

THE "DISARMAMENT" SLOGAN

In a number of countries, mostly small and not involved in the present war—Sweden, Norway, Holland and Switzerland, for example—there have been voices in favour of replacing the old Social-Democratic minimum-programme demand for a "militia", or the "armed nation", by a new demand: "disarmament". An editorial article in favour of disarmament appeared in No. 3 of *Jugend-Internationale* (The Youth International), organ of the international youth organisation. In R. Grimm's "theses" on the military question drawn up for the Swiss Social-Democratic Party Congress we find a concession to the "disarmament" idea. In the Swiss magazine *Neues Leben* (New Life) for 1915, Roland-Holst, while ostensibly advocating "conciliation" between the two demands, actually makes the same concession. Issue No. 2 of *Vorbote* (The Herald), organ of the International Left, carried an article by the Dutch Marxist Wijnkoop in defence of the old armed-nation demand. The Scandinavian Lefts, as is evident from the articles printed below, accept "disarmament", though at times they admit that it contains an element of pacifism.⁴⁹

Let us take a closer look at the position of the disarmament advocates.

I

One of the principal premises advanced, although not always definitely expressed, in favour of disarmament is this: we are opposed to war, to all war in general, and the demand for disarmament is the most definite, clear and unambiguous expression of this point of view.

We showed the fallacy of that idea in our review of Junius's pamphlet, to which we refer the reader.* Socialists cannot be opposed to all war in general without ceasing to be socialists. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by the present imperialist war. Such wars between "Great" Powers are typical of the imperialist epoch; but democratic wars and rebellions, for instance, of oppressed nations against their oppressors to free themselves from oppression, are by no means impossible. Civil wars of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for socialism are inevitable. Wars are possible between one country in which socialism has been victorious and other, bourgeois or reactionary, countries.

Disarmament is the ideal of socialism. There will be no wars in socialist society; consequently, disarmament will be achieved. But whoever expects that socialism will be achieved *without* a social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a socialist. Dictatorship is state power based directly on *violence*. And in the twentieth century—as in the age of civilisation generally—violence means neither a fist nor a club, but *troops*. To put "disarmament" in the programme is tantamount to making the general declaration: We are opposed to the use of arms. There is as little Marxism in this as there would be if we were to say: We are opposed to violence!

It should be observed that the international discussion of this question was conducted mainly, if not exclusively, in the German language. The Germans, however, use two words, the difference between which is not easily rendered in Russian. One, strictly speaking, means "disarmament",** and is used by Kautsky and the Kautskyites, for instance, in the sense of reduction of armaments. The other, strictly speaking, means "disarming",*** and is used mainly by the Lefts in the sense of abolishing militarism, abolishing all militarist systems. In this article we speak of the *latter* demand, which is current among certain *revolutionary* Social-Democrats.

* See present edition, Vol. 22, pp. 305-19.—*Ed.*

** Abrüstung.—*Ed.*

*** Entwaffnung.—*Ed.*

The Kautskyite advocacy of "disarmament", which is addressed to the present governments of the imperialist Great Powers, is the most vulgar opportunism, it is bourgeois pacifism, which *actually*—in spite of the "good intentions" of the sentimental Kautskyites—serves to distract the workers from the revolutionary struggle. For this advocacy seeks to instil in the workers the idea that the present bourgeois governments of the imperialist powers are *not* bound to each other by thousands of threads of finance capital and by scores or hundreds of corresponding *secret treaties* (i.e., predatory, plundering treaties, preparing the way for imperialist war).

II

An oppressed class which does not strive to learn to use arms, to acquire arms, only deserves to be treated like slaves. We cannot, unless we have become bourgeois pacifists or opportunists, forget that we are living in a class society from which there is no way out, nor can there be, save through the class struggle and the overthrow of the power of the ruling class.

In every class society, whether based on slavery, serfdom, or, as at present, on wage-labour, the oppressor class is always armed. Not only the modern standing army, but even the modern militia—and even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, Switzerland, for instance—represent the bourgeoisie armed *against* the proletariat. That is such an elementary truth that it is hardly necessary to dwell upon it. Suffice it to recall that in all capitalist countries without exception troops (including the republican-democratic militia) are used against strikers. A bourgeoisie armed against the proletariat is one of the biggest, fundamental and cardinal facts of modern capitalist society.

