

Exile Tells War's Effects on Socialism and Nations

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LEON TROTZKY ASSERTS PARLIAMENTARY MOVEMENT HAS BEEN RIPPED APART – DESERTION OF PARTY LEADERS A CRIME, HE SAYS.

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In the dingy little office of Novy Mir, the Russian Socialist daily at 77 St. Mark's place, yesterday, sat Leon Trotzky, exiled Russian revolutionist, deported from Germany, France and Spain, and now one of the radical group in New York. Trotzky arrived in this city Sunday and was whisked away to the shelter of friends and Comrades. He will join the editorial staff of the Novy Mir, and expects to contribute articles on Socialism, world politics and anti-militarism to The Call and the German Volkszeitung.

Though his life has been replete with revolutionary activities, Trotzky is a young man. Tall, well-built, and rather handsome, he greatly resembles Dr. Karl Liebknecht, whom he so greatly admires, and who, he prophesies, will lead the revolutionary forces in Germany and central Europe after the war.

Tales of Recent Events

Two exiles to Siberia for revolutionary work, escapes in disguise from three capitals, stories of sub-cellar printing presses and endless subterfuge and strategy to further his beloved Socialist propaganda are themes that Trotzky is too modest to talk of. Instead, he likes to dwell on the events of the past two and a half years, and lay plans for the future.

"I do not like to criticize a nation that extends the hospitality that the United States has afforded me," he said to a Call reporter yesterday, "but it does not seem possible that President Wilson's efforts toward peace and intervention in the European war can bring results.

U.S. Real Interest in War

"A capitalistic nation of the rank of this country must have a great interest in peace before its efforts toward intervention can be taken seriously. The United States, as embodied in its ruling class, can hardly have any real interest in stopping hostilities. Rather, its egotistic and selfish desires would want a continuation of the war. This country's efforts toward peace bear a strong resemblance to the smug, middle-class merchant who exploits the poor on weekdays and then goes to church on Sundays, piously asking absolution for his sins.

"Neither the central powers nor yet the allies will work for peace. It will come only through the third power, the greatest the world has ever seen, that of the enlightened workers of all Europe."

Day of Reckoning

Trotsky said, however, that while the workers of all the warring countries really preferred peace to war, the nations of both Germany and France also desired it. “Yet so fearful are these two governments of the day of reckoning that must come with peace, the day on which they must give accounting to their subjects for the wastage of human life and of money, that they continue fighting. The fear of the day of reckoning automatically spurs them on to ever greater sacrifices of blood and gold. They fear war, but, worse yet, they fear the inevitable question: ‘What was it all about?’”

Trotsky’s greatest hope and inspiration lie in the awakening of the workers of Europe. From the blind faith, the illusions and the phantom hopes of democracy and freedom that were held before their gaze at the beginning of the war, they are slowly imbibing the seeds of revolt, of social unrest, of Socialism.

It may be true that a Guesde became minister of France, but it is true also that the revolutionary ideas he spread in the minds of his following did not join the ministry. Those revolutionary ideas remain and multiply.

As executive member of the Zimmerwald conference Trotsky came in contact with thousands of anti-war agitators in all nations. Letters from soldiers at the front breathed the spirit of revolt. Trotsky himself, after two years of editorial work in Paris during the war, was exiled to Spain at the behest of the Russian ambassador.

Most significant of all are Trotsky’s ideas as to the failure of European Socialism to halt the war. He said it was curious that in those nations where Socialist parliamentarianism was weakest the Socialism of today was strongest. The older Socialist movements, such as France’s and Germany’s, have been split wide open and after the war will be practically disintegrated, while in nations such as Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Greece and Rumania, where the Socialist movements are young, “where they are not saddled with parliamentarianism, and where the revolutionary tendencies are not suppressed and distorted by leaders,” the power of the proletariat is able to make itself felt.

Political Organizations Shattered

“The war has shattered the Socialist political organizations in all nations of Europe,” he said. “That does not mean, however, that the work of two generations in the second international will be lost. It means a revision after the war, new methods, new organization, new modes of fighting.

“The epoch between the wars of 1870 and 1914 was one of working-class bureaucracy rule by leaders in both economic and political fields. The new epoch to come will be one of real working-class expression, a revolutionary bureaucracy whose leaders must spring from the ranks of the people, but who will not leave the ranks.

“The work of the second international was necessary; it was preparatory to that of the third international. So far we have been parliamentarians; we have made political compromises with other parties to gain our own points; we have evolved a leadership which for a generation has played politics in our name.

“They sought to win the state, and, instead, were won by the state. When the crucial moment came, with the first blare of the war trumpet, they knelt at the feet of our masters. It was the greatest political and moral crime of the century.

“In the peaceful epoch before the war our leaders got to the Parliaments and became obsessed with their importance as lawmakers. In doing so they forgot the historic mission of Socialism – the spiritual and moral education and preparation of the workers. Yet the small gains, the reforms that we made through our two generations of social reform, have been infinitesimal compared with the destructive work of war.”

He Sums Up Results of War

Trotsky summed up the net results of the war as follows:

1. Economically the war spells ruin for the middle class of Europe. It will heighten the friction between workers and the oligarchy of the trusts and the banks.
2. Financially the war has sunk the warring nations into debt. Social reform after the war will be impeded, if not altogether prevented, because of poverty. Money which formerly went in sickness, accident, industrial and unemployment relief, etc. will be used to pay the interest and principal of war debts. In addition to this the taxes on the necessities of life will be enormous.
3. Politically the war means a concentration of power in the hands of the militarist caste, in republic and monarchy alike. Peace will bring with it an enormous growth in reaction.
4. Social unrest will eclipse anything the earth has ever seen. The workers will demand a heavy accounting of their masters, and the future alone can tell what forms their protests will take.