracy, both as they oppose and as they supplement each other. It is especially so, because the very use of the word conspiracy, even in Marxian literature, contains a superficial contradiction due to the fact that it sometimes implies an independent undertaking initiated by the minority, at others a preparation by the minority of a majority insurrection.

History testifies, to be sure, that in certain conditions a popular insurrection can be victorious even without a conspiracy. Arising “spontaneously” out of the universal indignation, the scattered protests, demonstrations, strikes, street fights, an insurrection can draw in a part of the army, paralyze the forces of the enemy, and overthrow the old power. To a certain degree, this is what happened in February 1917 in Russia. Approximately the same picture is presented by the development of the German and Austro-Hungarian revolutions of the autumn of 1918. Since in these events there was no party at the head of the insurrectionaries imbued through and through with the interests and aims of the insurrection, its victory had inevitably to transfer the power to those parties which up to the last moment had been opposing it.

To overthrow the old power is one thing; to take the power in one’s own hands is another. The bourgeoisie may win the power in a revolution not because it is revolutionary, but because it is bourgeois. It has in its possession property, education, the press, a network of strategic positions, a hierarchy of institutions. Quite otherwise with the proletariat. Deprived in the nature of things of all social advantages, an insurrectionary proletariat can count only on its numbers, its solidarity, its cadres, its official staff.

Just as a blacksmith cannot seize the red hot iron in his naked hand, so the proletariat cannot directly seize the power; it has to have an organization accommodated to this task. The coordination of the mass insurrection with the conspiracy, the subordination of the conspiracy to the insurrection, the organization of the insurrection through the conspiracy, constitutes that complex and responsible department of revolutionary politics which Marx and Engels called “the art of insurrection.” It presupposes a correct general leadership of the masses, a flexible orientation in changing conditions, a thought-out plan of attack, cautiousness in technical preparation, and a daring blow.

Historians and politicians usually give the name of *spontaneous insurrection* to a movement of the masses united by a common hostility against the old régime, but not having a clear aim, deliberated methods of struggle, or a leadership consciously showing the way to victory. This spontaneous insurrection is condescendingly recognized by official historians—at least those of democratic temper—as a necessary evil the responsibility for which falls upon the old régime. The real reason for their attitude of indulgence is that “spontaneous” insurrection cannot transcend the framework of the bourgeois régime.

The social democrats take a similar position. They do not reject revolution at large as a social catastrophe, any more than they reject earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, eclipses and epidemics of the plague. What they do reject—calling it “Blanquism,” or still worse, Bolshevism—is the conscious preparation of an overturn, the plan, the conspiracy. In other words, the social democrats are ready to sanction—and that only *ex post facto*—those overturns which hand the power to the bourgeoisie, but they implacably condemn those methods which might alone bring the power to the proletariat. Under this pretended objectivism they conceal a policy of defense of the capitalist society.

From his observations and reflections upon the failure of the many insurrections he witnessed or took part in, Auguste Blanqui derived a number of tactical rules which if violated will make the victory of any insurrection extremely difficult, if not impossible. Blanqui demanded these things: a timely creation of correct revolutionary detachments, their centralized command and adequate equipment, a well-calculated placement of barricades, their definite construction, and a systematic, not a mere episodic, defense of them. All these rules, deriving from the military problems of the insurrection, must of course change with social conditions and military technique, but in themselves, they are not by any means “Blanquism” in the sense that this word approaches the German “putschism,” or revolutionary adventurism.

Insurrection is an art, and like all arts, it has its laws. The rules of Blanqui were the demands of a military revolutionary realism. Blanqui’s mistake lay not in his direct but his inverse theorem. From the fact that tactical weakness condemns an insurrection to defeat, Blanqui inferred that an observance of the rules of insurrectionary tactics would itself guarantee the victory. Only from this point on is it legitimate to contrast Blanquism with Marxism. Conspiracy does not take the place of insurrection. An active minority of the proletariat, no matter how well organized, cannot seize the power regardless of the general conditions of the country. In this point, history has condemned Blanquism. But only in this. His affirmative theorem retains all its force. In order to conquer the power, the proletariat needs more than a spontaneous insurrection. It needs a suitable organization, it needs a plan; it needs a conspiracy. Such is the Leninist view of this question.

Engels’ criticism of the fetishism of the barricade was based upon the evolution of military technique and of technique in general. The insurrectionary tactic of Blanquism corresponded to the character of the old Paris, the semi-handicraft proletariat, the narrow streets and the military system of Louis Philippe. Blanqui’s mistake in principle was to identify revolution with insurrection. His technical mistake was to identify insurrection with the barricade. The Marxian criticism has been directed against both mistakes. Although at one with Blanquism in regarding insurrection as an art, Engels discovered not only the subordinate place occupied by insurrection in a revolution but also the declining rôle of the barricade in an insurrection. Engels’ criticism had nothing in common with a renunciation of the revolutionary methods in favor of pure parliamentarism, as the philistines of the German Social Democracy, in co-operation with the Hohenzollern censorship, attempted in their day to pretend. For Engels, the question about barricades remained a question about one of the technical elements of an uprising. The reformists have attempted to infer from his rejection of the decisive importance of the barricade a rejection of revolutionary violence in general. That is about the same as to infer the destruction of militarism from considerations of the probable decline in importance of trenches in future warfare.

The organization by means of which the proletariat can both overthrow the old power and replace it, is the soviets. This afterwards became a matter of historic experience, but was up to the October revolution a theoretical prognosis—resting, to be sure, upon the preliminary experience of 1905. The soviets are organs of preparation of the masses for insurrection, organs of insurrection, and after the victory organs of

government.

However, the soviets by themselves do not settle the question. They may serve different goals according to the program and leadership. The soviets receive their program from the party. Whereas the soviets in revolutionary conditions—and apart from revolution they are impossible—comprise the whole class with the exception of its altogether backward, inert or demoralized strata, the revolutionary party represents the brain of the class. The problem of conquering the power can be solved only by a definite combination of party with soviets—or with other mass organizations more or less equivalent to soviets.

When headed by a revolutionary party the soviet consciously and in good season strives towards a conquest of power. Accommodating itself to changes in the political situation and the mood of the masses, it gets ready the military bases of the insurrection, unites the shock troops upon a single scheme of action, works out a plan for the offensive and for the final assault. And this means bringing organized conspiracy into mass insurrection.

