

Concerning the Russian Revolution

By Romain Rolland

DO NOT think it necessary for me to explain again my ethical position in time of war. It is neither political nor social. It is human. I am absolutely opposed to violence, from whatever side it comes. Moreover, I have said and repeated twenty times that I belong to no party. One has no more right to connect me with Bolshevism, as the newspaper *La France Libre* recently attempted to do, than with militarism.

I am not a Bolshevik, but I can not tolerate lying or wilful error. Now I have established beyond a doubt that the greater part of the news of the Russian revolution is unblushingly false in almost the entire range of the leading papers (with the exception of certain French and English papers who are trying to find out the truth). Means of information are not wanting. But it is only derived from sources hostile to the revolutionaries. I have more than once pointed out the fact, with details, to some of the leading Swiss papers.

They did not deny it, but no change was made in their behavior, and one never hears anything but the cry of one side. 'Audi alterem partem.' Inasmuch as the two sides will not be heard before the bar of the Swiss press, I deny to the readers of that press the right to judge of the affairs in Russia.

I deplore the attitude which the Allied governments have persistently maintained toward the Russian revolution from its beginning. They have done everything possible to add to its difficulties, to provoke violence on its part and in short to force it into the arms of Germany, their worst enemy. That is what Captain Sadoul has said, it is what the French Socialist delegates said on their return from Russia. It is what is said by the English and American correspondents of the *Manchester Guardian*, and of the *Independent Review*, *The Liberator* of New York. It was even publicly declared recently in New York by a political

enemy of the Bolsheviks, the Menshevik leader, Lomonosoff, head of the Russian mission to the United States, appointed by the Kerensky government.

I understand the antipathy of the European bourgeoisie to the Social revolution achieved in Russia, whose influence threatens to spread to the West. The revolution is disquieting to the big interests who feel themselves menaced, and at the same time, it exasperates the exalted ideology of the conservatives. But the opponents of the revolution are indeed blind if they do not see that the social revolution is the daughter of war, and that in order to stop one, it is necessary to stop the other.

In my article "To the Peoples Assassinated" (November, 1916) I said of the people of Europe sacrificed by millions upon the field of battle:

"Have you at last reached the depth of the tragedy? No, I see that in the future, after all this suffering, I dread that fatal day when in the disillusionment of betrayed hopes, in the recognized futility of vain sacrifices, the people worn out with misery shall blindly seek upon what and upon whom to avenge themselves. Then they also will fall into injustice and will be despoiled by a riot of disaster just in the funeral glory of their sacrifices. And from top to bottom of the scale all will become equal participants in calamity and error."

These lines were written in November, 1916. Since then the world has made long strides towards this plunging of all sides alike in violence. To accuse the revolutionary movement of this is as absurd as to blame the wall against which one throws a ball for sending it back again. The revolution exists as a product of war, and war as a product of the abominable social system of Europe.

Mr. Eugene Pictet, referring to Bolshevism, speaks of the "bloody governmental anarchy." How, then, will he qualify the social state which has led Europe, during four years, to twenty or thirty millions of wounded, without counting the abyss of suffering and demoralization over which the official press judiciously throws a veil? Bolshevism has not disorganized, it has tried in an unformed way to organize disorder; in the midst of the spiritual and material ruin of Europe, it has endeavored to bring forward new social forms. The value of the result we are not discussing here; but in order to have either sympathy or antipathy for this work, one is forced, if sincere, to recognize in it the spirit of the proconsuls of the convention. And, indeed, it is to this lineage that the leaders of Bolshevism are related; and they are the object of the same hatred and the same wrongs.

As for myself, I do not take my stand with them any more than with the bloody heroes of the Convention. I am not on the side of violence whether of war or of revolution. But I recognize energy and intelligence wherever I find them. I have not the gift to see or not to see according as it pleases or displeases me. Free of every party and of all prejudice, I see what is before my eyes and I say what I see. The interview of Wissen and Leben, reproduced by Mr. Herman Fernan with perfect fidelity (although at certain points insufficiently shaded) has on the last page outlined what I conceive to be my intellectual duty:

"My position in this war is that of an observer who forsores and who warns. Above all, I am the servitor of truth. My highest duty is to oppose hate, in the name of liberty and humanity. For the future of human civilization rests only in mutual love and mutual esteem. . . ."

