

The League of Nations

At an early stage in human history the necessity for combinations of rival factions became apparent. The struggle for existence made imperative such alignments. The weaker tribes, even though bitterly opposed to each other, often found it necessary for their mutual preservation to combine their forces when some strong and hostile tribe threatened their destruction.

Since the inception of class society this tendency towards group co-operation has not ceased. Medieval history is replete with examples of national and provincial alignments for the purpose of resisting the encroachments of invading forces. This was a period of migration. The great European States of today were then in the process of formation. The incessant wandering of tribes and races, all bent on the same errand—seeking what they might devour, was obviously conducive to keen competition which in turn led naturally to combination.

The early years of the capitalist system were marked by numerous cases of national unions. The "dual alliance," the "triple alliance"; alliances holy and unholy stand out plainly in the labyrinth of combinations through the course of the last few centuries. When one section of Europe succeeded in reaching the pinnacle of commercial importance the less fortunate competitors could solve their problem only by a concentrated attempt to undermine the position of the victor.

Italy, Spain, Portugal, Holland and France in turn enjoyed a season of supremacy on the commercial field. But not for long was this supremacy to remain uncontested. The lesser lights were continually formulating ways and means to ensure their own aggrandisement at the expense of the common enemy. One by one the leading powers succumbed to the inevitable and made way for a temporary successor.

With the great industrial inventions of the 18th century the competition became ever more intense. The manufacturing class had now the means for producing commodities at a rate unknown and unthought of before. The discovery of new lands made possible new markets for the products of field, factory and mine. For a brief period the demand for commodities was greater than the supply. But soon came the change. The machine was perfected at a rapid rate. The productivity of labor increased enormously. The discovery of new continents had its limitations. The foreign markets began to contract. A crisis was imminent. It eventually arrived.

From that time up till the present the necessity for national alliances was repeatedly emphasized. The more there was to sell, and the smaller the dimensions of the market, the greater the need of effective concentration in the ranks of the capitalist class. Self-preservation was the great incentive for group dominance. There was no possibility for absolute expansion. The machine and the market prevented this. But one faction could grow and become powerful by selecting temporary confederates, whose needs were pressing, and in conjunction with these crush the aspirations of all contenders. Even before the Great World War the industrial nations of Europe were divided into two hostile camps. The interests of the various states determined in which camp they were to be found.

Today the international situation is vastly changed. A League of Nations is demanded but not such a league as of yore. In the present combination it is not a question of a balance of power between two evenly matched groups of nations. Rather is it the objective to include all the great powers. A few of the unorthodox, and erstwhile enemy, countries are temporarily excluded. Even those are to be admitted when occasion permits. A few backward undeveloped sections, which are not as yet blessed with stable governments that allow unfettered exploitation on the part of the great powers, are not eligible for membership. They must prove their worth by erasing the barriers that stand in the way of foreign capital. When they meekly submit to being civilized and capitalized they are, then, re-

garded as suitable partners in this laudable enterprise.

The main purpose of the present league is to avert another 1914. Another such catastrophe, and capitalism is doomed. Everything possible must be done to cope with the situation. During the past few years the tendency towards disintegration has been very pronounced. In Russia the old regime collapsed. In Germany, Austria, Italy, and England the structure is rapidly crumbling. Nothing can be done to avert the downfall of class society. But sagacious co-operation on the part of the big capitalist nations may easily retard the revolution for a time. Ergo—the league. So far as we can see the most important work that will come before the league executive will be the preparation for the next war. This problem must be carefully handled, or disastrous results are sure to ensue.

So far as the victorious nations are concerned they are practically unanimous regarding the advisability of belonging to the league. There is one exception — the United States. In the big European countries, any opposition to the covenant that may have existed was merely the work of irresponsible individuals or cliques. No great interests within any of the Entente Allies were arrayed against the league. Why such should be the case in the U. S. appears strange till we understand the situation.

During the greater portion of the war period the U. S. was the store house of the belligerents. When they required food, clothing, munitions, guns, tractors, aeroplanes or submarines they had recourse to the commissary. But nothing tangible was given in exchange. The gold reserves were soon depleted after the commencement of war. Goods could be purchased only on credit. Loans totalling 10 billions of dollars were made to their partners by the U. S. capitalists. Payment was to be made when victory was assured. Britain was the Allied banker. She financed many of the European states to fight and others not to fight. With the war over their debts were forgiven them by their banker—Britain. A glance at the division of the spoils would be sufficient to show how the banker could be imbued with this spirit of generosity.

