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The Balkan War

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Though we can't yet evaluate the historical consequences of the slaughter, as it draws to a close we can at least examine it somewhat objectively from the socialist standpoint.

It is said that the Balkan peoples are fighting for the cause of civilisation, liberty and the independence of peoples; it is accepted as indisputable dogma that the disappearance of Turkey from the map of Europe will be a sound basis for eastern economic and social development, and so must be welcomed by socialists. Before an astonished Europe, the fine gesture of the four statelets took on the historic physiognomy of a crusade and a revolution at the same time. It enraptured Christians and republicans, nationalists and socialists, who vied in applauding the war.

But the rivers of blood and fire which welled up from countries devastated by one of the most murderous wars on record, while exhilarating for the nationalists and the theoreticians of massacre only make us curse, and serves us as warning for the future.

Here the historical problem is set before us in all its gravity: What stance must the socialists take on so-called “wars of independence”, which aspire to the liberation of an oppressed nationality from the foreign yoke?

Some would say: as history teaches us that national freedom is a pre-condition for the development of the capitalist bourgeoisie, and for the consequent class struggle which leads to socialism, socialists must look favourably on wars for independence.

We will discuss this conclusion, which is almost a sophism, with the very modest aim of unsettling the foundations of a too commonly-accepted prejudice.

First of all, the premise that the bourgeoisie needs “national freedom” for its development is not exact. The bourgeoisie only needs to take the State away from the feudal oligarchies and install a democratic political regime. The collaboration of the masses being necessary for this, the bourgeoisie tries to make this struggle popular by giving it, in cases where the aristocracies belong to a non-indigenous nation or race, a patriotic content.

So for example in Italy and Germany where, as an extra-national question, the conquest of power by the bourgeoisie was resolved with the wars of '59 and '66. In France on the other hand, the struggle between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie had a revolutionary character, and a fundamental physiognomy of civil war. Be it understood that these examples have a relative value, since historical facts are not so

neatly classified or catalogued.

Moreover, as the concepts of race and nationality are so elastic historically and geographically, they're always well adapted to the interests of oligarchic capitalist groups, according to the needs of their economic development. Only after the event can sycophantic history reconstruct fantastic, sentimental motives, and create the patriotic and national tradition, **which serves the shrewd bourgeoisie so well as an antidote to the class struggle.**

But the Party which represents the working class has to look a bit closer. We see irredentism as no more than a cunning reactionary ploy. Even from the viewpoint – we'll now re-examine it – which says the bourgeoisie needs to pursue its development, etc., irredentism is not justified. Nice and Trieste are more industrialised than much of Italy.

We're not making a comparison here with the Balkan regions. We accept as a fact that Bulgaria, Serbia, etc. are more civilised than Turkey. On that basis, is there perhaps some kind of right to armed conquest of territory subject to the less-civilised state?

We're not raising the question of whether the war is just or unjust in such a case; history isn't justified, it's just observed. We're merely discussing the position a revolutionary class party has to take in these conflicts.

Does the party have to support the war, in order to accelerate the development of the bourgeoisie in a country that is still feudal?

Our answer is no, and we applaud the heroic attitude of those Serb and Bulgarian comrades who opposed the war.

In fact, this is the first reason: the war could possibly be favourable to the more advanced people, but the inverse is also possible, with opposite results; even according to the theory of warmongering socialists (?) of the Bissolati type. This uncertainty alone would suffice to turn every true friend of progress against the armed conflict. Provided, that is, they don't still believe in God. But democracy, given time and... venality, even sinks that low.

On the other hand, even if the solution of the conflict were to be such as to give greater freedom to the peoples of the conquered territory, nothing proves that a better position would be obtained for the development of socialism. This is why:

1. The increased prestige of the dynastic, military and sometimes priestly oligarchies (in the nations that waged war).
2. The intensification of nationalism and patriotism, which delays the organisation of the proletariat into an internationalist class party.
3. In the defeated country, the intensification of racial hatreds, and of the desire for revenge against the race that was once dominant and is now oppressed, assuming it hasn't been totally destroyed.
4. The very grave fact of the degeneration of the races after healthy men have been decimated by war, the depopulation caused by massacres, sickness, hunger, etc., and the immense destruction of wealth, with the consequent economic crisis, and the impossibility of developing industry and agriculture through lack of capital and labour.

Therefore the idea that war accelerates the coming of socialist revolution is a vulgar prejudice. Socialism must oppose all wars, avoiding captious distinctions between wars of conquest and wars of independence.

There remains a sentimental objection to remove: But then you want to prolong the present state of affairs, and the Turkish oppression of the Christians? But that's the socialism of reactionaries!

In general, one mustn't discuss history on the basis of sentimental prejudices. Nevertheless, we'll counter these with some considerations. Evils are remedied by removing their causes. Now, it's an exaggeration to say that the cause of the Balkan disorder is Turkish rule. There are many other causes. The ambition of the foremost of the vile old states, which have always stirred the fires of racial hatred. The intervention of **civilised** Europe, which has spewed friars, priests and unscrupulous profiteers down there, causing the Muslim reaction. But the cause is race **hatred**, which can't be eliminated by means of wars. Just as the Bulgarians and Greeks have hushed up their ferocious mutual loathing, so they were able to attempt a general Balkan agreement. Can it be asserted that the Turkish oligarchy was more opposed to this agreement than the ambitious oligarchies of the four little states?

Anyway our assertion, based on socialist principles, is this: socialists have to oppose this war. If it had been strong enough to avoid the war, the International would also have the strength to resolve the Balkan question without massacres.

In declaring ourselves against wars of independence, we don't mean to defend racial oppression.

Marx said that being opposed to the constitutional regime was not the same as supporting absolutism.

And we can accept the formula – which seems to make up half all the vast diplomatic lucubrations we've read in a month – **the Balkans for the Balkan peoples**. But, we ask, to which people? To those who emerge from the mutual slaughter, to the orphans, the cripples, and the victims of cholera! This time, the statistics show clearly what effects war has! The losses are such that it isn't hyperbole to assert that the race will be drained of blood and sterilised for a long time to come!

The fields of devastation will remain to four gratified petty tyrants.

If tomorrow in Santa Sofia the czar, in eighteenth-century style, puts on the bloody crown of the Byzantine Empire, we hope there won't be any socialists among those who rummage among the historical trash of a clownish history and literature, seeking a few lines for the hymn to the victor!

In the name of a greater civilisation, we curse those who for the sake of their ambitious dreams, brought about the massacre of so many young lives!

No matter how brutal the crime, you'll always get glorification of its heroism and tradition from the eunuchs of bourgeois culture!