

The Aims of Labor.

(By Right Hon. Arthur Henderson,

NO ECONOMIC BOYCOTT.

The speeches and declarations of our leading statesmen, delivered in the early months of war, offer ample evidence of the fact that this country became an active participant in the gigantic world-struggle from only the highest and best motives. Speaking in the House of Commons as Prime Minister within a week of the declaration of war, Mr. Asquith said:

If I am asked what we are fighting for, I reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn international obligation. . . Secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed in defiance of international good faith. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that it is fighting, not for aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own selfish interests, but that it is fighting in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world.

Such, then, in broad outline, were the principal objects for which the British people unseathed the sword. We assumed the role of champion of the sanctity of international treaties and of the rights of small nations, and sought to impress upon the world that we desired neither territorial expansion, nor artificial economic advantage. This high conception of national duty inspired the entire population of the British Empire and its Dependencies, and produced an unparalleled display of unity and determination. Our armed intervention, taken with the full approval of practically the whole nation, was to be a clear and emphatic demonstration of our stern and uncompromising hostility to the savage recourse to the use of force, and the wicked and indefensible violation of the integrity of a neighbouring state by the German Government, which confessed that it regarded its treaties as "scraps of paper," and excused its act of wilful aggression by the plea that "necessity knows no law." And to-day, after more than three years of military effort, unprecedented in its toll of sacrifice — human, material, and financial—the majority of the people of these isles remain loyal to the high ideals and principles which animated them at the outbreak of hostilities, and are as firmly determined as ever to prosecute the war until these fundamental objects have been attained by military, diplomatic, and political means.

British Labour is convinced, as it has been from the beginning, that a victory for German Imperialism would be the defeat and the destruction of democracy and liberty in Europe. In the peace settlement, practical provision must be made against any future recurrence of the present terrible world-calamity by the elimination of aggressive militarism from the entire world and, what is equally important, by the removal of all the old-standing menaces and the prevention of new provocations to war.

The Allied nations are fighting against Germany's ambitions and immoral "will to power," which means German domination—military, political, and economic—at the expense of the rights of other peoples. The world will not tolerate German domi-

nation, but it does not wish for British or French or Allied domination. What it seeks is a full and practical recognition of the principles of freedom and equality among the nations.

If the suggested Federation of Nations is to have any prospect of real and permanent success, and if the present struggle is to be looked back upon as the war which ended all war, everything must be done to prevent the division of Europe into two separate and hostile economic camps after the war. It may safely be said that the latter eventuality would be fatal to all our hopes of a permanent peace, and a great betrayal of a righteous and noble cause. Instead of securing the abolition of war, it would perpetuate international suspicion, jealousy, and greed, the evil products of economic antagonisms which contributed so largely to the general causes of the present European conflict, and would lead inevitably to a bitter and devastating repetition of all the losses, sorrow, suffering and sacrifice within a few short years.

It cannot be too clearly understood that this is not the policy of organised Labour in this country, nor of the Socialists of France, Russia, Belgium or Italy, all of whom have declared emphatically that they do not seek the political and economic destruction of Germany. These representatives of the working classes and those in close association with them know full well that all attempts at economic aggression, whether by protective tariffs or capitalistic trusts or monopolies, lead inevitably to the exploitation of the working classes. They cannot regard with any other feeling than one of deep hostility any proposal or policy which seeks utterly to destroy the economic position of any people after the war; and if this is to be the intention or possible effect of the Paris Conference Resolutions, then it would be well to understand at once that organised Labour in this country is determined not to allow the normal economic relations of nations to be founded on a policy of oppression and ostracism, producing, as it must, hostility and hatred after the war.

British Labour is out to strangle and stamp under foot Kaiserism and Militarism and the "will to world domination" — and to substitute for them goodwill and fraternity: it is not at war with the peoples of Germany and Austria, except in so far as they support the war policy of their autocratic rulers. That it appreciates the danger of an economic struggle was clearly indicated in a decision reached at the recent Trade Union Congress by 2,339,000 votes to 278,000 or a majority of more than eight to one. The resolution was as follows:—

That the economic conditions created by the War have in no way altered the fundamental truth that Free Trade between the Nations is the broadest and surest foundation for world-prosperity and international peace in the future, and that any departure from the principle of Free Trade would be detrimental to the prosperity of the Nation as a whole.

