

Writings of Trotsky from 1917

The Growing Conflict

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.

This article was published in the Russian-language New York newspaper Novy mir (New World) on March 19, 1917. It was published in Russian in Trotsky's 1923 Voina i Revoliutsiiia (War and Revolution), vol. 2, pp. 438-440. It appeared in English in Trotsky Speaks. Below is an original translation.

An open conflict between the forces of the revolution, headed by the urban proletariat, and the anti-revolutionary liberal bourgeoisie, temporarily in power, is absolutely inevitable. It is possible, of course—and this will be fervently done by the liberal bourgeois and the quasi-socialists of the narrow-minded type—to gather many pathetic words about the great advantage of national unity over class divisions. But no one has ever yet managed to remove social contradictions with such incantations, or to stop the natural development of revolutionary struggle.

We know of the inner history of the unfolding events only through fragments and hints that have slipped out in official telegrams. Nevertheless, one can even now note two points where the revolutionary proletariat and the liberal bourgeoisie will increasingly come into opposition to one another.

The question of the form of state has already provoked the first conflict. Russian liberalism needs a monarchy. In all countries carrying out imperialist policies, we see the extraordinary growth of personal power. The British king, the French president, and more recently the president of the United States have concentrated in their hands an enormous share of state power. The politics of worldwide seizures, secret treaties, and open betrayals demands independence

from parliamentary control and guarantees against changes in course which would be prompted by the frequent replacement of ministers. On the other hand, the monarchy is creating the most reliable support for the propertied classes in the struggle against the revolutionary moods of the proletariat.

In Russia, both of these causes act with greater force than anywhere else. The Russian bourgeoisie does not feel that it is possible to refuse the people universal suffrage, understanding that such a refusal would immediately arouse the widest layers of the masses against the Provisional Government and would rapidly give prevalence in the revolutionary movement to the new, most decisive wing of the proletariat. Even the monarch in reserve, Mikhail Aleksandrovich, understands that it would be impossible to approach the throne in any other way than "universal, equal, direct and secret electoral rights." It is all the more important for the bourgeoisie to create in good time a monarchist counter-weight to the profound social and revolutionary demands of the toiling masses. Formally, in words, the bourgeoisie agrees to leave the resolution of this question to the future Constituent Assembly. But essentially, the Octobrist-Cadet Provisional Government[1] and the Octobrist-Cadet ministry supplementing it will transform all the preparatory work of convening a Constituent Assembly into a struggle for the monarchy against a republic. The resolution of the Constituent Assembly will to a large extent depend on who convenes it, and how. Consequently, even now, immediately, the revolutionary proletariat will have to set up its own revolutionary bodies, the Councils (Soviets) of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies in opposition to the executive bodies of the Provisional Government. In this struggle, the proletariat must have

as its direct goal the conquest of power, by uniting around itself the insurgent popular masses. Only a revolutionary workers' government will possess the will and ability during the preparation of a Constituent Assembly to carry out a radical democratic cleansing in the country, to reconstruct the army from top to bottom, to turn it into a revolutionary militia, and to prove in deed to the peasant lower masses that their salvation lies only in supporting the revolutionary workers' regime. A Constituent Assembly convened on the basis of this kind of preparatory work will truly reflect the revolutionary, creative forces in the land and will itself become a mighty weapon in the revolution's further development.

The second question, which must irreconcilably place the internationalist-socialist proletariat in opposition to the liberal-imperialist bourgeoisie, is the attitude toward war and peace.

Novy mir, 19 March 1917.

[1] This refers to the Duma Committee, headed by Rodzianko, and to the government of Guchkov-Miliukov; each name is based on the first, extremely confused American telegrams from Petrograd.



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