

THE TIMELINESS OF THE SLOGAN, THE
UNITED STATES OF EUROPE

By LEON TROTSKY

(Translator's Note: Comrade Trotsky's article, The Timeliness of the Slogan, the United States of Europe, was first printed in Pravda on June 30, 1923 as his contribution to the international discussion on the slogan, "workers and peasants governments" put forward by the enlarged plenum of the R. C. C. I. which met on June 18-20, 1923 following the fourth and last Leninist Congress. The article was reprinted in Trotsky's Five Years of the Communist of the Communist International, and also in Vol. XII of his Wozna, ^(with an Russian text) where it forms the first article of the section entitled Concrete Problems of the Proletarian Revolution. This is the first time it has been translated into English.

--F. Forest)

I think that, along with the slogan "the government of workers and peasants", it is timely to bring forward the slogan, "the United States of Europe". Only in the union of these two slogans can we acquire a certain perspective, an etape in our approach to the more burning questions of European development.

The last imperialist war was basically a European war. The episodic participation of America and Japan did not alter its real character. Having got what it wanted, America pulled its hand out from the European conflagration and returned home.

The capitalist productive forces which had outgrown the frame of European national states were the motivating forces of the war. Germany had set itself the task "to organize Europe", i.e. of an economic unity of the European continent under its leadership in order afterwards genuinely to begin the struggle against England for world domination. France posed as its task the smashing up of Germany. The numerically small population of France, its overwhelmingly agrarian character, the conservatism of its economic forms make even the posing of the problem --the organization of Europe--out of reach of the French bourgeoisie. The solution of this task has proved a bigger bite than German capitalism could chew, armed as it was by the military machine of the Hohenzollerns. Victorious France now sustains its domination by a Balkanization of Europe. Great Britain instigates and protects the French policy of dismembering and draining the strength of Europe, concealing its role with traditional hypocrisy. As a result, our hapless continent is cut up, dismembered, exhausted, disorganized, Balkanized, transformed into an insane asylum. The Ruhr occupation is a manifestation of violent interference combined with a shrewd scheme (the definitive dismemberment of Germany) --a combination more than once observed by psychiatry.

Just as the need of the productive forces for a broad arena of development, cleared customs barriers, lay at the basis of the war, so the occupation of the Ruhr, so disastrous for Europe and for humanity, is the distorted expression of the need for combined development of coal from the Ruhr and iron from Lorraine. Europe cannot develop its economy within the state-customs limitations which have been forced upon it by Versailles. It must remove these restrictions, otherwise it is threatened with complete economic decline. But the methods which the ruling bourgeoisie adopts for eradicating the limitations which it has created only in-

crease the chaos and hasten the fall.

The incapacity of the bourgeoisie to resolve the basic questions of the economic restoration of Europe is revealed all the more clearly to the toiling masses. The slogan of "a workers' and peasants' government" meets only halfway this growing desire of the toilers to find a way out through their own forces. It is now necessary more concretely to point the way out: this is the close economic cooperation of the nations of Europe as the only means of saving our continent from economic decay and enslavement to powerful American capital.

America has gone away from Europe, calmly awaiting the day when the agony of European economy will reach that stage when it will be possible to buy Europe --like Austria*-- for cheap money. But France cannot leave Germany nor Germany leave France. And Germany and France comprise the basic nucleus of Western Europe. Here is the beginning and end of the European problem. All the rest is only supplementary. That the Balkan states are incapable of living and developing outside of the federation we have recognized long before the imperialist war. The same thing applies to the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the western parts of the Tsarist Empire which have remained outside of the Soviet Union. The Apennines, Pyrenees and Scandinavia are organs of the European body which have been pushed into the ocean. They cannot exist independently. The continent of Europe at the given level of its productive forces is an economic

*The reference is to the Geneva agreement whereby the League loaned Austria 745 million gold kron., of which, however, she actually got only 585 million since England, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia took 27%. Austria was, in addition, deprived of its independence and put under a League protectorate.--Tr.

unit, not entirely insulated of course, but internally highly interdependent, as is revealed in the terrible catastrophe of imperialist war and once more in the mad attack on the Ruhr. Europe is not a geographical but an economic term, a term incomparably more concrete than the world market, especially in the present, post-war conditions. If, in relation to the Balkan peninsula, we have long recognized the necessity of federation, then it is now time to pose this task clearly and precisely in relation to the Balkanization of Europe.

There remains the question of the Soviet Union on the one hand and Great Britain on the other. It is self evident that the Soviet Union will not oppose a federative union of Europe with Europe. By that token there is guaranteed a stable bridge between Europe and Asia.

The question about Great Britain is decided more conditionally, depending upon the tempo of its revolutionary development. If the "government of the workers and peasants" is victorious on the continent of Europe, up to the overthrow of English imperialism, which is entirely probable, then the European federation of workers and peasants will by that token be directed against British capital. It is understood that from the moment of the overthrow of the latter the British isles will become a welcome member of the European federation.

It may be asked: why a European and not a world federation? Such a posing of the question is extremely abstract. Of course, world economic and political development gravitates toward a single world economy, with a degree of centralization in direct correspondence to the technological level. But the problem is not one of a future socialist economy of the world, but to find a way out of the present blind alley of Europe. It is necessary to show the workers and peasants of tortured and ravaged Europe a way out -- independent of the tempo of the revolution in America, Australia, Asia or Africa. From this point of view the

slogan for the United States of Europe stands on that historical place as the slogan for a workers and peasants government: it is a transitional slogan, pointing the way out, opening up a perspective of rescue and at the same time thrusting the toiling masses on the revolutionary path.

