

Disarmament

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The problem of disarmament, by the very nature of the case, presumes the existence of armament. Therefore our task begins with the armed condition of society; it is the tendencies which bring about this condition that we must study and grasp, in order to arrive at an understanding of the possibilities of doing away with armament.

Society arms itself to be able to resort to force. Whenever two or more decide on such a course, it means—WAR. That means that the real starting point of our treatment must be the nature of war, its origin and purposes, for armament and disarmament are only incidental considerations in the problem of war as a whole.

What, then, is war? To begin with, a physical fight by organized masses, a concrete struggle which is the expression or material result of a disagreement between the opposing parties, an antagonism of their interests which is being overcome by physical test.

Going a step further, we find that all parties, whether non-participants or participants, are agreed on the point that this physical test is never a first resort, but always a last resort; that, is to say, they maintain that the object desired could not possibly be arrived at by peaceful means.

The stage of actual combat is reached at the point where both sides demand concessions which they consider absolutely essential and on which they cannot compromise, at the same time that the opposing side or sides, on whom the demands are made, consider their fulfilment an equally absolutely impossibility.

Under such circumstances, with two powers or groups of powers ready to appeal to ordeal by battle, we must ask ourselves, to begin with, whether disarmament can be advocated to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, to prevent bloodshed. And the answer is that it cannot, because the armed combatants would

first have to agree to postpone the question that led to the test of physical force, before they can agree to disarm. And we have assumed that the question at stake is one which each belligerent considers a vital issue—an issue of life or death; and experience shows that the cause of war is always so presented by belligerent powers. Disarmament, in that event, would be the result of previous amicable agreement, and not the means of reaching, not to mention *compelling* such agreement, and the question in contention would already have passed out of the contentious stage, in other words, *there is then no issue really involved*. Under such circumstances, peace is self-evident, for the existing set of postulates.

Incompatibility of interests is the basis of the military situation, that is, previous agreement by other than military methods is admitted to be impossible; whichever way we put it, an appeal to disarmament is futile as a means of preventing the outbreak of war under existing conditions, that is, for example, under conditions such as existed before the outbreak of the present war: and these conditions are the typical conditions of all capitalist society.

Of course, interests that are incompatible may not be unalterably so; they may be changed so that they no longer contain inherent antagonisms. Instead of imperialistic capitalist groups, we may, by the achievement of the Social Revolution, succeed in introducing harmony of industry and production. The new order would have no conflicting interests to be overcome by physical test of armed masses, for two proletariats can have no cause to fight each other.

Then, however, the disarmament theory has become useless, and its discussion is therefore a form of meaningless scholastic trifling. For, if society arrives at a stage where armament serves no purpose, it will not arm itself, and there is no need of recommending disarmament to solve anything. It would be like trying to cure an illness that had already passed. The disarmament theory, being merely academic under Socialism, must therefore, to have any significance at all, be applicable to society