

A YOUNG SOCIALIST

IT is not the purpose of this article to develop a socialist theory of international life. Still less is it intended to set out a detailed plan of campaign to be followed in the complicated day-to-day manipulation of foreign policy. The writer proposes rather to indicate the relation of socialism to the more general issues. He can do little more than state the case and hope that the bald statement will itself suggest the framework of fact and argument which support it.

The distinctive characteristic of the socialist approach to any subject is in the attention it devotes to the influence of economic considerations. It is only right to emphasise, and probably it will be appreciated by most of the readers of this periodical, that this is no mere theoretical bias.

War, legitimately, or as now illegitimately, is an ultimate instrument of national policy. It is not an end in itself, though military victory may have its value. War may actually break out on some issue which is itself only derivatory as an instrument of policy—a strategic base, or a military movement, or an affront to prestige. Many of the problems of international politics are of this secondary order, and it is no doubt reasonable to maintain that they would disappear if an alternative basis of power politics could be organised. But it is useful to probe deeper, and to find that there must be some ultimate ends which the manœuvres of power politics are intended to achieve. There may be political, territorial, religious and, perhaps most common of all, economic classification.

There exists a great variety of admittedly economic questions in international life—tariffs and quotas, currencies and exchange, shipping, export subsidies, dumping and the like. But economic aims enter very largely into other issues. Silesia and Alsace-Lorraine have been bones of contention not merely on account of the mixed populations who occupy the surface of those territories, but also because of the assorted minerals which are found underneath. Political influence in or control of a state brings with it economic advantages in ordinary trading intercourse, and also in valuable concessions of mining rights and other openings for profitable penetration. The colonial issue is admitted to be largely of this order, and although the conclusion of some publicists, that the claim for colonies is principally political or psychological, is comforting to Englishmen, it is unfounded in fact.

Now it could not reasonably be argued that socialism would in itself directly solve all the economic issues which arise between nations. But it may fairly be said that it would greatly ease the problem which they set. It may at first sight appear strange that the nations persist in protectionist policies which every economist, and indeed every financier or business man, agrees are as a whole unsound. But these policies are the expression of a whole series of concessions to private interests. It is no accident that while socialists are planners, they are in general less protectionist than their neighbours. And if it be correct that socialistic methods will help to solve the problems of unemployment and wasted resources, that strikes at the root of the new economic nationalism which is intended to pass the burden of slump on to the shoulders of other nations.

But there remain real issues of national economic advantage and other basic international issues as well, just as there are causes of dispute among countries or provinces or the states of a federation. One fact stands out above all else. If war is to be avoided, then we have to organise our international society—be its component states socialist or not. Even though all states were socialist, that organisation would still be necessary. Furthermore this task of preventing war

is becoming ever more urgent. International organisation cannot wait upon the formation of a socialist world, but will be based on states of divergent economic structures. It has not been necessary to remove capitalism to procure peace among the component states of the American Federation nor to practise communism in order to keep the peace within national frontiers. What must be recognised by all is that the preservation of peace depends on the maintenance of the rule of law—that no one individual or state is above the law or can break the law as and when it thinks fit. That is the fundamental axiom for the prevention of war but, in addition to that, and no less important, the law must be founded on justice and must be capable of being changed in accordance with the dictates of a non-static international morality.

THE NEW COMMONWEALTH advocates a machinery and a policy whereby this international society can be attained. Through the medium of an international police force, under the control of an international authority, the rule of law can be upheld: by means of equity tribunals, the machinery of the League can be so implemented as to make the removal of international grievances a reality. The inevitable logic of its argument is such as to commend itself or indeed to force itself on even the meanest mentality. The resistance with which it meets is not in general intellectual doubt as to whether the procedure it proposes is the most practical. It is a compound of ignorance, interests, and sheer conservatism and, as a broad psychological basis, nationalism in a narrow sense. Such nationalism will have ultimately to be undermined. Is there reason to think that a socialist state will be more international than a capitalist one, and should we in the near future hope for more from a socialistic government than from a capitalist one? Is nationalism an independent force to be fought *in vacuo*, or is the struggle against it in some way allied to the economic issue?

Now it is a simple fact that the policy of THE NEW COMMONWEALTH is practically the official policy of the Labour Party, in a degree to which that could not be said of the National Coalition. It is natural that an individual who rejects tradition in one matter is unlikely to concede too much to inertia in another; it is difficult to support tradition in one field and innovation in another.

It is perfectly true that another war would destroy capitalism, but men in day-to-day life scarcely foresee the ultimate consequences of their acts. The foreign concessionaire or colonial industrialist, the exporter (particularly in the heavy industries) brings pressure to bear on governmental circles of his own type, not to go to war but to manœuvre, to carry through an imperialist or an aggressive economic policy. If one is maintaining the rights of private enterprise against Government control at home, it is natural not to support the surrender of full state sovereignty in the international field. Yet unless this is done, the dissatisfied states will retain their freedom to go to war, as surely as the trade unions retain the right to strike.

At every turn it is convenient to appeal to the nationalistic passion, to justify a tariff or to resist a wage-increase because of the "competition of low-paid foreign labour." To some extent, one can scarcely doubt, nationalism is deliberately fostered as a weapon in the everyday economic struggle between states. To a greater extent it is probably by a subconscious psychological process that the class of men who use nationalism as a defence for themselves are genuinely nationalist. It is hardly possible for the defenders of sectional interests to be internationalists, while it would be illogical to work for a co-operative commonwealth restricted to the limits of a nation or even an empire.