It would be an error of course to fit the entire revolutionary development into one pattern. America came out of the war, not weakened but strengthened. The internal stability of the American bourgeoisie is still very great. It has reduced its dependence upon the world market to a minimum. The revolution in America --if we are to abstract ourselves from Europe--is thus in the distant decades. Does this mean that the revolution in Europe must be equated to that in America? Of course not. If backward Russia did not (indeed could not) await the revolution of Europe, all the more reason why Europe will not and cannot await the revolution in America. Worker-peasant Europe, blockaded in the first instance by capitalist America and perhaps by Great Britain as well, can survive and develop only on the basis of a close military and economic union.

We must not close our eyes to the danger of the United States preserving a ruined Europe and preparing at the same time to usurp its possessions, which makes especially urgent a "United States of European Workers and Peasants" out of the nations now bent on running each other. This counterposition naturally flows from differences in the objective conditions of European countries and the powerful republic on the other side of the Atlantic. Naturally, it is in no degree directed against the international solidarity of the proletariat or against the interests of the American proletariat. On the contrary, One of the causes of the retarded development of the revolution in all the world is the gross European faith in "Uncle Sam" (Wilsonism, philanthropic feeding of the starved areas of Europe, American

"loans", etc. etc.). The quicker the national masses of Europe regain confidence in their own forces, shattered by the war, the firmer will they unite under the slogan of the union of worker-peasant republics of Europe, the faster will be the development of the revolution both here and on the other side of the ocean. Just as the victory of the proletariat in Russia gave a powerful push to the development of Communist Parties in Europe, the victory of the European revolution, to the same and even to an incomparably greater degree, will give impetus to the revolution in America, and the whole world. If, abstracting ourselves from Europe, we were compelled above to look at the American revolution through a mist of decades, so, standing on the ground of a more natural sequence of historical events, we can say with confidence that the victory of the revolution in Europe will, in the course of several years, shake the might of the American bourgeoisie.

Not only the question of the Ruhr, i.e. of heat metal for Europe, but the question of reparation as a whole is included in the scheme of "United States of Europe". The question of reparations is purely a European question and in the coming period it can and will be resolved only by European means. The Europe of workers and peasants will have its reparation budget as it will have its military budget so long as external dangers threaten it. This budget will be made up of appropriately graduated taxes, taxes on capital, confiscation of war profits, etc. Its distribution will be regulated by appropriate organs of the European-worker-peasant federation.

We will not stop to concern ourselves with forecast of the tempo of the union of European republics, what economic and constitutional forms it will take, or what degree of centralization the European economy will reach in the first period of the worker-peasant regime. This can be calmly left to the future, taking into consideration the experience of the Soviet Union which has already been formed on the ground of the old Tsarist Russia. But it is entirely clear that customs barriers

will have to be obliterated. European nations must look on Europe as an arena of a united and ever more planned economy.

It may, perhaps, be objected that we are actually speaking about a European socialist federation as the initial stage of a future world federation and that this regime can be realized only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. We will not, however, stop to consider this argument since it has already been subjected to a considerable international examination in the discussion of the question of a "workers government". The "United States of Europe" represents the type of slogan that is in every respect like the slogan of "worker (or worker-peasant) government". Is the worker-peasant government realizable outside of the dictatorship of the proletariat? There can be only conditional answers. In any case, we consider the "workers government" as a stage to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this precisely lies the tremendous value of the slogan. But it has an entirely similar, completely parallel significance in the slogan "United States of Europe". Without this complementary slogan the basic European problems are suspended in mid-air.

Does not this slogan play into the hands of the pacifists? I do not think that "leftists" really exist who consider this danger a sufficient basis for the rejection of the slogan. We live in the year 1923 and have learned a little. To fear that the slogan "United States of Europe" may be interpreted as pacifism on such a basis or rather absence of basis is to fear the interpretation of the slogan "worker-peasant government" as a democratic Social-Revolutionary proposal. Of course, if we to put forward the slogan, "United States of Europe," as an independent program as a panacea for pacification and rehabilitation, divorcing this slogan from that of a workers' government, from the united front, from the class struggle, then it is simple t

slip down to democratized Wilsonism, i.e. Kautskyism, and lower (if in reality, there is something lower than Kautskyism). We must repeat, however, that we live in the year 1923 and have learned something. The Communist International now represents a reality. Kautsky will not be the one to achieve and control the struggle for our slogans. The manner in which we pose the question is directly opposite to that of Kautskyism. Pacifism is an academic program, having as its task, to obviate the necessity of revolutionary action. On the contrary, our posing of the question impels us toward the path of struggle. And to the workers of Germany (not the Communists -- them we do not have to convince); and to workers in general, particularly the Social-Democratic workers who fear the economic consequences of the struggle for a workers government; and to the workers of France whose thought is still shackled to the question of reparations, and state debt; and to those workers of Germany, France and all of Europe who fear that the establishment of a workers' regime will lead to isolation of their countries and to economic decline -- to them we say: even a Europe temporarily isolated (and it will not be easy to isolate Europe in the face of the existence of the Soviet Union, its great bridge of the East) will not merely survive but will rise and become strong, abolishing the internal customs barriers and uniting its economy with the boundless natural wealth of Russia.

The "United States of Europe" is a purely revolutionary perspective, the most immediate aspect of our general revolutionary perspective, arising clearly from a profound understanding of the conditions of Europe and America. He who ignores this basic characteristic of the contemporary period, he unwittingly smothers the real revolutionary perspective in historical abstractions. Of course, a worker-peasant

Federation will not be confined to the European stage. Through our Soviet Union it will, as we said, open the road to Asia. Likewise it will open for Asia a way out to Europe. Thus the time is not an ordinary stage, but ~~the~~ most important historical stage, and it is necessary for us to charge and achieve it immediately.

Translated by F. Forest

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