

Vladimir Lenin's

The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution

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This article (in a letter Lenin calls it "Entwaffnung"-- "On Disarmament") was written in German and meant for publication in the Swiss, Swedish and Norwegian Left Social-Democratic press. However, it was not published at the time. Shortly afterwards Lenin re-edited it somewhat for publication in Russian.

The original, German text appeared in *Jugend-Internationale*, organ of the International League of Socialist Youth Organisation, titled, "Das Militär programm der proletarischen Revolution".

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Vladimir Lenin
The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution

Among the Dutch, Scandinavian and Swiss revolutionary Social-Democrats who are combating the social-chauvinist lies about "defense of the fatherland" in the present imperialist war, there have been voices in favor of replacing the old Social-Democratic minimum-programme demand for a "militia", or "the armed nation," by a new demand: "disarmament." The *Jugend-Internationale* [1] has inaugurated a discussion on this issue and published, in No. 3, an editorial supporting disarmament. There is also, we regret to note, a concession to the "disarmament" idea in R. Grimm's latest theses. [2] Discussion have been started in the periodicals *Neue Leben* [3] and *Vorbote*.

Let us take a closer look at the position of the disarmament advocates.

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Their principal argument is that the disarmament demand is the clearest, most decisive, most consistent expression of the struggle against all militarism and against all war.

But in this principal argument lies the disarmament advocates' principal error. Socialists cannot, without ceasing to be socialists, be opposed to all war.

Firstly, socialists have never been, nor can they ever be, opposed to revolutionary wars. The bourgeoisie of the imperialist "Great" Powers has become thoroughly reactionary, and the war *this* bourgeoisie is now waging we regard as a reactionary, slave-owners' and criminal war. But what about a war *against* this bourgeoisie? A war, for instance, waged by peoples oppressed by and dependent upon this bourgeoisie, or by colonial peoples, for liberation? In Section 5 of the *Internationale* group these we read: "National wars are no longer possible in the era of this unbridled imperialism."

That is obviously wrong.

The history of the 20th century, this century of "unbridled imperialism," is replete with colonial wars. But what we Europeans, the imperialist oppressors of the majority of the world's peoples, with our habitual, despicable European chauvinism, call "colonial wars" are often national wars, or national rebellions of these oppressed peoples. One of the main features of imperialism is that it accelerates capitalist development in the most

backward countries, and thereby extends and intensifies the struggle against national oppression. That is a fact, and from it inevitably follows that imperialism must often give rise to national wars. *Junius*, who defends the above-quoted "theses" in her pamphlet, says that in the imperialist era every national war against an imperialist Great Power leads to intervention of a rival imperialist Great Power. Every national war is thus turned into an imperialist war. But that argument is wrong, too. This *can* happen, but does not always happen. Many colonial wars between 1900 and 1914 did not follow that course. And it would be simply ridiculous to declare, for instance, that after the present war, if it ends in the utter exhaustion of all the belligerents, "there can be no" national, progress, revolutionary wars "of any kind", wages, say, by China in alliance with India, Persia, Siam, etc., against the Great Powers.

To deny all possibility of national wars under imperialism is wrong in theory, obviously mistaken historically, and tantamount to European chauvinism in practice: we who belong to nations that oppress hundreds of millions in Europe, Africa, Asia, etc., are invited to tell the oppressed peoples that it is "impossible" for them to wage war against "our" nations!

Secondly, civil war is just as much a war as any other. He who accepts the class struggle cannot fail to accept civil wars, which in every class society are the natural, and under certain conditions inevitable, continuation, development and intensification of the class struggle. That has been confirmed by every great revolution. To repudiate civil war, or to forget about it, is to fall into extreme opportunism and renounce the socialist revolution.

