

8. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SOCIAL-CHAUVINISM

THE SOCIAL-CHAUVINISTS HELP REACTION TO SEND
THE WORKERS TO SLAUGHTER EACH OTHER

The world war which had been brewing eventually erupted in late July 1914. It was a war between two imperialist robber gangs — the Alliance and the Entente — for the redivision of the world and the seizure of spheres of influence.

The war was the general explosion of imperialist antagonisms and, in turn, sharpened these antagonisms still further. At the same time, it uncovered the opportunist abscess of the Second International; it ripped away the masks of the renegades concealed within the international working-class movement. From the very outbreak of the war, the leading cliques of opportunists in the socialist parties of the belligerent countries betrayed the Stuttgart and Copenhagen resolutions and the Basle Manifesto, and blatantly threw themselves into the arms of the bourgeoisie. Under cover of the slogan of the "defence of the fatherland", they fanatically supported their own governments in waging the imperialist war.

In Germany, the Social-Democratic Party's statement raised the bogey of "Russian invasion" and declared that "in the hour of danger we shall not desert the fatherland". The Right-wing leader of the German Party, Philip Scheidemann, said:

We have the task of protecting the country of the most developed Social-Democracy against servitude to Russia. . . . We Social-Democrats have not ceased to be Germans because we have joined the Socialist International.

The German General Trade Unions Council declared "civil peace", calling on the workers to support the government in the war. Hugo Haase, leader of the parliamentary group of the German Party, said that to Germany the war was defensive and therefore every German should defend his fatherland, and that in this war Germany would "fight for freedom" for the Russian people. The German Social-Democratic Party not only voted for war credits in parliament, but sent emissaries to the front to rouse the soldiers' morale.

Similarly in Austria, the Social-Democrats issued a statement fully supporting the government, and calling on the people to wage a "war of emancipation" "against tsarist Russia and the semi-barbarous Serbia".

In France, the Socialist Party declared it imperative to defend France and resist German aggression. It also conducted propaganda everywhere that France was fighting a defensive and just war. The parliamentary fraction of the French Party voted for the government's war budget. Two socialist deputies, Jules Guesde and Sembat, joined the imperialist French government so as to guarantee "co-operation" between labour and capital during the war.

The Right-wing of the British Socialist Party, the Russian Mensheviks and the leaders of the Belgian Socialist Party (including Vandervelde, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the International Socialist Bu-

reau) all supported the war which their governments were waging against Germany.

Some of the Social-Democrats not only disseminated chauvinism in their own countries, but travelled abroad for this purpose. German Socialists — Scheidemann, Legien and others — were entrusted by their government to solicit Socialist and public support for Germany in Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark and other neutral countries. At the same time, British and French Socialists went to Russia on missions to persuade the Russian workers to fight for the defence of tsardom and its allies.

As the majority of the leaders of the Second International had openly betrayed socialism and degenerated into social-chauvinists, the International became completely discredited. The German Social-Democratic Party was the arch-criminal in splitting the international working-class movement and causing the collapse of the Second International. Lenin said:

The responsibility for disgracing socialism in this way rests, in the first place, on the German Social-Democrats who comprised the strongest and most influential party in the Second International.¹

UPHOLDING THE BASLE MANIFESTO AND EXPOSING
THE REACTIONARY SLOGAN OF "DEFENCE
OF THE FATHERLAND"

At this critical moment of history, at a time when the socialist parties of the various countries were in a state of abysmal crisis and when leader after leader of the

¹ "The War and Russian Social-Democracy", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, pp. 125-26.

working-class movement turned renegade, Lenin and the Bolsheviks under his leadership unhesitatingly held aloft the banner of opposition to the imperialist war, adhered to the principles of proletarian internationalism, rallied the revolutionary Socialists and led the toiling masses firmly along the revolutionary road of Marxism.

After the outbreak of the war, Lenin moved from Austria to neutral Switzerland in order to carry on his revolutionary activity more easily. As soon as he arrived in Berne, Lenin drafted his theses on the war — “The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War”. In these theses, he answered the most urgent basic questions of the time and showed the revolutionary masses of the world the road of struggle. After obtaining the concurrence of the Party organization in Russia, Lenin revised and published these theses in the form of a political manifesto of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, under the title “The War and Russian Social-Democracy”. This manifesto served as a programmatic document for the entire war period; it thoroughly exposed the imperialist character of the war, sharply denounced the betrayal of the leaders of the socialist parties of the chief European countries, and laid down the only correct line of struggle for the revolutionary Social-Democratic Parties. The manifesto said:

To seize land and to conquer foreign nations, to ruin a competing nation and to pillage her wealth, to divert the attention of the toiling masses from the internal political crises of Russia, Germany, England and other countries, to disunite the workers and fool them with nationalism, to exterminate their vanguard in order to

weaken the revolutionary movement of the proletariat — such is the only real content, the significance and the meaning of the present war.¹

The manifesto issued a call for efforts to bring about the defeat of the tsarist government in the war, and declared:

