The Menace of American Capitalism

By J. D. Newbold, M. A.

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THE world has, for several years past, been looking towards the President of the United States of America as one ordained to lead its people out from the bondage of fear and suffering beneath which they have come. From all nations and all lands men and women have called upon Woodrow Wilson to save them and to set their feet in the path of peace. Probably, never has any statesman had such hopes built upon his sincerity, his capacity, his courage and his resolve. It was not that he was greater than many a leader who has been before him, but that the world has been bound together in common sympathy by common intercourse to a degree utterly inconceivable at any earlier epoch. He is the one ruler who, throughout the war, was able to bring to international affairs an attention little affected by the traditions of European state craft, and who has, at the same time, had at his disposal vast reserves of political power. His moral authority seemed to depend upon his purity of motive and his nobility of utterance and not upon the peculiar circumstances of his country's situation and social evolution. True, he is a fine character and a great figure in the history of political society, one of those men who stand forth like Cromwell and Charlemagne, like Abraham Lincoln and Gladstone to be numbered amongst the mighty statesmen of the earth. He is worthy to stand silhouetted against the skyline in the tremendous setting of a revolutionary drama. He fired the imagination of the Democracies of the world and in him they reposed a trust terrible in its responsibility.

The World's Quest of Peace

The war has been a strange episode. It has awakened an idealism amongst the Allied Nations which had evidently been put to sleep, but had not been killed by the sordid everyday practice of commercialism, hawking its saleable commodities from market to market. The peoples have often in the past risen in revolt or wrestled in agitation and in elections against many a real and imaginary tyranny, always striving to recover their lost liberty, that wraith of goodwill which for ages has flitted mocking before their puzzled gaze, that back-of-the-brain mental image transmitted to them in legend and in story, through conscience and through instinct from their communal past. This yearning for they know not what has called them on this occasion to do battle for their country and its professed ideal, bringing to the conflict the passions and the prejudices of the long dead centuries of kith and kin. It is no mere unworthy reversion to a brutish origin which has swept the nations on to a carnival of slaughter and destruction, but a bursting through the bonds of a property civilization in pursuit of the ultimate Brotherhood of Man. The solidarity inherent in the herding instinct has escaped from the toils of buying and selling, of making money and dissipating its equivalents. The peoples have no desire to go back, yet they hesitate to pioneer into the great unknown. They have flung themselves in masses against barbed entanglements under a rain of machine gun bullets and through clouds of poison-gas, yet they look at the intermittent street battles of Soviet Russia and shudder at the dangers which may await them on the road to a reasoned and sane social system.

Woodrow Wilson had a plausible solution of their troubles to lay before the peoples. He spoke in generalities. He coined and trundled his vague and indefinable phrases about Liberty and Democracy, about Self Determination and Public Right, backwards and forwards before them. They knew the present and had forgotten the past before they had time to learn its story. Hence they did not pause to ask him to explain what precisely he meant by these amiable abstractions which, throughout its history, have been the one great contribution of American Democracy to the leaden-footed progress of human emancipation. They recognised a difference, a most pleasing but, not necessarily, a fundamental difference between his speeches and those of Wilhelm II. and Georges Clemenceau. They looked upon the surface and looked no deeper. They missed the sabre-rattling of the old diplomacy and in contradiction to the Anglo-French model read what they deemed to be a plain statement of facts in a series of elegant notes and declarations duly laid upon their breakfast tables.

Wilson is, essentially, an American in his methods. Not the American of the middle of the nineteenth century with his crude lithographs and his shady prospectuses, but the American businessman, college-trained and admirably tailored, ready with a sauve tongue to take you for a pleasant afternoon's enlightenment and entertainment around his elegant departmental store. Wilson is admirable as the stately commissionaire deputed to attract the world's custom to the monster emporium, known as the United States.

Prior to this, no President had gone abroad during his term of office. On this occasion, Wilson did not shatter the tradition without causing considerable and not too favorable comment, but never before had the United States adventured its dominant interests in the cross-currents of world-politics. Since 1915, the U. S. A. had extended its economic power into Europe and had since that time, offered seven and a half billion dollars of its official credits to the States associated with it in the Crusade for Democracy. Close on the heels of this economic force came its political custodian, escorted by lines of material warships and aeroplanes, to give his idealism shape and sanction at the Congress of Paris. He crossed the Atlantic and came supported by a terrific weight of material power greater than any conqueror of the past. He was in Europe as commander-in-chief of his armies and navies, "utterly autocrat in Government," independent of Senate and Congress, executive head of the mightiest capitalist state in the world.

Léon Trotzki came to Brest-Litovsk with no armies and no armaments, delegate of the first Soviet Republic, trusting only to the millions of mankind. He has been scorned as a materialist. It is Wilson who is the great idealist.

Let us enquire further into the circumstances attendant upon Americas' appearance at the Peace Congress in the persons of her President and his suite, including, amongst others, McCormick, Charles M. Schwab and Mr. Leslie Urquhar's bosom crony, Mr. Hoover. Let us look around and about and behind the presidential seat and make ourselves somewhat more familar with the forces which have determined the course of United States policy and the interests which have set the stage whereon Woodrow Wilson must play his part.

The American Democracy

The United States of America is a federation of states, thirteen of which existed when she broke away from British sovereignty and thirty-five more which at divers times have been carved out of the territories west of the Alleghany Mountains which have been purchased or seized from Spain, France and Mexico and whose lands have been obtained from the aboriginal inhabitants by every exercise of bargain and chicanery. The War of Independence was no popular uprising but a sordid quarrel between the landed, mercantile and manufacturing classes of the thirteen colonies and the government of the mother country. The American Constitution was the handiwork of a family circle of land speculators and bankers who carried its adoption in face of intense opposition by the threat of withdrawing credit from those who failed to support its ratification. According to Adams it was "the work of the commercial people in the sea-port towns, of the planters of the slave-holding states, of the officers of the Revolutionary army, and the property-holders everywhere." It was drafted in secret session in such a way as to protect the rule of the dominant class of the period and there was slipped into it a clause "forbidding any State to pass legislation impairing the obligation of a contract." This unprecedented safeguard, the work of two bank attorneys, has made legislative reform the plaything of the Courts from that day to this.

The Supreme Court of the United States early arrogated to itself the right of deciding what laws were or were not constitutional, and only last year, under this usurped power, this body declared void the new Child Labor Law restricting the employment of children in the Democratic South. The Constitution has been balanced up to now so as to equate State Rights and Federal Authority, the workers generally being let down between the two by skilful jugglery with inter-state and intra-state laws and regulations. The President is the head of the Federal State, elected by the vote of the people. The states have each their Governor similarly elected by the people therein. There are Assemblies and Senates in each State and from each State representatives are sent to sit in the Federal Congress and the Federal Senate in Washington. The State Governors appoint the State Judges to their several Courts (though in some cases elective for long terms). The President nominates the Judges on the Federal Circuit and Supreme Courts subject to ratification by the Federal Senate. These judges of the Supreme Court of the U. S. A. sit for life and whilst, in theory, they can be impeached there is no case of this course being proceeded with. Their number can be increased by legislative action but, otherwise—and the former course is most exceptional—the composition of this final Court of Appeal can only be altered by appointments on resignation or death. It is the Courts which really matter in the internal governance of the United States and it is their tradition which makes so grave the prospect of an International Court for a League of Nations established on the model of America's supposedly popular Democracy.

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