The Bolsheviks were compelled more than once, and long before the October revolution, to refute accusations of conspiracy and Blanquism directed against them by their enemies. Moreover, nobody waged a more implacable struggle against the system of pure conspiracy than Lenin. The opportunists of the international social democracy more than once defended the old Social Revolutionary tactic of individual terror directed against the agents of czarism, when this tactic was ruthlessly criticized by the Bolsheviks with their insistence upon mass insurrection as opposed to the individual adventurism of the intelligentsia. But in refuting all varieties of Blanquism and anarchism, Lenin did not for one moment bow down to any “sacred” spontaneousness of the masses. He thought out before anybody else, and more deeply, the correlation between the objective and subjective factors in a revolution, between the spontaneous movement and the policy of the party, between the popular masses and the progressive class, between the proletariat and its vanguard, between the soviets and the party, between insurrection and conspiracy.

But if it is true that an insurrection cannot be evoked at will, and that nevertheless in order to win it must be organized in advance, then the revolutionary leaders are presented with a task of correct diagnosis. They must feel out the growing insurrection in good season and supplement it with a conspiracy. The interference of the midwife in labor pains—however, this image may have been abused—remains the clearest illustration of this conscious intrusion into an elemental process. Herzen once accused his friend Bakunin of invariably in all his revolutionary enterprises taking the second month of pregnancy for the ninth. Herzen himself was rather inclined to deny even in the ninth that pregnancy existed. In February, the question of determining the date of birth hardly arose at all, since the insurrection flared up unexpectedly without centralized leadership. But exactly for this reason, the power did not go to those who had accomplished the insurrection, but to those who had applied the brakes. It was quite otherwise with the second insurrection. This was consciously prepared by the Bolshevik Party. The problem of correctly seizing the moment to give the signal for the attack was thus laid upon the Bolshevik staff.

Moment here is not to be taken too literally as meaning a definite day and hour. Physical births also present a considerable period of uncertainty—their limits interesting not only to the art of the midwife but also to the casuistics of the Surrogate’s Court. Between the moment when an attempt to summon an insurrection must inevitably prove premature and lead to a revolutionary miscarriage, and the moment when a favorable situation must be considered hopelessly missed, there exists a certain period—it may be measured in weeks, and sometimes in a few months—in the course of which an insurrection may be carried out with more or less chance of success. To discriminate this comparatively short period and then choose the definite moment—now in the more accurate

sense of the very day and hour—for the last blow, constitutes the most responsible task of the revolutionary leaders. It can with full justice be called the key problem, for it unites the policy of revolution with the technique of insurrection—and it is needless to add that insurrection, like war, is a continuation of politics with other instruments.

Intuition and experience are necessary for revolutionary leadership, just as for all other kinds of creative activity. But much more than that is needed. The art of the magician can also successfully rely upon intuition and experience. Political magic is adequate, however, only for epochs and periods in which routine predominates. An epoch of mighty historic upheavals has no use for witch-doctors. Here experience, even illumined by intuition, is not enough. Here you must have a synthetic doctrine comprehending the interactions of the chief historic forces. Here you must have a materialistic method permitting you to discover, behind the moving shadows of program and slogan, the actual movement of social bodies.

The fundamental premise of a revolution is that the existing social structure has become incapable of solving the urgent problems of development of the nation. A revolution becomes possible, however, only in case the society contains a new class capable of taking the lead in solving the problems presented by history. The process of preparing a revolution consists of making the objective problems involved in the contradictions of industry and of classes find their way into the consciousness of living human masses, change this consciousness and create new correlation of human forces.

The ruling classes, as a result of their practically manifested incapacity to get the country out of its blind alley, lose faith in themselves; the old parties fall to pieces; a bitter struggle of groups and cliques prevails; hopes are placed in miracles or miracle workers. All this constitutes one of the political premises of a revolution, a very important although a passive one.

A bitter hostility to the existing order and a readiness to venture upon the most heroic efforts and sacrifices in order to bring the country out upon an upward road—this is the new political consciousness of the revolutionary class, and constitutes the most important active premise of a revolution.

These two fundamental camps, however—the big property holders and the proletariat—do not exhaust the population of a country. Between them lie broad layers of the petty bourgeoisie, showing all the colors of the economic and political rainbow. The discontent of these intermediate layers, their disappointment with the policy of the ruling class, their revolutionary initiative on the part of the proletariat, constitute the third political premise of a revolution. It is partly passive—in that it neutralizes the upper strata of the petty bourgeoisie—but partly also active, for it impels the lower strata directly into the struggle side by side with the workers.

That these premises condition each other is obvious. The more decisively and confidently the proletariat acts, the better will it succeed in bringing after it the intermediate layer, the more isolated will be the ruling class, and the more acute its demoralization. And, on the other hand, a demoralization of the rulers will pour water into the mill of the revolutionary class.

The proletariat can become imbued with the confidence necessary for a governmental overthrow only if a clear prospect opens before it, only if it has had an opportunity to test out in action a correlation of forces which is changing to its advantage, only if it feels above it a far-sighted, firm and confident leadership. This brings us to the last premise—by no means the last in importance—of the conquest of power: the revolutionary party as a tightly welded and tempered vanguard of the class.

Thanks to a favorable combination of historic conditions both domestic and international, the Russian proletariat was headed by a party of extraordinary political clarity and unexampled revolutionary temper. Only this permitted that small and young class to carry out a historic task of

unprecedented proportions. It is indeed the general testimony of history—the Paris Commune, the German and Austrian revolutions of 1918, the Soviet revolutions in Hungary and Bavaria, the Italian revolution of 1919, the German crisis of 1923, the Chinese revolution of 1925-1927, the Spanish revolution of 1931—that up to now the weakest link in the chain of necessary conditions has been the party. The hardest thing of all is for the working class to create a revolutionary organization capable of rising to the height of its historic task. In the older and more civilized countries powerful forces work toward the weakening and demoralization of the revolutionary vanguard. An important constituent part of this work is the struggle of the social democrats against “Blanquism,” by which name they designate the revolutionary essence of Marxism.

Notwithstanding the number of great social and political crises, a coincidence of all the conditions necessary to a victorious and stable proletarian revolution has so far occurred but once in history: in Russia in October 1917. A revolutionary situation is not long-lived. The least stable of the premises of a revolution is the mood of the petty bourgeoisie. At a time of national crises, the petty bourgeoisie follows that class which inspires confidence not only in words but deeds. Although capable of impulsive enthusiasm and even of revolutionary fury, the petty bourgeoisie lacks endurance, easily loses heart under reverses, and passes from elated hope to discouragement. And these sharp and swift changes in the mood of the petty bourgeoisie lend their instability to every revolutionary situation. If the proletarian party is not decisive enough to convert the hopes and expectations of the popular masses into revolutionary action in good season, the flood tide is quickly followed by an ebb: the intermediate strata turn away their eyes from the revolution and seek a savior in the opposing camp. And just as at flood tide the proletariat draws after it the petty bourgeoisie, so during the ebb the petty bourgeoisie draws after it considerable layers of the proletariat. Such is the dialectic of the communist and fascist waves observable in the political evolution of Europe since the war.

