Writings of Trotsky from 1917

Two Faces (Internal Forces of the Russian Revolution)

Leon Trotsky
18 March 2017

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.

This article was published in the Russian-language New York newspaper Novy mir *(New World) on March 17, 1917. It was published in Russian in Trotsky's 1923* Voina i Revoliutsiia *(War and Revolution), vol. 2, pp. 434-438. It appeared in English in* Trotsky Speaks. *Below is an original translation. (Translation: Fred Williams; Copyright: WSWS)*

Let us take a closer look at what is happening.

Nikolai has been overthrown and, according to some sources, is even under guard. The most prominent Black Hundreds have been arrested, and some of the most hated ones have been killed. A new ministry has been assembled of Octobrists, liberals and the radical Kerensky. A general amnesty has been declared.

These are all striking facts, major facts. These are the facts that are most visible to the outside world. On the basis of these changes in the highest levels of the government, the European and American bourgeoisie is evaluating the meaning of events and declaring that the revolution has been victorious and has come to an end.

The Tsar and his Black Hundreds fought only to retain power. The war, the imperialist plans of the Russian bourgeoisie, the interests of the "Allies"—all this receded for them into the background. They were prepared at any moment to conclude a peace with Hohenzollern and Habsburg in order to free up their most reliable regiments and direct them against their own people.

The Progressive Bloc in the Duma did not trust the Tsar and his ministers. This bloc was made up of various parties of the Russian bourgeoisie. It had two goals: first, to continue the war to the end, until victory; second, internal reform in the country: more order, control, accountability. The Russian bourgeoisie needs victory to conquer markets, to obtain territory, to get rich. The Russian bourgeoisie needs reforms mainly to enable victory.

But the progressive-imperialist bloc wanted peaceful reforms. The liberals intended to put Duma pressure on the monarchy and to hold it in check with the cooperation of the British and French governments. They did not want a revolution. They knew that a revolution which would place the working class at the forefront signified a threat to their domination and most of all a threat to their imperialist plans. The laboring masses—in the cities, in the villages and in the army itself—want peace. The liberals know this. Therefore, they have always been enemies of the revolution. A few months ago Miliukov declared in the Duma: "If a revolution were needed for victory, then I would be against victory."

But the liberals have now come to power thanks to the revolution. The bourgeois journalists see nothing but this fact. As the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miliukov has already declared that the revolution had been conducted in the name of conquering the foreign enemy and that the new government has taken upon itself the task of conducting the war to the very end. The New York ammunition exchange took stock of the Russian revolution in precisely this way: the liberals are in power—that means more shells will be needed.

On the Stock Exchange there are many clever people, and there are clever ones, too, among the newspapermen. But they all reveal their complete stupidity as soon as it comes to mass movements. It seems to them that Miliukov is managing the revolution, just as they manage their banks or newspaper offices. They see only the liberal governmental reflection of unfolding events, foam on the surface of the historical flood.

The long-restrained discontent of the masses has burst onto the surface so late, in the thirty-second month of the war, not because the masses confronted a police dam that had been greatly weakened during the course of the war, but because all the liberal institutions and bodies, ending with their social-patriotic henchmen, applied enormous political pressure on the least conscious layers of the working class, trying to instill in them the need for "patriotic" discipline and order. At the last moment, when starving women went into the streets and workers prepared to support them with a general strike, the liberal bourgeoisie, according to recent telegrams, tried to hold back the development of events through appeals and exhortations, just as one of Dickens' heroines wanted to hold back the rising tide of the sea with a broom.

But the movement grew from below, from the workers' quarters. After hours and days of indecision, exchange of gunfire, and skirmishes, the troops joined the insurgents from below, starting with the best units of the army masses. The old regime proved to be exhausted, paralyzed, annihilated. The Black Hundred bureaucrats hid themselves, like cockroaches, in their corners.

