

Current Affairs

The new Danger: Peace by Negotiation

It is becoming increasingly evident from day to day that the reactionaries of the world are preparing to "negotiate" and conclude peace at the expense of Russia, and to strangle the Russian Revolution in the process of "peace"-making.

For nearly three years—in fact since Germany failed in her initial rush at the battle of the Marne—the ruling classes of the world were living on the horns of a terrible dilemma: To continue the war, which had become a war of attrition, was fraught with great danger, since a war of attrition made the governments of the belligerent countries more and more dependent upon the working class—not merely the working class in the trenches, but the working class not subject to military discipline, the working class on its own battlefield, the mine, mill, and factory. On the other hand a "stalemate" peace, a peace in which neither side gained anything, in which both sides come home from the field of battle empty-handed, was equally as dangerous, particularly for the aggressor in the conflict. The failure of the aggressor meant the failure, and therefore the futility of all militarism and of the institution and social groups which go with militarism and live by it. Hence the frantic efforts of both sides for "peace with victory" even on the part of those elements of the ruling classes on both sides of "no man's land" which would otherwise have preferred to live in peace and harmony with their brethren across the line. It was a case of *sauve qui peut*—each "national" ruling group trying to save its own skin at the expense of its rival in other belligerent camps.

Then the Russian Revolution suddenly broke upon the tedium and monotony of the "stale-mate" world, and things began to move with lightning rapidity.

The Russian Revolution which at first seemed nothing more than an attempt of the Russian people to "modernize" their

state by riddling it of the incubus of Czarism, soon turned out to be a danger to the entire existing order of things not only in Russia but the world over. The Conflagration which started in Petrograd in March, 1917, was threatening to spread far beyond the confines of Russia, reaching out even beyond the European continent and into the British Isles. Already there was a "maximalist" movement in Great Britain, which, although much more moderate in its demands and modest in its ambitions than its Russian namesake, was nevertheless quite beyond anything that was ever attempted by the English working class, at least not since the Chartist Movement. The very name of this movement had an ominous ring, and was evidently a Russian importation. There was also talk of the organization of "Workmen's Councils," and many other disquieting symptoms.

Under these circumstances it was only natural that the more "far-sighted" among the ruling classes in both belligerent camps should seek a way to compose their differences so as to be able to present "a united front" to the common enemy. Fortunately, the very presence of this common enemy which made "peace by negotiation" an imperative necessity from the point of view of the reactionaries of the world, also furnished the means of bringing it about to their entire and mutual satisfaction. The problem of how to get "peace with victory" without either side "breaking through" on the Western Front was solved;—nay, the quite impossible feat of both sides carrying home "the prize of victory," suddenly became possible: There is that great shaggy bear that suddenly broke loose from the chain by which it had been fettered for centuries, and which was now running amuck—a danger to all good people and civilized order. If he be felled—as of right he ought to be—there will be enough booty to go round. It is true that the duty of felling him will devolve upon our "German cousin," who will naturally keep the entire booty to himself and his immediate associates in the enterprise. But then the matter could be arranged by way of "compensations"—a mode of international plunder with which