And in face of this fact, revolutionary Social-Democrats are urged to "demand" "disarmament"! That is tantamount to complete abandonment of the class-struggle point of view, to renunciation of all thought of revolution. Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, appropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only

tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow logically from, and are dictated by, the whole *objective development* of capitalist militarism. Only *after* the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap-heap. And the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but only when this condition has been fulfilled, certainly not before.

If the present war arouses among the reactionary Christian socialists, among the whimpering petty bourgeoisie, *only* horror and fright, only aversion to all use of arms, to bloodshed, death, etc., then we must say: Capitalist society is and has always been *horror without end*. And if this most reactionary of all wars is now preparing for that society an *end in horror*, we have no reason to fall into despair. But the disarmament "demand", or more correctly, the dream of disarmament, is, objectively, nothing but an expression of despair at a time when, as everyone can see, the bourgeoisie itself is paving the way for the only legitimate and revolutionary war—civil war against the imperialist bourgeoisie.

A lifeless theory, some might say, but we would remind them of two world-historical facts: the role of the trusts and the employment of women in industry, on the one hand, and the Paris Commune of 1871 and the December 1905 uprising in Russia, on the other.

The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not "demand" such development, we do not "support" it. We fight it. But *how* do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!

That argument takes account of *objective* development and, with the necessary changes, applies also to the present militarisation of the population. Today the imperialist bourgeoisie militarises the youth as well as the adults; tomorrow it may begin militarising the women. Our attitude

should be: All the better! Full speed ahead! For the faster we move, the nearer shall we be to the armed uprising against capitalism. How can Social-Democrats give way to fear of the militarisation of the youth, etc., if they have not forgotten the example of the Paris Commune? This is not a "lifeless theory" or a dream. It is a fact. And it would be a sorry state of affairs indeed if, all the economic and political facts notwithstanding, Social-Democrats began to doubt that the imperialist era and imperialist wars must inevitably bring about a repetition of such facts.

A certain bourgeois observer of the Paris Commune, writing to an English newspaper in May 1871, said: "If the French nation consisted entirely of women, what a terrible nation it would be!" Women and teen-age children fought in the Paris Commune side by side with the men. It will be no different in the coming battles for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively as poorly armed or unarmed workers are shot down by the well-armed forces of the bourgeoisie. They will take to arms, as they did in 1871, and from the cowed nations of today—or more correctly, from the present-day labour movement, disorganised more by the opportunists than by the governments—there will undoubtedly arise, sooner or later, but with absolute certainty, an international league of the "terrible nations" of the revolutionary proletariat.

The whole of social life is now being militarised. Imperialism is a fierce struggle of the Great Powers for the division and redivision of the world. It is therefore bound to lead to further militarisation in all countries, even in neutral and small ones. How will proletarian women oppose this? Only by cursing all war and everything military, only by demanding disarmament? The women of an oppressed and really revolutionary class will never accept that shameful role. They will say to their sons:

"You will soon be grown up. You will be given a gun. Take it and learn the military art properly. The proletarians need this knowledge not to shoot your brothers, the workers of other countries, as is being done in the present war, and as the traitors to socialism are telling you to do. They

need it to fight the bourgeoisie of their own country, to put an end to exploitation, poverty and war, and not by pious wishes, but by defeating and disarming the *bourgeoisie*."

If we are to shun such propaganda, precisely such propaganda, in connection with the present war, then we had better stop using fine words about international revolutionary Social-Democracy, the socialist revolution and war against war.

III

The disarmament advocates object to the "armed nation" clause in the programme also because it more easily leads, they allege, to concessions to opportunism. The cardinal point, namely, the relation of disarmament to the class struggle and to the social revolution, we have examined above. We shall now examine the relation between the disarmament demand and opportunism. One of the chief reasons why it is unacceptable is precisely that, together with the illusions it creates, it inevitably weakens and devitalises our struggle against opportunism.

Undoubtedly, this struggle is the main, immediate question now confronting the International. Struggle against imperialism that is not closely linked with the struggle against opportunism is either an empty phrase or a fraud. One of the main defects of Zimmerwald and Kienthal—one of the main reasons why these embryos of the Third International may possibly end in a fiasco—is that the question of fighting opportunism was not even raised openly, let alone solved in the sense of proclaiming the need to break with the opportunists. Opportunism has triumphed—temporarily—in the European labour movement. Its two main shades are apparent in all the big countries: first, the avowed, cynical, and therefore less dangerous social-imperialism of Messrs. Plekhanov, Scheidemann, Legien, Albert Thomas and Sembat, Vandervelde, Hyndman, Henderson, et al.; second, the concealed, Kautskyite opportunism: Kautsky-Haase and the Social-Democratic Labour Group in Germany; Longuet, Pressemane, Mayéras, et al., in France; Ramsay MacDonald and the other leaders of the Independent Labour Party in England; Martov,

Chkheidze, et al., in Russia; Treves and the other so-called Left reformists in Italy.

