

# Facing the Third American Revolution

By John Pepper

## The Skyscraper is Swaying

THE United States today is the strongest and healthiest part of world capitalism.

The world war has shown that European capitalism has built its wonderful palaces upon sand. But American capitalism could say proudly: My structure is built on rocks, even as the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

Yet even American capitalism must begin to see and feel now that its skyscraper too is beginning to rock. Of course, the first cry of American capitalism was that this swaying is but "normalcy," that it is merely the normal oscillation of the skyscraping marvel. But American capitalism is now emitting a fearful cry, like a wounded Behemoth. It is forced to realize that it is not the top of the skyscraper of capitalism which is swaying, but the rocks at its very foundations.

It is remarkable how at times, comparatively small happenings drive great fundamental changes of society into the consciousness of the people. The press, the parties and the scholars of American capitalism have not noticed for years anything of the most deep-going changes in American society. They have overlooked the over-development of capitalism, the levelling of the working class, the bankruptcy of the farmers, the acquirement of a centralized government, the disintegration of the old parties. But a small symptom—the election in Minnesota, the great victory of the Farmer-Labor Party over the old capitalist parties, has all at once awakened American public opinion, has daubed the faces of the capitalists pale with the white paint of fright.

Woodrow Wilson the living ideological consciousness of the American bourgeoisie has been the first to utter the cry of panic:

"There must be some real ground for the *universal unrest* and perturbation. It is not to be found in superficial politics or in mere economic blunders. It probably lies deep at the sources of the spiritual life of our time. *It leads to revolution*: and perhaps if we take the case of the Russian Revolution, the outstanding event of its kind in our age, we may find a good deal of instruction for our judgment of present critical situations and circumstances.

"*What gave rise to the Russian Revolution?* The answer can only be that *it was the product of a whole social system*. It was not in fact a sudden thing. It had been gathering head for several generations. It was due to the systematic denial to the great body of Russians of the rights and privileges which all normal men desire and must have if they are to be contented and within reach of happiness. The lives of the great mass of the Russian people contained no opportunities, but were hemmed in by barriers against which they were constantly flinging their spirits, only to fall back bruised and dispirited. Only the powerful were suffered to secure their rights or even to gain access to the means of material success.

"It is to be noted as a leading fact of our time that it was against 'capitalism' that the Russian leaders directed their attack. It was *capitalism* that made them see red;

*and it is against capitalism under one name or another that the discontented classes everywhere draw their indictment...*

"The world has been made safe for democracy. There need be no fear that any such mad design as that entertained by the insolent and ignorant Hohenzollerns and their counsellors may prevail against it. *But democracy has not yet made the world safe against irrational revolution*. That supreme task, which is nothing less than the salvation of civilization, now faces democracy, insistent, imperative. There is no escaping it, *unless everything we have built up is presently to fall in ruin about us*; and the United States, as the greatest of democracies, must undertake it."—(Woodrow Wilson: *The Road Away from Revolution*, Atlantic Monthly, August, 1923.)

And at the same time, Magnus Johnson, who indeed is very far from any consistent ideology but who was elected by the desperate farmers and workers of Minnesota, threatens with revolution:

"*Revolution—political, industrial, or even a resort to arms—faces the United States*, 'if conditions confronting the laboring man and the farmer are not changed,' in the opinion of Magnus Johnson, recently elected Senator from Minnesota of the Farmer-Labor ticket.

"*Many think the same thing that happened in Russia cannot happen in this country*,' the Senator-elect said today in a statement to the Associated Press, 'but don't fool yourself. It could happen here before you knew what was going on.

"The Czar had a big army, but he couldn't stop a revolution. We haven't hardly any army at all, so what could our Government do if there was a nation-wide revolution? It couldn't do a thing." (Report of the *New York Times*, July 27, 1923.)

The revolution is threatening, Woodrow Wilson cries! Consider the example of Russia! Capitalism provokes the discontented classes to revolution!

Political, industrial and even armed revolution faces the United States, cries Magnus Johnson! What happened in Russia can also happen in America. The common people are going to revolt against the handful of rich!

*The educated ideologist and the ignorant farmer-politician, both accuse capitalism*. It is remarkable that Wilson the hero of finely polished phrases and Magnus Johnson the hero of the rough voice simultaneously foretell with trembling knees the American revolution.

And both are right. The revolution is here. World history stands before one of its greatest turning-points—America faces her third revolution.