Attempting to ground themselves upon the assertion of Marx that no régime withdraws from the stage of history until it has exhausted all its possibilities, the Mensheviks denied the legitimacy of a struggle for proletarian dictatorship in backward Russia where capitalism had far from exhausted itself. This argument contained two mistakes, both fatal. Capitalism is not a national but a world-wide system. The imperialist war and its consequences demonstrated that the capitalist system had exhausted itself on a world scale. The revolution in Russia was a breaking of the weakest link in the system of world-wide capitalism.

But the falsity of this Menshevik conception appears also from a national point of view. From the standpoint of economic abstraction, it is indeed possible to affirm that capitalism in Russia has not exhausted its possibilities. But economic processes do not take place in the ether, but in a concrete historical medium. Capitalism is not an abstraction, but a living system of class relations requiring above all things a state power. That the monarchy, under whose protection Russian capitalism developed, had exhausted its possibilities is not denied even by the Mensheviks. The February revolution tried to build up an intermediate state régime. We have followed its history: in the course of eight months it exhausted itself completely. What sort of state order could in these conditions guarantee the further development of Russian capitalism?

“The bourgeois republic, defended only by socialists of moderate tendencies, finding no longer any support in the masses ... could not maintain itself. Its whole essence had evaporated. There remained only an external shell.” This accurate definition belongs to Miliukov. The fate of this evaporated system was necessary, according to his words, the same as that of the tsarist monarchy: “Both prepared the ground for a revolution, and on the day of revolution neither could find a single defender.”

As early as July and August, Miliukov characterized the situation by

presenting a choice between two names: Kornilov or Lenin? But Kornilov had now made his experiment and it had ended in a miserable failure. For the régime of Kerensky there was certainly no place left. With all the varieties of mood, says Sukhanov, “the one thing upon which all united was hate for the Kerensky régime.” Just as the tsarist monarchy had toward the end become impossible in the eyes of the upper circle of the nobility and even the grand dukes, so the government of Kerensky became odious even to the direct inspiritors of his régime, the “grand dukes” of the compromisist upper crust. In this universal dissatisfaction, this sharp political nerve-tension of all classes, we have one of the symptoms of a ripe revolutionary situation. In the same way every muscle, nerve, and fiber of an organism is intolerably tensed just before an abscess bursts.

The resolution of the July congress of the Bolsheviks, while warning the workers against premature encounters, had at the same time pointed out that the battle must be joined “whenever the general national crisis and the deep mass enthusiasm have created conditions favorable to the going over of the poor people of the city and country to the side of the workers.” That moment arrived in September and October.

The insurrection was thenceforth able to believe in its success, for it could rely upon a genuine majority of the people. This, of course, is not to be understood in a formal sense. If a referendum could have been taken on the question of insurrection, it would have given extremely contradictory and uncertain results. An inner readiness to support a revolution is far from identical with an ability clearly to formulate the necessity of it. Moreover, the answer would have depended to a vast degree upon the manner in which the question was presented, the institution which conducted the referendum – or, to put it more simply, the class which held the power.

There is a limit to the application of democratic methods. You can inquire of all the passengers as to what type of car they like to ride in, but it is impossible to question them as to whether to apply the brakes when the train is at full speed and accident threatens. If the saving operation is carried out skillfully, however, and in time, the approval of the passengers is guaranteed in advance.

Parliamentary consultations of the people are carried not at a single moment, whereas during a revolution the different layers of the population arrive at the same conclusion one after another and with inevitable, although sometimes very slight intervals. At the moment when the advanced detachment is burning with revolutionary impatience the backward layers have only begun to move. In Petrograd and Moscow all the mass organizations were under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. In Tambov province, which has over three million population—that is, a little less than both capitals put together—a Bolshevik faction first appeared in the Soviet only a short time before the October revolution.

The syllogisms of the objective development are far from coinciding—day by day—with the syllogisms of the thought process of the masses. And when a great practical decision becomes unpostponable, in the course of events, that is the very moment when a referendum is impossible. The difference in level and mood of the different layers of the people is overcome in action. The advance layers bring after them the wavering and isolate the opposing. The majority is not counted up, but won over. Insurrection comes into being at exactly that moment when direct action alone offers a way out of the contradictions.

Although lacking the power to draw by themselves the necessary political inferences from their war against the landlords, the peasants had by the very fact of the agrarian insurrection already adhered to the insurrection of the cities, had evoked it and were demanding it. They expressed their will not with the white ballot, but with the red cock—a more serious referendum. Within those limits in which the support of the peasantry was necessary for the establishment of a soviet dictatorship, the support was already at hand. “The dictatorship”—as Lenin answered the doubters—“would give land to the peasants and all power to the peasant

committees in the localities. How can you in your right mind doubt that the peasant would support that dictatorship?” In order that the soldiers, peasants and oppressed nationalities, floundering in the snow-storm of an elective ballot, should recognize the Bolsheviks in action, it was necessary that the Bolsheviks seize the power.

But what correlation of forces was necessary in order that the proletariat should seize the power? “To have at the decisive moment, at the decisive point, an overwhelming superiority of force,” wrote Lenin later, interpreting the October revolution, “—this law of military success is also the law of political success, especially in that seething and bitter war of classes which is called revolution. The capitals, or generally speaking, the biggest centers of trade and industry ... decide to a considerable degree the political fate of the people—that is, of course, on condition that the centers are supported by sufficient local rural forces, although this support need not be immediate.” It was in this dynamic sense that Lenin spoke of the majority of the people, and that was the sole real meaning of the concept of majority.

The enemy democrats comforted themselves with the thought that the people following the Bolsheviks were mere raw material, mere historic clay. The potters were still to be these same democrats acting in co-operation with the educated bourgeoisie. “Can’t those people see,” asked a Menshevik paper, “that the Petrograd proletariat and garrison were never before so isolated from all other social strata?” The misfortune of the proletariat and the garrison was that they were “isolated” from those classes from whom they intended to take the power!

But was it really possible to rely upon the sympathy and support of the dark masses in the provinces and at the front? “Their Bolshevism,” wrote Sukhanov scornfully, “was nothing but hatred for the coalition and longing for land and peace.” As though that were little! Hatred for the coalition meant a desire to take the power from the bourgeoisie. Longing for land and peace was the colossal program which the peasant and soldier intended to carry out under the leadership of the workers. The insignificance of the democrats, even the most leftward, resulted from this very distrust—the distrust of “educated” skeptics—in those dark masses who grasp a phenomenon wholesale, not bothering about details and nuances. This intellectual, pseudo-aristocratic, squeamish attitude toward the people was foreign to Bolshevism, hostile to its very nature. The Bolsheviks were not lily-handed, literary friends of the masses, not pedants. They were not afraid of those backward strata now for the first time lifting themselves out of the dregs. The Bolsheviks took the people as preceding history had created them, and as they were called to achieve the revolution. The Bolsheviks saw it as their mission to stand at the head of that people. Those against the insurrection were “everybody”—except the Bolsheviks. But the Bolsheviks were the people.