Avowed opportunism is openly and directly opposed to revolution and to incipient revolutionary movements and outbursts. It is in direct alliance with the governments, varied as the forms of this alliance may be—from accepting ministerial posts to participation in the war industries committees. The masked opportunists, the Kautskyites, are much more harmful and dangerous to the labour movement, because they hide their advocacy of alliance with the former under a cloak of plausible, pseudo-“Marxist” catchwords and pacifist slogans. The fight against both these forms of prevailing opportunism must be conducted in *all* fields of proletarian politics: parliament, the trade unions, strikes, the armed forces, etc.

What is the main distinguishing feature of *both* these forms of prevailing opportunism?

It is that the concrete question of the *connection between the present war and revolution, and the other concrete questions of revolution*, are hushed up, concealed, or treated with an eye to police prohibitions. And this despite the fact that before the war the connection between *this* impending war and the proletarian revolution was emphasised innumerable times, both unofficially, and officially in the Basle Manifesto.

The main defect of the disarmament demand is its evasion of all the concrete questions of revolution. Or do the advocates of disarmament stand for an altogether new kind of revolution, unarmed revolution?

IV

To proceed. We are by no means opposed to the fight for reforms. And we do not wish to ignore the sad possibility—if the worst comes to the worst—of mankind going through a second imperialist war, if revolution does not come out of the present war, in spite of the numerous outbursts of mass unrest and mass discontent and in spite of our efforts. We favour a programme of reforms directed *also* against the opportunists. They would be only too glad if we left the struggle for reforms entirely to them and sought

escape from sad reality in a nebulous “disarmament” fantasy. “Disarmament” means simply running away from unpleasant reality, not fighting it.

Incidentally, certain Lefts fail to give a sufficiently concrete answer on the defence of the fatherland issue, and that is a major defect of their attitude. Theoretically, it is much more correct, and in practice immeasurably more important, to say that in the *present* imperialist war defence of the fatherland is a bourgeois-reactionary deception, than to take a “general” stand against defence of the fatherland under “all” circumstances. That is wrong and, besides, does not “strike” at the opportunists, those direct enemies of the workers in the labour parties.

In working out a concrete and practically necessary answer on the question of a militia we should say: We are not in favour of a bourgeois militia; we are in favour only of a proletarian militia. Therefore, “not a penny, not a man”, not only for a standing army, but even for a bourgeois militia, even in countries like the United States, or Switzerland, Norway, etc. The more so that in the freest republican countries (e.g., Switzerland) we see that the militia is being increasingly Prussianised, and prostituted by being used against strikers. We can demand popular election of officers, abolition of all military law, equal rights for foreign and native-born workers (a point particularly important for those imperialist states which, like Switzerland, are more and more blatantly exploiting larger numbers of foreign workers, while denying them all rights). Further, we can demand the right of every hundred, say, inhabitants of a given country to form voluntary military-training associations, with free election of instructors paid by the state, etc. Only under these conditions could the proletariat acquire military training for *itself* and not for its slave-owners; and the need for such training is imperatively dictated by the interests of the proletariat. The Russian revolution showed that every success of the revolutionary movement, even a partial success like the seizure of a certain city, a certain factory town, or winning over a certain section of the army, inevitably *compels* the victorious proletariat to carry out just such a programme.

Lastly, it stands to reason that opportunism can never be defeated by mere programmes; it can only be defeated by deeds. The greatest, and fatal, error of the bankrupt Second International was that its words did not correspond to its deeds, that it cultivated the habit of unscrupulous revolutionary phrase-mongering (note the present attitude of Kautsky and Co. towards the Basle Manifesto). In approaching the demand for disarmament from this aspect we must first of all raise the question of its *objective* significance. Disarmament as a social idea, i.e., an idea that springs from, and can affect, a certain social environment, and is not the invention of some crackpot or group, springs, evidently, from the peculiar "tranquil" conditions prevailing, by way of exception, in certain small states which have for a fairly long time stood aside from the world's path of war and bloodshed, and hope to remain that way. To be convinced of this, we have only to consider the arguments advanced, for instance, by the Norwegian advocates of disarmament. "We are a small country," they say. "Our army is small; there is nothing we can do against the Great Powers (and, consequently, nothing we can do to resist forcible involvement in an imperialist *alliance* with one or the other Great-Power group!). We want to be left in peace in our backwoods and continue our backwoods politics, demand disarmament, compulsory arbitration, permanent neutrality, etc." ("permanent" after the Belgian fashion, no doubt?).