## A Continent in Change

A more and more general unrest embraces the United States. The classes are in the process of change. The political parties are in the process of change. Capitalism has developed in a dizzyingly speedy tempo. The lives of millions are not only being made uncertain, but are even destroyed by it. During the *economic crisis* of 1920—21 it drove from industry five to six million workers. During the



Maurice Becker

### Farming the Farmer

*prosperity* of 1922 it drove away two million farmers from the land and forced them into industry. It stirred up the South and caused the exodus of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Negroes from the cotton fields to the steel mills. *American capitalism within the last three years has pauperized millions of workers, has made millions of farmers into industrial workers, has transformed hundreds of thousands of Negro slaves living in pre-capitalist conditions, into modern wage-slaves.* Never before in the world's history, not even in capitalist history, has it happened that such immense migrations, such deep changes in the manner of living of such great masses of people could take place in the short period of three years.

Capitalism, the greatest revolutionary, has changed the old conditions of life so inexorably, so suddenly, that the conservative masses of workers, farmers and colored slaves feel themselves shaken out of their conservatism. It was a gigantic task to stir up the non-political conservative mass of American workers, farmers and colored slaves; but capitalism has succeeded in performing this miracle. *Politics today has become a mass occupation.* The basis of American conservative democracy was the inert mass of farmers. This basis is now collapsing. The last sure reserve of capitalism in America was the eight million Negroes of the South. This last reserve is in the act of deserting it.

Capitalism has built up a massive centralized government, for the championing of its common interests. In a country like America which in reality never had been governed in a centralized, European manner, this was a greater miracle than the putting up of a Himalaya in the midst of the Sahara Desert. And this centralized government draws upon itself more and more the gaze and interest of everybody, as the magnetic mountain in the fairy tale draws the ship towards itself with irresistible power.

*Capitalism has turned the United States into a monarchy* at whose head there stands a president with unlimited powers at the very time when the illusion of democracy is

most necessary for keeping the masses down. The government of the United States for years has been nothing else than a government-strikebreaker, and now it has received its fitting head—Calvin Coolidge the strike-breaker president. Coolidge became Governor of Massachusetts because he gained merit as a “negotiator” in the breaking of the textile strike of Lawrence. He became vice-president on the strength of having broken the police strike of Boston by force. And his first official act as president is the marshalling of all the forces of the government against the coal miners. The government today is the most dangerous Anarchist in the United States, and there can never reign order in America again, before the workers and exploited farmers render harmless its bombs, knives, and pistols.

The workers are beginning to organize politically. The bankrupt farmers are overthrowing the most sacred fundamental law of capitalism, namely, cash payment, and do not pay their debts. The Negroes in the South are making an unarmed Spartacus uprising. But that is still not all. Capitalist America beholds with great terror the native capitalism of the Philippines and Cuba breaking out into open revolt against American finance-capital, striving to throw off the yoke of American imperialism. And all this is coming to pass at a time when the chaos in Europe is becoming more and more complete. And American capitalism is compelled to realize, with the greatest alarm, that the chaos of Europe does not mean the end of the world, but is like the chaos of Kant-Laplace, from which new worlds will be formed. The slogan of the workers' and farmers' government is now on the order of the day in Europe, and tomorrow the slogan of the United States of Europe against American imperialism may be on the order of the day.

### The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

American capitalism has become too big for America.

Industrialization has taken place too rapidly and too one-sidedly.

The present industrial prosperity in America has too narrow a basis. It had to come to a standstill because four powerful factors imposed limits upon it: 1. The shortage of transportation. 2. Bankruptcy of the farmers. 3. Ruination of Europe. 4. The instability of China. These four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are riding fast, announcing the coming of Plague, Famine, War and Death of the next economic crisis.

Prosperity means a bigger and bigger expansion, while American capitalism can expand no further on the basis of the present state of the railroads. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover said at the annual meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce: “One of the great wastes in our economic machine is the shortage of transportation. It is the most profound and far-reaching deterrent upon our growth. It imposes great costs upon production.

“I need not point out to you that the periodic car shortage in its real meaning of insufficient tracks and terminals, as well as rolling stock, imposes intermittent stoppages of our industries and intermittent strictures in the law of supply and demand, influences price levels and creates local famines and gluts.”

But the anarchy of transportation can be brought to an end only with public ownership of the railroads. Every class has its plan for solution of the transportation problem. The Harding-Coolidge administration aims to coordinate the

railroads into nineteen big corporations; La Follette wants a small-businessman form of public ownership. The railroad trade unions, through the Plumb Plan, advocate some confused form of socialization. Collective ownership of the railroads is the only possible solution of the transportation problem, is a condition absolutely necessary for the further growth of the forces of production in the United States. But the capitalists accept the periodic crisis rather than conclude a pact with the very devil personified—with socialization.