Thirdly, the victory of socialism in one country does not at one stroke eliminate all wars in general. On the contrary, it presupposes wars. The development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in different countries. It cannot be otherwise under commodity production. From this it follows irrefutably that socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously *in all* countries. It will achieve victory first in one or several countries, while the others will for some time remain bourgeois or pre-bourgeois. This is bound to create not only friction, but a direct attempt on the part of the bourgeoisie of other countries to crush the socialist state's victorious proletariat. In such cases, a war on our part would be a legitimate and just war. It would be a war for socialism, for the liberation of other nations from the bourgeoisie. Engels was perfectly right when, in his letter to Kautsky of September 12, 1882, he clearly stated that it was possible for *already victorious* socialism to wage "defensive wars". What he had in mind was defense of the victorious proletariat against the bourgeoisie of other countries.

Only after we have overthrown, finally vanquished and expropriated the bourgeoisie of the whole world, and not merely in one country, will wars become impossible. And from a scientific point of view it would be utterly wrong -- and utterly unrevolutionary -- for us to evade or gloss over the most important things: crushing the resistance of the bourgeoisie -- the most difficult task, and one demanding the greatest amount of fighting, in the *transition* to socialism. The "social" parsons and opportunists are always ready to

build dreams of future peaceful socialism. But the very thing that distinguishes them from revolutionary Social-Democrats is that they refuse to think about and reflect on the fierce class struggle and class *wars* needed to achieve that beautiful future.

We must not allow ourselves to be led astray by words. The term "defense of the fatherland", for instance, is hateful to many because both avowed opportunists and Kautskyites use it to cover up and gloss over the bourgeois lie about the *present* predatory war. This is a fact. But it does not follow that we must no longer see through to the meaning of political slogans. To accept "defense of the fatherland" in the present war is no more nor less than to accept it as a "just" war, a war in the interests of the proletariat -- no more nor less, we repeat, because invasions may occur in any war. It would be sheer folly to repudiate "defense of the fatherland" *on the part* of oppressed nations in their wars *against* the imperialist Great Powers, or on the part of a victorious proletariat in *its* war against some Galliffet of a bourgeois state.

Theoretically, it would be absolutely wrong to forget that every war is but the continuation of policy by other means. The present imperialist war is the continuation of the imperialist policies of two groups of Great Powers, and these policies were engendered and fostered by the sum total of the relationships of the imperialist era. But this very era must also necessarily engender and foster policies of struggle against national oppression and of proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie and, consequently, also the possibility and inevitability; first, of revolutionary national rebellions and wars; second, of proletarian wars and rebellions *against* the bourgeoisie; and, third, of a combination of both kinds of revolutionary war, etc.

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Jugend-Internationale* (The Youth International) -- Organ of the International League of Socialist Youth Organizations, which was associated with the Zimmerwald Left. It was published from September 1915 to May 1918 in Zurich.

[2] The reference is to Robert Grimm's these on the war question published in the *Grutlianer* Nos. 162 and 164, July 1916.

[3] *Neue Leben* (New Life) -- A monthly journal of the Swiss Social-Democratic Party published in Berne from January 1915 to December 1917. It expressed the views of the Zimmerwald Right and early in 1917 took up a social-chauvinist position.

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To this must be added the following general consideration.

An oppressed class which does not strive to learn to use arms, to acquire arms, only deserves to be treated like slaves. We cannot, unless we have become bourgeois pacifists or opportunists, forget that we are living in a class society from which there is no way out, nor can there be, save through the class struggle. In every class society, whether based on slavery, serfdom, or, as at present, wage-labor, the oppressor class is always armed. Not only the modern standing army, but even the modern militia -- and even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, Switzerland, for instance -- represent the bourgeoisie armed *against* the proletariat. That is such an elementary truth that it is hardly necessary to dwell upon it. Suffice it to point to the use of troops against strikers in all capitalist countries.

A bourgeoisie armed against the proletariat is one of the biggest fundamental and cardinal facts of modern capitalist society. And in face of this fact, revolutionary Social-Democrats are urged to "demand" "disarmament"! That is tantamount of complete abandonment of the class-struggle point of view, to renunciation of all thought of revolution. Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow logically from, and are dictated by, the whole *objective development* of capitalist militarism. Only *after* the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap-heap. And the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but *only when this condition has been fulfilled, certainly not before*.

