

France -- the Last Week Before the War

By A. Rosmer

INTRODUCTION

dispatch from Strasbourg relating to Socialist activity in Alsace-Lorraine:

In an article entitled: "Malediction!" Bataille Syndicaliste inveighs not so much against the war in general as the Emperor of Austria in particular. This unexpected malediction occurs in the last line of the article.

"MALEDICTION"

"Weeping! Weeping! Weeping! . . . A rain of tears is falling upon the city.

" . . . It is the general mobilization! . . . May the monstrous crime which is to plunge all of Europe into barbarism, into the abyss of black mourning and ruin be punished.

"May the thrones tumble, may the crowns fall!

"The will of the people has been violated, imperialism is the criminal that has unleashed the tempest.

" . . . But if it must be, if the catastrophe is inevitable, if the force of the workers for peace was valiant but futile to save their honor, oh! then may the very extent of the evil consummated arise to annihilate stifling militarism!

"May this be the end of the nightmare! "And a curse upon the name of the senile Emperor Franz-Josef!"

Throughout Sunday, the first day's conscripts were entrained to join their regiments. During this time, the people left behind, undoubtedly looking for booty, sacked the "boches" shops, and abandoned themselves also, here, there and everywhere, "spy hunts." The Confederal Committee held a brief meeting in the early afternoon, Monday's Bataille Syndicaliste said nothing about it. The leading article, captioned "The Irreparable," is signed B.S.:

"The irreparable has now occurred. . . The European war is unleashed.

"The spirit still refuses to believe this. Nevertheless, it is only too true, this catastrophe which shatters our lives and our spirits, recalls us back to our sense of duty, fastens it to those conceptions to us which we want to erase, can compromise all our hopes, crush all our past efforts.

"It is atrocious, it is odious, it is unbelievable. "But it is . . ."

Social-Patriotism

Of the speeches made at the funeral of Jaures, that of Jouhaux alone must be retained here. The B.S. for Wed., August 5, prints long extracts. Jouhaux first explained why the working class loved Jaures, then he cried:

"Today, it is still in our minds that we will draw upon indispensable forces. In the name of those who are about to depart—myself among them—I declare that it is not hatred of the German people which drives us to the battle fields, it is hatred of German imperialism."

The editor of B.S. adds in his story:

"Tumultuous applause. Emotion was at its zenith. People wept. M. Maurice Barres applauded vigorously and said to one of his neighbors: 'Very good! Very good!' one senator, a bitter enemy of the C.G.T., cried out: 'And to think that these are the men we wanted to clap in jail!'"

In the B.S. of Thursday, Aug. 6, a new explanation of the war is given in an unsigned but prominently placed article:

FROM THE CLASH OF LIBERTY LET LIBERTY SPRING FORTH

" . . . In the present conflict the ethical question has its importance. The Germans whose blood is of a coarser strain and therefore more submissive and resigned in spirit, have not our spirit of independence."

Nevertheless the anonymous author will say in his conclusion that it is only the "proud and ferocious clique" which must be conquered.

On Friday, August 7, in an article entitled: "Humanity! Justice!" Ch. Malotta recommends tact to the foreign anarchists and Socialists residing in France, and discernment to the government which had somewhat indiscriminately imprisoned several."

On August 8, another new recruit, Charles Albert, who will become a regular and prolific contributor. Here are the principal passages of his first article:

"DEPART WITHOUT BITTERNESS"

"Immense hopes, incalculable hopes are rising in the world. . . Depart without bitterness, without regret, comrade workers, you who are being called to the front to defend French soil.

"Depart without bitterness, leave without any mental reservations, comrade workers. It is for the revolution you are going to fight.

"And should you fall, all those closest to you who remain, both young and old, whose hour has not (Continued on Page 4)

The last week of July 1914 was the last week of peace, the last week also of an era in the life and the history of Europe and of the world. The ultimatum of the Austro-Hungarian Government was served on Serbia on Friday, July 24. The French newspapers published it and commented on it the next day, Saturday the 25th. The Bataille Syndicaliste (organ of the C.G.T.—Ed.) gave it the importance that it deserved; a three-column spread announced: "The ultimatum of Austria to Serbia. The Viennese Government wants to impose humiliating conditions on Belgrade. If Serbia refuses, it means war, and then . . ." The article stressed the gravity of this new phase of the conflict and emphasized the inevitable character of the European complications which would follow. It drew no conclusions.

In the same edition a prominent position was given to the "Russian strikes" under the heading: "The riots continue. Repression has begun."