The fundamental political force of the October revolution was the proletariat, and the first place in its ranks was occupied by the workers of Petrograd. In the vanguard of these workers stood the Vyborg district. The plan of the insurrection chose this fundamental proletarian district as the point of departure for its offensive.

Compromisers of all shades, beginning with Martov, attempted after the revolution to portray Bolshevism as a soldier movement. The European social democrats grabbed up this theory with delight. But fundamental historic facts were here ignored: the fact that the proletariat was the first to come over to the Bolsheviks; that the Petrograd workers were showing the road to the workers of all countries; that the garrison and front much longer than the workers remained bulwarks of compromise; that the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks created all kinds of privileges for the soldier at the expense of the worker in the soviet system, struggled against the arming of the workers and incited the soldiers against them; that the break in the troops was brought about only by the influence of workers; that at the decisive moment the leadership of the soldiers was in the hands of the workers; and finally that a year later the social democrats of

Germany, following the example of their Russian colleagues, relied on the soldiers in their struggle against the workers.

By autumn the Right Compromisers had ceased even to be able to make speeches in the factories and barracks. But the Lefts were still trying to convince the masses of the madness of insurrection. Martov, who in the struggle against the counterrevolutionary offensive in July had found a path to the minds of the masses, was now again serving a hopeless cause. "We cannot expect"—he himself acknowledged on the 14th of October, at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee—"We cannot expect the Bolsheviks to listen to us." Nevertheless he considered it his duty to "warn the masses." The masses, however, wanted action and not moral admonition. Even where they did patiently listen to their well-known adviser, they "thought their own thoughts as before," as Mstislavsky acknowledges. Sukhanov tells how he made an effort in a drizzling rain to convince the Putilov men that they could fix things up without an insurrection. Impatient voices interrupted him. They would listen for two or three minutes and interrupt again. "After a few attempts I gave it up," he says, "It was no use ... and the rain was drizzling down on us heavier and heavier." Under that impatient October sky the poor Left Democrats, even as described in their own writings, look like wet hens.

The favorite political argument of the "Left" opponents of the revolution—and this even among the Bolsheviks—was a reference to the absence of fighting enthusiasm among the lower ranks. "The mood of the laboring and soldier masses, write Zinoviev and Kamenev on October 11, "is far from comparable even to the mood which existed before the 3rd of July." This assertion was not unfounded: there was a certain depression in the Petrograd proletariat as a result of waiting too long. They were beginning to feel disappointed even in the Bolsheviks: Can it be that they are going to cheat us too? On October 16, Rakhia, one of the fighting Petrograd Bolsheviks, a Finn by birth, said at a conference of the Central Committee: "Our slogan is evidently already getting a little out of date, for there exists a doubt as to whether we will do the thing for which we are calling." But this weariness of waiting, which looked like listlessness, lasted only up to the first fighting signal.

The first task of every insurrection is to bring the troops over to its side. The chief means of accomplishing this are the general strike, mass processions, street encounters, battles at the barricades. The unique thing about the October revolution, a thing never before observed in so complete a form, was that thanks to a happy combination of circumstances, the proletarian vanguard had won over the garrison of the capital before the moment of open insurrection. It had not only won them over but had fortified this conquest through the organization of the Garrison Conference. It is impossible to understand the mechanics of the October revolution without fully realizing that the most important task of the insurrection, and the one most difficult to calculate in advance, was fully accomplished in Petrograd before the beginning of the armed struggle.

This does not mean, however, that insurrection had become superfluous. The overwhelming majority of the garrison was, it is true, on the side of the workers. But a minority was against the workers, against the revolution, against the Bolsheviks. This small minority consisted of the best-trained elements in the army: the officers, the junkers, the shock battalions, and perhaps the Cossacks. It was impossible to win these elements politically; they had to be vanquished. The last part of the task of the revolution, that which has gone into history under the name of the October insurrection, was therefore purely military in character. At this final stage rifles, bayonets, machine-guns, and perhaps cannon, were to decide. The party of the Bolsheviks led the way on this road.

What were the military forces of the approaching conflict? Boris Sokolov, who directed the military work of the Social Revolutionary party, says that in the period preceding the overturn, "in the regiments, all the party organizations except those of the Bolsheviks had disintegrated,

and conditions were not at all favorable to the organization of new ones. The mood of the soldiers was tending definitely toward the Bolsheviks. But their Bolshevism was passive and they lacked any tendency whatever toward active armed movements." Sokolov does not fail to add: "One or two regiments wholly loyal and capable of fighting would have been enough to hold the whole garrison in obedience." Literally all of them, from the monarchist generals to the "socialistic" intelligentsia, wanted only those "one or two regiments" and they would have put down the proletarian revolution!

But it is quite true that the garrison, although deeply hostile to the government in its overwhelming mass, was not capable of fighting even on the side of the Bolsheviks. The cause of this lay in the hostile break between the old military structure of the troops, and their new political structure. The backbone of a fighting unit is its commanding staff. The commanding staffs were against the Bolsheviks. The political backbone of the troops was composed of Bolsheviks. The latter, however, not only did not know how to command but in the majority of cases hardly knew how to handle a gun. The soldier crowd was not homogeneous. The active fighting elements were, as always, a minority. The majority of the soldiers sympathized with the Bolsheviks, voted for them, elected them, but also expected them to decide things. The elements hostile to the Bolsheviks in the troops were too insignificant to venture upon any initiative whatever. The political condition of the garrison was thus exceptionally favorable for an insurrection. But its fighting weight was not large—that was clear from the beginning.

However, it was not necessary to dismiss the garrison entirely from the military count. A thousand soldiers ready to fight on the side of the revolution were scattered here and there among the more passive mass, and for that very reason more or less drew it after them. Certain individual units, more happily constituted, had preserved their discipline and fighting capacity. Strong revolutionary nuclei were to be found even in the disintegrating regiments. In the Sixth Reserve Battalion, consisting of about 10,000 men, out of five companies, the first invariably distinguished itself, being known as Bolshevik almost from the beginning of the revolution and rising to the heights in the October days. The typical regiments of the garrison did not really exist as regiments; their administrative mechanism had broken down; they were incapable of prolonged military effort; but they were nevertheless a horde of armed men a majority of whom had been under fire. All the units were united by a single sentiment: Overthrow Kerensky as soon as possible, disperse, and go home and institute a new land system. Thus, that completely demoralized garrison was to rally once more in the October days and rattle its weapons suggestively, before completely going to pieces.

