Chapters from My Diary

371

Letter to Jules Guesde, "Socialist" member of the French Ministry, concerning Trotzky's expulsion from France in 1916.

R. MINISTER: Before I leave the soil of France, under the escort of a police officer, who personifies the liberties in whose defense you were appointed to the national ministry, I consider it my duty to express to you a few thoughts, not in the vain hope that they may convince you, but that they may at least be useful and of value against you. When my expulsion from France was decided upon, your colleague, Mr. Malvy, the Minister of Justice, did not have the courage to tell me the reasons for this measure. Nor did the other of your colleagues, the Minister of War, consider it proper to enumerate the causes that led to the suppression of the Russian newspaper "Nashe Slovo" (Our Word), of which I was the editor, and which had, for two long years, suffered continually the trials of censorship, under the watchful eye and special care of that same Minister of War.

Still I need not conceal from you the fact that the reasons that led to my expulsion are no secret to me. You feel the need of adopting repressive measures against an international Socialist, against one of those who refuse to accept the part of defender or voluntary slave of this imperialistic

war.

Moreover, even though the reasons for this action against me have not been communicated to me, whom they above all concern, these reasons have been stated by Mr. Briand to the deputies and to the journalists.

In Marseilles last August a number of Russian mutineers killed their colonel. A court investigation is alleged to have disclosed that a number of these soldiers were in possession of several numbers of the "Nashe Slovo." At least this is the explanation given by Mr. Briand in an interview with Deputy Longuet and with the president of the Chamber Committee of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Leygues, who, in turn, transmitted this version to the journalists of the Russian bourgeois press. To be sure, Mr. Briand did not possess the audacity to claim that the "Nashe Slovo," which stood subject to his own censorship, was directly responsible for the killing of the officer.

It is likely that his thoughts were somewhat along the following lines. In view of the presence of Russian soldiers in France, it is necessary to weed out the "Nashe Slovo" and to banish its editors from the soil of the Republic. For a Socialist newspaper that refuses to spread illusions and lies may, according to the memorable doctrine of Mr. Renaudel, open the eyes of the Russian soldiers to hypocrisies and lead them into dangerous paths of reflection and meditation. Unfortunately, however, for Mr. Briand, this explanation of his is based upon a very vexatious anachronism. A year ago Gustav Herve, at that time still a member of the permanent administrative committee of your party, wrote that this forcible removal from France of Russian refugees guilty of revolutionary internationalism would be accepted by public opinion without protest or resistance. Obviously Herve received the inspiration for this prophecy from ministerial sources.

At the end of July this same Herve whispered, officiously, that I would be expelled from France; at about the same time-i. e., still before the killing of the colonel in Marseilles-Professor Durkeheim, the President of the Commission for Russian immigrants, established by the Government, informed a representative of these immigrants of the impending suppression of the "Nashe Slovo" and the expulsion of its editors (vide, "Nashe Slovo," July 30, 1916.) Everything had been prearranged, even the public opinion of the slaves of Mr. Herve. They waited only for a pretext to strike the final blow. And the pretext was found. The unfortunate Russian soldiers killed their colonel at a moment that was most opportune to the interests of certain people. This happy coincidence invites a suspicion that may, I fear, penetrate the invulnerable skin of even your ministerial shame. Russian journalists who made a special investigation of the case in Marseilles have established the fact that in this case, as in so many similar cases, the leading role was played by an agent provocateur. What was his aim, or rather what were the aims of the well-paid rascals who directed this agent, is not difficult to comprehend. An excess of some kind among the Russian soldiers was necessary not only to justify the rule of the knout against By Leon Trotzky

them, which was still somewhat offensive to the French authorities, but in order to create a pretext for repressive measures against the Russian immigrants, accused of abusing French hospitality by demoralizing Russian soldiers during the war. To their credit we will assume that the instigators of this project did not themselves believe that the matter would assume such a fatal aspect, that they did not intentionally desire what actually occurred from the very beginning. It is probable that they hoped great gains by small sacrifices. But all undertakings of this sort involve an element of business risk. In this case the provocateur himself went anmolested, but Colonel Krause and his assassins were the victims. Even the patriotic Russian journalists, who are openly hostile to the "Nashe Slovo," expressed the suspicion that copies of our paper were given to the soldiers, at the most auspicious moment, by the agent provocateur.

May I beg of you, Mr. Minister, to institute, through the services of Mr. Malvy an investigation of this matter? You do not see that anything could be gained by such an investigation? Neither do I. Because—let us speak openly—agents provocateur are at least as valuable for "national defense" as Socialist ministers. And you, Jules Guesde, having so generously assumed responsibility for the foreign policy of the Third Republic, for the Franco-Russian alliance and its consequences, for the conquest aims of the Czar, and for all the aims and methods of this war—it remains for you to accept as well the renown for the deeds of these agents provocateur of his Majesty the autocratic ruler of Russia.

At the beginning of the war, when promises were spread with a lavish hand, your partner, Sembat, enchanted the Russian journalists with the perspective of the most beneficial influence to be exerted by the allied democracies upon the internal regime of autocratic Russia. Moreover, this argument was used persistently by the Social patriots of France and Belgium to reconcile the revolutionary Russians with the French Government, but with little success. Twenty-six months of constant military coalition between the generalissimi, between diplomats and parliamentarians, the visits of Viviani and Thomas to Tsarkoe Selo, in short, twenty-six months of incessant influence exerted by the Western democracies upon the Russian regime have only served to strengthen in our land the boldest and most impudent reaction, softened, to a small extent, by the chaos of the administration; have succeeded, moreover, in transforming the internal regime of England and France until they have become very similar to that of Russia.

