

Manifesto¹

Source: The Bolsheviks and War, by Sam Marcy ;

Transcribed: by Andy Blunden.

Proletarians of Europe!

The war has lasted more than a year. Millions of corpses cover the battlefields. Millions of human beings have been crippled for the rest of their lives. *Europe is like a gigantic human slaughterhouse.* All civilization, created by the labor of many generations, is doomed to destruction. The most savage barbarism is today celebrating its triumph over all that hitherto constituted the pride of humanity.

Irrespective of the truth as to the direct responsibility for the outbreak of the war, one thing is certain. *The war which has produced this chaos is the outcome of imperialism,* of the attempt on the part of the capitalist classes of each nation, to foster their greed for profit by the exploitation of human labor and of the natural treasures of the entire globe.

Economically backward or politically weak nations are thereby subjugated by the Great Powers who, in this war, are seeking to remake the world map with blood and iron in accord with their exploiting interests. Thus entire nations and countries, like Belgium, Poland, the

¹ After being presented with three drafts (from the right wing of the German delegation, from the Zimmerwald Left, and from "the Nashe Slovo representative" - ie Trotsky, the Commission outlined some fundamental theses and requested Robert Grimm and L. Trotsky to write the final text. The manifesto which was adopted by the Conference is almost identical with Trotsky's draft manifesto. The sources used are Lenin's Sbornik, a Bundist publication and Trotsky's own writings.

Balkan states, and Armenia are threatened with the fate of being torn asunder, annexed as a whole or in part as booty in the game of compensations.

In the course of the war, its driving forces are revealed in all their vileness. Shred after shred falls the veil with which the meaning of this world catastrophe was hidden from the consciousness of the peoples. The capitalists of all countries who are coining the red gold of war-profits out of the blood shed by the people, assert that the war is for defense of the fatherland, for democracy, and the liberation of oppressed nations! They lie. *In actual reality, they are burying the freedom of their own people together with the independence of the other nations in the places of devastation.*

New fetters, new chains, new burdens are arising, and it is the proletariat of all countries, of the victorious as well as of the conquered countries, that will have to bear them. Improvement in welfare was proclaimed at the outbreak of the war – want and privation, unemployment and high prices, undernourishment and epidemics are the actual results. *The burdens of war will consume the best energies of the peoples for decades*, endanger the achievements of social reform, and hinder every step forward. Cultural devastation, economic decline, political reaction these are the blessings of this horrible conflict of nations. Thus the war reveals the naked figure of modern capitalism which has become irreconcilable, not only with the interests of the laboring masses, not only with the requirements of historical development, but also with the elementary conditions of human intercourse.

The ruling powers of capitalist society who held the fate of the nations in their hands, the monarchic as well as the republican governments, the secret diplomacy, the mighty business organizations, the bourgeois parties, the capitalist press, the Church – all these bear the full weight of responsibility for this war which arose out of the social order fostering them and protected by them, and which is being waged for their interests.

Workers!

Exploited, disfranchised, scorned, they called you brothers and comrades at the outbreak of the war when you were to be led to the slaughter, to death. And now that militarism has crippled you, mutilated you, degraded and annihilated you, the rulers demand that you surrender your interests, your aims, your ideals – in a word, *servile subordination to civil peace*. They rob you of the possibility of expressing your views, your feelings, your pains; they prohibit you from raising your demands and defending them. The press gagged, political rights and liberties trod upon – this is the way the *military dictatorship* rules today with an iron hand.

This situation which threatens the entire future of Europe and of humanity cannot and must not be confronted by us any longer without action. The Socialist proletariat has waged a struggle against militarism for decades. With growing concern, its representatives at their national and international congresses occupied themselves with the ever more menacing danger of war growing out of imperialism. At *Stuttgart*, at *Copenhagen*, at *Basel*, the international Socialist congresses have indicated the course which the proletariat must follow.

Since the beginning of the war, Socialist parties and labor organizations of various countries that helped to determine this course have disregarded the obligations following from this. Their representatives have called upon the working class *to give up the class struggle*, the only possible and effective method of proletarian emancipation. They have granted credits to the ruling classes for waging the war; they have placed themselves at the disposal of the governments for the most diverse services; through their press and their messengers, they have tried to win the neutrals for the government policies of their countries; they have delivered up to their governments *Socialist Ministers* as hostages for the preservation of civil peace, and *thereby they have assumed the responsibility before the working class, before its present and its future, for this war, for its aims and its methods*. And just as the individual parties, so the highest

of the appointed representative bodies of the Socialists of all countries, the *International Socialist Bureau*, has failed them.

These facts are equally responsible for the fact that the international working class which did not succumb to the national panic of the first war period, or which freed itself from it, has still, in the second year of the slaughter of peoples, found no ways and means of taking up an energetic struggle for peace simultaneously in all countries.

In this unbearable situation, we, the representatives of the Socialist parties, trade unions and their minorities, we Germans, French, Italians, Russians, Poles, Letts, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Swedes, Norwegians, Dutch, and Swiss, we who stand, not on the ground of national solidarity with the exploiting class, but on the ground of the international solidarity of the proletariat and of the class struggle, have assembled to retie the torn threads of international relations and to call upon the working class to recover itself and to fight for peace.

This struggle is the struggle for freedom, for the *reconciliation* of peoples, for Socialism. It is necessary to take up this struggle for peace, for a peace without annexations or war indemnities. *Such a peace, however, is only possible if every thought of violating the rights and liberties of nations is condemned.* Neither the occupation of entire countries nor of separate parts of countries must lead to their violent annexation. No annexation, whether open or concealed, and no forcible economic attachment made still more unbearable by political disfranchisement. *The right of self-determination of nations must be the indestructible principle in the system of national relationships of peoples.*

Proletarians!

Since the outbreak of the war, you have placed your energy, your courage, your endurance at the service of the ruling classes. Now you must stand up for your own cause, for the sacred aims of Socialism, for the emancipation of the oppressed nations as well as of the enslaved classes, by means of the irreconcilable proletarian class struggle.

It is the task and the duty of the Socialists of the belligerent countries to take up this struggle with full force; it is the task and the duty of the Socialists of the neutral states to support their brothers in this struggle against bloody barbarism with every effective means. Never in world history was there a more urgent, a more sublime task, the fulfillment of which should be our common labor. No sacrifice is too great, no burden too heavy in order to achieve this goal: peace among the peoples.

Working men and working women! Mothers and fathers! Widows and orphans! Wounded and crippled! We call to all of you who are suffering from the war and because of the war: Beyond all borders, beyond the reeking battlefields, beyond the devastated cities and villages –

Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Zimmerwald, September 1915.