What force did the Petrograd workers offer from a military point of view? This raises the question of the Red Guard. It is time to speak of this in greater detail, for the Red Guard is soon to come out on the great arena of history.

Deriving its tradition from 1905, the Workers' Guard was reborn with the February revolution and subsequently shared the vicissitudes of its fate. Kornilov, while Commander of the Petrograd military district, asserted that during the days of the overthrow of the monarchy, 30,000 revolvers and 40,000 rifles disappeared from the military stores. Over and above that, a considerable quantity of weapons came into the possession of the people during the disarming of the police and by the hands of friendly regiments. Nobody responded to the demand to restore the weapons. A revolution teaches you to value a rifle. The organized workers, however, had received only a small part of this blessing.

During the first four months the workers were not in any way confronted with the question of insurrection. The democratic régime of the dual power gave the Bolsheviks an opportunity to win a majority in the soviets. Armed companies of workers formed a constituent part of the militia. This was, however, more form than substance. A rifle in the hands of a worker

involves a totally different historic principle than the same rifle in the hands of a student.

The possession of rifles by the workers alarmed the possessing classes from the very beginning, since it shifted the correlation of forces sharply to the advantage of the factory. In Petrograd, where the state apparatus supported by the Central Executive Committee was at first an indubitable power, the Workers' Militia was not much of a menace. In the provincial industrial regions, however, a reinforcement of the Workers' Guard would involve a complete change of all relations, not only within the given plant but all around it. Armed workers would remove managers and engineers, and even arrest them. Upon resolutions adopted by a factory meeting the Red Guard would not infrequently receive pay out of the factory exchequer. In the Urals, with their rich tradition of guerilla fighting in 1905, companies of the Red Guard led by the old veterans established law and order. Armed workers almost unnoticeably dissolved the old government and replaced it with soviet institutions. Sabotage on the part of the property owners and administrators shifted to the workers the task of protecting the plants – the machines, stores, reserves of coal and raw materials. Rôles were here interchanged: the worker would tightly grip his rifle in defense of the factory in which he saw the source of his power. In this way elements of a workers' dictatorship were inaugurated in the factories and districts sometime before the proletariat as a whole seized the state power.

Reflecting as always the fright of the property owners, the Compromisers tried with all their might to oppose the arming of the Petrograd workers or reduce it to a minimum. According to Minichev, all the arms in the possession of the Narva district consisted of "fifteen or twenty rifles and a few revolvers." At that time robberies and deeds of violence were increasing in the capital. Alarming rumors were spreading everywhere heralding new disturbances. On the eve of the July demonstration it was generally expected that the district would be set fire to. The workers were hunting for weapons, knocking at all doors and sometimes breaking them in.

The Putilov men brought back a trophy from the demonstration of July 3rd: a machine-gun with five cases of cartridge belt. "We were happy as children," said Minichev. Certain individual factories were somewhat better armed. According to Lichkov, the workers of his factory had 80 rifles and 20 big revolvers. Riches indeed! Through the Red Guard headquarters, they got two machine-guns. They put one in the dining-room, one in the attic. "Our commander," says Lichkov, "was Kocherovsky, and his first assistants were Tomchak, who was killed by White Guards in the October Days near Tsarskoe Selo, and Efimov, who was shot by White bands near Hamburg." These scant words enable us to glance into the factory laboratory where the cadres of the October revolution and the future Red Army were forming, where the Tomchaks and Efimovs were being chosen out, tempered, and were learning to command, and with them those hundreds and thousands of nameless workers who won the power, loyally defended it from its enemy, and fell subsequently on all the fields of battle.

The July Days introduced a sudden change in the situation of the Red Guard. The disarming of the workers was now carried out quite openly—not by admonition but by force. However, what the workers gave up as weapons was mostly old rubbish. All the very valuable guns were carefully concealed. Rifles were distributed among the most reliable members of the party. Machine-guns smeared with tallow were buried in the ground. Detachments of the Guard closed up shop and went underground, closely adhering to the Bolsheviks.

The business of arming the workers was originally placed in the hands of the factory and district committees of the party. It was only after the recovery from the July Days that the Military Organization of the Bolsheviks, which had formerly worked only in the garrison and at the front, took up the organization of the Red Guard, providing the workers

with military instructors and in some cases with weapons. The prospect of armed insurrection put forward by the party gradually prepared the advanced workers for a new conception of the function of the Red Army. It was no longer a militia of the factories and workers' districts, but the cadres of a future army of insurrection.

During August, fires in the shops and factories multiplied. Every new crisis is preceded by a convulsion of the collective mind, sending forth waves of alarm. The factory and shop committees developed an intense labor of defending the plants from attacks of this kind. Concealed rifles came out into the open. The Kornilov insurrection conclusively legalized the Red Guard. About 25,000 workers were enrolled in companies and armed—by no means fully, to be sure—with rifles, and in part with machine-guns. Workers from the Schlüsselberg powder factory delivered on the Neva a bargeful of hand grenades and explosives—against Kornilov! The compromise Central Executive Committee refused this gift of the Greeks. The Red Guards of the Vyborg side distributed the gift by night throughout the district.

"Drill in the art of handling a rifle," says the worker Skorinko, "formerly carried on in flats and tenements, was now brought out into the light and air, into the parks, the boulevards." "The shops were turned into camps," says another worker, Rakitov ... "The worker would stand at his bench with knapsack on his back and rifle beside him." Very soon all those working in the bomb factory except the old Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were enrolled in the Guard. After the whistle, all would draw up in the court for drill. "Side by side with a bearded worker you would see a boy apprentice, and both of them attentively listening to the instructor ..." Thus while the old tsarist army was disintegrating, the foundation of a future Red Army was being laid in the factories.

As soon as the Kornilov danger passed, the Compromisers tried to slow up on the fulfillment of their promises. To the 30,000 Putilov men, for instance, only 500 rifles were given out. Soon the giving out of weapons stopped altogether. The danger now was not from the right, but the left; protection must be sought not among the proletarians but the junkers.

An absence of immediate practical aims combined with the lack of weapons caused an ebbing of workers from the Red Guard, but this only for a short interval. The foundation cadres had been laid down solidly in every plant; firm bonds had been established between the different companies. These cadres now knew from experience that they had serious reserves which could be brought to their feet in case of danger.

The going over of the Soviet to the Bolsheviks again radically changed the position of the Red Guard. From being persecuted or tolerated, it now became an official instrument of the Soviet already reaching for the power. The workers now often found by themselves a way to weapons, asking only the sanction of the Soviet. From the end of September on, and more especially from the 10th of October, the preparation of an insurrection was openly placed on the order of the day. For a month before the revolution in scores of shops and factories of Petrograd an intense military activity was in progress—chiefly rifle practice. By the middle of October, the interest in weapons had risen to a new height. In certain factories, almost every last man was enrolled in a company.

