

Option 3: Work Toward a Future Socialist Society

The ideas of Karl Marx can guide Russians to a bright future. Marx's ideas mirror what is happening now in Russia. Russia is industrializing rapidly. This process is both creating an urban lower class and exacerbating class conflict. Since the 1890s, Russia has seen population growth in the cities and an increasing number of strikes and labor violence.

But we are not quite ready for socialism. According to Marx, industrial capitalism is the final stage of history. This stage pits factory owners against the factory workers. In a socialist revolution, the workers will overthrow the owners and seize power. Eventually, private property will be abolished and capitalism will be succeeded by an economic system—socialism—in which the people will labor out of a sincere desire to contribute to the well-being of their fellow humans. However, in Russia, industrial capitalism is still in its infancy; and therefore, Russia is not yet ready for socialism. We must be patient and allow the lower classes to develop enough class-consciousness to organize for the final defeat of capitalism. We must also trust in our wise Menshevik leaders to guide us to this eventual goal.

Active participation in the soviets provides us with the best opportunity to contribute to the new Russia. The soviets control the armed forces, transportation, and communications. They are workers' organizations pursuing workers' objectives. The brave deeds of the Petrograd workers of the glorious February Revolution must be advanced through the organization of a strong workers' political party. This workers' party must be active in the upcoming elections to the Constituent Assembly.

Although led by liberals and capitalists, the Provisional Government is putting together a temporary post-tsarist political structure. In time, by working in this political structure, revolutionaries will come to know the true nature of the class enemy, and will be better-prepared to defeat it in the final conflict.

It is true that the Great War is the savage result of destructive competition between corrupt bourgeois states and, as such, is contemptible. However, the progress made in Russia since February must be protected from German invaders. When Russia is under attack, all of her children must lay aside their differences and defend the fatherland. We must win the war so that a just peace will nurture our social revolution!

Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 3

1. Karl Marx has provided an ideology based on scientific laws of history. This philosophy positions socialist revolutionaries within an historical stream flowing from the dawn of man, through the French Revolution, to a future when man can finally control his own destiny.

2. Industrial capitalism is the crucial fact of modern economic life. Its great promise and its awful pitfalls embody the present and future of Russia. The workers must master industrial capitalism in order to transcend it.

3. The current international borders of the Russian state must not be altered. In principle, we accept the right of ethnic groups to self-determination within Russia. However, we are opposed to any efforts at territorial autonomy or separation before the election of the Constituent Assembly.

4. The progress made in Russia since February must be protected from German invaders. We must win the war so that a just peace will nurture our social revolution!

Supporting Arguments for Option 3

1. While the final socialist revolution will eventually occur, Russia has just entered the stage of bourgeois-led industrialization. This stage must be well-advanced before the lower classes acquire enough class consciousness to organize for the defeat of capitalism. We must not interfere with the process of historical inevitability.

2. For the present, we must actively participate in the soviets, which have become the most powerful institutions in Russia. We must organize a strong workers' political party. In addition, cooperation with the Provisional

Government will give a voice to the workers in the post-tsarist political structure.

3. The Constituent Assembly will represent all of Russia, and any important political issues, such as self-determination for nationalities, must only be considered after its election.

4. When Russia is under attack, all of her children must lay aside their differences and defend the motherland. After our victory, the international brotherhood of workers will unite in a just and fair peace.

From the Historical Record

Central Committee of the Social Democrats, February 27, 1917

“Citizens! The strongholds of Russian tsarism have fallen. The prosperity of the Tsarist gang, built on the bones of the people, has collapsed. The people have risen and the capital is in their hands. Units of revolutionary troops have come over to support the uprising. The revolutionary proletariat [property-less laborers] and the revolutionary army must save the country from the downfall and final ruin which the Tsarist government was preparing. The Russian people through its huge efforts, its blood and at the cost of many lives has thrown off the slavery of centuries.

The task of the working class and the revolutionary army is to create a Provisional revolutionary government which will stand at the head of the new-born republican order. The Provisional revolutionary government must draw up temporary laws to defend the rights and liberties of the people, to confiscate church, landowners', government and crown lands and transfer them to the people, to introduce the eight-hour working day and to summon a Constituent Assembly on the basis of a suffrage which is universal, without regard to sex, nationality or religion, direct, equal and secret....

Citizens, soldiers, wives and mothers! All to battle! To open battle with tsardom and its troops!

The red flag of revolt will be raised right across Russia! Everywhere take freedom into your own hands, overthrow the tsarist lackeys, summon the soldiers to the struggle! ...

Forward, there is no return!

Merciless struggle under the red flag of revolution!

Long live the democratic republic!

Long live the revolutionary working class!

Long live the revolutionary people and the revolutionary army!”

V. A. Bazarov, March 2, 1917

“The energy and unity of revolutionary democracy have already forced the bourgeoisie to take a number of steps beyond the line the ruling class was originally unwilling to cross....

But in order to prevent the transformation of this revolutionary path into [one of] counterrevolution, the democratic [camp] should participate energetically in the Provisional Government to prevent it from stopping half-way [and] push it further and further....”

Resolution of the Second Moscow military equipment factory, March 5, 1917

“The Provisional Government that emerged from the revolution speaks for the interests of the bourgeoisie, and therefore the working class can support this government only insofar as its policy will not run against the interests of the broad toiling masses. At the same time, the working class must organize itself for the defense of its class interests and the consolidation of all the achievements of the revolution.”

Editorial, Rabochaia Gazeta (Menshevik newspaper), March 31, 1917

“Time and again we warned the workers against an unorganized economic struggle.... We cautioned the workers against thoughtless steps; we urged on them restraint and organization in the interests both of their class and of the struggle for economic and political freedom being conducted by the proletariat. But in making these comradely appeals we were also well aware of how unavoidably disorganized and chaotic the struggle would be during this early period. One has only to remember how the industrialists exploited the helplessness of workers laboring under wartime regulations and squeezed them of their remaining strength.... After having made a revolution, can one blame such workers for also wanting to attain a more humane existence?”