Transform the present imperialist war into civil war — is the only correct proletarian slogan; it was indicated by the experience of the Commune, was outlined by the Basle resolution (1912) and logically follows from all the conditions of an imperialist war among highly developed bourgeois countries.²

Socialists of Britain, France, Belgium and other Entente countries held a conference in London in February 1915, and in April of the same year, Socialists of Germany and Austria of the Allied countries held a conference in Vienna. While making tongue-in-cheek appeals to all the governments to establish peace, the Socialists on both sides helped their respective bourgeois governments to allay the anxieties of the masses and they defended their chauvinistic stand. The Russian Bolsheviks sent Litvinov to the London Conference, and he read out the manifesto “The War and Russian Social-Democracy”. The chairman of the conference infamously interrupted Litvinov again and again while he spoke, and Litvinov left the conference. Writing about the London Conference Lenin said:

The task of the opponents of social-chauvinism at the London Conference was therefore clear: to leave

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

the conference in the name of decisive anti-chauvinist principles, at the same time *not falling into* Germanophilism, since the pro-Germans are decidedly opposed to the London Conference for no other reason than chauvinism!¹

Lenin denounced the betrayal of the Basle Manifesto by the opportunists of the Second International, saying:

... neither the avowed opportunists nor the Kautskyites dare repudiate the Basle Manifesto or compare its demands with the conduct of the socialist parties during the war.²

He added:

It is downright hypocrisy to ignore the Basle Manifesto altogether, or in its most essential parts, and to quote instead the speeches of leaders, or the resolutions of various parties, which, in the first place, *antedate* the Basle Congress, secondly, were not the decisions adopted by the parties of the whole world, and thirdly, applied to various *possible* wars, but never to the present war.³

In the same article Lenin also said:

There is not a single word in the Basle Manifesto about the defence of the fatherland, or about the difference between a war of aggression and a war of defence. . . .

¹ "The London Conference", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, pp. 157-58.

² "Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International", *Collected Works*, Moscow, Vol. 22, p. 108.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

... the Manifesto very clearly recognises the predatory, imperialist, reactionary, slave-driving character of the present war, i.e., a character which makes the idea of defending the fatherland theoretical nonsense and a practical absurdity.¹

Lenin pointed out that Marxism was not opposed to the "defence of the fatherland" slogan in general. It recognized under certain conditions the legitimacy, progressivism and justice of "defending the fatherland" or of a "defensive" war. He said:

... if Morocco were to declare war against France to-morrow, or India against England . . . etc., those wars would be "just," "defensive" wars, no matter which one was the first to attack. Every Socialist would then wish the victory of the oppressed, dependent, non-sovereign states against the oppressing, slave-holding, pillaging "great" nations.²

However, the social-chauvinists' plea of "defence of the fatherland" was put forward not to oppose foreign oppression but to safeguard the right of the "great" nations to plunder the colonies or to oppress other nations.

SOCIAL-CHAUVINISM IS A RIPE "BOURGEOIS ABSCESS INSIDE THE SOCIALIST PARTIES"

Lenin made a pointed analysis of social-chauvinism in his "The Collapse of the Second International", "Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International" and

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-09.

² "Socialism and War", *Collected Works*, New York, Vol. XVIII, p. 220.

other works, showing how opportunism gradually developed inside the Social-Democratic Parties and, within several decades, ripened into social-chauvinism.

He wrote:

By social-chauvinism we mean the recognition of the idea of the defence of the fatherland in the present imperialist war, the justification of an alliance between the Socialists and the bourgeoisie and governments of "their own" countries in this war, the refusal to preach and support proletarian-revolutionary action against "one's own" bourgeoisie, etc.¹

Lenin pointed out that social-chauvinism was the concrete manifestation of opportunism in the imperialist war. The political and ideological content of the two was the same: class collaboration in place of class struggle. In Lenin's words:

The war drives this idea to its logical conclusion, adds to its ordinary factors and stimuli a whole series of extraordinary ones and by special threats and violence compels the unenlightened, disunited masses to co-operate with the bourgeoisie. This naturally widens the circle of adherents of opportunism and it explains sufficiently why the quondam radicals desert to this camp.²

Lenin indicated:

The economic basis of opportunism and social-chauvinism is the same: the interests of an insignif-

¹"The Collapse of the Second International", *Selected Works*, London, Vol. 5, p. 203.

²*Ibid.*

icant layer of privileged workers and petty bourgeoisie who are defending their privileged positions, their "right" to the crumbs of profits which "their" national bourgeoisie receives from robbing other nations, from the advantages of its position as a great nation.¹

Lenin, therefore, concluded: "Social-chauvinism is opportunism ripened to such a degree that the existence of this bourgeois abscess inside the Socialist Parties as it has existed *hitherto* has become impossible."² He further stated:

Social-chauvinism is a direct continuation of and a logical conclusion from Millerandism, Bernsteinism, the English liberal Labour Party; it is their sum total, their consummation, their highest achievement.³

¹"Socialism and War", *op. cit.*, pp. 229-30.

²"The Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 205.

³"Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International", *op. cit.*, p. 389.