French Socialists and the "Union Sacrée"

A FEW months ago, Louise Saumoneau, secretary of a small group of Socialist women in Paris opposed to the war, *Comite d'Action pour la Paix contre le Chauvinisme,* was arrested by the French government on a charge of anti-militarist agitation. According to available reports, the French Socialist press and the party have not protested against this violation of a citizen's right to free expression.

This is in line with an attitude of the French Socialists that is doing them a great deal of harm in the international movement, and that reflects seriously upon their Socialist integrity. They seem to take a sort of morbid pride in abiding by the "Union Sacree"—the French counterpart of the German "Burgfrieden"—while pointing out that the bourgeois classes are continuously and persistently violating the spirit and letter of this inter-class peace.

Waiving the matter of principle, temporarily—the principle that under no conceivable circumstances should Socialists suspend the class struggle—we shall discuss it as a matter of policy. It is admitted that the bourgeois classes are not abiding by the "Union Sacree," that they are taking advantage of the war to entrench their social and political power; and, in many cases, to transmute into unholy

profits the woes of the nation—demonstrated by the scandals recently aired in the Chamber of Deputies. This should convince the French Socialists that acquiescence in the "Union Sacree" is not alone a violation of Socialist principles, but a direct menace to the safety of the nation. The bourgeois does not change his nature in time of war: he is ever the predatory beast battening upon the needs of the nation; and only the working class—the class struggle waged relentlessly—can make the bourgeois class toe the mark of straight dealing.

The French Socialists profess to believe that the defense of their country involves a Socialist duty—an international duty. All the more reason why they should not weaken their stand by the abandonment of Socialist principles implied in suspending the class struggle. The defense of their country—which in their opinion is not a denfense of France prmarily, but a defense of Europe and the world from a recrudescence of Napoleonic domination by force—the favorable Socialist conditions they expect from a victory of the Entente Allies,—all would gain immeasurably by uncompromising adherence to Socialist principles and the class struggle.

The argument that the class struggle would hamper national defense seems to have no justification in the facts of the present situation—surely has no justification in history. The wars of the French Revolution are a case in point. At a time when the nation was in danger of being overwhelmed by invasion, at a time when the conduct of the nation's affairs was still largely in the hands of a class that was bent upon rule or ruin, it was the class struggle waged intrepidly and even ferociously, that saved France from annihilation. If the revolutionists at the time had acquiesced in a "Union Sacree," if they had lacked the courage to do and die, the annals of France would not record the glorious achievements of '93.

Rosa Luxemburg has stated another theoretical and historical justification for not suspending the class struggle during war:

"There is a necessary and dialectic relation between class struggle and war. The class struggle develops into war and war develops into the class struggle; and thus their essential unity is proved. It was so in the medieval cities, in the wars of the Reformtaion, in the Flemish wars of liberation, in the French Revolution, in the American Rebellion, in the Paris Commune, and in the Russian uprising in 1905."

The real point, however, is that the French Socialists have proven themselves nationalistic. They have not as yet come out in favor of Imperialism, as the German Socialists have; nor does there seem any chance of their doing so. But nationalistic they have been, and their acquiescence in the 'Union Sacree" proves it. Their actions and their words

indicate on the whole that the nation occupies as important a place in their thinking as the class struggle. The French Socialists could have gone into this war with a revolutionary Socialist sanction; but they preferred to act in harmony with a nationalistic sanction. Participation in the war need not necessarily have carried with it participation in the bourgeois iniquity of Chauvinism and "peace between the classes."—*F*.