

Aspects of the Coming Peace

ALTHOUGH the final settlement of the problems arising out of the war rests with men very much different from those about to assemble at Versailles, yet there is no doubt that the next few chapters of the world's history will be colored, to a large extent, by the results of the Peace Conference. It is commonly assumed by the bourgeois press of the Allied countries that the most pressing problem confronting the Peace Council is the nature of the terms to be imposed on Germany; but unless the delegates delve much deeper into the causes of the war than the consideration of the relative guilt of the nations involved—or the total guilt of Germany—and the nature of the punishment to be meted out, they will have failed to accomplish anything of even immediate value to the world. No mere rearrangement of the map of Europe, renaming of the outlying stretches of the world's surface that were Germany's colonies, fixing of the amount to be collected from the vanquished, after the manner of a Domestic Relations' Court settling a squabble over the ownership of the household effects, can settle the problems at present confronting the world.

The real issue facing the Allies at the Peace Conference is not Germany's fate,—that is being shaped by the German people; but the fate of their own nations. It is true that the Allies can dictate to Germany in the same sense as the Germans were able to dictate to Russia at Brest-Litovsk—whether the progress of the revolution in Germany will pursue a comparatively peaceful path, facing only the opposition forces within, or whether it shall tread the stormy way of strife at home complicated by semi-international war—but beyond that the real course of events in the erstwhile Central Empires lies with the awakened proletariat.

Russia, at the present moment, presents much more of a problem to the Allies than does Germany. Germany has been the enemy, Russia has been an ally, in fact the member of the Allies who has contributed most in sacrifice of life to the war, and it is by the actions of the Associated Powers towards the Russian Proletarian Government that their real purposes will be more clearly discernible to the proletariat of their own countries and will largely determine the actions of this proletariat.

Whether it is right or whether it is wrong, the present tendency of the masses is away from what has hitherto been known as patriotism. The fervent outbursts of nationalistic love and pride, shown in the sacrifices and devotion that have astonished mankind during the war, and the natural feeling of glory that these sacrifices have been crowned with victory, are by no means the real measure of the feelings of the masses. Hitherto the people have gone to war as a matter of course when the drum beat to battle, usually without having even the faintest notion of the why or the whereof of the conflict, but that is changed. The world has marched forward many steps while the guns thundered, and whereas in August 1914 scarcely one person in a hundred knew or cared anything about international affairs, now the great majority of the common people are taking an intense interest in the relations of nation to nation.

The people of the Allied countries have fought a victorious war, and more important, they have seen the coming of Social Revolution in Russia and Germany. They have seen kings topple from their thrones like overripe fruit from the trees in autumn, they have seen mighty autocracies blown away overnight by the breath of the common people, they have glimpsed in the mirror of their brothers' deeds their own power, they feel the hitherto latent strength beginning to pulse in their veins, they are dimly conscious of the fact that their's is the victory, their's the power, and they are enquiring more and more into their own status in society. They are asking, why?

At the peace table two definite factions will emerge. Not the factions of the erstwhile Central Empires on the one hand, and the Allies on the other—the pleading for mercy of the vanquished and the reply of the conqueror—these will, of course, appear and very much overdressed, strut the stage; nor will the division alone be along the lines of groups of national alliances

among the Allies themselves, groups squabbling about spheres of influence, these will also appear and play their part; but the real struggle at the peace table will be between the "conservatives" and the "liberals", the autocrats and the democrats, those who say "after us the deluge" and those who are concerned about the future status of capitalism. Between these two factions the great struggle of the Peace Conference will center and it is upon the outcome of this struggle that the vivid pages of the immediate future will be written.

Outside the halls of the council chamber is another power—the awakened proletariat—whose actions will be determined by the result within. This power, the new "third estate", is the coming dominant force, the herald of the new age. If the conservatives prevail at the peace table then the clarion call to the final battle will sound and the next few years will see "whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world", but if the liberal forces triumph then the call will be delayed and the final transition from Capitalism to Socialism may even take a less violent form. In this sense the Peace Conference will determine the course of events, though it cannot control the final outcome.

But while the real issue of the peace conference lies in the class struggle and the final division will be along the lines of the "conservative" and "liberal" attitude towards the proletariat, the minor and apparently more immediate issues, though perhaps bringing a scattering of these forces, will generally follow the same tendency. The "conservatives" will insist on a "woe to the conquered" policy in dealing with the central European countries, and will then themselves split on a nationalist basis over the apportionment of the spoils of victory. They will form and counterform entangling alliances over trade routes, spheres of influences, and will necessarily have to resplit again on the question of national armaments, each insisting on the maximum military and naval machine for his own particular nationality.