Rabochaia Gazeta, March 25, 1917

“Democracy grew up during the last ten years. The crumbs of freedom that were left in Russia after the struggle in 1905—the shadow of popular representation, the pitiful freedom of the press—slowly but steadily did their educative work. If not for that [work], Democracy could not have proven itself...in the days of the revolution. But now that it has—there is hope for the future.”

N.S. Chkheidze, speaking in the Petrograd Soviet, March 14, 1917

“We make this offer with weapons in our hands. The slogan for the revolution is ‘Down with [the German Kaiser] Wilhelm!’”

Irakli Tsereteli, speaking in the Petrograd Soviet Executive Committee, March 21, 1917

“We should not consider the defense of the country as something which does not concern us, something we don’t talk about. It should be for us one of the basic tasks of the Revolution, without which we should not be able to conclude a democratic peace and preserve the achievements of the Revolution.”

Socialist pamphlet directed to the peasants, 1917

“[Under socialism] want and hunger will disappear and pleasure will be equally accessible to all. Thieving and robbery will come to an end. In place of compulsion and coercion there will be a kingdom of freedom and fraternity.”

Options in Brief

Option 1: Create a Liberal Democracy

The time has come to build a liberal democracy in Russia! We support the Provisional Government until a Constituent Assembly can be elected to enact needed political and social reforms. Representatives of the people must be chosen by universal suffrage; government is best guided by the ballot box, not mob violence. Educated persons can provide necessary leadership. Russia deserves to be guided by the rule of law—law that respects the freedom and dignity of every human being. Individual rights, such as the right to speak, write, and worship freely, should be safeguarded. Private property should be protected and free enterprise should be encouraged. The civil and cultural rights of minority peoples should be respected, but the integrity and unity of the Russian state has to be preserved. The sacrifices of our brave soldiers and sailors must not be in vain. We will defend the fatherland!

Option 2: Respect the Peasants

The exploitation of the peasants must end! Land and liberty! The peasants are the backbone of Russia, yet it is they who suffer the most. All land should be granted to the peasants without compensation to the nobility. The traditions of the commune will be observed; the equality of all peasants will be guaranteed, while private ownership of land will not be reintroduced. Peasants and workers share the brotherhood of toil. Agriculture is more important than urban industries, which will only grow if the rural economy progresses first. We support the civil and cultural rights of minority peoples. Participation in the soviets, the Provisional Government, and the upcoming Constituent Assembly will help to achieve these aims. We should work with the Socialist Revolutionary Party to advance the cause of the peasants. Abroad, Russians must fight to defend their country and, after the war, we will work internationally for a peace of justice.

Option 3: Work Toward a Future Socialist Society

Karl Marx's ideas mirror what is happening now in Russia. Russia is industrializing rapidly, and this process is both creating an urban lower class and exacerbating class conflict. However, Russian capitalism is still in its infancy, and it will be a long time before Russia is ready for socialism. We must trust in our wise Menshevik leaders to guide us to that eventual goal. For now, active participation in the soviet's development of a strong labor party to prepare for future Constituent Assembly elections, and cooperation with the Provisional Government will move Russia toward a better tomorrow. We support self-determination for minority groups, but this must be decided by the Constituent Assembly. Russia should defend itself against aggression. After the war, together with our brothers throughout the world, we will strive for a just peace.

Option 4: Organize Now for a Second Revolution

Marxist theory is sound, but must be adapted to Russian conditions. With the February Revolution, the time is ripe for radical change. It is true that, at present, Russia's urban lower class lacks sufficient class-consciousness to overthrow capitalism. However, an elite group of well-organized, highly-disciplined, dedicated revolutionaries can teach and lead the workers to achieve this goal. A second revolution is needed in Russia! All power to the soviets! Peace, land, and bread! All peoples of Russia should join the cause of the Bolsheviks! The Provisional Government is an empty shell; after a period of organization and subversion, we can topple it. Russia must withdraw from the war and conclude an immediate peace. Land should be confiscated from the nobles and redistributed by the peasants themselves. City workers must be fed. Long live the international socialist revolution!

Presenting Your Option

The Setting: It is late April 1917. Crowds have gathered in Znamenskaya Square in Petrograd and are making speeches and arguing about the future of Russia.

Your Assignment: Your group comprises a variety of individuals who share a common vision for Russia. Your assignment is to persuade the undecided citizens that your option should become the basis for action. On Day Four, your group will be called upon to present a persuasive three-to-five minute summary of your option to these individuals. You will be judged by the undecided citizens on how well you present your option. This worksheet will help you prepare. Your teacher will moderate discussion.

Organizing Your Group: Each member of your group will take a specific role. Below

is a brief explanation of the responsibility of each role. Before preparing your sections of the presentation, work together to address the questions below. The **group director** is responsible for organizing the presentation of your group's option to the undecided citizens. The **political expert** is responsible for explaining why your option is most appropriate in light of the current domestic and international political climates. The **economic expert** is responsible for explaining why your option makes the most sense for the country economically. The **social expert** is responsible for explaining why your group's option offers the best route in terms of social issues. The **military expert** is responsible for explaining why your group's option offers the best route in terms of security.

Consider the following questions as you prepare your presentation:

1. What will be the impact of your option on the people of Russia?

2. What will be the impact of your option on foreign relations?

3. What is your option's long-term vision for Russia?

4. What are your option's short-term strategies for Russia?

5. What potential difficulties might your option's strategy encounter?

6. On what values is your option based?