This overwhelming majority shows very clearly that British Industrial Democracy, as represented by Congress, will decline to subscribe to a policy prejudicial to the economic in-

terests of our own working folk, and one that is calculated to prevent the definite and essential reconciliation of free democracies. Therefore, the proposal to cripple Germany financially and to render her impotent commercially by a ruthless trade war, may be expected to receive the determined opposition of the British Labor and Socialist Movement. Once the British people as a whole realise the true inwardness of such a policy how far it is out of accord with their own cherished aims in this war as declared by Mr. Asquith in his Guildhall, Dublin, and Cardiff speeches, and opposed to the spirit of international co-operation and goodwill, they will reject it as one inspired by a spirit of revenge, and consequently a fatal impediment to the attainment and maintenance of world peace.

In the interests of world peace, therefore, the Paris Resolutions, so far as they are intended to form the basis of a policy of organised systematic commercial and economic boycotting, which aims at the destruction of German commerce, must be strenuously opposed. They would provide a new standing menace to a healthy internationalism and to the future peace of the world, and impose further burdens upon the consumers in the respective countries.

If we have amongst us a class of politicians who regard the German people as rightful spoils to be economically exploited and oppressed after the conclusion of hostilities, let them cease talking of a fight to a finish, for no mere military victory can ever be the final stage of the struggle; it would only mean a transfer of the venue, with a change of weapons from the military to the economic. But British Labour, and especially the organised section, will refuse to regard the German and Austrian people in that light.

The fundamental purpose of British Labour in continuing its support of the war is the hope that it may influence the development of world democracy. In order that this may be accomplished, it is determined that the peace terms shall be just and honourable, and such as shall erect no barriers that will prevent the realisation of these high ideals. A spirit of revenge, if introduced, would vitiate the findings of any peace conference and make a democratic peace an impossibility. Moreover, British Labour appreciates the difficulty that has arisen already by the promulgation of the suggested policy of commercial repression and its effect in prolonging the war. France, Russia, and America all provide evidence that the objects and aims of England are suspected; consequently, we have persistent demands for a restatement of our position. We say to the German people that if they want peace, they must make themselves masters in their own house, that they must destroy the Kaiser's power for evil and that they must come into line with the free democracies of the world; but we increase their already serious difficulties by intimating that when they have succeeded they are not to be a free people but are to be commercially and economically isolated. What is to be thought of a statesmanship which invites the German people to form part of a Federation of Nations for the maintenance of a world peace, and at the same time proclaims the intention of constructing a Federation of Allies for no other object than the setting up of a commercial boycott of Germany? Such a proposal, under all the terrible experiences of the war, may

appeal to a section of the people influenced by the wounded feelings of to-day without regard to the consequences of the morrow; but when the full effects are realised they will be recognised as not only dangerous but criminal, and the sooner they are officially repudiated the better it will be for the Allied Cause.

These contradictory After-War Proposals, and the suspicion and doubt as to where Britain now stands, only render it more imperative that our aims and objects should be clearly restated in order that the world may know why it is we continue to fight. General Smuts has stated that the war is already won, and all that is required is for the Allies to sit tight until Germany acknowledges her defeat. If that is so, how important it is that we should be satisfied that the struggle is continued only because of failure to obtain the ideal peace settlement, and not because of misunderstandings as to our terms. It should not be difficult to give to the country the assurance that we continue to remain loyal to the position as expressed by Mr. Asquith in 1914, and that we are fighting neither for conquest nor for economic boycott.

We do not lose sight of that aspect of the economic question as it affects our overseas Dominions and Dependencies, for we consider that without repression and revenge it would be possible to make such arrangements as would improve the relationship between them and the Mother Country, both with regard to food supplies, raw materials and essential industries, without a revolution in our fiscal system. On this point, Sir Robert Borden, speaking as Prime Minister of Canada, has said that the people of Canada would not desire the people of the United Kingdom to change their fiscal policy for the purpose alone of giving a preference to the producers of Canada, especially if the proposed fiscal changes would involve any injustice or be regarded as oppressive by any considerable portion of the people of the United Kingdom. After calling attention to the Imperial Preference Resolution approved by the Imperial War Cabinet, which runs:—

The time has arrived when all possible encouragement should be given to the development of Imperial resources, and especially to the making the Empire independent of other countries in respect of food supplies, raw materials and essential industries. With these objects in view this Conference expresses itself in favour of:—

1. The principle that each part of the Empire, having due regard to the interests of our Allies, shall give specially favourable treatment and facilities to the produce and manufacture of other parts of the Empire.

2. Arrangements by which intending emigrants from the United Kingdom may be induced to settle in countries under the British flag.

the Canadian Premier continued:—

I should say at once that this resolution does not necessarily propose, or even look to, any change in the fiscal arrangements of the United Kingdom. It does not involve taxation of food; it does not involve the taxation of anything. As far as the fiscal system of the United Kingdom is concerned, I followed when in England precisely the same course that I have carried out in this Parliament, and in this country—I decline to interfere in matters which are the sub-

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