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War in the Pacific—What For?

Part 2.

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NO doubt some reader will be influenced by the press accounts of progress made at Washington towards a favorable basis for the reduction of armament.

He may conclude this to be a sincere attempt on the part of the ruling class to give the world a respite from war.

Alas, such is not the case, but is instead the outward show to appease the pacifists upon whose shoulders fall most heavily the burden of taxes for the upkeep of the State forces.

These taxes must be paid by bourgeois society for industrial expansion.

In support of this, let me cite for a moment a similar condition which developed in 1910, when the war clouds were gathering over the Atlantic, and the race for naval construction became most frenzied.

At that time Great Britain decided to lay down two keels for each one laid down in Germany.

A decision arrived at after the great "Peace" conference at the Hague in 1909, when the Agenda on armaments was precisely the same as that drawn up at Washington, November 1921.

In an "open letter," addressed to an English contemporary, Prof. Hans Delbrueck of Germany had this to say concerning the cause of armament:—

"Full of alarm concerning the new arisen maritime power England has thereupon enormously strengthened her own armaments, and from all sides are now heard complaints of the intolerable burdens which are laid upon the peoples.

"It is a great exaggeration to attribute these armaments simply and solely to the German-English opposition; there are many other States and parts of the world in which obstructive rivalries call forth armaments; but assuredly one of the most important elements of all is the tension which I have just described between Germany and England.

"This tension cannot be got rid of. The Germans . . . will insist for all time upon the possession of a fleet which compels the respect of even England; and we shall the more certainly do this since our trans-oceanic trade and mercantile fleet are rapidly improving and extending."—(Emphasis mine.)

That is a frank admission that armament is not the cause of war but, instead, is simply the effect of the way in which trade is carried on.

It is refreshing compared with the nauseating panegyrics appearing in the press today.

Moreover, the best of living writers having claims upon the title of thinkers will admit that the war of 1914-18 was the outcome of trade rivalry; the very terms of settlement made that clear.

A settlement which made the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles look like a scene from Ali Baba.

"Where instead of settling the claims of oppressed peoples they each submitted programs of territorial aggrandizement and economic advantages, while at the same time they (the Allied representatives), presented erroneous indemnity bills the total of which exceeded by billions the aggregate wealth of the enemy countries."

Disarmament conferences have followed each other in a steady stream since 1899, when the Czar of Russia proposed that the nations of the world should cease to develop their armies and navies beyond their (then) present strength.

And each in turn, like every "Peace" conference, has failed miserably to establish a basis upon which they can all agree.

Take for example, France, the most brazenly imperialist country in Europe today and watch the moves made by the Government and the declarations made by its representatives at Washington while discussing reduction of armament.

Replying to Secretary Hughes' outline of a basis for naval reduction, Briand had this to say:—

"You have shown us the way; you have shown us that it is no longer a question of groping in the dark for a way out of the difficulty, you have struck out boldly the opportunity for us by setting the example. I say, Mr. Secretary, that we are back of you."

How far the French Government was willing to go, in support of Hughes' basis of reduction is shown in the press despatch here quoted from the daily press December 7th, but a few days previous to Briand's reply:—

"The Chamber of Deputies (Paris) yesterday adopted provisionally the naval budget of 844,000,000 francs which covers the commencement of, and progress on three light cruisers, six torpedo boat destroyers, twelve torpedo boats, twelve submarines and one airplane carrier in addition to three cruisers and twenty-four submarines."

This weighty contribution to the future peace of the world will be further increased if the following report from Washington, December 16th, is correct:

"The British delegation learned that the French plan provides for ten 35,000-ton super-dreadnoughts in the ten years subsequent to 1925.

"These vessels of a type similar to the American battleship Maryland, would give France a capital ship tonnage of 350,000, as against 315,000 for Japan and a preponderance of new "post Jutland" type of craft over all nations."

