Writings of Trotsky from 1917

War and the Revolution

Leon Trotsky
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The United States is entering the war at a moment when the war has already managed to provoke a revolution in Eastern Europe. This coincidence is very noteworthy and, one might think, not accidental. The Russian revolution is lending events a new force which causes great concern in the hearts of the ruling classes. Today Russia is headed by the Octobrist-Cadet government, which triumphantly pledges in its manifesto to fulfill all the financial and international political obligations of tsarism, that is, to pay interest in a timely manner to the French, British and American stock exchanges and, in solidarity with them, to wage war to "a victorious end." In itself, such a pledge is very comforting, but who can vouch for what happens tomorrow? If the ministry of Guchkov-Miliukov is swept away, and in its place a government of the revolution appears, this will mean the liquidation of the war and the revolutionary liquidation of the debts of the old regime. Such an occurrence would be very inauspicious for the intervention of the United States in the war. They have to hurry. They must reduce the time needed for the preparatory education of the people for war, all the more so because, as the colossal meetings in New York have shown, the re-education of the masses under the influence of the great events in Russia has begun—and in the opposite direction. They must strike while the iron is hot.

The capitalist classes of the United States cannot stop. The war industry and its foster brother, finance capital, exert pressure on the will of the rulers, while fear of the extreme crisis pushes them from below—into the abyss of war. Despite the example of Russia, where the link between the war and revolution is so clear; despite the fact that all the European governments have entered a period of feverish alarm; despite the fact that the American bourgeois press is now accustoming its readers to the idea of the inevitability of revolution in Europe—the "pacifist" government of the United States is compelled to fulfill its predestined task: to draw the last great power into the bloody school of war. This fact shows us the degree to which the bourgeoisie has lost the possibility and capability of controlling events and peoples. The unbridled forces of capitalism act with automatic ruthlessness. Only the revolutionary proletariat can harness them. American capital is drawing the nation into war. The American proletariat will find the way out of war on the path to socialist revolution.

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