The petty striving of petty states to hold aloof, the petty-bourgeois desire to keep as far away as possible from the great battles of world history, to take advantage of one's relatively monopolistic position in order to remain in hidebound passivity—this is the *objective* social environment which may ensure the disarmament idea a certain degree of success and a certain degree of popularity in some of the small states. That striving is, of course, reactionary and is based entirely on illusions, for, in one way or another, imperialism draws the small states into the vortex of world economy and world politics.

Let us cite the case of Switzerland. Her imperialist environment objectively prescribes *two* courses to the labour movement. The opportunists, in alliance with the

bourgeoisie, are seeking to turn the country into a republican-democratic monopolistic federation that would thrive on profits from imperialist bourgeois tourists, and to make this "tranquil" monopolistic position as profitable and as tranquil as possible. Actually, this is a policy of alliance between a small privileged stratum of the workers of a small privileged country and the bourgeoisie of that country *against* the mass of the proletariat. The genuine Swiss Social-Democrats are striving to use Switzerland's relative freedom, her "international" position (proximity to the most cultured countries, the fact that Switzerland, thank God, does not have "a separate language of her own", but uses three world languages) to extend, consolidate and strengthen the *revolutionary* alliance of the revolutionary elements of the proletariat of the whole of Europe. Let's help our own bourgeoisie retain as long as possible its monopoly of the supertranquil trade in the charms of the Alps; perhaps a penny or two will fall to our share—such is the *objective* content of the Swiss opportunists' policy. Let us help weld the alliance of the revolutionary sections of the French, German and Italian proletariat for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie—such is the objective content of the Swiss revolutionary Social-Democrats' policy. Unfortunately, it is still being carried out far from adequately by the Swiss "Lefts", and the splendid decision of the 1915 Aarau Party Congress (acceptance of the revolutionary mass struggle) is still largely a dead letter. But that is not the point we are discussing at the moment.

The question that interests us now is: Does the disarmament demand correspond to this revolutionary trend among the Swiss Social-Democrats? It obviously does not. Objectively, the "demand" for disarmament corresponds to the opportunist, narrow national line of a labour movement, a line that is restricted by the outlook of a small state. Objectively, "disarmament" is an extremely national, specifically national programme of small states; it is certainly not the international programme of international revolutionary Social-Democracy.

P. S. In the last issue of the English *Socialist Review*⁵⁰ (September 1916), organ of the opportunist Independent Labour Party, we find, on page 287, the resolution of the party's Newcastle Conference—refusal to support any war waged by any government even if “nominally” it is a war of “defence”. And in an editorial on page 205 of the same issue we read the following declaration: “In no degree do we approve the Sinn Fein rebellion [the Irish Rebellion of 1916]. We do not approve armed rebellion at all, any more than any other form of militarism and war.”

Is there any need to prove that *these* “anti-militarists”, that *such* advocates of disarmament, not in a small, but in a big country, are the most pernicious opportunists? And yet, theoretically, they are quite right in regarding insurrection as one “form” of militarism and war.

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IMPERIALISM AND THE SPLIT IN SOCIALISM

Is there any connection between imperialism and the monstrous and disgusting victory opportunism (in the form of social-chauvinism) has gained over the labour movement in Europe?

This is the fundamental question of modern socialism. And having in our Party literature fully established, first, the imperialist character of our era and of the present war, and, second, the inseparable historical connection between social-chauvinism and opportunism, as well as the intrinsic similarity of their political ideology, we can and must proceed to analyse this fundamental question.

We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is (1) monopoly capitalism; (2) parasitic, or decaying capitalism; (3) moribund capitalism. The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the *quintessence* of imperialism. Monopoly manifests itself in five principal forms: (1) cartels, syndicates and trusts—the concentration of production has reached a degree which gives rise to these monopolistic associations of capitalists; (2) the monopolistic position of the big banks—three, four or five giant banks manipulate the whole economic life of America, France, Germany; (3) seizure of the sources of *raw material* by the trusts and the financial oligarchy (finance capital is monopoly industrial capital merged with bank capital); (4) the (economic) partition of the world by the international cartels has *begun*. There are already over *one hundred* such international cartels, which command