The post-war situation was a perplexing one. There was no possibility of settling accounts with the creditors. Europe was left in straightened circumstances. To obtain anything, even in the future, the U. S. must again assist financially to reconstruct the shattered mines, factories, oil wells, and fields of her embarrassed debtors. So interwoven and interrelated have the capitalist class of all continents become that a working agreement must be made between them. Whatever profits accrued during the war were largely made up of bonds, debentures, securities, mortgages, and other paper evidences of property ownership. An international league embracing all business associates appeared to be the one means of adjusting affairs.

But in the United States there happen to be clashing interests within the nation. The overshadowing issue in the recent election campaign was the league or no league. The real reason for the division was not given to the public. "The papers 'id it 'andsome." We were told harrowing tales about our boys being forced to go to Europe to fight were the covenant accepted without drastic reservations. Strange as it may seem they were forced to do precisely this same thing before the subject of the league was broached. It was not on sentimental grounds that the opposition was directed.

Article X. was the bone of contention. Wilson's statement that this article was the heart of the covenant was well made. Here the territorial integrity of all members of the league is guaranteed. The great manufacturing and commercial interests in the U. S. cannot afford to guarantee the territorial integrity of Europe and Asia. Here they find their great competitors. Their altruistic associates of only a few months ago are today their business opponents.

Previous to the war, England, Japan, and Germany did the bulk of the South American business. While engaged in feats of arms this trade was necessarily neglected. The business houses of the U. S. supplied the deficiency. Regardless of the demoralization of the war years, the manufacturers of Europe are rapidly renewing their former trade affiliations. Especially is this true of Britain. Her business acumen is forcing the U. S. to release its hold on the South American market.

The only possibility of the American capitalists gaining a new and profitable field for exploitation is by expanding in the direction of the Orient. In all other foreign markets the American enters into competition at best on an equal footing with the capitalists of other countries. In many instances, and in widely separated places, he finds circumstances that place him at a profound disadvantage.

In China, however, the field is decidedly favorable. The altruistic attitude of America in refusing to accept a cash indemnity during the Boxer rebellion in China has always left them "persona grata" in the minds of the Chinese merchants. This good feeling was greatly enhanced when the U. S. refused to accept the decision of the peace conference in regard to the "Shantung steal," and insisted on an amendment to the peace treaty rectifying the matter in such a way that the national integrity of China would be assured for the future.

But, again, the problem arises, no matter in which direction the U. S. moves in order to extend its foreign markets there is no possibility of avoiding an encroachment on either Britain or Japan. For the American business man to subscribe to a league covenant which guarantees the territorial integrity of the two countries whose holdings must be encroached upon would be downright foolishness. Of course, it may be asserted that even were the league proposal endorsed it would still be a mere "scrap of paper" that could be deserted at will. But such drastic action as this is possible only in cases where the aggressor is able to hold his own in opposition to all the forces that can be arrayed against him. Ethical considerations can be wiped out only by brute force. Such a favorable position is not occupied by the U. S. today.

Other interests in America like the big bankers and international traders who have interests in all countries are for the league. So long as the world situation is sound they have nothing to lose and much to gain by a league of those sections in which their interests are located. They own no personal or private property in tangible form. Their wealth consists of bonds of all countries and industries. Anything that tends to strengthen the position of international capitalism and sweep back the rising tide of revolution is considered worthy of their endorsement. Their outlook extends beyond the boundaries of any one country, for the simple reason that their interests do likewise. Between these two conflicting groups the quarrel is.

From the workers' standpoint it matters not who wins, he loses. League or no league he is still one of millions of downtrodden, oppressed, exploited slaves. Since the inception of political society we of the working class have occupied this menial position and must continue so to do 'till ignorance and apathy make way for knowledge and action. None of the problems confronting our masters on either side of the league concern us. We have no interests to lose or conserve. Our only hope lies in the direction of a league of workers who understand their class position and act accordingly.

J. A. McD.

Canadian Workers' Defense League

Send all money and make all cheques payable to A. S. Wells, B. C. Federationist, Labor Temple, Vancouver, B. C.

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