If the present war rouses among the reactionary Christian socialists, among the whimpering petty bourgeoisie, *only* horror and fright, only aversion to all use of arms, to bloodshed, death, etc., then we must say: Capitalist society is and has always been *horror without end*. If this most reactionary of all wars is now preparing for that society an *end to horror*, we have no reason to fall into despair. But the disarmament "demand", or more correctly, the dream of disarmament, is, objectively, nothing but an expression of despair at a time when, as everyone can see, the bourgeoisie itself is paving the way for the only legitimate and revolutionary war -- civil war against the imperialist bourgeoisie.

A lifeless theory, some might say, but we would remind them of two world-historical facts: the role of the trusts and the employment of women in industry, on the one hand, and the Paris Commune of 1871 and the December 1905 uprising in Russia, on the other.

The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not "demand" such development, we do not "support" it. We fight it. But *how* do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!

With the necessary changes that arguments is applicable also to the present militarization of the population. Today the imperialist bourgeoisie militarizes the youth as well as the adults; tomorrow, it may begin militarizing the women. Our attitude should be: All the better! Full speed ahead! For the faster we move, the nearer shall we be to the armed uprising against capitalism. How can Social-Democrats give way to fear of the militarization of the youth, etc., if they have not forgotten the example of the Paris Commune? This is not a "lifeless theory" or a dream. It is a fact. And it would be a sorry state of affairs indeed if, all the economic and political facts notwithstanding, Social-Democrats began to doubt that the imperialist era and imperialist wars must inevitably bring about a repetition of such facts.

A certain bourgeois observer of the Paris Commune, writing to an English newspaper in May 1871, said: "If the French nation consisted entirely of women, what a terrible nation it would be!" Woman and teenage children fought in the Paris Commune side by side with the men. It will be no different in the coming battles for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively as poorly armed or unarmed workers are shot down by the well-armed forces of the bourgeoisie. They will take to arms, as they did in 1871, and from the cowed nations of today -- or more correctly, from the present-day labor movement, disorganized more by the opportunists than by the governments -- there will undoubtedly arise, sooner or later, but with absolute certainty, an international league of the "terrible nations" of the revolutionary proletariat.

The whole of social life is now being militarized. Imperialism is a fierce struggle of the Great Powers for the division and redivision of the world. It is therefore bound to lead to further militarization in all countries, even in neutral and small ones. How will proletarian women oppose this? Only by cursing all war and everything military, only by demanding disarmament? The women of an oppressed and really revolutionary class will never accept that shameful role. They will say to their sons: "You will soon be grown up. You will be given a gun. Take it and learn the military art properly. The proletarians need this knowledge not to shoot your brothers, the workers of other countries, as is being done in the present war, and as the traitors to socialism are telling you to do. They need it to fight the bourgeoisie of their own country, to put an end to exploitation, poverty and

war, and not by pious wishes, but by defeating and disarming the bourgeoisie."

If we are to shun such propaganda, precisely such propaganda, in connection with the present war, then we had better stop using fine words about international revolutionary Social-Democracy, the socialist revolution and war against war.

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The disarmament advocates object to the "armed nation" clause in the programme also because it more easily leads, they allege, to concessions to opportunism. The cardinal point, namely, the relation of disarmament to the class struggle and to the social revolution, we have examined above. We shall now examine the relation between the disarmament demand and opportunism. One of the chief reasons why it is unacceptable is precisely that, together with the illusions it creates, it inevitably weakens and devitalizes our struggle against opportunism.

Undoubtedly, this struggle is the main, immediate question now confusing the International. Struggle against imperialism that is not closely linked with the struggle against opportunism is either an empty phrase or a fraud. One of the main defects of Zimmerwald and Kienthal [4] -- on the main reasons why these embryos of the Third International may possibly end in a fiasco -- is that the question of fighting opportunism was not even raised openly, let alone solved in the sense of proclaiming the need to break with the opportunists. Opportunism has triumphed -- temporarily -- in the European labor movement. Its two main shades are apparent in all the big countries: first, the avowed, cynical, and therefore less dangerous social-imperialism of Messrs. Plekhanov, Scheidemann, Legien, Albert Thomas and Sembat, Vandervelde, Hyndman, Henderson, et al.; second, the concealed, Kautskyite opportunism: Kautsky-Haase and the social-Democratic Labor Group in Germany [5]; Longuet, Pressemane, Mayeras, et al., in France; Ramsay MacDonald and the other leaders of the Independent Labor Party in England; Martov, Chkheidze, et al., in Russia; Treves and the other so-called Left reformists in Italy.

