

Chapters from My Diary

By Leon Trotzky

IV

Entering France. — Paris. — Viviani. — Joffre. — Briand. — Clemenceau.

NOVEMBER 19, 1914, I crossed the French boundary. Already there were many wounded all over, and Red Cross Sisters were at the doors of the cars with collection boxes. Everyone had a feeling that the war would end not later than the Spring, although no one could precisely say why. Simple humanity had not yet come to the point of regarding war as the normal condition of affairs.

Paris was sad: the hotels were closed, and by no means all the persons who had fled from the city in August had as yet returned; the streets were plunged in darkness at night, the cafes closed at 8 P. M. "What is the explanation for this last step?" I asked the people who knew. "That's very simple; General Gallieni, the Governor of Paris, does not wish to have any gathering of crowds. In times like these, the cafes might very easily become, in the evenings the centres of criticism and of dissatisfaction among the laboring classes, which are kept busy by day."

All over there were many women in black. In the first days, when the proudly patriotic mood was still upon them, mourning was worn not only by mothers and wives, but even by rather distant relatives. The children played at war all over, and many had been dressed in army uniforms by their mothers. Convalescent wounded soldiers, with fresh crosses on their breasts, swarmed in all the streets. In respectful, almost flattering conversation with them stood old men, who were not only patriotic, but sometimes physically able, in whose lapsels were the ribbons of the Legion of Honor. There are a lot of them in Paris, these indestructible advocates of a "war jusqu'au bout" who in 1870 were too young to serve and now are too old.

At times there were Zeppelins. I remember a night in December (1914), when I was returning home through streets that were in semi-darkness. From one direction, later from another, there were trumpet blasts that were terrifying to the last degree. Dark shadows rushed by, and one by one the street lanterns, covered by screens across the top, were put out. A few minutes later the streets were absolutely dark, and not a soul in them. I did not understand at all, although I had an idea that something interesting was going on.

Suddenly there was a dull roar, then another—nearer, a third—again more distant. It became clear that there was a bombardment: were the shots fired from the ground upward, or out of the air downward? That is, were the canons shooting in order to fight off invisible Zeppelins, or were these cruisers of the air dropping explosive shells?

I learned later that both these things had been going on at once. Half an hour later the searchlight on the Eiffel Tower began to pierce the clouds. Once more in my hotel, I was confronted with an unusual tableau: all the time inmates were sitting on the steps of the winding staircase reading, conversing, or playing cards by the light

of tallow candles. It was strictly prohibited to turn on the electric light in the rooms. From my window in the fifth story I had an indistinct sensation of the city that was in hiding beneath me. Distant explosions were twice heard again. The searchlights ceaselessly played over the clouds. Early in the morning we again heard the trumpet blasts, this time stormy and jovous: the enemy had been put to flight, you might turn on your light, and those who had sought safety in the cellars might with impunity mount the staircase to their rooms. The morning after that, the papers announced in what parts of the city houses had been destroyed, and how many human victims there had been.

At the head of the French Government at the beginning of the war stood the rather colorless phrasemaker Viviani, who had formerly been a Socialist and a pupil of Jaures. In fact, the French bourgeoisie seems to make a practice of entrusting the most responsible government posts to the Socialists of yesterday. The French Radicals, are for the most part distinguished by their over-who constitute the principal party of the Republic, narrow and provincial petit-bourgeois outlook, which would prevent them from guiding the world interests of the French Bourgeoisie. A lawyer who has gone through the school of Socialism, and who knows what manner of speech to use toward the working masses, is much more adaptable to the complicated politics of the present day.—on the condition, of course, that this lawyer is prepared to sell his conscience, so to speak, to Capitalism for a sufficient consideration. Another former Socialist, Briand, once an exponent of the general strike, held the position of Minister of Justice in the Viviani Ministry. Briand assumed an attitude of unconcealed skepticism toward the head of his ministry, openly criticized the reactionary devices of his chief in the corridors of the Chamber, and did not a little toward preparing the downfall of his friend and superior in this way.

The prestige of Joffre, at this moment, just after the Battle of the Marne, by which the advance of the Germans had been stopped, had reached its highest point. The entire press could not speak of him without raptures, and referred to the Parliament of the Republic with Bonapartist contemptuousness, as to a body of windmills, with no useful function in the world. The reactionary depths were boiling with active preparations for a great coup d'etat. Negotiations were being carried on with the chief newspaper of France "Le Temps", in this connection and reports concerning them were a matter of every-day gossip. As far as words merely were concerned, the Bonapartist coup d'etat was already in the air. But, to reduce the hare to a ragout, as the French proverb puts it, it is necessary, first of all, to have your hare: that is just what was lacking: for you cannot have a Bonapartist coup d'etat without a Bonapart.

At any rate, hardly anyone could have been less appropriate for this role than "Papa Joffre." His

guarded and cautious character, the absence of any ideal spark, made him a precise opposite to the great genius of French military tradition, Napoleon. In the domain of strategy, Joffre is a precise counterpart of the conservative and narrow French petite bourgeoisie, which is afraid of taking any step that involves any risk. After the Battle of the Marne (the credit for which is ascribed by many not to Joffre, but to Gallieni), the military prestige of the generalissimo began to go down, at first gradually, later with great swiftness. Nor did the French army discover another eagle to succeed him. Of new victories and of new glories there were none. The chances for a military coup d'etat naturally went by the board.

