

On the March

Ricardo Flores Magón

1917

Nothing is still in this moment of supreme commotion.

A breath of tragedy sweeps the world, and in its wake sprout the plants of discontent and protest, the natural fruits of injustice and tyranny.

The peoples, brutally awakened, get on their feet. What is the fatherland, they ask themselves, to deserve the sacrifice of tranquility and the lives of our children?

And in three years of war alone, in three years of chastisement, the peoples have learned more than in a hundred years of anarchist propaganda. The peoples are understanding that this fatherland that demands the sacrifice of the welfare and the blood of the proletarians, is wealth, is capital, is, in short, all the goods that a social caste, a privileged class holds in its power for its own exclusive benefit.

This truth is taking root in proletarian minds, and the cult of the fatherland loses followers among those who have no other patrimony than the creative force of their arms, at the same time channeling the current of ideas towards the healthy principle of the fraternization of peoples, a principle that will make war between the different nations of the world impossible.

The obstacle to the fraternization of peoples, the serious barrier which stands in the way of this human aspiration and prevents its achievement, is the principle of private property, the abundant source of discord which makes man the enemy of man and for the safeguarding of which the survival of the principle of authority is indispensable. It is, then, this obstacle that is logically called upon to disappear if the establishment of a permanent peace among all the peoples of the earth is desired.

The day of justice is approaching, nearer and nearer. The peoples are tired of a senseless war, and from one moment to another the great newspapers of the bourgeoisie will announce in horror that the disinherited are digging the grave in which the economic, political and social institutions that need war to perpetuate themselves must be buried forever.

Everything suggests that it will be the working class of the whole world who will create peace, who will impose it in spite of the obstinate resistance of the capitalist class. The peace conferences to be held in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, are the most patent manifestation of the fact that the masses of the people have lost faith in governments, and that they want to settle the relations of peoples among themselves. The governments, naturally, view these conferences with displeasure, because they understand that with them they lose their prestige as arbiters of human destinies and that if they are allowed to take place without protest, it is equivalent to

recognizing the proletariat as having the authority to direct international politics in a manner favorable to their interests as the producing class.

The governments of the belligerent countries have refused to provide passports for the delegates of the workers' parties appointed to take part in such conferences. Such a decision on the part of governments has created deep resentment among the proletariat, and opens wide the doors to rebellion.

The Stockholm conferences, although of a political character, would result in a further step towards the fraternization of the peoples, and the patriotic sentiment, already quite deteriorated by the eloquence of the facts, would end up dying in proletarian hearts, with grave danger for the bourgeoisie, since it would no longer find soldiers to defend its wealth under the name of the fatherland. The English Prime Minister, Lloyd George, says in this regard:

“Nothing would be more fatal than such conferences, when the necessary step to re-establish discipline should be to prevent the fraternization of the soldiers of both belligerent parties on the battle front.”

The bourgeoisie views with horror the fraternization of the human races. The bourgeoisie wants to keep alive the hatred between the races, in order to exploit patriotic sentiment to its advantage. This is very clear in the words of the English minister.

Hjalmar Branting, leader of the Scandinavian socialist committee which is arranging the conferences, says:

“The refusal of passports will produce a rupture between the governments and the socialist parties that have decided to have representatives at the Stockholm conferences. The refusal may bring consequences of great magnitude which cannot now be predicted.”

The consequences cannot be other than revolution, because the peoples, having lost hope of obtaining peace by peaceful means, will resort to violence. Between dying in the trenches in defense of the interests of the bourgeoisie, and dying as rebels in defense of their own interests, proletarians will opt for the latter.

Spain is a theater of violent scenes. Workers are battling with militiamen and police in various cities of the kingdom. Martial law is in force; the strike committee of Madrid has been interned in prison; in Barcelona and Sabadell the rebels have been attacked with artillery; the kinglet has taken refuge in Santander.

In England, the labor party confronts the government and appoints delegates to the Stockholm conferences, in defiance of government opposition. Canada, faced with the threat of a general strike, did not dare to enforce the compulsory military service law.

The French proletariat prepares the second act of the Commune; the revolutionary abortion of 1914 is a lesson that the Italian proletariat has taken advantage of to produce a formidable movement this time.

The Russian provisional government appeals to extreme measures to prolong for a few moments the life of the bourgeois system; General Korniloff forces his artillery on twenty-five thousand soldiers who refuse to fight for the interests of the bourgeoisie, and deprives them of their lives; Kerensky threatens that the revolutionaries will be treated with the same rigor that they

suffered under Tsarism, and in spite of the threats and executions, the soldiers refuse to fight for interests that are not their own; insurrections multiply within ranks of the army; the governor of Petrograd dies at the hands of the righteous; the dagger seeks Kerensky's heart, and the second chapter of the Russian Revolution is about to open.

Faced with the specter of revolution, the Pope shudders, and sends a note to the governments of the belligerent countries proposing peace, a peace that satisfies neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat, because he proposes that things remain in the same state as they were before the war was declared. The bourgeoisie would not be able to recover the billions of dollars spent in the war, and the proletariat would be subjected to the same slavery as before, aggravated by the imposition of new taxes, and always under the threat of a new war. The governments rejected the Pope's proposal.

Naturally, the Pope was not moved by pious sentiments in making the proposal. The men who burned Giordano Bruno alive; the accursed caste from which sprouted like poisonous mushrooms Alexander VI, Loyola, Torquemada, Pedro de Arbués, Domingo de Guzmán and so many other wrongdoers; the clerics, the priests of all religions, do not feel pity. What they want, what they aspire to is to dominate the world once again, and they see, with terror, that this domination is slipping from their hands before the light of science, and will disappear definitively when the revolution buries capital, government and religion, the three executioners of humanity, in the same grave.

