

# Chapters from My Diary

By Leon Trotsky

II

In Switzerland—The "German Treason"—Plekhanov—Greulich.

I ARRIVED in Zurich on August 4, 1914. Switzerland was then already over-run with fugitives from the warring countries. The central question in Swiss life had become—the potato. Would there or would there not be enough? The violation of Belgian neutrality, the first communications of the general staffs, lists of killed and wounded, these things were already finding difficulty in obtaining a hearing, but the question of the food supply was beginning to be imperative. And the Russians who were stranded in Switzerland also conceived of world affairs, in these early days, from the angle of the kitchen-garden. Credit suddenly had gone to pieces; communications with Russia were broken, the banks stopped changing Russian money, then they would pay 100 francs for 100 roubles, then the rate would go up, then down, and then they stopped altogether.

"They were giving 240 francs for 100 roubles this morning."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, they were. You see England declared war yesterday. Change your fifty roubles at once, or tomorrow Italy will come in, and they'll begin giving us nothing again."

The Russian traveling public, the emigrants, the students, the pleasure-seekers, formed a Committee of Public Welfare out of their midst, around which all the fugitives grouped themselves, the army deserter, the member of the Odessa supreme court, the Jewish laborer, the director of a hospital, some actresses, etc., etc. At Geneva they formed a General Administration for Economic Welfare, in the Russian colony, under the presidency of the Caucasian social-democrat T, who, as is the custom, was called "Comrade Chairman." Wessel, the Russian Consul, who was present at the meetings (oh, sweet were the days of national unity!) asked his neighbor in great astonishment: "If this is only the Comrade of the Chairman, who is the real Chairman?"—after which he respectfully addressed his remarks to T.

After the food crisis had abated, there began a discussion, among the political emigrants, as to the conduct of the Socialist parties of the various countries. The agreement of the German Social-Democratic Party to vote the first five milliards of war credits, created an impression of dismay. Many would not believe it, and insisted that the August 5th number of the Berlin "Vorwaerts," which brought us Haase's declaration, was a simple creation of the German General Staff, intended to confuse the enemy as to the internal conditions of Germany.

The first rather indistinct tendencies were already observable toward the formation of groups within the party. P. B. Axelrod was completely upset by the "treason of the Germans": for that is what we called the consent of August 4th in our private conversations. "If Rebel were still alive," declared Axelrod, "he would never have permitted it." The action of the French Socialists, who on that very day, August 5th, did exactly what the Germans had done, namely, voted the war credits, made much less of an impression. Most of us had always considered the French Socialism inferior to the German, and others, Axelrod among them, found "extenuating circumstances" pleading for the French in the circumstances of the war itself.

We began to receive news of the position of Plekhanov, who, at the beginning of the war, was in Paris. This news was not very definite at first, but what there was of it was calculated to produce the greatest disquietude. I had a number of conversations with Axelrod on this subject and he would never admit the possibility that Plekhanov would turn out to be a patriot. "I admit that he will make distinctions in his estimates of French and German Socialism, and that he will desire a French victory, but that he will come out for a victory of the Czar's armies—never!"

I did not share this confidence. Already at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Plekhanov occupied a position by himself in the "Iskra" Group of those days. To be sure, he did not voice his patriotic feelings aloud, and at the Amsterdam Congress he ostentatiously shook the hand of Kata-

yama, yet at the same time, he was openly hostile to the confidence, then so dear to the revolutionist, that the forces of Czarism would meet with defeat in the war. But in 1913, when I was at Bucharest, Rakovsky told me that just at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Plekhanov had assured him with greater frankness than he had shown toward us, that in his opinion the idea that Socialism should be "anti-nationalist," and that it should "work for national defeat" (to use the expression that has since become current), was an importation into the party that had been brought about by the Hebrew intellectuals. This assertion must have appeared all the more remarkable to Rakovsky in view of the fact that at that time not only the radical intellectuals, but even the majority of the Liberal intellectuals, with Milyukov at their head, were permeated with outspoken "defeatist" sentiments. Later, in July, 1914, two or three weeks before the opening of the war, on the occasion of the "unifying" Russian Conference at Brussels, I understood from a number of guarded observations made by Plekhanov, that he was not well-disposed toward the "anti-patriotic" campaign which I had carried on in my communications from Serbia and Bulgaria at the time of the Balkan War. All these things produced in me in August, 1914, an attitude of suspicion toward the anointed leader of the Russian Social-Democracy. But the actual course of events far outstripped my most gloomy expectations. In Paris, Plekhanov blessed the Russian Revolutionary Volunteers in their struggle with

## A Campaign of Slander

THE Allied, including also the American capitalist press, has never shown any great inclination to tell the truth in their dispatches of the present progress of events in Russia. If at the beginning of the Revolution this press attempted to be impartial, not in the interpretation of the event, but in the description of its movement, then, very soon, having learned the real character of the event, it changed its front. Instead of facts it is giving the reader fruits of leisure fancy from its special correspondents; instead of at least a show of truth in the reports it gives fictions full of slander, insinuations fabricated by its mercenaries. Until recently this was done with the purpose of distorting the actual meaning of the Russian Revolution and discrediting it in the eyes of the masses of the Allied countries. Now it is being done in order to justify the attack of the Allied governments on the Soviet Republic.