In fact, there are no "eagles" in the military life of France at the present time. On the contrary, never has mediocrity prevailed with such undisputed sway in the Third Republic, as at the present tragic epoch. The greatest man whom the French bourgeoisie has managed to attract to a position of leadership is Aristide Briand. Without possessing a single dominating "national" idea, without the most necessary guiding principles of statesmanship or morality, a past master in the art of wire-pulling, a trafficker in the lost souls of the French Parliament, an indigator of bribery and corruption, a prestidigitator with the manners of a political grisette, Aristide Briand is, in his every quality, a complete caricature of the "greatness" of the "national" war for "liberation".

The most formidable opponent of Briand is the old undoer of ministries, the "tiger" of French radicalism, the seventy-five-year-old Clemenceau. The impelling force of his great publicistic talent is that of malice. Clemenceau is too well acquainted with all the inside wire-pulling of French politics to cherish any illusions as to its possessing any idealistic motives. He is too evil to permit such illusions to remain unstained in others. Clemenceau did more than any other person to prick the inflated reputations of those who led the nation's war: of Poincaré, President of the Republic, of Joffre, Commander-in-Chief, and of the head of the Briand Ministry. Yet the same Clemenceau that constituted a chip of Jacobinism in the reign of capitalist finance, utterly lacked any sort of "constructive" policy. He demands a tenfold exertion of forces to wage war to the end. Yet he knows the secret of success as little as does anyone else. And if his constructive criticism of the uninspired and deceptive and timid policy of Briand should bring about the downfall of the latter, it is hardly likely that the French Parliament will decide to summon as his successor the great "disintegrator," Georges Clemenceau.

P. S. — After the above lines were written, the fall of the Briand Cabinet and the formation of a new Cabinet became accomplished facts. Clemenceau has been passed over. At the head of the Cabinet was placed the aged Ribot, the conservative, somewhat "leftish" in tendencies, who has no definite ideas on the questions connected with the war. I should say that the Cabinet of Ribot is the Cabinet of fruitless waiting.

They Have Started to Quarrel

By Gregory Weinstein

Whether or not the German fleet will be sunk, future events will show. But the rumor itself is characteristic. It shows that among the Allies great differences are developing and that these differences threaten to break the unity of the Allied diplomatic front at the peace conference. Clashes are expected not only among individual states in Europe, but also between Europe and America. In this connection, the representative of the Baltimore "Sun," just returned from the other side, says:

"The truth is, and everybody in Paris knows it, that in governmental and political circles they do not love us at all over there, neither the English nor the French. . . . Some disposition to resent anything like American domination or the sneaking of America in a strong voice at the peace table is already manifesting itself in an undercurrent of criticism of our army staff, and a tendency to minimize somewhat our effort in the war."

What is the reason for England's unfriendliness towards America? An answer to this question can be found in the following extract from the same article by the representative of the Baltimore "Sun":

"Great Britain wants a just peace all right, but she wants Great Britain to be the policeman

with the club to enforce this peace, and she is preparing to cling to her position as the dominant sea power of the world as she clings to life. If England is to continue the maintenance of a great fleet it will force us into the maintenance of a great fleet. . . . That sort of thing, it is argued, is not the way to peace. It is the way that logically, in the long run, leads to the other thing. . . . A little concerned already about the merchant marine now building in the United States, the suggestion that the American nation may be forced to compete with Great Britain in the size of its navy, certainly "gets the wind up" with the average Englishman. He knows perfectly well that his country is in no condition financially to stand the kind of competition the United States would give if forced."

Such is the case with England. And France has her own interests. She, as testified by the representative of the Baltimore "Sun," is interested in expanding her territory at the expense of Germany, and in obtaining, at least, a part of the German colonies. As for Italy, her territorial appetite is notorious. England and France are very much "disappointed" in Italy. She helped very little in the war, but instead, by threatening to leave the Allies, she demanded and secured from the latter men and money.

THE Peace Conference is not yet in session, but "knight errants of democracy and the self-determination of nationalities" are quarreling among themselves. The information concerning this quarrel, which recently assumed scandalous forms, is just beginning to creep into the American Press. The European military censorship does not allow information to pass freely, and only persons arriving here from Europe as newspaper representatives begin to inform public opinion in the United States concerning the serious "differences" among the Allies. The scandal has gone so far that it is no longer possible to pass it in silence.

A few days ago the newspapers printed a report that the Allies are very much dissatisfied with Italy. It appears that Italy violates the armistice terms, and, not waiting for the decisions of the coming peace conference, seizes Austrian territory which, according to the terms, do not belong to Italy. And following this a sensational rumor penetrates the press about the "Solomon" decision which was apparently adopted by the Allies concerning the question of disposition of the German warships. If we are to believe these rumors, the Allies decided to sink the German fleet that was surrendered to avoid "misunderstandings" which might arise when the time for dividing it up should come.