Questions

IT is generally known that President Wilson had talked and is talking a great deal that the basis of the coming peace should be the principle of justice and an equal non-partisan attitude towards all peoples—big and small, strong and weak—and he has found the most complete and bright expression in the famous formula proclaimed by the Russian Revolution: "peace with no annexations or contributions and on the basis of self-determination of peoples."

We don't know how President Wilson understands the principle of justice. But, there can be no doubt, that the demand put forward by him to the Central Powers regarding the evacuation by the latter of foreign lands seized by their troops, at least, technically speaking, is in accord with that part of the Russian formula which speaks about peace without annexations. In connection with this a question arises: Does this demand of evacuation apply also to Russian provinces which are at the present moment in the hands of the Central Powers? And furthermore, another question: "Does not the principle of justice and equal attitude towards all-without-exception nations, proclaimed by President Wilson, dictate also the evacuation of the Russian provinces by the Allies?"

These questions are especially important because of the coming peace negotiations. They excite and fill with alarm the heart of every citizen of the Russian Soviet Republic. And the Soviet Government is facing these questions, the government which, as the newspapers report, only the other day sent a communication to President Wilson asking, in effect, when he intends to withdraw his troops from the Murman region, Archangel and Siberia.

What can President Wilson answer to that? What can the Allies answer?

The Soviet Government, in its communication, states that it accepts the Wilson condition regarding evacuation and is ready to conclude an armistice with

the Allies in case they clear from the troops the parts of Russian territory occupied by them.

Will the Allies take into consideration this statement? Doubtful. Indeed as they interpret, they do not wage war against Russia, and therefore, there can be no talk in this case about an armistice.

But if the Allies do not wage war against Russia, then, what, are their troops doing there? Have they gone there for a jolly good time. And, furthermore, what is the explanation of the fact that the American and Allied press print official reports regarding war operations on the Murman and Far East fronts?

And another question: What sort of an enemy is spoken of right along in the official reports from the above fronts. Against whom are the French, British, Japanese, American, Italian, Serbian, Checho-Slovaks and other Allied troops fighting? Not against ghosts, surely.

It means, then, that war is being waged, and a war, evidently of a regular character. Why can there be no question in this case about an armistice?

Education in Russia

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Demonstrative Arts; 7, Musical-Vocal; 8, Artistic-Ethnographical; 9, Cinematographical.

These sections are proceeding to create in Petrograd:

1. A central Socialist Theatre.
2. A theatre of the Socialist youth.
3. A garden for the children and the youth of the proletariat with a permanent theatre, games and scientific-sportive occupations.
4. A central Socialist Club.
5. A Socialist theatrical school with special courses for actors of the revolutionary stage.
6. A bureau of lectures.
7. A bureau of proletarian stage performers.
8. A bureau of theatre plays.
9. A central literature store.
10. A central Socialist library.

"All comrade Socialists having to do with art and with the education and instruction of children who are willing to participate in the creation of a proletarian culture are requested to address themselves to the Central Committee (Petrograd, Fontanka, Tchernysheff Square, House of the Commissariat of Public Instruction) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 7 to 9 P. M., on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4.30 to 8 P. M.

Honorary Chairman of the Central Committee,

A. V. LUNACHARSKY.

Chairman of the Executive Bureau,

F. KALINN.

To the American Workers

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meet with a number of serious setbacks and overthrows.

And yet we are certain that we are invincible, for if humanity will not emerge from this imperialistic massacre broken in spirit, it will triumph. Ours was the first country to break the chains of imperialistic warfare. We broke them with the greatest sacrifice, but they are broken. We stand outside of imperialistic duties and considerations, we have raised the banner of the fight for the complete overthrow of imperialism for the world.

We are in a beleaguered fortress, so long as no other international Socialist revolution comes to our assistance with its armies. But these armies exist, they are stronger than ours, they grow, they strive, they become more invincible the longer imperialism with its brutalities continues. Workingmen the world over are breaking with their betrayers, with their Gompers and their Scheidemanns. Inevitably labor is approaching communistic Bolshevik tactics, is preparing for the proletarian revolution that alone is capable of preserving culture and humanity from destruction.

We are invincible, for invincible is the Proletarian Revolution.