While the hands of America, Britain and France are raised high in amazement at the perfidy of France, the sheet is still wet where the signatures of Balfour, Hughes and Kato are appended to a naval agreement between them to discard the oldest and most obsolete craft and retain those which are most efficient of pre-war days and those that embody the net experiences of the war.

Ships like the Colorado, the Hood, and the Mutsu, whose displacement is greater than any other fighting ships afloat or is intended by the naval programme of other nations; ships whose gun batteries are the highest calibre, and whose speed is that of express trains.

Fleets made up of craft like these and of vessels of immediate pre-war days can afford to be less, numerically, than was the case in former days. They displace, too, a considerable amount of manpower, as every known device for conserving this is embodied in them.

So governments may be able to show the taxpayers that they have considered their interests by reducing active workers aboard these ships to the naval reserves, thus reducing expenses by reducing pay (reader, let's have a drink!).

Naval engagements in the near future will be of such a character that an entire fleet will be wiped out in a few hours. A big reserve then is necessary to man new fleets in course of construction, and in case of such a disaster.

From all of the foregoing one may deduce the fact that Washington will be no more successful in arranging a basis upon which society can rest at peace, undisturbed by thoughts of war,—no more so than Paris, Versailles, London, Geneva, and the Hague on previous occasions.

What bourgeois society has failed to take cognizance of is that capitalism is organized for war and not for peace.

Under capitalism industrial activity can only proceed in spasms; yet so prolific is machine production, the output of labor can only be consumed in war.

On the other hand, so great is the cost of war, the levies made on industry, industrial stagnation soon follows and the workers for the major part of peace time are casually employed. It is then that competition becomes keener between the sellers and whenever trade can be carried on friction is generated.

So back we come again to the only potential market for the surplus of sellers and sellers of surplus. Writing in the November issue of "Current History" (New York) Stephen Bonsal has this to say about this market:—

"When I say that China was our great market I merely state what most people will admit; but when I add that China, far away and disturbed, today the Cinderella of world politics is a market of almost limitless possibilities I shall be thought to indulge in a figure of speech or at best to be merely expressing a pious wish. Nevertheless, it is a fact that cannot be successfully controverted.

"For proof of my assertion let us look at the carefully compiled figures of our export trade for the first six months of the current year as furnished by the matter-of-fact statisticians of the Department of Commerce.

"These figures reveal that Russia is off the commercial map and that our German trade, naturally enough, is greatly reduced.

In fact, in every column radical reductions are revealed, not merely from the figures of boom years, but also by comparison with what were our exports in normal times. It is only when we come to China, in part famine stricken and with her trade and transportation disturbed and even crippled by unfavorable internal and external problems, that anything like a basis for optimism is noticeable.

"Now, these figures show that, in spite of all these unfavorable conditions and heavy handicaps that await adjustment at the Pacific conference, our exports to China for the first six months of 1921 have increased 12 per cent!

"This fact is intrinsically important, but it also possesses a psychological value of great importance, for it gives the first indication of a favorable change in the commercial chart of our world trade, upon the maintenance and growth of which depends, among other things, the high living standard (!) of American labor.

"Here plainly, then, across the Pacific, with its hundreds of millions to be clothed and fed, is the cure for present unemployment and an available and most opportune substitute for European markets, which will be disturbed and may prove unprofitable for years, long lean years to come."

Here, too, are attracted the sellers from other nations; sellers whose profits from industry are also affected by conditions in Europe, and with interests in China which cannot fuse.

For instance, the United States will trade machinery with China and receive in exchange raw silk and silk substitutes. These materials will be transformed in American factories, and the products will place still further in the background of a world market the textiles of Great Britain.

The machine in China as elsewhere in the world will supersede handicraft production and reduce the value of output as well as increase quantity. Hence, given unretarded, development under the tuition of America, China will supply the world with silk to the same degree at least, that Britain supplied it, formerly, with linen and cotton goods.

But the establishment of the machine means also the development of power. And this development calls for the release of capital for exploitive purposes, in extracting from nature coal for fuel, which has scarcely been touched in China. Again comes a

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