The generous promises of Mr. Sembat are obviously less expensive than his "coal." The unfortunate fate of the "right of asylum" is but a conspicuous symptom of materialistic and police rule that are becoming more and more predominant on both sides of the Channel. Lloyd George, of Dublin fame, the imperialist incarnate, with the manners of a drunken clergyman, and Mr. Aristide Briand, for whose characterization I beg to refer you, Mr. Jules Guesde, to your own article of earlier days, these two figures represent, in the highest degree, the spirit of the present war, its justification, its morality based upon the appetites of classes and of individuals. Can there be a better and a more deserving partner for Messrs. Lloyd George and Briand than this Mr. Sturmer, who, like a real Russian, has made a career by pinning himself to the Cossacks of the Metropolitans and to the petticoats of bigoted court damsels? What a splendid, what an incomparable trio! Verily, history could have selected no better colleagues and chieftains for Guesde, the minister.

Is it possible for an honest Socialist not to fight against them? You have transformed the Socialist party into a submissive chorus, that servilely imitates the leaders of capitalist highway robbery, at a historical epoch when bourgeois society—whose deadly enemy you, Jules Guesde, have hitherto been—has revealed and demonstrated its true nature to the core. From the events, prepared in a period of world-wide depredation and robbery, whose awful consequences we have so often predicted, from the rivers of blood, from the awful suffering, and misfortune, from the crimes, from the bloodthirsty ferocity and hypocracy of the Governments you, Jules Guesde, draw but one lesson for the enlightment of the French

proletariat: that Wilhelm II and Francis Joseph are two criminals, who, contrary to Nicholas II and Mr. Poincare, refused to respect the rules and regulations of international law.

French Socialism, with its glorious past, with its proud line of thinkers, of fighters and martyrs, has at last found (—and what a disgrace to think that it has found!—) in Renaudel, a translator, during the most tragic period of the world's history, for the elevating thoughts of the yellow book into the language of yellow journalism.

The Socialism of Babeuf, of Saint-Simon, of Fourier, of Blanqui, of the Commune, of Jaures, and of Jules Guesde-yes, of the Jules Guesde of the days of yore—has found its Albert Thomas, who consults with the Russian tyrant concerning the surest and safest method of capturing Constantinople; has found its Marcel Sembat, to exercise and display dilettante nonchalance over the corpses and the ruins of French civilization; has found its Jules Guede, to follow the triumphal chariot of the trumpeter Briand. And you believed and you hoped that the French proletariat, that has been bled to the point of exhaustion in this endless war for the crime of the ruling classes, will continue to tolerate quitely, to the end, this shameful union between official Socialism and the worst enemies of the proletariat? You are mistaken. The opposition is growing. In spite of martial law, in spite of this mania of nationalism which, whatever its form, be it royalistic, radical, or socialistic, always preserves its capitalistic quintessence—revolutionary opposition is marching forward, slowly, but surely. Daily it is gaining ground. "Nashe Slovo," the paper that you have strangled, lived and breathed in the atmosphere of awakening French international Socialism. The group of "Nashe Slovo," expelled from Russia by the counter-revolution, that is gaining in power and strength through the help and support of the French Banking Exchange, the group of "Nashe Slovo" was privileged to echo, even though it was hindered and hampered by your censor—the voice of the French side of the new International, that raises its head in the midst of the terrors of fratricidal war. In our capacity as "undesirable foreigners" we have identified our cause and our fate with that of the French opposition. We are proud to have received the first blow from the French Government, from your government, Jules Guesde'

We have the honor, together with Monatte, Merrheim, Saumoneau, Rosmer, Bourderon, Loriot, Guilbeaut, and so many others, to be accused, all of us, of being pro-German, of friendliness

toward Germany.

The weekly Paris organ of your friend Plekchanoff, your partner in honor and glory as well as in your inglorious fall, has denounced us week after week to the police of Mr. Malvy, as being in the service of the German General Staff. Formerly you knew the value of such accusations, for you yourself had the honor of being subjected to similar accusations. But now you put your stamp of approval upon Mr. Malvy by collecting, for the government of "National Defense," the reports of Mr. Malvy's police spies. Moreover, my political correspondence box contains a very recent prison sentence pronounced against me, during the war, by a German court, in continuation—as I was not present—for my pamphlet, "The War and the International."

But besides this brutal fact, that can make an impression even upon the police brain-cells of Mr. Malvy, I should, I believe, emphasize that we revolutionary internationalists are more dangerous enemies of German reaction than all the Governments of the Allies taken together. Their hostility to Germany is, at the bottom, nothing but the hatred of the competitor; our revolutionary hatred of its ruling class is indestructible. Imperialist competition may again unite the rival enemy brethren of today. When the total destruction of Germany has been realized, England and France, after a decade, would again approach the Kaiserdom of the Hohenzollern in the friendliest spirit, to defend themselves against the superiority of Russia. A future Poincare will exchange telegrams of congratulations with Wilhelm or with his heirs; Lloyd George, in the peculiar language of the priest and the boxer, will curse and condemn Russia, as the defending wall of barbarism and militarism; Albert Thomas, as the French ambassador to the Kaiser, would be showered with flowers cut by the gentle hands

(Continued on Page Seven.)