The American capitalist press shows especial zeal, in the slanderous campaign the Allied press is waging against Revolutionary Russia. It lies, lies meanly and shamelessly. Almost every telegram from Russia is a vile invention, every report on Russian events an abominable libel on the Revolution and Russian people.

In connection with the developing Allied intervention in Russia the American newspapers fill their pages with all sorts of absurd fairy tales, such as, the population of the regions where the troops advance hail with joy and enthusiasm their "liberators." But who will believe it? Who will believe that a people who has made the greatest revolution in the history of mankind will "with joy" hail oppressors who are trying to take away from them the conquests they have achieved? Who will believe that a Revolution will hail its own executioners? Who will ever think that there is truth in the assumption that the Russian worker and the peasant, freed from their oppressors, will begin to express joy because the power of the oppressors was going to be restored?

The American press picturing the Russian people as naive primitive men who with joy will exchange the gold of their conquests for the glassy beads of "foreign liberation," this press is lying and slandering. And it knows that it lies. It does it consciously for, it has no other means to justify intervention.

Let then this mistress of the imperialistic bourgeoisie keep silent! Let her not abuse the honor of the Russian people!

"Prussian militarism," and then was unable to muster manhood enough within himself to raise a voice in protest, when French militarism, represented in the persons of the non-coms of the Foreign Legion, subjected the unhappy Russian idealists to degrading indignities. Plekhanov sent a communication to the Bulgarians, summoning them to intervene in the war on the side of the Allies. Plekhanov mobilized Kant in the defense of Czarist diplomacy. Plekhanov agitated for Italian intervention in the war by writing the most extravagant chauvinistic articles for the Italian yellow journals. And, finally, Plekhanov combined with certain backward laborites and populists, and with the renegade Alexinsky, to form the staff of the Paris "Prizyv" ("The Call"), which, from number to number, stamped us, the internationalists, as the agents of the German General Staff.

But let us return to the opening of the war. In Zurich I met Greulich, a German, the patriarch of the Swiss Social Democracy. Not of tall stature, but rugged; not stout, but heavy; a complete contrast to his contemporary, the late Bebel, whose leanness was more like that of an emaciated steel spring; Greulich produces an immediate impression of importance, with his white mane and the deep furrows of his thoughtful face. He was fiercely indignant in these first weeks with the action of the German Socialists; later the power of his indignation went down day by day.

"The International no longer exists," said Greulich, and I at once entered this observation of his in my notebook. "In the discharge of our every-day political labors," he continued, "we feel that we are a real force, and we really are a force. But when great masses sweep over the stage of action, when it is clear that we constitute a minority, we may easily be hurled out of our political pride into political self-debasement. To me, that is the key to an understanding of all that is going on. Victor Adler, Austerlitz, Renner, are splendid Socialists, but even they will be lost altogether with the rest of the party in the welter of the politically amorphous masses."

"We are entering upon a period of great crisis for the International. It may be reborn later, but it will not be on the same foundations. We must acknowledge before everything else that the political parties have compromised themselves. The trade unions have kept aloof, but they cannot exist without international bonds between them. It is, therefore, my opinion, that the International will be reborn after the war on the basis of the trade unions."

But Greulich was only partly right in these words. Numerically, to be sure, we Socialists are in the minority. But the class that is waging the war is also in the minority. In our social system there are still great masses of the population that are completely "unhistorical" in their point of view, that is, who in normal times have no kind of political life. The conditions of Capitalism do not permit and never will permit of the elevation of these lowly petit bourgeois, semi-proletarian, semi-hobo classes to the level of an equal participation in the destinies of society. These classes are torn out of their intellectual death only by such catastrophes as war or revolution.

War shatters the fetters of the commonplace, and consequently the oppressive, debasing, unenlightened conditions. War destroys the existing equilibrium, tears one out of the accustomed track, and gives promise of change. War clutches all classes, and, consequently, those who are oppressed and overburdened feel themselves on an equal footing with the wealthy and powerful. These powerful hopes for decisive changes are one of the reasons why war so often brings revolution in its train. Because war alone can never make good the hopes which it arouses. Having convulsed the masses with the most excruciating physical crises, war invariably deceives them in the end. At the very same time sections of society, which in ordinary times are scarcely touched by our propaganda, look in the direction of the revolutionary party for the realization of the hopes which not so long ago they hoped the government would make good, with its apparatus of war. The success of the Revolution depends to no slight degree on the extent to which the Socialist party is able to convince these masses that their hopes are not illusions.