

# Unease in Europe

Leon Trotsky  
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*The WSWS is publishing new translations of Leon Trotsky's writings from February-March 1917. In many cases, these articles are now in English for the first time.*

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Europe is uneasy. A worrisome spring wind is blowing from the Russian East, and it brings with it the revolutionary cries of Petrograd and Moscow workers.

Two years ago, Hohenzollern and Habsburg would have met news about a revolutionary movement in Russia not without satisfaction. But now such news can only fill their hearts with anxious foreboding. For there is unease in Germany and terror in Austria. German submarines are rather successful in sinking "Allied" munitions, but they are powerless in obtaining even one extra piece of bread or glass of milk for German mothers. And the demonstrations of hungry women in Petrograd and Moscow might tomorrow awaken a response among mothers in Berlin and Leipzig.

"We must win," the conservative leader Count Westarp said recently in Dresden, "and we must receive indemnity: otherwise, after the war every German soldier will have to pay taxes to the state that are five times greater than he paid before the war."

The French Minister of Finance, Ribot, is of the same opinion as Westarp: we must conquer (Germany), and we must receive indemnity (from Germany)—otherwise the rulers will be in difficult straits with the people when the results begin to be tallied. But victory is now just as far away as it was on the first day of the war. Meanwhile France, with its population that has not been growing, has already lost one and a half million dead. And how many legless, armless, insane and blind

invalids... Terror grips the souls of "patriotic" windbags and political charlatans who are strangers to a feeling of responsibility, but know very well a sense of fear. The French parliament is seeking a way out. What to undertake? It intends to throw overboard Premier Briand, the father-protector of all financial and political scoundrels of the unhappy republic, in order to replace him with another figure of the same quality, but lesser stature.

England, too, is worried. Lloyd George showed great cunning when it came to sticking a knife into his boss, Asquith. Idlers and simpletons therefore expected that Lloyd George would crush the Germans in the shortest possible time; but this defrocked evangelical, who had become the head of the bandits of British imperialism, turned out to be incapable of performing miracles. The population of England, as in Germany, has become ever more convinced that the war has been driven into a blind alley. Agitation by opponents of the war is finding an ever greater response. The prisons are overflowing with socialists. The Irish are ever more insistently demanding the establishment of home rule from the government which answers with arrests of Irish revolutionaries.

The Italian government, which brought to the war a much greater appetite than an armed force, feels it is on no more solid ground than all the others. On the one hand, the Austro-German submarines are hindering shipments of coal that they need so badly. On the other hand, courageous Italian socialists with ever-growing success are conducting their agitation against the war. The rapidly approaching retirement of the Hungarian dictator Tisza is therefore unable to bring joy to the Italian premier Boselli: it only reminds him of his own fatal hour.

There is unease in the parliaments and governmental circles of warring Europe. Ministerial crises everywhere hang in the air, and if the fall of the tattered

leaders of “national” war is delayed for some reason, then it is only because there are slightly more “authoritative” parliamentary operators or adventurers who would be prepared to take upon themselves the burden of power under the present circumstances.

Meanwhile the war machine is working non-stop on both sides. All governments want peace and all fear it, for the day that peace negotiations begin will be the day of drawing a balance sheet. Lacking hope for victory, the rulers continue the war, lending an ever more destructive character to its methods. And yet it is becoming clear—even for bourgeois public opinion in the neutral countries—that only the intervention of a third force is capable of putting an end to the mutual slaughter of the European people. This third force can only be the revolutionary proletariat.

Fear when facing its inevitable emergence is the main force in the politics of governments, parliaments and parties. Both the ministerial crises and the shuffling of parliamentary parties are prompted in the final analysis by their fear of the masses they have deceived.

Under these conditions, the strikes and unrest in Petersburg and Moscow receive a political significance that goes far beyond the borders of Russia. This is the beginning of the end. Every decisive action taken by the Russian proletariat against the most worthless of the worthless European governments will serve as a mighty stimulus for the workers in all other countries. The crust of patriotic moods and military discipline has grown ever so thin over the 31 months of the war. One sharp jolt—and this crust will turn to dust. The rulers know this. For that reason there is such unease in Europe....

*Novy mir*, 15 March 1917.



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