If the "conservative" forces of the Conference carries the day international wars can hardly be averted before the present armies have time to demobilize. They will cut up territory with regard only to their own particular economic interests, putting race against race and burdening their own and foreign peoples with debts, almost certainly they will immediately wage war against the Socialist states and will precipitate world revolution either out of the fresh wars or out of the misery of their own peoples consequent on the enormous expenditures for armaments.

If on the other hand the "liberal" forces win, they will endeavor to placate the masses of their own countries, they will attempt to rearrange Europe along racial lines, as far as is possible in accord with their particular economic interests, they will endeavor to effect a League of Nations with the purpose of gradually reducing armaments or at least preventing their increase. In dealing with the conquered peoples the indications are that the "liberals" will attempt to enforce only such indemnities as can be paid without extreme hardship or collected without the probability of causing armed resistance, they will try to fit trade privileges to the circumstances and attempt to apportion the receipt of indemnity on an equitable basis.

The League of Nations will in all probability only eventuate if the "liberals" are successful and even then it is very much open to question whether it can be made workable, even for a time. If a split occurs in the liberal forces it will be on this question which is the central idea of the "liberal" ideology. Already there are indications that the "freedom of the seas" will form one of the chief points of difference between the Allies and the "freedom of the seas" is absolutely essential to the establishment of a League of Nations as it is obvious that no such league can function while the waterways of the world are controlled by one nation. Sea power is the key to foreign trade success, and foreign trade, or more specifically the export of capital, investment markets, protectorates and undeveloped territory generally, is absolutely essential to the continuance of Capitalism in the present highly developed state of the world. In times of peace foreign markets may be open to all competitors but without naval power no foreign market can be considered in any sense

secure when with the outbreak of war one nation can cut communications. The so-called "rights of neutrals" are in reality non-existent, the privileges of neutrals, in respect to foreign trade at least, lie in the hands of the dominant sea power.

Freedom of the seas means in effect naval disarmament and naval disarmament will necessitate freedom of the land which means the disbanding of armies. But even if this question could be patched up by means of rules and regulations, for, of course, there is no intention even among the most liberal "liberals" of bringing about total disarmament, history shows that immediately the necessity is strong enough the regulations and rules would be broken by the stronger powers and the League of Nations would end in another world war.

Furthermore a League of Nations, to effect anything like what its advocates claim for it, must be a league of all nations, and at the present moment there are among the bigger nations one Socialist state and another on the verge of becoming Socialist. The former of these states, Russia, would apparently not be invited into this league because even now, the Allies are in a state of semi-war with Russia and the latter, Germany, could hardly be invited in because she is just now in the nature of an unknown quantity, consequently if all the other nations, great and small, became members of the league and Russia and Germany were left out they would be forced into the position of outlaws and instead of avoiding wars the league would necessarily cause war.

With regard to the rearrangement of the map of Europe more unity can be expected among the "liberals" than among the "conservatives" but even here difficulties must arise over the small nationalities and the present tendency seems to be to endeavor to grant the requests of the small races outside of the Allied countries and leave the question of the subject nationalities within these countries alone, thus half settling this problem which in itself contains the germs of future wars.

Moreover, where the question of the small nationalities will be taken up at all, happenings in Austria, Hungary and the Balkans show that such a question cannot be settled without leaving rankling sores somewhere, and it is already evident that arbitrary decisions are going to have a worse effect than no decision at all. The only chance, with regard to the small and subject peoples, of any sort of a peaceful settlement is on the basis of the people concerned deciding for themselves, and this cannot be generally put into practice, as very naturally these small peoples would not consider such important questions, from the viewpoint of the great powers, as, for instance, the balance of power. No matter what good intentions may actuate the "liberals" in dealing with the small nations, the fact remains that it is the interests of the big nations that will decide the fate of the small and not such abstract things as justice, liberty and right.

The idea behind the formation of a League of Nations is the creation of some sort of international court that will be able to combine the functions of judge, jury and police, but even the bourgeois liberal conception of courts recognizes that there can be no justice where the court has a personal interest in the dispute. Any question coming before a League of Capitalist Nations must necessarily affect very definitely the interests of the jurors, as it is now admitted that nations do not live by themselves alone, but as part of the whole group and that everything affecting the group must affect the individual nation. This fact in itself, will sooner or later cause one of the disputants to reject the decision of the league and then the only course open will be an appeal to arms with the result that what might have merely developed into a local war will become a world war of even greater magnitude than that which the Peace Conference is trying to settle.

In any event whether the "conservatives" or "liberals" gain the ascendancy Capitalism will still remain in power; the war will not have solved the fundamental problems that produced it, bringing instead new and more intricate problems; and the intervention of the third power—the proletariat—will become still more imperative to realize the longings of the masses for permanent peace and a new civilization.