

The conquerors of bread

Anselmo Lorenzo

1915

The European war has produced an important and unexpected split in the emancipatory proletariat.

On the one hand, there are those who, considering German imperialism as the most dangerous threat to the ideal, and taking into account the revolutionary and democratic antecedents of France and England, disregarding the absolutist significance of Russia, think that the workers must contribute directly, morally and materially to the destruction of German arrogance.

Others, firm supporters of the principles and aspirations of the Workers' International, maintain their opposition to the war, seeing in the current war the result of the domination of capitalism, formed on the archaic and still valid legal concept of Roman property, and of the imperialisms fighting for world hegemony, and declare that accepting the war, taking part voluntarily in it, is to give in; worse still, it is to renounce, which only serves to favor the exploiting bourgeoisie, strengthen the tyrannical State and annul the proletarian personality.

In Spain, news of this split is received from the press, which reports on the public demonstrations of the foreign proletariat, especially the English, French, Italian and Portuguese, without the Spanish, up to the present time, having said a word on this matter, almost reduced to fear, to the threat of hunger and busy with the ineffective task of arranging resources, in agreement with the authorities, to alleviate the crisis of subsistence and work.

I consider this attitude unworthy of the mentality and strength of the Spanish workers, manifested in the workers' press and in a series of acts that, from the Workers' Congress of Barcelona in 1870 until now, have achieved great historical importance, and I urge them to come clean and show their faces, as is appropriate for those who must play a progressive role, especially at these times when there is so much concern about the pros and cons of neutrality.

It should be noted that capitalism, in its present existence of monopolizing trusts and large exploitative companies, no longer lives from the direct exploitation of the worker, but from loans, credit, usury, commercial speculation, the export of products and the conquest of markets, reaching its highest expression in imperialism, an insatiable monster of conquest and domination.

Germany has created the type of militarist State: if it were to triumph in the present war, its power would increase indefinitely, but it must be recognized that if the allies were to triumph, justice would not be the victor, but the lesser evil, which has seduced the anarchists turned into opportunists, because victory would be shared among nations without possible homogeneity, incapable of each constituting a predominant danger by itself, having also the counterweight of

contracting within itself greater popular resistance and greater strength of revolutionary tradition.

It is evident that this war is caused by capitalism, by the various more or less powerful imperialisms, by the different military parties, by the multiple interests supported by war and by armed peace, and by industrial and banking antagonisms. It is beyond doubt that no State fights sincerely for freedom, for civilization, for progress, and what is positively at stake is the capitalist aggrandizement of each nation, or at least the mutual defense of the relatively weak nations against the monstrously predominant one. It follows that the warlike action of the workers would redound to their own harm, because it would undo their work, annul their propaganda, vanish their rudimentary organization and even deprive them of a rational basis for all protest and rebellion, since by enlisting as soldiers they renounce their inherent rights.

Let us not forget that those who, in defence of a State, speak of war as a means of imposing on the world an ideal of civilisation and peace against another of disciplinary slavery, reserve industrial and commercial superiority as a guarantee; they aspire, with economic dominance, to economic dominance; they want victory and empire in order to reign over the world from the counter and the desk, displaying as a sceptre, not a rod but a yard of gold; they sell civilisation, they do not give it away, they reserve the resulting profit; the result is that in the last analysis, if in every contract of sale the one reduced to a constant buyer remains in routine stagnation, the seller accumulates profit upon profit and finally enriches himself at the expense of the clientele.

Having put the matter thus, I propose to demonstrate that the present war represents the failure of the State, a consequence of previous failures, especially those suffered by the dominant, non-ruling classes, the aristocracy and later the bourgeoisie; that the proletariat presents itself as the truly progressive and saving element, without the upheaval caused by the war having any more significance than that of an annoying and disturbing incident that can be controlled, nor that the retroactive declarations made recently by prestigious saints have any more significance than that of symptoms of cerebral weakness and cases of morbid individual pessimism.

In view of so much ruin and desolation, for the consolation and rational hope of my fellow workers, I wish to spread this great thought of Reclus: "The cause of progress is entrusted to the conquerors of bread, that is, to working men, associated, free, equal, detached from patronage. It will be up to them to introduce the scientific method in the application of all individual discoveries to social interests."

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Written in his final days in 1914, it was published in a special issue of *Tierra y Libertad* in 1915. It was accompanied by a note: “He wrote this article a few days before he died to publish it in the bourgeois press, which he was unable to achieve despite his efforts.”

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