

## 10. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL-PACIFISM

PEACE PROPAGANDA UNACCOMPANIED BY THE  
CALL FOR REVOLUTION SERVES ONLY  
TO FOOL THE MASSES

At the same time as he strongly opposed imperialist war, Lenin also firmly opposed social-pacifism which renounced revolution. Shortly after the outbreak of the World War, he refuted social-pacifism in these terms:

One of the forms of deception of the working class is pacifism and the abstract preaching of peace. Under capitalism, particularly in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable. On the other hand, Social-Democrats cannot deny the positive significance of revolutionary wars, *i.e.*, not imperialist wars, but such as were conducted, for instance, between 1789 and 1871, for the purpose of abolishing national oppression and creating national capitalist states out of the separate feudal states, or of possible wars for the defence of the gains of the victorious proletariat in the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Propaganda of peace at the present time, if not accompanied by a call for revolutionary mass action, is only capable of spreading illusions, of demoralising the proletariat by imbuing it with belief in the humanitarianism of the bourgeoisie, and of making it a plaything in the hands of the secret diplomacy of the

belligerent countries. In particular, the idea that a so-called democratic peace is possible without a series of revolutions is profoundly mistaken.<sup>1</sup>

After the War had gone on for nearly a year and some representative bourgeois people repeatedly made overtures for peace, the opportunists also advanced the slogan of a so-called "democratic peace". Lenin pointed out that the millionaires "sympathized" with peace because they were afraid of revolution; at the same time they knew very clearly that so long as the bourgeoisie was not expropriated, the so-called "democratic" peace (without annexations or restriction of armament, etc.) was nothing but an illusion. But the opportunists, the supporters of Kautsky and the Socialists who called mournfully for peace were publicizing exactly this kind of philistine utopia. Lenin applied the term social-pacifists to describe those who used socialist phraseology to preach pacifism.

How should Marxists approach the question of peace? Lenin wrote:

The peace slogan can be advanced either in connection with definite peace conditions, or without any conditions at all, as a desire, not for a definite peace, but for peace in general (*Frieden ohne weiteres*). It is obvious that in the latter case we have a slogan that is not only not Socialist, but that is entirely devoid of meaning and sense. Absolutely everybody is in favour of peace in general, including Kitchener, Joffre, Hindenburg, and Nicholas the Bloody, for every one

<sup>1</sup>"Conference of the Sections of the R.S.D.L.P. Abroad", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 135.

of them wishes to end the war. The trouble is that every one of them advances imperialist (*i.e.*, predatory in relation to other peoples), oppressive peace conditions for the benefit of "his" nation. Slogans must be advanced in order to make clear to the masses, by means of propaganda and agitation, the irreconcilable difference between Socialism and capitalism (imperialism); they must *not* be advanced in order to *reconcile* two hostile classes and two hostile political lines by means of a little word which "unites" the most divergent things.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin stressed:

The end of wars, peace among peoples, cessation of pillaging and violations are our ideal, to be sure, but only bourgeois sophists can seduce the masses with this ideal, while separating it from a direct and immediate preaching of revolutionary action.<sup>2</sup>

#### IMPERIALIST PEACE IS THE CONTINUATION OF THE IMPERIALIST POLICY OF WAR

During the second half of 1916 and the early days of 1917, there were growing signs in world politics of a turn from imperialist war to imperialist peace. The belligerents were worn out and their reserves exhausted. Finance capital had already squeezed a great deal out of the people through war profiteering and it was becoming diffi-

<sup>1</sup>"The Peace Question", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 266.

cult to squeeze more. The people's discontent and anger were growing and revolutionary sentiment was steadily gaining ground. The imperialist bourgeoisie, therefore, began to plot a peace pact whereby they could "peacefully" parcel out the loot, disarm the millions of proletarians and, by a few unsubstantial concessions, cover up their scheme for continuing to plunder the colonies and strangle the weak nations. Social-pacifism spread rapidly in response to this change in imperialist policy.

