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War and the Worker

W. S. Van Valkenburgh

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The country person may be able to inform us why girls go wrong, but if there is any psychologist on the face of this planet who can explain why supposedly sensible men will suddenly cast all reason to the winds and make themselves suffer for the benefit of other people he has not yet risen, nor has his voice been heard.

Not much longer than a year ago great preparations were under way for an International Congress to be held at Vienna. A world meeting that expected to take up the question of international war and formulate a program that would make impossible in the future such carnage as now sweeps all Europe.

But a Roman Catholic politician of the Hapsburg breed was shot by a student. Popular histories of the United States tell us that the battle of Lexington was the "shot heard round the world." By such a criterion then, future historians must write of the shot in Serajevo that it was the explosion that tore the mask of hypocrisy from the face of 20th century barbarism.

Austria demanded an apology that was not forthcoming from Serbia. Her insistence aroused the slumbering Bear to the protection of his mischievous Cub. The movements of Russia menaced the peace of the Prussian Eagle which prompted the

Kaiser to snap the whip and Hell was let loose. All that followed is but an aftermath.

The German Socialists castrated themselves from the International. Then came a rapid succession the allegiance of “loyalty” to their various governments by the Socialists of all countries on Europe; Italy remaining sane until the last.

When Marx and Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto that “workingmen have no country,” they wrote a falsehood. Either that, or the position of the Socialist movement abroad is a sanctimonious mockery to the memory of its founders. There are no two ways about it. Wars are right and men should fight them valiantly, or they are wrong and no man should consciously pick up a gun to kill his brother.

But when the whole German movement and the movement of the other countries flocked to the aid of their masters they openly repudiated the teachings they had given the world for over half a century. Politicians took their seats in the capitalist councils where they could not have had a hearing previous to the war. But to the credit of those who so suddenly became a part of the State they had hitherto denounced it should be said that they only acted in keeping with their philosophy. They were opportunists; and the opportunity came.

There is also a measure of justification for the Socialists to take up the cudgels for their respective governments; because in the last analysis, the objective of the Socialist ideal is the erection of a great State within the shell of the old that they hope to destroy. To build and maintain that State demands that a military power must stand behind it. Therefore if the Socialist State — or any other conceivable State — would stand, it must be erected upon a foundation of physical force. All the world rests upon force to-day, so why all this silly prattle about International peace when it is a foregone conclusion that so long as nations exist the smaller must protect themselves from the greater?

aimed to abide by it. This has been demonstrated innumerable times.

Because of these reasons — and they are not the only reasons — those who do not approve of placing unlimited power in the hands of any person are Anarchists. Therefore, how futile it is for an Anarchist above all to take sides with any government. He not only discredits himself with his comrades but he places himself in a ridiculous position with those whose side he adheres to.

We, who yet hold to the original International program, have anything but a sanguinary battle before us. We must hew close to the line that differentiates between progress and reaction. We must continue with renewed efforts the teachings of those principles that between the exploiters and the exploited there can be no compromise. The philosophy of Anarchy does this, for it demands the total abolition of all national, race and religious lines between the masses, regardless of any man-made laws or boundaries.

The difference is that the Socialist can betray himself and his party while the Anarchist, tho he betrays himself, cannot drag his comrades after him.

It is not pleasant to have to admit that Nationalism is still deeply rooted in the breasts of the people; but this is true nevertheless. With all their sufferings at the hands of the robbers who rule, the people continue to love their enemies and hate their friends.

The Anarchists are the only consistent teachers of Cosmopolitanism, and the task of the future is clearly to break down the patriotic superstition that goads men to slaughter each other for glory and a tin medal.

It is quite another matter tho, when the fact — and we cannot deny that it is a fact — that Anarchists too have fallen victims to the propaganda of national cupidity, is considered. The Socialist may be forgiven for his consistency; but the Anarchist; never!

Gratitude for the ennobling lessons that he has given to the world; charity for the veneration of his age and a sort of subconscious realization of self-diminutiveness prevents my innermost opinions from expression regarding our old comrade in exile. Kropotkin's position on the war was a sad shock to many of his comrades.