The bankruptcy of the farmers has become a mass-catastrophe. The unholy Trinity of Industrial Monopoly, Transportation Monopoly, and Marketing Monopoly is a mightier deity over the farmers, than the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost has ever been. The monopoly of finance-capital is expropriating the farmers by the millions. The terrible scenes of the expropriation of the English peasantry depicted by the master hand of Marx in his "Capital," are having their repetition upon a greater scale in America today. The Western farmers and Southern colored tenants are being forced by the millions to leave the land, and are being turned into industrial workers. It is an entirely new development for America. In Europe the proletariat arose through expropriation and pauperization of the farmers. In America the bulk of the industrial proletariat was formed through immigration.

A reverse movement occurred in America in the past. The proletarians and semi-proletarians of the cities migrated to the free land by the millions. Greeley's famous slogan, "Go West, young man, go West" was the best safety-valve for Eastern capitalism in the United States. Today, however, there is a change, not only of the direction of mass-migration, but also of its composition and conditions. The migration from East to West was truly a movement of fresh, hopeful men and women who liberated themselves from the yoke of capitalism and sought and found free land. In contrast, the new mass migration from West to East is a movement of broken, uprooted persons who, after having collapsed under the yoke of tenantry and mortgage, are now bringing their last muscular power to the stone-piles of the cities. A new, invisible Greeley of the new America has issued the new slogan, "Go East, old man, go East."

The chaos in Europe means, for American capitalism, the impossibility of export of industrial products, at a stage when American capitalism, for the first time in its life is no longer an exporter of raw materials, but is an exporter of manufactured goods. The financial collapse of Europe has come at the moment when the United States has changed from a debtor nation into a creditor nation. The instability of all economic and political conditions in Europe has arisen at a moment when the United States, for the first time in its life, has become a capital-exporting country.

The greatest country of the world which is not as yet being exploited for raw material and for the export of industrial products and capital, is China. By the Treaty of Washington, and by the policy of the Open Door, the United States hoped that it could exploit for its own ends this great Eldorado of primitive accumulation of capital. The revolutions and counter-revolutions in China, the immense fermentation of hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants and artisans, and the rivalry of other big powers, have closed and even locked the Open Door of China.

The miracle of the independent prosperity of American capitalism was brought to an end through the four iron-clad,

limiting factors. America stands today at the beginning of an economic depression. The depression is only starting, but the panic of the capitalists is already complete. American capitalists in the past always believed that an economic crisis is something abnormal, no more than a mere accident which could have been avoided through skillful manipulation. American capitalism has gone through no less than fifteen economic crises, and in spite of that it has been so optimistic, that it has refused to believe that a crisis was an inherent attribute of capitalism, considering it to be simply a piece of hard luck caused by bad men and bad administrations. The crisis of 1873 was called the "Jay Cooke Panic", the crisis of 1884 "The Railroad Panic", the crisis of 1893 "The Cleveland Panic", the crisis of 1903 "The Rich Man's Panic", the crisis of 1907 "The Roosevelt Panic". Now for the first time, American capitalism sees that the crisis is a capitalist crisis. Wesley C. Michell, professor of economics at Columbia University writes:

"Longer experience, wider knowledge of business in other countries, and better statistical data have gradually discredited the view that crises are 'abnormal' events, each due to a special cause. The modern view is that crises are but one feature of recurrent 'business cycles'. Instead of a 'normal' state of business interrupted by occasional crises, men look for a continually changing state of business—continually changing in a fairly regular way. A crisis is expected to be followed by a depression, the depression by a revival, the revival by prosperity, and prosperity by a new crisis." (The National Bureau of Economic Research: "Business Cycles and Unemployment," New York, 1923.)

### Collectivism Looms Up.

Conditions today are so acute and so unusually clear that the ideological representatives of capitalism see plainly, not only the nature of the crisis but even the only remedy against the crisis—collectivism. Secretary of Commerce Hoover said in his speech before the United States Chamber of Commerce: "We have reached a stage of national development of such complexity and interdependence that we must have a national planning of industry and commerce. We have gained a larger prospective than individual business because individual prosperity is impossible without the prosperity of the whole.

"This is the function of industry and commerce itself through collective thought. Government has definite relationship to it, not as an agency for production and distribution of commodities nor as an economic dictator, but as the greatest contributor in the determination of fact and of cooperation with industry and commerce in the solution of its problems."