Lenin pointed out that in principle what united the social-chauvinists and the social-pacifists was the fact that objectively both were servants of imperialism. Some served it by glorifying the imperialist war and describing it as a war for the "defence of the fatherland"; others served the same imperialism by using decorative phrases about a "democratic" peace, "exerting all their humanitarianism, their love of humanity, their celestial virtue (and their high intellect) to *embellish* the coming imperialist peace!"<sup>1</sup>

Lenin said that the social-pacifists could not understand the fundamental Marxist thesis on war and peace. He wrote:

War is the continuation, by forcible means, of the politics pursued by the ruling classes of the belligerent Powers long before the outbreak of war. Peace is a continuation of the *very same* politics, with a *registration* of the changes brought about in the relation of forces of the antagonists as a result of military operations. War does not change the direction in which poli-

<sup>1</sup>"A Turn in World Politics", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 426.

tics developed prior to the war; it only *accelerates* that development.<sup>1</sup>

The peace the imperialists can bring about can only be an imperialist peace, in which they continue to prepare for imperialist war. To the imperialists, "war is a 'branch of industry,' similar to forestry: it takes decades for trees of proper size — that is to say, for a sufficiently abundant supply of adult 'cannon fodder' — to grow up".<sup>2</sup> Lenin scientifically predicted that "humanity may — if the worst comes to the worst — go through a second imperialist war, if . . . revolution does not come out of the present war".<sup>3</sup>

WHILE THERE IS STILL CLASS OPPRESSION,  
THE DEMAND FOR "DISARMAMENT" AMOUNTS TO  
THE ABANDONMENT OF ALL REVOLUTION

In the midst of the great calamities caused by the imperialist war and the general war-weariness of the people, some Social-Democrats put forward the slogan of "disarmament", and argued in favour of deleting the point about "militia" or the "armed nation" in the Social-Democratic minimum programme. Their main argument was that the demand for disarmament was the clearest, most decisive and most consistent expression of the struggle against all militarism and against all war.

<sup>1</sup>"The Peace Programme", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>"A Turn in World Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 428.

<sup>3</sup>"The War Program of the Proletarian Revolution", *Selected Works*, Moscow, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 578.

In "The War Program of the Proletarian Revolution" and "The 'Disarmament' Slogan", Lenin thoroughly exploded this idle fancy. He said, "Socialists cannot, without ceasing to be Socialists, be opposed to all war."<sup>1</sup> In the epoch of imperialism there were three kinds of revolutionary war: first, national-liberation wars against imperialism by the people in the colonial and dependent countries; second, the civil wars of the oppressed and exploited classes against the oppressing and exploiting class; third, wars of self-defence by a socialist country against the intervention of capitalist-imperialist countries which could still break out after socialist revolution had achieved victory in one or more countries. "Socialists have never been, nor can they ever be, opposed to revolutionary wars," he said.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin categorically declared:

An oppressed class which does not strive to learn to use arms, to acquire arms, deserves to be treated like slaves. We cannot forget, unless we have become bourgeois pacifists or opportunists, that we are living in a class society, that there is no way out, and there can be none, except by means of the class struggle and the overthrow of the power of the ruling class.

In every class society, whether it is based on slavery, serfdom or, as at present, on wage labour, the oppressing class is armed. The modern standing army, and even the modern militia—even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, Switzerland, for example—represents the bourgeoisie armed *against* the proletariat. This is such an elementary truth that it is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 569.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

hardly necessary to dwell on it. It is sufficient to recall the use of troops (including the republican-democratic militia) against strikers, which occurs in all capitalist countries without exception. The fact that the bourgeoisie is armed against the proletariat is one of the biggest, most fundamental, most important facts in modern capitalist society.

Only *after* the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historical mission, to throw all armaments on the scrap-heap; the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but only when this condition has been fulfilled, certainly not before.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin made the penetrating remark that to demand "disarmament" while imperialism existed was "tantamount to the complete abandonment of the point of view of the class struggle, the renunciation of all thought of revolution". He said that there was little Marxism in this, and that such advocacy of "disarmament" was "the most vulgar opportunism, it is bourgeois pacifism".<sup>2</sup>

As against the slogan of the opportunists, the Marxist slogan was: "the arming of the proletariat for the purpose of vanquishing, expropriating and disarming the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics a revolutionary class can adopt, tactics which follow logically from the whole *objective development* of capitalist militarism, and dictated by that development."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The 'Disarmament' Slogan", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XIX, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 354.

<sup>3</sup> "The War Program of the Proletarian Revolution", *op. cit.*, pp. 573-74.