

the Bolsheviks were generally looked upon by others in the Second or Socialist International as overly argumentative and sectarian because of their disputes with the Mensheviks and other reformist socialists.

August 4, 1914

But what happened on August 4, 1914, proved something very different. The events of that day showed that the Bolsheviks—and only the Bolsheviks out of all the organized parties in the millions-strong Second International—were truly revolutionary Marxists. There were other individuals who took a revolutionary position at that time—like Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Liebnicht and others—but none of the other organizations within the Second International. What happened that day that was so earthshaking? On August 4, 1914, the German SDP voted for war credits, the military budget, in the German parliament and by doing so voted for war. This was the beginning of the first imperialist world war, known as World War I, and all of the other socialist parties that had representatives in the parliaments of countries that were going to war did the same—with one exception, the Bolsheviks in Russia.

Was the war a surprise? Were all these parties caught off guard? Not at all. As early as 1892, 22 years earlier, Frederick Engels had written in a remarkably prophetic passage: "If it comes to war nonetheless, just one thing is certain—this war in which fifteen or twenty million men will slaughter one another, and all Europe will be laid to waste as never before—this war must bring the immediate victory of socialism, or it must upset the old order of things from head to foot." Since that time, war between the capitalist powers had been the subject of much discussion, and many international conferences of socialists. Just two years before the war came, a socialist conference in Switzerland had issued the Basle Manifesto, stating that in the event of war, all socialist parties had the duty to fight against the sending of the workers off to slaughter each other for the benefit of their respective capitalists, and that socialists would work not only to oppose the war, but to utilize it to bring about the overthrow of capitalism and the triumph of socialism.

Why was it so clear—not only to socialists but also to pacifists and liberals—that war was coming?

[Have someone read from Somicurcio educational, which follows:]

Capitalist historians describe the decades before World War I, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a time of peaceful industrial progress. And it was a time of relative peace between the advanced capitalist countries. But it was a time of almost uninterrupted war by the European powers, the United States and Japan against the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific.

Between 1874 and 1914, British troops subjugated Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Sierra Leone, Bechuanaland, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, northern Somalia, the Sudan, Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Burma, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar, Zambia, Nyasaland, Swaziland and Tonga and added them to its already vast colonial empire. France invaded Algeria, Madagascar, Niger, Mali, Chad, Mauritania, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Morocco and part of the Congo, and finished its conquest of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Belgium seized most of the Congo, and Germany grabbed Tanganyika, Dahomey, Cameroon and Namibia. Italy seized Libya and southern Somalia and attacked Ethiopia. Japan attacked China and annexed Korea and Okinawa, while Tsarist Russia conquered the Uzbek, Turkmen and Tazhik peoples. Between 1893 and 1901, the U.S. annexed Hawaii, Guam and Samoa, seized Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines from Spain, and sent marines into several countries in Central America. In 1908, Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. And all the Western powers and Japan ganged up on China, forcing it to sign one unequal treaty after another. By 1914, 84 percent of the earth's land area was under European or United States rule.

These annexations and conquests were accompanied by genocidal oppression. Between 1898 and 1904, the U.S. Army murdered 1 million people in the Philippines in order to crush the independence movement there. Across Africa, millions of peasants were forced off the land as the

continent was carved up into rubber, cotton, coffee, cocoa and nut plantations for European monopolies. Under Belgian rule, the population of the Congo fell from 20 million to 8 million between 1891 and 1911. In India the "jewel" in the British crown, the average life expectancy was 26 years. In China in 1901 U.S. and European troops sacked Beijing, murdering thousands. A sign was put up in the Chinese capital saying "No dogs or Chinese allowed." In 1907, French naval artillery leveled Casablanca to force Morocco to accept French rule.

As Lenin wrote in *Socialism and War*, "From 1876 to 1914 six 'Great' Powers grabbed 25 million square kilometers, i.e., an area two and a half times that of Europe. Six Powers have enslaved 523 million people in the colonies. For every four inhabitants in the 'Great Powers' there are five in 'their' colonies. It is common knowledge that colonies are conquered with fire and sword, that the population of the colonies is brutally treated and that they are exploited in a thousand ways."

But by 1914, with the entire world divided up between competing capitalist monopolies, there was no more world left to conquer. J. P. Morgan once said, "I would annex the planets if I could." But he couldn't. So any new conquests had to come at the expense of a rival imperialist. And of what had been conquered the lion's share belonged to old capitalists, especially Britain, which had had its bourgeois revolution back in 1649. In 1914, Britain, with 46 million people, ruled over 400 million colonial slaves. "The sun never sets on the British empire," its rulers boasted. But the new, up-and-coming capitalist powers—the U.S., Germany, Japan—with their vast productive capacity, they too needed markets, new arenas for exploitation, for capital investment.

"American factories are making more than the American people can use. American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours. And we shall get it as our mother, England, has told us how. We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing posts for American products. We will cover the ocean with our merchant marine. We will build a navy to the measure of our greatness. Great colonies, governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us will brow beat our posts of trade. Our institutions will follow our trade on wings of commerce. And American law, American order, American civilization will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted, by those agencies of god henceforth made beautiful and bright." —Sen. J. Beveridge of Indiana, April 27, 1898

As Woodrow Wilson said in another candid moment: "Britain owned the earth, and Germany wanted it." What he failed to say was that the United States wanted it too, and wound up getting most of it.

In July 1914, as a war crisis heated up, touched off by the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the decrepit Austro-Hungarian Empire, by a Serbian nationalist youth in Sarajevo, there were mass antiwar demonstrations led by the SDP in Germany and other countries. But when war itself came, the SDP voted for it, and began in its newspapers to support the war as one of "national defense" for Germany. Likewise in France, England, Austria, Russia, etc.

Opportunism & the collapse of the Second International

This was such a shocking development that Lenin at first refused to believe that it was true. For the first 48 hours, he held to the belief that the report of the SDP voting for war credits was disinformation designed to confuse and disarm the workers' movement around the world. But it was true.

What was WWI?

[Have someone read other section of Somicurcio educational:]

From 1914 to 1918, Europe was engulfed by the unprecedented carnage of the First World War. The armies and navies of the Central Powers, comprising Germany, the Austro-Hungarian