The Situation in Italy

The news of the smashing Austro-German offensive against Italy reached this country simultaneously with the news of the flaming forth of a rebellious spirit among the Italian people. Correspondents and editors admit freely that discontent is seething, and that not the least dangerous aspect of the Italian defeats may be a revolutionary uprising, as in Russia.

This spirit of revolt has been gathering momentum for two years, and recent events are bringing it to a head.

The first impulse attending its disastrous defeats was the achievement of a semblance of national unity in Italy. But not alone is it merely a *semblance* of unity, it is in the nature of things purely temporary. Whether the Italian army succeeds in checking the invaders, or whether its defeats pile one upon the other, a reckoning will be demanded, and a situation created in which the forces of revolution will spring into action.

The social and economic situation in Italy is acute. Perhaps in no other belligerent nation are the necessities of life scarcer and their prices higher than in Italy. There is a menacing scarcity of food and of coal, as well as a scarcity of the things necessary for purposes of war. Industrial life has been terrifically disarranged, and Italy's proverbial industrial inefficiency has been emphasized by the war. Italians in this city receive heart-rending reports of the unbelievable sufferings and privations of the peasantry and proletariat in the old country.

During the summer strong food riots broke loose in Milan and other large cities of Italy, and smaller demonstrations are of regular occurrence. The riots during the summer were formidable, assuming the nature of mass uprisings, which were suppressed only after bloody clashes with police and soldiers, in which hundreds were killed and wounded.

The animating force that is directing and coalescing this discontent into active revolt is the splendid and intrepid stand of the Italian Socialist Party against the war.

Recent actions of the party indicate the character and force of its propaganda. Some months ago, Lazzari, the General Secretary, officially addressed a secret communication to munici-

pal locals and officials calling upon them to refuse payment of certain federal taxes in order to strike at the war.

In September, Lazzari followed this up by a circular addressed to Socialist municipal office-holders, calling upon them:

1. To carry on an intensive public agitation against the war and to act generally in a way that would result in their dismissal from office.

2. In the event that their agitation would not result in dismissal, to be ready to resign office on a certain date, when all Socialist officials would simultaneously resign as a protest, and in order not to even have any indirect participation in the war.

Now comes the most significant feature of Lazzari's actions. Lazzari was placed under arrest, but released on his own recognizance. The Imperialists in parliament took the matter up, protested that the traitor should be allowed at large, and a resolution was passed demanding that Lazzari be brought to immediate trial. Lazzari appeared before a Grand Jury, which in Italy consists of Judges, and *the charge against him was dismissed.*

Nor has the government since taken any further action against the "traitor," not daring to force the issue in fear of the consequences. This alone shows how intense is the spirit against the war and the government.

The actions of Lazzari are in line with the whole activity of the Italian Socialist party, an activity that is revolutionary and in direct contact with the masses.

But this is not all. The party is being forced to even more definite and aggressive action by a growing and powerful Left Wing group within the party. The Socialists of Naples and Florence instructed delegates to the party convention to criticize the actions of the Party and to urge more revolutionary activity.

The Italian revolutionists desire international proletarian action against the war and for peace. To them the war is an opportunity for achieving revolution, not simply for securing peace. It is precisely this attitude that animates the revolutionist everywhere. F.