The next day's edition, Sunday, July 26, was of paramount importance; it provided the conclusions which were missing from the article of the day before and provided them in the name of the C.G.T. (The trade union federation—Ed.). First a boxed head over the first two columns under the caption:

"WE DON'T WANT WAR"

The decisions of the federal congress on the attitude of the working class in case of war become operative at the moment war is declared. . . In such a case the declaration of war should be the signal for every worker to immediately stop work.

To every declaration of war the workers should immediately reply with a revolutionary general strike."

(Extract from the resolution adopted by the Special Conference of Central Labor Unions and Federations, Oct. 1, 1911.)

Youth Against War

During this last part of the month of July when the war danger suddenly reappeared, the Jeunessees Syndicalistes decided to call their members once more to demonstrate against the military parades of Saturday the 25th. In the morning Bataille Syndicaliste published their appeal and in the evening there were more demonstrations. The Bataille Syndicaliste reported them as follows on Sunday:

"THE MILITARY PARADES PROVOKE INCIDENTS"

"Cries of Down with War! The military maneuvers provoked incidents last evening to which the present situation gave an especial importance. After a year's truce, the Jeunessees Syndicalistes have called on their members to demonstrate when the military parades passed over to the right bank.

On one side the shouts were raised: Long live the Republic! Long live Calliaux! Down with war! Down with the three years military service! On the other: Long live the army! After the demonstration, the Jeunessees Syndicalistes, reinforced by numerous spectators, demonstrated on the Boulevards."

But during Sunday, other demonstrators, several thousand in number, marched along the Boulevards shouting: "Long live the army! Long live the War! On to Berlin! On to Berlin!" The Seine Trade Union Federation, and the Bataille Syndicaliste decided to reply immediately. They called on the Parisian workers to come out on the streets in their turn and assemble before the offices of Matin, a newspaper especially hated by the workers and the one which at that time most cynically pushed on toward war. The Bataille Syndicaliste renewed the appeal in a special edition printed during the afternoon and sold by newsboys in the working class sections of the city after 5 P.M.:

"ANSWER THE JINGOES"

"On to the Streets Tonight "Everything isn't settled yet; the die is not yet cast; but as things are now, only a blunder or a rash move is needed to precipitate the catastrophe.

War . . . is the unleashing of every hideous instinct, the bloodiest, vilest and basest instincts. Reread the reports of the correspondents on the atrocities committed in the course of the last Balkan war. Remember the women raped and disemboweled, the old men and children mutilated, their fingers and ears cut off, their eyes gouged out, villages burned and the piles of decomposing corpses abandoned in the open to the flies and vultures! Those corpses, tomorrow, it will be you!

Those women, those children, those old men, tomorrow they will be yours! That is war!

"And that is what the bandits on the Boulevards have been hailing for the last two days.

"And that, mind you, solely because some Serbian peasants and some Austrian soldiers are quarrelling and will come to grips.

"So! Unless we are either crazy or corrupt; unless we want to see our country throw itself in a few hours into the worst imaginable adventure; if, comrade, you do not want to be torn from the arms of your family to be led into the East to the firing line, the people of Paris must be immediately aroused. This is an emergency. If these criminal fools, who cry: 'Long live war!' are not silenced this very evening then the end has come.

"Tomorrow We Will be Mobilized!"

"It is the duty of all our readers, of all our friends, of all the trade unionists of Paris, of all the friends of peace to come:

"This Evening After 9 o'Clock"

on the main streets opposite the offices of Matin.

"And everyone shouting, 'Down with War!'"

"Belleville, Menilmontant, St. Antoine, Montparnasse, remember your heroic traditions. Let the streaming masses from the faubourgs flood the centers of the city and submerge these imbecile and jingo provocations.

"That is our only hope of peace. That is our only salvation.

"That is our last hope of avoiding the catastrophe; let us save ourselves while there is still time.

"Time presses. "Until this evening!"

"—Bataille Syndicaliste."

Finally the District Committee was convoked for the next Thursday:

"Meeting of the District Committee, joint meeting of both sections, Thursday, July 30, 9 P.M. 33 Rue la Grange aux Belles. Agenda: the international situation.

"(signed) Jouhaux, Sec'y."