The principal spokesman of American capitalism comes to the conclusion that the economic development of the United States has reached the stage where individual business is no longer adequate, where a national plan is necessary, where trusts no longer suffice, where collective thought is needed. Hoover is right. Only collectivism can banish crisis and anarchy out of American economic life. But neither Hoover's capitalist government nor capitalism can bring about collectivism. Collectivism can only be put into effect by the workers. Collectivism is not a remedy to eliminate the shortcomings of the capitalist system, but is the historical consummation and means of abolition of the capitalist system itself.

The spokesmen of capitalism can recognize the truth; but they cannot go the way of the truth. Capitalism must advance along capitalist ways.

And what are these capitalist ways?

The first capitalist salvation is the artificial reduction of the forces of production, through a frightful crisis. The depression has already come, and the crisis is due. It means new unemployment and new wage-cutting, it means sharper class struggle between workers and capitalists, it means increased interference by the government, it means radicalization of the working class.

The second capitalist solution is the decimation of the farmers through bankruptcy, the turning of mortgage farmers into tenant farmers and industrialization of agriculture by the capitalists themselves. That means political organization, political upheaval, and revolt of the farmers.

The third capitalist solution is an imperialist attempt to yoke Europe as an American colony. That means complications in foreign affairs, that means greater militarism and navalism. The World Court is not an instrument for World Peace, but for another World War.

The capitalist solution means unrest and instability all along the line; it means war-menace; it means discontent; it means forcing the masses into politics. But American democracy has rested until now on the non-political attitude of the laboring masses. Less than 50% of the voters, in the past, have taken part in elections. American democracy has lived until now not upon the principle of the majority, but on the contrary, on the principle of the minority. It will be the debacle of American democracy the moment that the majority becomes so greatly aroused that it turns political, that it makes its voice heard.

The capitalist solution of American problems means the provocation of the third American revolution.

The *first* revolution in America took place as the forces of production of the country developed to such an extent that an independent American capitalism could lift its head, and could throw off the exploitation of English capitalism. The first American revolution was necessary in order to permit free development to the forces of production.

The *second* revolution came as the forces of production in the North developed to such an extent that compulsion had to be used in order to open up the South of the big landowners and colored slaves. The victory of the Northern capitalists in the Civil War meant the removal of the greatest obstacle—the non-capitalistic South, in the way of the free development of capitalist forces of production.

The *third* revolution is being caused again by the capitalistic forces of production which no longer have room in America of today in order to develop freely. The trusts have developed the forces of production tremendously. But they are no longer adequate. Collectivism is necessary. However, capitalists cannot bring about collectivism. It would be the death of capitalism. The capitalists will attempt their own solution and thereby they will provoke the revolution which will make way for collectivism.

The coming third revolution will not be a proletarian revolution. It will be a revolution of well-to-do and exploited farmers, small businessmen and workers. The revolution will come through the ballot and, as Magnus Johnson foretells, through the force of arms. It will

come through rebellions within the old parties, through third parties, farmer-labor parties. America is not a state, but a continent. America is not as unified and centralized as Germany and France. The revolution cannot be uniform, and will not be centralized, will show a varying picture according to the various economical and political structures of the individual sections. It will contain elements of the great French Revolution and the Russian Kerensky revolution. In its ideology it will have elements of Jeffersonianism, Danish cooperatives, Ku Klux Klan and Bolshevism. The proletariat *as a class* will not play an independent role in this revolution. Gompers and many sections of the labor aristocracy will be even the allies of the ruling class. But in this revolution the working class will free itself from the rule of the Gompers bureaucracy, will create a labor party from below and will acquire a class consciousness on a national scale. After the Victory of this La Follette revolution, there will begin the *independent* role of workers and exploited farmers, and there will begin then, the period of the *fourth* American revolution:—the period of the proletarian revolution. We stand before a complete renaissance of the whole economic, social and political life of America and we Communists can say what Ulrich von Hutten said in the age of the great European Reformation and Renaissance: It is a time for the joy of living.

## Rebel

FROM sun up till sun down you can hear him hammering,  
you can hear his hammer ringing on the vast anvil  
while the whole earth trembles under his blows.  
And all through the long hours of the night  
you can see the sparks flying, you can see the sparks  
dancing in the steel blue sky.

O huge smith, what are you hammering  
so tirelessly, without resting day or night?

Child, I am smashing the chains...

Sometimes the flames shoot upwards  
from the center of the earth as from an open forge,  
and the titan's hand from the blazing maw  
plucks a fiery sword and vanishes in the clouds.

O huge smith, what are you hammering  
so tirelessly, without resting day or night?

Child, I am making a sword...

Edwin Seaver.

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