The Pope sees more clearly than governments that the present war will result in the insurrection of the peoples against the institutions that make wars possible, and he trembles. Hence his proposal for peace. Here are the words of Archbishop Bonzano, apostolic delegate of the Pope to the United States:

"By the providence of God – says Bonzano – the Pope appears at the precise moment to save governments from a new danger that grows more menacing with every roar of the artillery at the front."

Neither the kings nor the presidents of the belligerent countries should deceive themselves. At each encounter of the millions of soldiers engaged in the struggle on the devastated fields of Flanders, the specter of danger stands out with greater precision, strengthened by all the passions that war exalts. Radicalism advances by leaps and bounds. The security of constitutional governments hangs by a thread.

"The Pope's note," Bonzano continues, "could be taken as a plea to governments to give their peoples a true democracy before it is too late, so that they are not forced to take by force or revolution what can hardly result from this war: a lasting and just peace."

The first sparks of revolution in the United States have occurred during the month just passed in the States of Oklahoma, North Carolina and Georgia, where more or less numerous groups of American citizens have armed themselves and taken to the fields to resist the draft law by force. The Oklahoma rebels have reconcentrated in Seminole, Hughes, Pontotoc, Okmulgee and Pottawatomie counties. The federal government, fearful that the revolution might take an upswing, has not dared to act against the rebels, and the governors of the states affected by the revolt have contented themselves with arresting harmless persons who happened to meet somewhere along the route taken by the revolutionaries.

The rebels have dynamited bridges, cut off telegraph and telephone communications, looted warehouses and forced all the men they meet in their path to follow them, thinking perhaps that

the indifferent may be armed by the government against them, and they anticipate doing what the government would do.

The slogan of the revolutionaries is this: The present war is waged for the benefit of the rich. Let us fight to the death here, rather than die in the European trenches.

But do not think that the Oklahoma uprising is caused solely by the draft law; misery is one of its mainsprings. Two secret agents in the pay of the federal government have been accepted as members of the revolutionary organization known as the Jones Family, which is one of the organizations that have taken up arms, and the agents have revealed that one of the reasons for the insurrection is the dissatisfaction of the tenant farmers who are forced to sacrifice themselves by working year after year to pay rent to their landlords and remain destitute.

The Oklahoma uprising included people of different races; Indians, Blacks and whites.

In Emory, Texas, eighteen persons were arrested on charges of conspiring to resist, by force, the military service law, and weapons were seized.

Discontent is widespread throughout the nation. It is not only the working class that is displeased and shows unmistakable signs of rebellion; so too does a good part of the bourgeoisie. Arrests are frequent, whether for strikes of an increasingly numerous and violent character; whether for evading the military service law or resolutely opposing it; whether for agitating against the militarization of the country; whether for conspiring to carry out an armed uprising or for preaching doctrines of salvation for the human species in general, but which are harmful to those who take advantage of a system founded on oppression, exploitation and pain.

Government tyranny has become so rampant that even deputies and senators are showing their discontent. The immoral and criminal origin of the present war is denounced before the Senate by Senator Vardaman, of the State of Mississippi. Says the senator:

“I think the cause of this war lies in the fact that Germany has placed obstacles in the way of trade between the businessmen of New York and London. I have always believed that this war was a mere business matter, and I still believe it to be so. If the German submarines had not placed obstacles in the way of exploitation, there would have been no declaration of war on the part of the United States.”

Senator La Follette, in his paper, summarizes the situation thus:

“At present, secret service men, federal prosecutors, marshalls, federal commissioners and other federal officials, are blatantly abusing their authority in every way. People are being illegally arrested; they are being locked up in jail; they are being denied the right to appoint counsel or to communicate with their friends and even their families are being denied any information as to the place of their arrest; people are being subjected to the humiliation of having their clothes searched; people are being threatened, intimidated, questioned and cross-examined and the most sacred rights guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution are being violated in the name of democracy.”

It seems to be the purpose of all those who have indulged in such manipulations to sow terror, to intimidate public opinion, to stifle all criticism, to suppress discussion of the events of the war, and to stifle all opposition. And to cap it all off, President Wilson, in his message of June fourteenth, issued this threat: “Woe be to the man or group of men who try to stand in our way...”

Professor Guy H. Broughton, professor of the chair of chemistry at the University of California, said before U.S. Commissioner Krull:

“There are laws so vicious, that chaos is the only way to get rid of them.”

John L. Donnelly, president of the Arizona State Federation of Labor, in speaking before the convention held lately at Clifton, Arizona, by the delegates of that labor organization, referring to the outrages and outrages of which the workers have been the victims of in these last few months, said:

“When you see the lawfully elected authorities trampling on the law and abusing authority in the manner that has been done in Bisbee, there is reason to fear the results.”

This is precipitating the revolution...

Enough of this talk. If the people of this nation cannot get absolute protection under the law, then we must do something to protect ourselves.

Dr. David Starr Jordan, honorary dignitary of Stanford University, referring to the prevailing tyranny, said the following at a public rally:

“The red flag of anarchy is manufactured when the people think, but cannot act.”

The old society cracks, weakened by its own crimes. Mends and patches, reinforcements and props are of no use to it. Its collapse is near. Only the deaf will be able to stop hearing the creaking of its old structure; only the blind will be able to stop seeing its wobbles announcing the approaching collapse. The forces of misery are on their feet and are moving towards a new form of social coexistence more in harmony with nature.

Cheer up everyone, we are at the threshold of a new era.

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