The Violence of "Democracy"

These appeals were heard. From 9 o'clock until midnight that Monday an enormous crowd flowed ceaselessly through the Boulevards. Extraordinary numbers of police were mobilized; the tactic of the chief of police was to protect the offices of Matin (in anticipation of a working class assault, a hundred police agents had been stationed inside the "red house"), and, by police cordons, established in each of the streets leading to the Boulevards, to prevent the formation of a single mass demonstration by checking the flow of new arrivals. But the workers who came from the faubourgs into the centers of the city were so numerous that the tactics of the police produced unexpected results: there were soon as many demonstrations as there were streets. The violence and brutality of the police could not dampen the fighting spirit of these crowds; all evening the cry of "down with war!" resounded from the Opera to the Place de la Republique. The following lines summed up the report—an accurate report by a certain J.—which the Bataille Syndicaliste gave of the demonstration:

"The government officials? Ah! the great apostles of democracy! They were pacifists at election time. Yesterday they opposed to Paris' will for peace the sabres of the police and the guns of the Gardes Mobiles. It was their first step toward war. Yes, they are mobilizing, but mobilizing the police against the workers. . . Their first victory. . . No, they were not victorious."

Most of the Tuesday, July 28 issue was devoted to this demonstration. The front page bore the streamer: "The People Rise Up Against the War."

"PARIS WANTS NO SLAUGHTER"

"It proved it yesterday evening. There were demonstrations everywhere yesterday evening in the teeming sections of Paris. The great boulevards were jammed. Officials and jingoes were warned. The police charged violently against the demonstrators who shouted: Long live peace! Down with war!"

The report was preceded by an article entitled: "First notice," whose importance was indicated by the signature of the Bureau of the C.G.T. and the Union des Syndicats. The following is the text:

"Yesterday morning the Bataille Syndicaliste in its own name and in the name of trade union organizations called upon the people of Paris to demonstrate the same evening against the threat of war. A special edition appearing at five o'clock repeated the urgent appeal of the morning.

"And yesterday evening at eight o'clock up to the time of this writing, despite the police, one hundred thousand, two hundred thousand,—who can estimate such a crowd?—of the workers of Paris demonstrated on the great boulevards with constant shouts of: Down with war! Long live peace!

. . . This is the first warning given to the rulers of France who from now on are informed of the

CONFUSION has its roots in ignorance, and the widespread confusion of the present day on the burning problem of war is in large measure due to ignorance not only of revolutionary policy but of the past. This condition can be principally traced to the studied, seditious, systematic dissemination of false information and interpretation by the social-patriots. A disoriented working class, nurtured on lies, is pliant material for the militarists in time of war. To create such a condition is the special job of social patriots.

What is the lesson of the World War? To read or listen to the Stalinists, reformists or pacifists one would gather that it was a terrible calamity, destroying wealth, body and soul, and that is all. That the World War shattered material treasures and the lives of millions of human beings, the policies of the leading circle of the working class movement, is carefully avoided in their press and literature. Why? Because these very same policies, with differences only in degree and emphasis, are being practiced and advocated in the labor movement today. Disaster for the working class followed in the wake of these policies in 1914-1918; blindfolded, it was led to the imperialist slaughter, while at home the iron heel of capitalist dictatorship made a mockery of the shillboles they were dying for on the battlefields. Certain as death itself the same policies today will lead to the same tragic results.

The imminence of another war, no longer considered even by the skeptical as a fantastic prediction of panic-mongers, makes it imperative that we, the revolutionists, the class-conscious workers, study and assimilate the real lessons of the first World War—imperative if we are not to be caught unawares, with the war coming as an unexpected shock. For this reason we are devoting an entire page of the NEW MILITANT to a chapter of Alfred Rosmer's invaluable book, recently published in France, Le Mouvement Ouvrier Pendant la Guerre—De l'Union Sacrée a Zimmerwald (The Workers' Movement during the War—From Civil Peace to Zimmerwald). This chap-

ter dealing with the last week before the war in France, describes in detail the reaction of the trade union movement to the problems raised by the war crisis. In it we note the gradual but perceptible metamorphosis of the outstanding leaders, some of whom, like Jouhaux, are still at the head of the trade unions of France and still advocating the same policies.