Avowed opportunism is openly and directly opposed to revolution and to incipient revolutionary movements and outbursts. It is in direct alliance with the governments, varied as the forms of this alliance may be -- from accepting ministerial posts to participation in the war industries committees (in Russia). [6] The masked opportunists, the Kautskyites, are much more harmful and dangerous to the labor movement, because they hide their advocacy of alliance with the former under a cloak of plausible, pseudo-"Marxist" catchwords and pacifist slogans. The fight against both these forms of prevailing opportunism must be conducted in *all* fields of proletarian politics: parliament, the trade unions, strikes, the armed forces, etc. The main distinguishing feature of *both*

these forms of prevailing opportunism is the concrete question of the *connection between the present war and revolution, and the other concrete questions of revolution, and the other concrete questions of revolution*, are hushed up, concealed, or treated with an eye to police prohibitions. And this despite the fact that before the war the connection between *this* impending war and the proletarian revolution was emphasized innumerable times, both unofficially and officially in the Basle Manifesto. [7] The main defect of the disarmament demand is its evasion of all the concrete questions of revolution. Or do the advocates of disarmament stand for an altogether new kind of revolution, unarmed revolution?

To proceed. We are by no means opposed to the fight for reforms. And we do not wish to ignore the sad possibility -- if the worst comes to the worst -- of mankind going through a second imperialist war, if revolution does not come out of the present war, in spite of our efforts. We favor a programme of reforms directed *also* against the opportunists. They would be only too glad if we left the struggle for reforms entirely to them and sought escape from sad reality in a nebulous "disarmament" fantasy. "Disarmament" means simply running away from unpleasant reality, not fighting it.

In such a programme, we would say something like this: "To accept the defense of the fatherland slogan in the 1914-16 imperialist war is to corrupt the labor movement with the aid of a bourgeois lie." Such a concrete reply to a concrete question would be more correct theoretically, much more useful to the proletariat and more unbearable to the opportunists, than the disarmament demand and repudiation of "all and any" defense of the fatherland. And we would add: "The bourgeoisie of all the imperialist Great Powers -- England, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Japan, the United States -- has become so reactionary and so intent on world domination, that *any* war waged by *the bourgeoisie of those* countries is bound to be reactionary. The proletariat must not only oppose all such wars, but must also wish for the defeat for revolutionary insurrection, if an insurrection to prevent the war proves unsuccessful."

On the question of a militia, we should say: We are not in favor of a bourgeois militia; we are in favor only of a proletarian militia. Therefore, "not a penny, not a man", not only for a standing army, but even for a bourgeois militia, even in countries like the United States, or Switzerland, Norway, etc. The more so that in the freest republican countries (e.g., Switzerland) we see that the militia is being increasingly Prussianized, particularly in 1907 and 1911, and prostituted by being used against strikers. We can demand popular election of officers, abolition of all military law, equal rights for foreign and native-born workers (a point particularly important for those imperialist states which, like Switzerland, are more and more blatantly exploiting larger numbers of foreign workers, while denying them all rights). Further, we can demand the right of every hundred, say, inhabitants of a given country to form voluntary military-training associations, with free election of instructors paid by the state, etc. Only under these conditions could the proletariat acquire military training for *itself* and not for its slaveowners; and the need for

such training is imperatively dictated by the interests of the proletariat. The Russian revolution showed that every success of the revolutionary movement, even a partial success like the seizure of a certain city, a certain factory town, or winning over a certain section of the army, inevitably *compels* the victorious proletariat to carry out just such a programme.