The workers were more and more impatiently demanding weapons from the Soviet, but the weapons were infinitely fewer than the hands stretched out for them. "I came to Smolny every day," relates the engineer, Kozmin, "and observed how both before and after the sitting of the Soviet, workers and sailors would come up to Trotsky, offering and demanding weapons for the arming of the workers, making reports as to how and where these weapons were distributed, and putting the question: 'But when does business begin?' The impatience was very great ..."

Formally the Red Guard remained non-party. But the nearer the final day came, the more prominent were the Bolsheviks. They constituted the nucleus of every company; they controlled the commanding staff and the communications with other plants and districts. The non-party workers

and Left Social Revolutionaries followed the lead of the Bolsheviks.

However, even now, on the eve of the insurrection, the ranks of the Guard were not numerous. On the 16th, Uritsky, a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee, estimated the workers' army of Petrograd at 40,000 bayonets. The figure is probably exaggerated. The resources of weapons remained still very limited. In spite of the impotence of the government it was impossible to seize the arsenals without taking the road of open insurrection.

On the 22nd, there was held an all-city conference of the Red Guard, its hundred delegates representing about twenty thousand fighters. The figure is not to be taken too literally—not all those registered had shown any sign of activity. But at a moment of alarm volunteers would pour into the companies in large numbers. Regulations adopted the next day by the conference defined the Red Guard as “an organization of the armed forces of the proletariat for the struggle against counter-revolution and the defense of the conquests of the revolution.” Observe this: that twenty-four hours before the insurrection the task was still defined in terms of defense and not attack.

The basic military unit was the ten; four tens was a squad, three squads, a company; three companies, a battalion. With its commanding staff and special units, a battalion numbered over 500 men. The battalions of a district constituted a division [otryad]. Big factories like the Putilov had their own divisions. Special technical commands—sappers, bicycles, telegraphers, machine-gunners and artillery men—were recruited in the corresponding factories, and attached to the riflemen—or else acted independently according to the nature of the given task. The entire commanding staff was elective. There was no risk in this: all were volunteers here and knew each other well.

The working women created Red Cross divisions. At the shops manufacturing surgical supplies for the army, lectures were announced on the care of the wounded. “Already in almost all the factories,” writes Tatiana Graff, “the working women were regularly on duty as nurses with the necessary first-aid supplies.” The organization was extremely poor in money and technical equipment. By degrees, however, the factory committees sent material for hospital bases and ambulances. During the hours of the revolution these weak nuclei swiftly developed. An imposing technical equipment was suddenly found at their disposal. On the 24th the Vyborg district soviet issued the following order: “Immediately requisition all automobiles ... Take an inventory of all first-aid supplies, and have nurses on duty in all clinics.”

A growing number of non-party workers were now going out for shooting drill and maneuvers. The number of posts requiring patrol duty was increasing. In the factories, sentries were on duty night and day. The headquarters of the Red Guard were transferred to more spacious rooms. On the 23rd at a pipe foundry they held an examination of the Red Guard. An attempt of a Menshevik to speak against the insurrection was drowned in a storm of indignation: Enough, enough! The time for argument is passed! The movement was irresistible. It was seizing even the Mensheviks. “They were enrolling in the Red Guard,” says Tatiana Graff, “participating in all duties and even developing some initiative.” Skorinko tells how on the 23rd, Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, old and young, were fraternizing with the Bolsheviks, and how Skorinko himself joyfully embraced his own father, who was a worker in the same factory. The worker Peskovoi says that in his armed detachment, “there were young workers of sixteen and old men of fifty.” The variety of ages gave “good cheer and fighting courage.”

The Vyborg side was especially fervent in preparing for battle. Having stolen the keys of the drawbridges, studied out the vulnerable points of the district, and elected their military revolutionary committee, the factory committees established continuous patrols. Kayurov writes with legitimate pride of the Vyborg men: “They were the first to go to battle with the autocracy, they were the first to institute in their district the eight-hour

day, the first to come out with a protest against the ten minister-capitalists, the first to raise a protest on July 7th against the persecution of our party, and they were not the last on the decisive day of October 25th.” What is true is true. The history of the Red Guard is to a considerable extent the history of the dual power. With its inner contradictions and conflicts, the dual power helped the workers to create a considerable armed force even before the insurrection. To cast up the general total of the workers' detachments throughout the country at the moment of insurrection is hardly possible, at least at the present moment. In any case, tens and tens of thousands of armed workers constituted the cadres of the insurrection. The reserves were almost inexhaustible.

The organization of the Red Guard remained, of course, extremely far from complete. Everything was done in haste, in the rough, and not always skillfully. The Red Guard men were in the majority little trained; the communications were badly organized; the supply system was lame; the sanitary corps lagged behind. But the Red Guard, recruited from the most self-sacrificing workers, was burning to carry the job through this time to the end. And that was the decisive thing. The difference between the workers' divisions and the peasant regiments was determined not only by the social ingredients of the two—many of those clumsy soldiers after returning to their villages and dividing the landlords' land will fight desperately against the White Guards, first in guerrilla bands and afterwards in the Red Army. Beside the social difference there existed another more immediate one: Whereas the garrison represented a compulsory assemblage of old soldiers defending themselves against war, the divisions of the Red Guard were newly constructed by individual selection on a new basis and with new aims.

The Military Revolutionary Committee had at its disposal a third kind of armed force: the sailors of the Baltic Fleet. In their social ingredients they are far closer to the workers than the infantry are. There are a good many Petrograd workers among them. The political level of the sailors is incomparably higher than that of the soldiers. In distinction from the none too belligerent reserves who have forgotten all about rifles, these sailors have never stopped actual service.

For active operations, it was possible to count firmly upon the armed Bolsheviks, upon the divisions of the Red Guard, upon the advanced group of the sailors, and upon the better-preserved regiments. The different elements of this collective army supplemented each other. The numerous garrisons lacked the will to fight. The sailor detachments lacked numbers. The Red Guard lacked skill. The workers together with the sailors contributed energy, daring, and enthusiasm. The regiments of the garrison constituted a rather inert reserve, imposing in its numbers and overwhelming in its mass.

In contact as they were from day to day with workers, soldiers and sailors, the Bolsheviks were aware of the deep qualitative difference between the constituent parts of this army they were to lead into battle. The very plan of the insurrection was based to a considerable degree upon a calculation of these differences.