That the author of *Mutual Aid* should so fall from grace is disappointing, to say the least. But that he who gave us in words that burn, "The Terror in Russia" could ever concur with Russia's friends and Allies is almost unbelievable. A short time before the war began I was discussing with a friend the wonderful insight of such men as Alfred Russell Wallace and Peter Kropotkin who in their ripe old age could still pour forth their wisdom unceasingly. My friend held that compared with their former works those of a latter period were inferior; that is to say, that after a certain age, varying in the individual, the mental activities begin to wane. I am not convinced. But it is the kindest rebuke that I can give to Kropotkin to grant that this true. He seems to have developed a magnified horror of Prussian militarism; a hallucination that for the time over-shadows Russian barbarism. Well; Kropotkin knows what that is, surely he has suffered enough because of it. In his relentless antagonism toward German Junkerism he seems to neglect only one thing which he very well knows, and that is: that all Europe can no more crush the spirit of German militarism from *without* than all civilization can crush the despotism of Russia from *without*; both will perish when the people *within* decide it and not before.

Kropotkin is not the only Anarchist that has taken sides in this war, but he is the most illustrious and his action carried much weight.

When men do such things, when they work and suffer for years and years without hope or desire for reward and then just when the critical test of their convictions is thrust upon them they openly repudiate, again for no reward, in substance all they formerly so firmly believed, is it not enough to make us wonder what the trouble is?

The Socialist, as before intimated, has an object for such action; and those in Europe who were fortunate enough to be in responsible positions within the party were very appropriately rewarded by their governments in proportion to the extent of their treason and the importance of the individual committing it. The few notable exceptions such as Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin only demonstrate that there is no room in the parliamentary movement for real revolutionists. The Anarchist has not even the chance of an official bribe, so what moots it to him what country is victorious? *All governments are the enemies of the working-class.*

And this theme brings me to a question that has long been a night-mare to me. Can any mortal under the sun be trusted? Many times has the experience come to all of us when those in whom we trusted and confided shattered our credulity while those in whom we would never have placed faith have proven true. Whether it is an innate or an acquired trait in human nature to be thus elusive I would not venture. The psychologists may answer if they can, but all the theorizing in the world cannot cover up the ugly fact that times without number ideals have been dragged in the mire by those who have suffered all but death for holding them aloft.

However, whether the contention that the human mind is so subject to the various influences and pitfalls that are carefully laid to entrap it is true or not, really doesn't matter. An Anarchist may hold either a negative or an affirmative view

and still be an Anarchist. What is of importance tho, is the fact that by the negation of all external authority the Anarchist position does not admit of the opportunity for that precarious test to be made; hence tho the individual might be inclined toward failure of principle when vested with power, if that power is not granted him he cannot use it. It follows then, that the Anarchist position is the logical solution for such abuses.

The career of the politician is a striking illustration of how deceitful human nature is.

A promising young reformer comes before the people imbued with certain ideas that will benefit the people. After an exciting campaign he is swept into office and the people rejoice. When he takes his seat among the other legislators great things are expected of him. But what happens? Invariably during the interval between election and the time of his taking office a great change comes over him. His entire psychology has been reconstructed. Together with the emotions due to his popular victory comes an association among people who are new to him. Various subtle influences gradually change his whole perspective of life and when the times comes for him to fight for those pre-election reforms he is found wanting. He has betrayed his constituency, and he must do this to attain success. Any other action on his part results in the steam-roller method of elimination. Certain exceptions may be taken, but they are so few in number as to be of little consequence.

In vain do the Socialists advance the theory of party control to thwart the inevitable apostasy of the individual official, They never have put this theme in operation successfully and they never can while politics remain politics. There are, among others, two very good reasons why the majority can never control the minority thru Socialist tactics. The first reason is that it is practically impossible for any appreciable number of persons to agree in thought and deed, the other reason is, that granting the possibility of such an agreement, there is no conceivable way of forcing the politician toward whom such action is