Lastly, it stands to reason that opportunism can never be defeated by mere programmes; it can only be defeated by deeds. The greatest, and fatal, error of the bankrupt Second International was that its words did not correspond to its deeds, that it cultivated the habit of hypocritical and unscrupulous revolutionary phrase-mongering (note the present attitude of Kautsky and Co. towards the Basle Manifesto). Disarmament as a social idea -- i.e., an idea that springs from, and can affect, a certain social environment, and is not the invention of some crackpot -- springs, evidently, from the peculiar "tranquil" conditions prevailing, by way of exception, in certain small states, which have for a fairly long time stood aside from the world's path of war and bloodshed, and hope to remain in that way. To be convinced of this, we have only to consider the arguments advanced, for instance, by the Norwegian advocates of disarmament. "We are a small country," they say. "Our army is small; there is nothing we can do against the Great Powers [and, consequently, nothing we can do to resist forcible involvement in an imperialist *alliance* with one or the other Great Power group].... We want to be left in peace in our backwoods and continue our backwoods politics, demand disarmament, compulsory arbitration, permanent neutrality, etc." ("permanent" after the Belgian fashion, no doubt?).

The petty striving of petty states to hold aloof, the petty-bourgeois desire to keep as far away as possible from the great battles of world history, to take advantage of one's relatively monopolistic position in order to remain in hidebound passivity -- this is the *objective* social environment which may ensure the disarmament idea a certain degree of success and a certain degree of popularity in some small states. That striving is, of course, reactionary and is based entirely on illusions, for, in one way or another, imperialism draws the small states into the vortex of world economy and world politics.

In Switzerland, for instance, the imperialist environment objectively prescribes *two* courses to the labor movement: the opportunists, in alliance with the bourgeoisie, are seeking to turn the country into a republican-democratic monopolistic federation that would thrive on profits from imperialist bourgeois tourists, and to make this "tranquil" monopolistic position as profitable and as tranquil as possible.

The genuine Swiss Social-Democrats are striving to use Switzerland's relative freedom and her "international" position to help the victory of the close alliance of the revolutionary elements in the European workers' parties. Switzerland, than God, does not have "a separate language of her own", but uses three world languages, the three languages spoken in the adjacent belligerent countries.

If 20,000 Swiss party members were to pay a weekly levy of two centimes as a sort of "extra war tax", we would have 20,000 francs per annum, a sum more than sufficient periodically to publish in three languages and distribute among the workers and soldiers of the belligerent countries -- in spite of the bans imposed by the general staffs -- all the truthful evidence about the incipient revolt of the workers, their fraternizing in the trenches, their hope that the weapons will be used for revolutionary struggle against the imperialist bourgeoisie of their "own" countries, etc.

That is not new. It is being done by the best papers, like *La Sentinelle*, [8] *Volksrecht*, [9] and the *Berner Tagwacht*, [10] although, unfortunately, on an inadequate scale. Only through such activity can the splendid decision of the Aarau Party Congress [11] become something more than merely a splendid decision.

The question that interests us now is: Does the disarmament demand correspond to this revolutionary trend among the Swiss Social-Democrats? It obviously does not. Objectively, disarmament is an extremely national, a specifically national programme of small states. It is certainly not the international programme of international revolutionary Social-Democracy.

N. Lenin

FOOTNOTES

[4] Lenin is referring to the international socialist conferences at Zimmerwald and Kienthal.

The first *Zimmerwald Conference* met on September 5-8 1915 and was attended by 38 delegates from 11 European countries. Lenin headed the RSDLP Central Committee delegation.

The Conference adopted the Manifesto "To the European Proletariat", in which, at the insistence of Lenin and the Left Social-Democrats, several basic propositions of revolutionary Marxism were included. It also adopted a joint declaration by the German and French delegations, a message of sympathy with war victims and fighters persecuted for their political activities, and elected the International Socialist Committee (ISC).

The Zimmerwald Left group was formed at this Conference. It included representatives of the RSDLP Central Committee headed by Lenin, the Regional Executives of the Social-Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, the Central Committee of the Lettish Social Democratic Party, the Swedish Left (Karl Zeth Hoglund), the Norwegian Left (Ture Nerman), the Swiss Left (Fritz Platten), and the "International Socialists of Germany" group (Julius Borchardt). The Zimmerwald Left waged an active struggle against the Centrist majority at the Conference. But it was only the Bolsheviks among the Left who advocated a fully consistent policy.