The possessing classes constituted the social force of the other camp. This means that they were its military weakness. These solid people of the capital, the press, the pulpit—where and when have they ever fought? They are accustomed to find out by telegraph or telephone the results of the battles which settle their fate. The younger generation, the sons, the students? They were almost all hostile to the October revolution. But a majority of them too stood aside. They stood with their fathers awaiting the outcome of the battle. A number of them afterward joined the officers and junkers—already largely recruited from among the students. The property holders had no popular masses with them. The workers, soldiers, peasants had turned against them. The collapse of the Compromise Parties meant that the possessing classes were left without an army.

In proportion to the significance of railroads in the life of modern states, a large place was occupied in the political calculations of both camps by

the question of the railroad workers. Here the hierarchical constitution of the personnel leaves room for an extraordinary political variegation, creating favorable conditions for the diplomats of the Compromisers. The lately formed Vikzhel [All-Russian Executive Committee of the Union of Railwaymen] had kept a considerably more solid root among the clerks and even among the workers than, for instance, the army committees at the front. In the railroads, only a minority followed the Bolsheviks, chiefly workers in the stations and yards. According to the report of Schmidt, one of the Bolshevik leaders of the trade union movement, the railroad workers of the Petrograd and Moscow junctions stood closest of all to the party.

But even among the compromiser mass of clerks and workers, there was a sharp shift to the left from the date of the railroad strike at the end of September. Dissatisfaction with the Vikzhel, which had compromised itself by talking and wavering, was more and more evident in the lower ranks. Lenin remarked: "The army of railroad and postal clerks continues in a state of sharp conflict with the government." From the standpoint of the immediate tasks of the insurrection that was almost enough.

Things were less favorable in the post and telegraph service. According to the Bolshevik, Boky, "the men in the Post and Telegraph Offices are mostly Kadets." But here too the lower personnel had taken a hostile attitude toward the upper ranks. There was a group of mail carriers ready at a critical moment to seize the Post Office.

It would have been hopeless in any case to try to change the minds of the railroad and postal clerks with words. If the Bolsheviks should prove indecisive, the advantage would remain with the Kadets and the compromiser upper circles. With a decisive revolutionary leadership, the lower ranks must inevitably carry with them the intermediate layers, and isolate the upper circles of the Vikzhel. In revolutionary calculations statistics alone are not enough; the co-efficient of living action is also essential.

The enemies of the insurrection in the ranks of the Bolshevik party itself found, however, sufficient ground for pessimistic conclusions. Zinoviev and Kamenev gave warning against an under-estimation of the enemy's forces. "Petrograd will decide, and in Petrograd the enemy has ... considerable forces: 5,000 junkers, magnificently armed and knowing how to fight, and then the army headquarters, and then the shock troops, and then the Cossacks, and then a considerable part of the garrison, and then a very considerable quantity of artillery spread out fan-wise around Petrograd. Moreover, the enemy with the help of the Central Executive Committee will almost certainly attempt to bring troops from the front ..." The list sounds imposing, but it is only a list. If an army as a whole is a copy of society, then when society openly splits, both armies are copies of the two warring camps. The army of the possessors contained the wormholes of isolation and decay.

The officers crowding the hotels, restaurants, and brothels had been hostile to the government ever since the break between Kerensky and Kornilov. Their hatred of the Bolsheviks, however, was infinitely more bitter. As a general rule, the monarchist officers were most active on the side of the government. "Dear Kornilov and Krymov, in what you failed to do perhaps with God's help we shall succeed ..." Such was the prayer of officer Sinegub, one of the most valiant defenders of the Winter Palace on the day of the uprising. But in spite of the vast number of officers, only single individuals were really ready to fight. The Kornilov plot had already proven that these completely demoralized officers were not a fighting force.

The junkers were not homogeneous in social make-up, and there was no unanimity among them. Along with hereditary fighters, sons, and grandsons of officers, there were many accidental elements gathered up under pressure of war-needs even during the monarchy. The head of an engineering school said to an officer: "I must die with you ... We are nobles, you know, and cannot think otherwise." These lucky gentlemen,

who did, after all, succeed in evading a noble death, would speak of the democratic junkers as low-breeds, as muzhiks "with coarse stupid faces." This division into the blue blood and the black penetrated deeply into the junker schools, and it is noticeable that here too those who came out most zealously in defense of the republican government were the very ones who most mourned the loss of the monarchy. The democratic junkers declared that they were not for Kerensky but for the Central Executive Committee.

The revolution had first opened the doors of the junker schools to the Jews. And in trying to hold their own with the privileged upper circles, the sons of the Jewish bourgeoisie became extraordinarily warlike against the Bolsheviks. But, alas, this was not enough to save the régime—not even to defend the Winter Palace. The heterogeneousness of these military schools and their complete isolation from the army brought it about that during the critical hours the junkers began to hold meetings. They began to ask questions: How are the Cossacks behaving? Is anybody coming out besides us? Is it worthwhile anyway to defend the Provisional Government?

According to a report of Podvoisky, there were about 120 socialist junkers in the Petrograd military schools at the beginning of October, and of these 42 or 43 were Bolsheviks. "The junkers say that the whole commanding staff of the schools is counter-revolutionary. They are being definitely prepared in case anything happens to put down the insurrection ..." The number of socialists, and especially Bolsheviks, was wholly insignificant, but they made it possible for Smolny to know everything of importance that went on among the junkers. In addition to that, the location of the military schools was very disadvantageous. The junkers were sandwiched in among the barracks, and although they spoke scornfully of the soldiers, they looked upon them with a great deal of dread.

The junkers had plenty of ground for caution. Thousands of hostile eyes were watching them from the neighboring barracks and the workers' districts. This observation was the more effective in that every school had its soldier group, neutral in words but in reality inclining toward the insurrection. The school storerooms were in the hands of non-combatant soldiers. "Those scoundrels," writes an officer of the Engineering School, "not satisfied with losing the key to the storeroom so that I had to give the order to break in the door, also removed the breech-blocks from the machine-guns and hid them somewhere." In these circumstances, you could hardly expect miracles of heroism from the junkers.

But would not a Petrograd insurrection be threatened from without, from the neighboring garrisons? In the last days of its life the monarchy had never ceased to put its hope in that small military ring surrounding the capital. The monarchy had missed its guess, but how would it go this time? To guarantee conditions excluding every possible danger would have been to make the very insurrection unnecessary. After all, its aim was to break down the obstacles which could not be dissolved politically. Everything could not be calculated in advance, but all that could be was.

Early in October a conference of the soviets of Petrograd province was held in Kronstadt. Delegates from the garrisons of the environs of the capital—Gatchina, Tsarskoe, Krasnoe, Oranienbaum, Kronstadt itself—took the very highest note set by the tuning-fork of the Baltic sailors. Their resolution was adhered to by the deputies of Petrograd province. The muzhiks were veering sharply through the Left Social Revolutionaries toward the Bolsheviks.