Beginning with loud pacifist pronouncements, with threats of general strike, with telegrams of international solidarity and even the organization of huge anti-war demonstrations, their position begins to veer the moment war is unleashed. The call for a general strike is forgotten, and how else could it be, as the leaders begin to explain: "We have done everything in our power. . . " then a complaint against the working class "for not understanding its duty" and finally the acceptance of the war as an accomplished fact: "It is odious, it is atrocious, it is unbelievable . . . but it is. . ." With this, the treacherous leaders wash their hands of all struggle against war, nay more, they join in the struggle for the victory of the capitalist fatherland they inveighed against in vague rhetorical flourishes the day before. But the ground is even then tested cautiously through a patriotic remark at the Emperor Franz-Josef. From this point on the social patriots grow bolder. The working class is exhorted to "leave for the front without bitterness," to die not for their capitalist fatherland but for the "revolution" (Modern version: democracy, the Soviet Union). The outstanding trade union leader enters the unholy coalition of class peace and advises the capitalist class as to how to induce passivity and quiet in the working class and how to profit most from the imperialist war.

Rosmer's book deals only with the French labor movement, but it can be applied almost in detail to those of almost every other country before and during the fatal years of 1914-1918. Above all, it can and must be applied today. The events of the last world war must become an integral part of the revolutionary arsenal. Only by learning the errors and crimes of yesterday can we be strong today and tomorrow.

hastily terminated, inasmuch as Jouhaux, Merrheim and other members rushed to the offices of PHUMANITE. When they arrived there, rue Montmartre was thronged with a vast multitude of agitated workers shocked by the horrible news. But there was not alone grief among them, there was also anger and a desire for vengeance. "Their number was constantly swelling. The Socialist leaders assembled at this time no doubt feared reprisals against the perpetrators of the crime, all of whom were well known, because a voice from one of the windows of the offices of the paper was suddenly heard urging calm. The multitude of workers dispersed slowly, very slowly; late into the night many groups still remained discussing. But the crime was to go unpunished.

Saturday, August 1, Bataille Syndicaliste drew the following balance sheet of this fatal day:

"A DAY OF TRAGEDY"

"Mobilization Rumored; Jaures Assassinated."

Under the heading: "A monstrous crime," the paper wrote: "What a sinister omen in this martyred death!" They Leon Jouhaux:

"NO HYSTERIA"

"The hour is grave, but not desperate. The cause of peace has still numerous friends in the world, and the working class of all countries are acting in a common thought: to avert the armed clash.

"Above all we must guard ourselves against panic and hysteria, which lead to the worst results. . . Our duty is to attentively scan the news we receive without however placing unlimited trust upon it.

"The confederal Committee will call popular demonstrations, in Paris and in the provinces."

On its part the Confederal Committee had adopted the following agenda:

"The Confederal Committee, meeting on Friday, July 31, resolves in view of the international situation, to organize in agreement with the Socialist Party a great international demonstration against war on August 9.

"A committee was selected to meet with a committee of the Socialist Party.

"The Committee was instructed to advance the demonstration if international events warrant it.

"Indignation Against the Assassination of Jaures.

"The committee learned during its session of the cowardly assassination which struck down the noble figure that was Jaures.

"It is impossible to transmit the sentiment of sorrow which gripped the members present.

"In Jaures we had the most clairvoyant, the most ardent defender of humanity's causes. Jaures who is no more.

"For Confederal Committee, The Bureau: Leon Jouhaux, Yvetot, Dumoulin, Marck, Calveyrach."

hood of the Etoile. All the neighboring subway stations were closed at seven o'clock. But the workers who, because of the late hour at which the government decision was made and posted, could not be prevented from arriving from all parts of the city in large numbers. All those who asked for an explanation were immediately beaten up, slugged, arrested, and jailed. Bataille Syndicaliste wrote that the garb of a worker sufficed to provoke a beating by the police. From which the newspaper concluded: "Wherever the workers, there the enemy." Despite this show of police force and the brutal orders conscientiously executed, crowds gathered around even the Etoile and the Place des Terres, which soon became the scene of bloody encounters. This quarter of Paris kept seething the entire evening.

Bataille Syndicaliste of Thursday, July 30, carried the following streamer: " . . . Down with war . . . despite everything!"

The government did not stop with this brutal prohibition of anti-war meetings and demonstrations; it methodically prepared the minds of the people for war and its acceptance. In these critical days it practiced special technique through the medium of the venal press which alternately blew hot and cold: one day it was war, the next day peace. In Paris the rhythm was even more rapid; on the same day they passed successively from war to peace. By this method the people were rapidly whipped up to a frenzy. On Wednesday, panic was already in the air. There was a run on the banks and on the savings banks and gold was universally demanded in place of bank notes.

The B.S. for Thursday reported the incidents of the panic under the following caption:

"LET THEM STOP AND THINK"

"A day of anxiety. The government could find only one solution to the international crisis: prepare the repression against the working class.