The second *International Conference* was held at Kienthal, a village near Berne, between April 24 and 30 1916. It was attended by 43 delegates from 10 countries. The RSDLP Central Committee was represented by Lenin and two other delegates.

The Conference discussed the following questions:

- 1) the struggle to end the war;
- 2) attitude of the proletariat on the peace issue;
- 3) agitation and propaganda;
- 4) parliamentary activity;
- 5) mass struggle;
- 6) convocation of the International Socialist Bureau.

Led by Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left was much stronger at Kienthal than at the earlier Zimmerwald Conference. At Kienthal, it united 12 delegates and some of its proposals obtained as many as 20 votes, or nearly half the total. This was indicative of how the internationalism in the world labor movement had changed in favor of internationalism.

The Conference adopted a Manifesto "To the Peoples Suffering Ruination and Death" and a resolution criticizing pacifism and the International Socialist Bureau. Lenin regarded the Conference decisions as a further step in uniting the internationalist forces against the imperialist war.

The Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences helped to unite the Left elements in the West-European Social-Democratic movement on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Subsequently these Left elements took an active part in founding communist parties in their countries and in organizing the Third, Communist International.

[5] *The Social-Democratic Labor Group* -- An organization of German Centrists founded in march 1916 by Reichstag members who had broken with the Social-Democratic Reichstag group. It had the support of the majority of the Berlin organization and became the backbone of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, founded in April 1917. The new party sought to justify avowed social-chauvinists and advocated preservation of unity with them.

[6] The *war industries committees* were established in Russia in May 1915 by the imperialist bourgeoisie to help the tsarist government in the prosecution of the war. The Central War Industry Committee was headed by one of Russia's biggest capitalists, Guchkov, leader of the Octobrists. In an attempt to bring the workers under their influence and foster chauvinist sentiments, the bourgeoisie decided to organize "workers' groups" in these committees, thereby creating the impression that a "class peace" had been achieved in Russia between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The Bolsheviks

declared a boycott of the committees and successfully carried it out with the support of the majority of workers.

As a result of Bolshevik propaganda, elections to the "workers' groups" were held only in 70 out of a total of 239 regional and local committees, and workers' representatives were elected only in 36 of them.

[7] The *Basle Manifesto* -- A manifesto on the war issue. Was adopted at the extraordinary International Socialist Congress held in Basle on November 24-25 1912.

[8] *La Sentinelle* -- A Newspaper, organ of the Swiss Social-Democratic organization of Neuchatel Canton (Switzerland), published at La Chaux-de-Fonds from 1890 to 1906 and resumed in 1910. During the First World War it followed an internationalist policy.

[9] *Volksrecht* (People's Right) -- A daily paper, organ of the Swiss Social-Democratic Party founded in Zurich in 1898. During the First World War it published articles by Left Zimmerwaldists.

[10] *Berner Tagwacht* (Berne Guardian) -- A Social-Democratic newspaper founded in Berne in 1893. It published articles by Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehrin and other Social-Democrats in the early days of the First World War. In 1917, it came out in open support of the social-chauvinists.

[11] The Aarau Congress of the Swiss Social-Democratic Party met on November 20-21 1915. The central issue was the party's attitude towards the Zimmerwald internationalist groups, and the struggle developed between the three following trends: 1) anti-Zimmerwaldists; 2) supporters of the Zimmerwald Right; and 3) supporters of the Zimmerwald Left.

Robert Grimm tabled a resolution urging the party to affiliate with the Zimmerwald group and endorse the political programme of the Zimmerwald Right. The Left forces, in an amendment moved by the Lausanne branch, called for mass revolutionary struggle against the war, declaring that only a victorious proletarian revolution could put an end to the imperialist war. Under Grimm's pressure, the amendment was withdrawn, but it was again proposed by M. M. Kharitonov, a Bolshevik with the right to vote delegated by one of the party's branches. Out of tactical considerations, Grimm and his supporters were obliged to approve the amendment and it was carried by 258 votes to 141.
