

## Treaties, Trades and Strikes

THE dictation of treaties, has always been in the will of the conqueror. They are the red seal authority on the transfer of property right. And since they are (in some form) the resultant of force, by force alone is the guarantee made good. Hence they contain conflicting elements of reaction and contradiction, which, growing with social progress either render them void, or shatter them with a new application of the strong arm.

But although force may dictate treaties it cannot execute them. That is entirely dependent on the economic development of society. If the demands of the treaty accord with that development they can and will be fulfilled. If not they cannot be. And if they cannot be, they are indicative of the decline of the dictating power. For as treaties are of ruling class origin, and their demands are in ruling class interests, the non-satisfaction of such interest carries with it the evidence of its social futility,—the evidence of the ripened antagonisms between class interests and social necessity.

Why? Because treaties are the expression of trade interests. They "endow" certain nationals with certain "rights." They "confer" particular "privileges." They are the legal emphasis of the "right of might" to exploit certain territories. They are the demarcation of the only boundary lines that capital recognizes—and it recognizes them only so long as it has to. Indeed, it can do no other. Commercialism and its merciless competition is the outstanding characteristic of civilization, and the impress of gain is stamped deep on every charter that it wins. "Success" is the ideal of bourgeois Philistines—and it is measured in terms of profit. So, if the treaty term violate the material facts of social conditions; if its objective—trade—cannot be realized, it proves that the initial interest of development has changed to its inevitable opposite, and has deadlocked further progress.

For trade is not a pastime. It is the prime motive of capitalist society; its chief activity. On trade has it grown and waxed fat, and on trade only can it subsist. Its necessities force it continually outwards. It cannot centre on itself because its aim can be realized only beyond itself. To thrive it must expand; to expand it must dispossess, and to dispossess is to enslave. Mutual or opposing interests are the attraction or repulsion of nations as of individuals. These interests are the keys to history, determining and explaining conflict and alliance, giving impulse and direction to development, and in the broad sweep of progress, marring and distorting the original detail of both.

Thus we find Tory Britain aligned against revolutionary France. Later, we have a bourgeois Britain, allied with a feudal Germany against Napoleon—that "bloody menace" to freedom, i.e., freedom of British trade expansion. At another time we see Britain, France, and the "unspeakable" Turk united against Czarist Russia—the new menace to India, Constantinople and French finance. We see the feudal landlord and bourgeois industry divided in the American civil war—for the freedom of the slaves. British and American ships "demonstrate" in Oriental harbors for the "right" of the "open door," that is, the "right" of western trade to eastern markets and resources. Now, the dapper little Jap has clothed himself in the gentlemanly attire of civilization and "demonstrates" on his own account; while the "Anglo-Saxon" kinsmen, Britain and America, under the stern compulsion of Imperialism have undertaken the heavy burden of Prussian militarism, and are busily setting the board for—oh—the safeguarding of "our democracy."

Still, although the fundamental principles of development remain the same, the political "topography" is constantly changing. The ever-developing interests of capitalist trade in ever widening spheres of action, induces an ever-varying feature of detail. The treaties of Berlin and Vienna, the pacts of London and Peking, although in essence identical are diverse in aspect from the modern treaties of Versailles, Sevres, and other "agree-

ments" of the great war. In the former the day of Imperialism was at its dawning; in the latter, setting. Then the Aladdin's cave of the world market lay open to the plunderer; now the magic formula is confounded. The economics of "win the war" has changed to the economics of "win the peace." And the necessities which compel the direction of the latter involves all society more and more in the grim, confused, desperations of the former, in the tragedies and consequences of a social system strong in its decline, yet helpless in the tightening coils of doom.

The Allies have demonstrated that their victory is barren,—because the spoils cannot be collected. But for them that collection is imperative. Yet the more desperate, insistent, and forcible they become, the more do their own economic burdens suffocate them, the more are they entangled in financial contradictions. Like the victim of the quicksands, the more they struggle the more certainly are they engulfed. If the vanquished must pay, then must the industry of the victors suffer. If British trade may not deal with countries of low exchange, then must the conquerors be penalized—and the "enemy" be less able to meet his liability. And if they do so trade, cheap competition will react on the plug "to home," will curtail his "rights" and "liberties," limit his standards of life and living, and by wiping out purchasing power will wipe out production. The penalty of victory is not new trade and luscious profit, but fresh war and revolution.

In addition, there is Bolshevism and its trade agreements, the latest of which, with Persia and Afghanistan strike a new blow at Imperialism. For by its renunciation of Czarist "concessions," conditionally that no third party shall acquire them, Bolshevism Russia draws those nations into the current of its trade influences, and at the same time limits the world mart for world empire. And although political conditions have compelled a considerable alteration in the immediate course of Bolshevism, it is steadfast in its fundamental aim. Forced by its dire need to capitalist trade, it has yielded to the principles of trade, but in yielding, by that much it has forced western capitalism to accept the limitations of Bolshevik trade relations.

But capital cannot admit limitations. On the contrary it requires the completest freedom of expansion. Checked, the more industry is thrown out of gear, the market becomes disorganized, production falls off and trade depression, wide and deep, settles over that great mis-called democracy, capital.

Thus we come to the misery, suffering and destitution of today. To the high costs of war "prosperity," to the wage depreciation of peace stagnation and its corollary of strikes and unemployment that shake society to its tottering foundations in the grip of the colossal and unrestrainable forces of developed capitalism.

The industrial troubles of the moment as yet little in themselves, are pregnant omens of change. Coal in Britain and steel in America are dominant industries; what happens to them is a forecast of future events. In normal times wage cutting (to some extent) and trade drives could result in lower costs and increasing sales; today, with stupendous debts, low exchanges and shrinking markets, the probability is less production. Hence we may, with every confidence, expect the situation to grow worse.

Since the main cause of our troubles is capitalist production for profit, the sole remedy is the negation of that cause. While capitalist society continues, our efforts must pivot on its ethic of gain. We must remain the pawns of its forces. It cannot be reformed, it must be abolished. Class law and social prosperity are antagonistic; profit and freedom cannot exist together; business and fraternity are antitheses. If commerce draws peoples together it is only in the temporary bonds of piratical association. A new interest compels a new alliance—and a new war. Commerce is ever disruptive. Throughout the ages wherever it has held sway it has brought the shadows of death. From the Attic tribes to the remotest east, from the Levant to

Peru, it has bedraggled society with blood, shrouded it in the "mists of tears," scourged it with cupidity and corruption, and left behind it a desolate trail of smoking ruins and bleaching bones. R

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