"This is undoubtedly the guarantee demanded by the Czar, 'our friend and ally.' "Such measures will save neither national independence, if it were endangered, nor the little statesmen who want to plunge the country into the most catastrophic of adventures.

"The workers have shown their sentiment by the demonstrations on the Boulevards; our ministers know today what they must count with. "The will of the people is clearly against the slaughter.

"Wee to those who ignore this today!

"Wee to those responsible for the cataclysm!

"Wee to the perpetrators of the slaughter and savagery!

"Wee to the powers that be!

"The working class alone will decide the fate of these criminal megalomaniacs. Before, during or after the massacre.

"Let them take warning before the die is cast.

—B.S."

Jaures Assassinated

Friday evening, July 31. The Confederal Committee was meeting. On its agenda was the organization and preparation of a new and powerful demonstration against the war which would take place simultaneously in Paris and in all the large cities of France. Suddenly the telephone rang, interrupting the deliberations. Jaures had just been assassinated! The discussion was

"STRASBOURG, July 31.—The Socialist Party has organized protest meetings against war and against the threat of a universal conflagration in the great cities of Alsace. A meeting was held yesterday evening at Mulhouse and this evening others will be held at Strasbourg, Mulhouse and Colmar. Meetings are also scheduled in the less important centers."

It also makes mention of international working class action. Legien had sent a telegram to the C.G.T.; Jouhaux replied to him. Here it is as published in the B.S.:

"INTERNATIONAL WORKING CLASS ACTION"

"In reply to a telegram from comrade Legien, secretary of the International Secretariat, requesting the opinion of the C.G.T. on the present situation, the Confederal Bureau addressed the following telegram to him:

"Legien, Engel Uter (15 Berlin. "French Federation of Labor resolutely against war, demands international proletariat intervene by pressure on governments to obtain a localization of the conflict.

"Peace is possible, and must triumph, if the workers organized internationally remain united in the same thought: opposition to all conflagration.

"This peace lies in the hands of the international working class, if it proves equal to the peril.

"Here pacifist demonstrations are continuing. We firmly believe in peace because we are energetically resolved to avert war.

"Down with war! Long live peace guaranteed by the Labor International. "Jouhaux."

The systematic campaign of demoralization of the masses by the circulation of false news continued. On the 28th the newspapers announced the assassination of the German representative in Belgrade. Jaures had been assassinated on Friday, July 31 at about 10 P.M. Saturday, August 1, the order of general mobilization was already posted at four in the afternoon, which set the first day of mobilization for Sunday morning. While the Socialists and syndicalists prepared their new demonstrations against war, the war makers had Jaures struck down by a hired thug, and the government, which continued to declare that it wanted peace and that it was making all efforts to avert war, had decided for the general mobilization. It only remained for Poincare to cynically declare that "mobilization is not yet war," although he knew only too well that the Russian general mobilization, begun on the 31, in the early hours of the day, made the universal conflagration inevitable.

But Poincare' le deceived no one. Mobilization is war. Bataille Syndicaliste announced it in its issue of Sunday, August 2 in this streamer: "Folly triumphs over reason."

The Die Is Cast

The C.G.T. issued a manifesto to the workers of France:

"A GRAVE HOUR HAS JUST STRUCK"

"The evil forces are on the point of triumph. A ray of hope is still visible, but so weak that the worst eventualities must be envisaged. "However swept by the whirlpool, we want to preserve the hope of a possible peace.

"Up to this hour the Confederal Committee has remained at its post, fighting for the cause of peace.

"Only yesterday it addressed a supreme appeal to the international working class.

"If its efforts do not appear to have yielded what we have every right to expect, what the organized working class hoped, it is because events have submerged us. And it is our duty to say at this supreme moment, it is also because the proletariat has failed to understand with sufficient unanimity all the consistent efforts necessary for preserving humanity from the horrors of war.

"Women, you who are weeping at this moment, we have done everything in our power to spare you this sorrow. But sad to say, today we can only deplore the fait accompli.

"Can we demand a greater sacrifice from our comrades? "Although we are pained to say it, we will reply: No.

"What we implore of all, is an unshakable attachment to trade unionism, which must traverse and survive the impending crisis.

"As firmly as yesterday, we must preserve our ideas in their entirety and faith in their final triumph.

"The Labor International will always remain the goal of our efforts. "To it all our hopes converge, it must not be destroyed in the tempest.

"Because we know that a day will come when the peoples will have more confidence in it and will give it strength, when it will constitute the only safeguard of Peace and Civilization."

And on this day it published a