

Rebellion of the Soldier

Manuel González Prada

1906

There are two things that are irreconcilable, no matter how many subtleties and quibbles we may employ in order to reconcile them: internationalism and patriotism. We have no fatherland, if we love all nations equally; we are not patriotic, if we fail to prefer a fellow-citizen to a Lapp, a French man or a Chinese man.

Socialism, in spite of believing itself detached from all religions, is founded on a Christian maxim: we are all brothers. Well, if being brothers is a truth engraved in the most intimate part of our heart, if all our actions must be governed by it, we have the right to protest when we are forced to violate it by becoming killers of our brothers.

The propaganda of the socialist-internationalists, in advising desertion in the case of war, is the most logical consequence of this doctrine. The pretension of some French and German socialists to reconcile internationalism with patriotism, and human freedom with military service, is not. Such conciliators remind us of case-by-case and Jesuitical theologians; in theory, they condemn military service and war; in practice, they do not oppose obedience, nor do they support indiscipline or rebellion within units of soldiers.

However, in the energetic resolve of the conscript who refuses to become a simple mechanism within a blind and collective machine, there lies the quickest resolution to the problem. Armies and, consequently, wars, will only end when men do not resign themselves to suffer the military yoke, when the majority of those called to service have sufficient courage to rebel, invoking the generous principle of fraternity.

And mass or collective protest cannot come about without having been initiated by a series of individual protests: many will follow an example, when some begin to provide it. The well-paid diplomat who draws up protocols at the Hague Conference does something for the ending of wars, but surely the poor Doukhobour who, on the Russian steppes, refuses military service and, before faltering in his convictions, endures the whip, prison and banishment to Siberia, does even more.

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