

Vladimir Lenin's Speech at an International Meeting in Berne

Comrades! The European war has been raging for more than eighteen months. And as each month, as each day of the war goes by, it becomes clearer and clearer to the masses of the workers that the Zimmerwald =

Manifesto[2] expressed the truth when it declared that phrases about "defence of the fatherland" and the like are nothing but capitalist deception. It is becoming more evident every day that this is a war between capitalists, between big robbers, who are quarrelling over the loot, each striving to obtain the largest share, the largest number of countries to plunder, and the largest number of nations to suppress and enslave.

It may sound incredible, especially to Swiss comrades, but it is nevertheless true that in Russia, also, not only bloody tsarism, not only the capitalists, but also a

section of the so-called or ex-Socialists say that Russia is fighting a "war of defence," that Russia is only fighting against German invasion. The whole world knows, however, that for decades tsarism has been oppressing more than a hundred million people belonging to other nationalities in Russia; that for decades Russia has been pursuing a predatory policy towards China, Persia, Armenia and Galicia. Neither Russia, nor Germany, nor any other Great Power has the right to claim that it is waging a "war of defence"; all the Great Powers are waging an imperialist, capitalist war, a predatory war, a war for the oppression of small and foreign nations, a war for the sake of the profits of the capitalists, who are coining golden profits amounting to billions out of the appalling sufferings of the masses, out of the blood of the proletariat.

Four years ago, in November 1912, when it had become clear that war was approaching, the representatives of the Socialist Parties of the whole world gathered at the International Socialist Congress in Basle. Even at that time

there was no room for doubt that the impending war would be a war between the Great Powers, between the great beasts of prey; that responsibility for the war would rest upon the governments and the capitalist classes of all the Great Powers. The Basle Manifesto, which was adopted unanimously by the Socialist Parties of the whole world, openly stated this truth. The Basle Manifesto does not say a word about a "war of defence," or "defence of the fatherland." It castigates the governments and the bourgeoisie of all the Great Powers without exception. It said openly that war would be the greatest of crimes, that the workers would consider it a crime to shoot at each other, that the horrors of war and the indignation these would rouse among the workers would inevitably lead to a proletarian revolution.

When the war actually broke out it was realised that its character had been correctly defined at Basle. But the Socialist and labour organisations were not unanimous in carrying out the Basle decisions; they split. We see now

that in all countries of the world the Socialist and labour organisations are split into two big camps. The smaller section, the leaders, functionaries and officials, have betrayed Socialism and have deserted to the side of the governments. Another section, to which the mass of class conscious workers belong, continues to gather its forces, to fight against the war and for the proletarian revolution.

The views of this latter section also found expression in the Zimmerwald Manifesto.

In Russia, from the very beginning of the war, the workers' deputies in the Duma waged a determined revolutionary struggle against the war and the tsarist monarchy. Five workers' deputies—Petrovsky, Badayev, Muranov, Shagov and Samoilov—distributed revolutionary manifestoes against the war and energetically carried on revolutionary agitation. Tsarism ordered the arrest of those five deputies, put them on trial, and sentenced them to lifelong exile in

Siberia. For months the leaders of the working class of Russia have been pining in Siberia; but their cause has not gone under; their work is being continued by the class-conscious workers all over Russia.

Comrades! You have heard the speeches of representatives of various countries, who have told you about the workers' revolutionary struggle against the war. I merely want to quote one other example from that great and rich country, the United States of America. The capitalists of that country are now making enormous profits out of the European war. And they, too, are agitating for war. They say that America must also prepare to take part in the war, hundreds of millions of dollars must be squeezed out of the people for new armaments, for armaments without end. And in America, too, a section of the Socialists echoes this false, criminal call. Let me read to you what Comrade Eugene Debs, the most popular leader of the American Socialists, the Presidential candidate of the American Socialist Party, writes.

In the September 11, 1915, American weekly, The Appeal to Reason,[3] September 11, 1915, he says: "I am not a capitalist soldier; I am a proletarian revolutionist. I do not belong to the regular army of rite plutocracy, but to the irregular army of the people. I refuse to obey any command to fight for the ruling class.... I am opposed to every war but one; I am for that war with heart and soul, and that is the world-wide war of the social revolution. In that war I am prepared to fight in any way the ruling class may make it necessary...."

This is what Eugene Debs, the American Bebel, the beloved leader of the American workers, writes to them.

This again shows you, comrades, that in all countries of the world real preparations are being made to rally the forces of the working class. The horrors of war and the sufferings of the people are incredible. But we must not, and we have no reason whatever, to view the future with despair.

The millions of victims who will fall in the war, and as a consequence of the war, will not fall in vain. The millions who are starving, the millions who are sacrificing their lives in the trenches, are not only suffering, they are also gathering strength, are pondering over the real cause of the war, are becoming more determined and are acquiring a clearer revolutionary understanding. Rising discontent of the masses, growing ferment, strikes, demonstrations, protests against the war—all this is taking place in all countries of the world. And this is the guarantee that the European War will be followed by the proletarian revolution against capitalism.