At a conference of the Central Committee on the 16th, a party worker in the province, Stepanov, drew a somewhat variegated picture of the state of the forces, but nevertheless with a clear predominance of Bolshevik colors. In Sestroretsk and Kolpino the workers are under arms; their mood is militant. In Novy Peterhof the work in the regiment has fallen off; the regiment is disorganized. In Krasnoe Selo the 176th regiment is Bolshevik (the same regiment which patrolled the Tauride Palace on July 4th), the 172nd is on the side of the Bolsheviks, "and, besides, there is cavalry

there.” In Luga the garrison of 30,000, after swinging over to the Bolsheviks, is wavering in part; the soviet is still defensist. In Gdov the regiment is Bolshevik. In Kronstadt the mood has declined; the garrison boiled over during the preceding months; the better part of the sailors are in the active fleet. In Schlüsselburg, within 60 versts of Petrograd, the soviet long ago became the sole power; the workers of the powder factory are ready at any moment to support the capital.

In combination with the results of that Kronstadt conference of soviets, this information about the first line reserves may be considered entirely encouraging. The radiation of the February insurrection had been sufficient to dissolve discipline over a wide area. And it was now possible to look with confidence upon the nearby garrisons, their conditions being adequately known in advance.

The troops of Finland and the Northern front were among the second line reserves. Here conditions were still more favorable. The work of Smilga, Antonov, Dybenko had produced invaluable results. Along with the garrison of Helsingfors, the fleet had become a sovereign in Finnish territory. The government had no more power there. The two Cossack divisions quartered in Helsingfors—Kornilov had intended them for a blow at Petrograd—had come in close contact with the sailors and were supporting the Bolsheviks, or the Left Social Revolutionaries, who in the Baltic Fleet were becoming less and less distinguishable from Bolsheviks.

Helsingfors was extending its hand to the sailors of the Reval naval base, whose attitude up to that time had been indefinite. The Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region, in which also apparently the Baltic Fleet had taken the initiative, had united the soviets of the garrisons surrounding Petrograd in such a wide circle that it took in Moscow on one side and Archangel on the other. “In this manner,” writes Antonov, “the idea was realized of armoring the capital of the revolution against possible attacks from Kerensky’s troops.” Smilga returned from the Congress to Helsingfors to organize a special detachment of sailors, infantry, and artillery to be sent to Petrograd at the first signal. The Finland flank of the Petrograd insurrection was thus protected to the last degree. On this side, no blow was to be expected, only strong help.

On other portions of the front, too, things were wholly favorable—at least far more favorable than the most optimistic of the Bolsheviks in those days imagined. During October, committee elections were held throughout the army, and everywhere they showed a sharp swing to the Bolsheviks. In the corps quartered near Dvinsk the “old reasonable soldiers” were completely snowed under in the elections to the regimental and company committees; their places were taken by “gloomy, grey creatures ... with angry piercing eyes and wolfish snouts.” The same thing happened in other sectors. “Committee elections are in progress everywhere, and everywhere only Bolsheviks and defeatists are elected.” The governmental commissars began to avoid making trips to their units.

“Their situation is now no better than ours.” We are quoting Baron Budberg. Two cavalry regiments of his corps, the Hussar and Ural Cossacks, who remained longest of all in the control of the commanders, and had not refused to put down mutinous units, suddenly changed color and demanded: “that they are relieved of the function of punitive troops and gendarmes.” The threatening sense of this warning was clear to the Baron and to everybody else. “You can’t command a flock of hyenas, jackals, and sheep by playing on a violin,” he wrote. “The only salvation lies in a mass application of the hot iron ...” And here follows the tragic confession: “... a thing which we haven’t got and is nowhere to be gotten.”

If we do not cite similar testimony about other corps and divisions, it is only because their chiefs were not as observant as Budberg, or they did not keep diaries, or these diaries have not yet come to light. But the corps standing near Dvinsk was distinguished in nothing but the trenchant style of its commander from the other corps of the 5th Army, which in its turn was but little in advance of the other armies.

The compromisist committee of the 5th Army, which had long been hanging in the air, continued to send telegraphic threats to Petrograd to the effect that it would restore order in the rear with the bayonet. “All that was mere braggadocio and hot air,” writes Budberg. The committee was actually living its last days. On the 23rd it failed of re-election. The president of the new Bolshevik committee was Doctor Skliansky, a magnificent young organizer who soon developed his talent widely in the work of creating the Red Army, and who died subsequently an accidental death while canoeing on one of the American lakes.

The assistant of the government Commissar of the Northern front reports to the War Minister on the 22nd of October that the ideas of Bolshevism are making great headway in the army, that the mass wants peace, and that even the artillery which has held out to the very last moment has become “hospitable to defeatist propaganda. This too is no unimportant symptom. “The Provisional Government has no authority”—reports its own direct agent three days before the revolution.

To be sure, the Military Revolutionary Committee did not then know of all these documents. But what it did know was amply sufficient. On the 23rd, representatives of various units at the front filed past the Petrograd Soviet and demanded peace. Otherwise, they answered, they would march to the rear and “destroy all the parasites who want to keep on fighting for another ten years.” Seize the power, the front men said to the Soviet, “the trenches will support you.”

In the more remote and backward fronts, the South-western and Rumanian, Bolsheviks were still rare specimens, curiosities. But the mood of the soldiers here was the same as elsewhere. Evgenia Bosh tells how in the 2nd Corps of the Guards, quartered in the vicinity of Zhmerinka, among 60,000 soldiers there were one young communist and two sympathizers. This did not prevent the corps from coming out in support of the insurrection in the October days.

To the very last hour the government circles rested their hope in the Cossacks. But the less blind among the politicians of the right camp understood that here too things were in a very bad way. The Cossack officers were Kornilovists almost to a man. The rank-and-file were tending more and more to the left. In the government they did not understand this, imagining that the coolness of the Cossack regiments to the Winter Palace was caused by injured feelings about Kaledin. In the long run, however, it became clear even to the Minister of Justice, Maliantovich, that “only the Cossack officers” were supporters of Kaledin. The rank-and-file Cossacks, like all the soldiers, were simply going Bolshevik.

Of that front which in the early days of March had kissed the hands and feet of liberal priests, had carried Kadet ministers on its shoulders, got drunk on the speeches of Kerensky, and believed that the Bolsheviks were German agents—of that there was nothing left. Those rosy illusions had been drowned in the mud of the trenches, which the soldiers refused to go on kneading with their leaky boots. “The denouement is approaching,” wrote Budberg on the very day of the Petrograd insurrection, “and there can be no doubt of its outcome. On our front, there is not one single unit ... which would not be in the control of the Bolsheviks.”



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