Then came the Duma's turn. At the last minute, the tsar had tried

© World Socialist Web Site

to dissolve it. And it would have submissively disbanded, "following the example of past years," if it had been given the chance to do so. But in the capitals, the revolutionary people already reigned, the very same people who, against the will of the liberal bourgeoisie, had gone out into the streets to fight. The army was with the people. And if the bourgeoisie had not attempted to organize its own regime, a revolutionary government would have emerged from the insurgent working class masses. The Duma of June Third never would have dared to seize power from the hands of tsarism. But it could not fail to use the interregnum that had been created: the monarchy had temporarily disappeared from the face of the earth, but a revolutionary regime had still not formed.

It is very likely, even doubtless, that the Rodziankos, even in this situation, would have tried to steal away. But the ever-watchful eyes of the British and French embassies were monitoring them. The "Allies" undoubtedly participated in creating the Provisional Government. Standing between a separate peace coming from Nikolai, and a revolutionary peace coming from the working masses, the Allied governments considered that the lone salvation lay in a transfer of power into the hands of the progressive-imperialist bloc. The Russian bourgeoisie is now financially very tightly dependent on London, and the "advice" of the British envoy sounded like a command for them. Despite all their previous history, despite their own policies, despite their own will, the liberal bourgeois found themselves in power.

Miliukov now speaks about continuing the war "to the end." These words did not easily pass his lips: he knows that they must arouse the indignation of the popular masses against the new regime. But Miliukov was obliged to say these words for the London, for the Paris, and for … the American stock exchanges. It is highly likely that Miliukov telegraphed his bellicose declaration to foreign nations, while concealing it from his own country. For Miliukov knows very well that he will not be able, under the present conditions, to wage war, crush Germany, dismember Austria, and seize both Constantinople and Poland.

The masses have rebelled with demands for bread and peace. The appearance in power of a few liberals has neither fed the starving nor healed anyone's wounds. In order to satisfy the most acute and the most unpostponable needs of the people, peace is required. But the liberal-imperialist bloc dares not even mention peace. First of all, because of the Allies. Secondly, because the Russian liberal bourgeoisie bears an enormous share of the responsibility for the war in the eyes of the people. The Miliukovs and Guchkovs, along with the Romanov camarilla, plunged the country into this horrific imperialist adventure. Stopping this miserable war, and returning to where they began, means that they must make an accounting to the people. The Miliukovs and Guchkovs fear the liquidation of the war no less than they feared the revolution.

This is how they are as they stand in power: They must conduct the war, yet they cannot count on victory; they fear the people, and the people do not trust them.

"… From the very beginning ready to betray the people and compromise with the crowned representatives of the old society, for they themselves belong to the old society; … not at the helm of the revolution because the people stood behind them, but because the people pushed them forward; … without faith in themselves, without faith in the people, grumbling against those above, trembling before those below; selfish on both fronts, and conscious of their selfishness; revolutionary toward conservatives and conservative toward revolutionaries; not trusting their own slogans, using phrases instead of ideas; frightened by the world maelstrom and exploiting it at the same time,—… banal, for they are devoid of originality, original only in their banality,—profiteering with their own desires; without initiative, without faith in themselves, without faith in the people, without a world historical mission,—they are like a cursed old man who has been doomed to lead and abuse in his senile interests the first youthful movements of a powerful people,—without eyes, without ears, without teeth, without everything—that is how the Prussian bourgeoisie stood at the helm of the Prussian state after the March revolution" (Karl Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Revolution," [1848]).

These words of the great master contain a perfect portrait of the Russian liberal bourgeoisie as it stands before us at the helm of power after *our* March revolution. "Without faith in itself, without faith in the people, without eyes, without teeth"—that is its political face.

Fortunately for Russia and Europe, the Russian revolution has another genuine face: telegrams announce that in opposition to the provisional Government there is a workers' committee which has already raised a voice of protest against the liberal attempt to rob the revolution and betray the people to the monarchy.

If the revolution were to stop today, as liberalism demands, on the very next day the tsarist-aristocratic-bureaucratic reaction would gather its forces and drive the Guchkovs and Miliukovs from their insecure ministerial trenches, just as the Prussian counterrevolution in its day tossed out all the representatives of Prussian liberalism. But the Russian Revolution is not stopping. And in its further development, it will sweep away the bourgeois liberals who are blocking its path, just as it is now sweeping away the tsarist reaction.

Novy mir, 17 March 1917

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site