

Observations and Comments on War Chauvinism

Mother Earth

1914

The attitude of the Socialists of Europe in the present war would be a master stroke of the God of Hoax were the situation not so terribly tragic.

The Social Democrats of Germany have been solemnly assured by the Kaiser that Germany is merely *defending* itself against encroaching Czarism. Therefore the Socialist members of Parliament vote in favor of the war budget, give their wholehearted co-operation to the Kaiser's army, and support him in invading Luxemburg and Belgium.

The French Socialists join hands with "their" government to *defend* "their" republic against Prussian militarism supported by four millions of German Socialists. Guesde and Sembat enter the war ministry and make common cause with — the Czar, the enemy of German militarism,

The Socialists of England, indignant at the invasion of Belgium, come to the rescue of — the Czar.

The revolutionists of Russia, fearful of any harm that might come to the precious culture of Czarism from the Socialist defenders of Prussian militarism, become "enthusiastically united" with the government of the Romanoffs.

It is, then, Prussian militarism against the Russian Knout. In other words, the Socialist millions of Germany slaughtering their brother Socialists in France, England and Russia, for the benefit of — whom?

Such is the madness of war that tries to banish the devil by feeding the fires of hell.

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The American Socialists are quite confused as to what attitude to take toward the war. Of course, their prophet has said, "Workers of all countries, unite!" But, then, their practical models, the German Social Democrats, are supporting the Kaiser. Again, Marx said the workers have nothing to lose but their chains. Why, then, should they fear an invader or defend "their" country? Oh, but Marx evidently forgot that the Party might lose votes by taking an unpopular stand on a vital matter!

What's to be done? The spokesmen of American Socialism rush into print to cry with one voice: "Of course, we believe in internationalism and solidarity; but — if the Socialists of Europe are just now murdering each other for Kaiser or Czar, reserve your judgment, please. We are sure they will explain everything satisfactorily afterwards."

And the good party sheep say Amen.

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No less tragic is the undeniable fact that even some Anarchists, who might have been expected to remain loyal to internationalism, have also been infected by the virus of chauvinism. Some of them favor “defending the higher civilizations” against Prussian militarism. Others argue that it was “the right and duty” of Belgium to repel the foreign invader, and that they therefore sympathize with the Allies.

Both arguments are superficial and fallacious. Prussian militarism cannot be destroyed by the military power of other countries. Such a method must lead to national bitterness, thoughts of revenge, increased armaments and future wars. The German people themselves – no one else – can free Germany from the curse of militarism.

And as to a nation’s “duty to repel the invader” – as H.K. argues in the *Modern School* – it is an attitude that voices bourgeois conceptions of national boundary lines and slavish “honor.” The Belgium workers had nothing to lose by the Germans passing through “their” country. But they lost thousands of lives by trying to keep the German boots off the sacred precincts of their masters’ land. And if the “invader,” while passing through Belgium, had tried to provision his army, had the Belgian workers anything to lose by it? Why should they defend the property of their Belgian exploiters against the foreign expropriators? Indeed, the sight of the Germans expropriating the property of the Belgian bourgeoisie might have served the Belgian workers as an example worthy of emulation.

We have no sympathy whatever with the “libertarians” – be they Socialists, Anarchists or what not – whose philosophic internationalism somersaults into rankest chauvinism the moment it is put to the practical test.

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