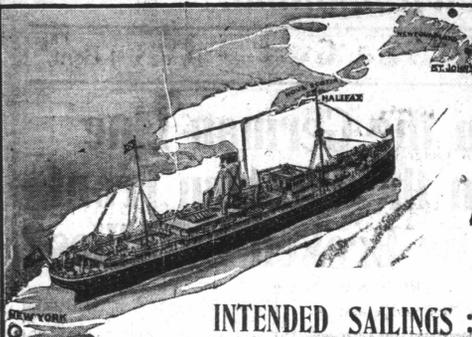


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## THE ROUND TABLE

### THE WAR AND ENGLISH LIFE.

A Quarterly Review of the Politics of the British Empire—Republished Under the Above Heading

#### IV. THE INDUSTRIAL OUTLOOK

THE attempt to review some of the domestic problems preoccupying the minds of the people at the present time would not be complete without a glance ahead; for the question of future relations of Capital and Labour, under the altered circumstances brought about by the war, is already much in men's minds, and has, in fact, been responsible for some of the most serious difficulties which have arisen.

Every thoughtful working man realizes that great difficulties are looming ahead for the working class after the war. Its growing strength before the war and the strong strategic position it occupied in its earlier stages will be the measure of its economic weakness then. The sudden cessation of war-contracts, which are employing several millions of workers, the demobilization of the Army, the weakening of the financial resources of the Trade Unions by the loss of contributions from members on war service, the presence in the Labour market of thousands of new recruits, difficult to organize, imperfectly trained, yet skilled enough to be available as blacklegs, seem likely to create a problem such as the working-class has never—not even after Waterloo—had to deal with before. It is clear that Labour will not be able to face it alone, without an understanding with Capital and active help from the State; just as Capital was not able by itself to face the unprecedented situation created by the demand for munitions. As the three partners were called into partnership by the problems of the war, and Labour forebore to press its full economic advantage by making concessions on the right to strike, and on Trade Union rules, so the partnership must be continued and extended in the effort to set the trade of the country on its feet again after the war. The prosperity of the next fifty years may, and probably will, depend on the rapidity with which our economic system adjusts itself to the new conditions. All three parties have a joint interest in the national task of recuperation, and if it is thwarted or even delayed by mutual suspicion and bickering and by the absence of considered plans, much of the sacrifice of the war will have been in vain.

It is too early to discuss in detail the problems that will arise; but certain main facts are already clear, and can be briefly stated.

Both Capital and Labour have much to learn. They have to adjust their minds to a totally new situation in which past landmarks and shibboleths will avail them little. In some form or other the problems which divided the nation before the war will still await solution. But to go back to pre-war conditions will be impossible. The nation will have lived through a great experience, a few years of crowded life embodying a century of development, which will have left its mark on every field of the national life—spiritual, social, economic and political. All sorts and conditions of people will have met and mingled, and will have learnt to know and respect one another's opinions and prejudices. Feelings of bitterness and suspicion born of isolation and segregation will often have been dissipated, even if only for a time, in the fellowship of common work. Vast new sections of the community—notably women in every class—will have become conscious of powers hitherto untried, and eager for wider fields of activity. Others, formerly classed as unskilled, will have become accustomed to a broader horizon and a higher standard of physical health and will be unwilling to sink back into the ancient groove. Great strides forward will have been made in the organization of production—not only in the munition trades but in the other trades affected by the war. Even agriculture, as a result of high prices and the shortage of labour, will find itself equipped, in part at least, with scientific labour-saving machinery.

These are the facts which Labour must boldly face and to which it must wisely adjust its attitude.

Labour, like the country as a whole, has everything to gain by improved and more scientific production, if only its temporary injurious reactions can be kept under control. Improvements in production mean, or could mean, fair remuneration to the worker and reasonable hours, and it rests with the working class and its leaders and with public opinion to see to it that they do. Restrictions on production and the policy of 'cannily benefit neither the workman nor the industry nor the State. The best that can be said of them is that they may serve to avert evils (such as the reduction of piece-work rates) which the workers consider to be impending; but there are other and better ways of combating such dangers as this. Labour will never rise to its full stature in the State, it will never achieve an industrial constitution worthy the name of Democracy, till workmen boldly claim the problems of the working conditions and processes of their industry as their problems, and treat attempts to meet them, whether by improved production or "scientific management" or whatever may be the particular suggestion, not as something imposed on them from above, but as their own concern, on which they should be consulted as a matter of right and on which they should offer responsible advice, not simply from the point of view of their own personal convenience, but as partners with Capital in the working of the industry and of the community as a whole. It is not enough for Labour to have the power of Veto, as exercised by the Strike. The people of England controlled the Executive by their power to veto supplies generations before they gained the positive rights of democratic self-government. Something more than blank negation is needed from Labour—a real understanding of the problems which each industry has to meet and a readiness to confer with and give considered advice to the industrial executive on matters within their competence. The more Capital and Labour can be brought together, not simply to

strike a "collective bargain" over the disposal of the surplus profit, but actually to discuss the problems of the industry or service which is their common concern, the better it will be for Trade Unionism, for British Industry and for the security and prosperity of the State.

The attainment of such a position presupposes the abandonment by Capital of certain patriarchal notions of proprietorship, still cherished in many quarters, and a willingness to meet the representatives of the workers on the common ground of industrial service. It presupposes no less a change of attitude and organization within the ranks of Labour itself. It implies the spread of broader and more democratic forms of organization within the Trade Union world, the elimination of relics of monopoly and privilege and craft-selfishness, the ready association of craft with craft in the pursuance of common ends, an eagerness to welcome new classes of members and to make them free of the fellowship, a readiness to bridge what has been too often in the past the impassable gulf between skilled and unskilled and between men and women, and, above all, a closer attention to the development of the industrial training and education by which alone the dignity and prosperity of the craft or industry can be maintained. In some of these directions progress can already be recorded. The executive of the English railways have at last broken with a bad past by consenting to negotiate directly with the representatives of the National Union of Railwaymen, while the Union, on its side, followed by the Railway Clerks' Association, has opened its doors to women workers, realizing that only by common membership and association can the new recruits be initiated into the spirit of the service.

But if Labour has much to learn, if it is to weather the coming storm, Capital has even more. If the moral for Labour is 'maximum production, as the only way to make up for the waste of wealth during the war, the moral for Capital is maximum taxation, as the only way of meeting the State's new burden of debt. The war has made Capital scarce, and in the natural course it will make dear: the rate of interest is already and is likely to remain unusually high. But what Capital demands and, owing to its international character, can succeed in exacting in interest it will have to field in taxation. The investing public must realize that it cannot in justice be allowed to enjoy to the full the advantages arising out of its economic position, just as Labour did not enjoy to the full the advantage arising out of the scarcity value of its service. The idyllic, affluent days have passed away from this country for long years ahead. Long may England till remain, what Mr. Lloyd George once described her, "the best place in the world for a rich man to live in"; but wealth will be asked to contribute in unprecedented measure to the service of the State. The gross inequality of the distribution of wealth in this country has long been felt to be a standing evil; but many have acquiesced in it, not simply out of selfish slothfulness, but because they distrusted the remedies proposed and the spirit of class-bitterness which often seemed to actuate their promoters. They felt uneasy about "great possessions," which seemed to separate them from the mass of their fellow-countrymen; but they felt still more uneasy over the designs of those who proposed to despoil them. Henceforward, if we are to pay our way as a nation, there must be, what England has not known for a century, a real simplicity of life in all classes, and an approximation, if not of incomes, at least of standards of living. If we are to avoid reverting to a struggle between the classes no less fruitless and even bitterer than before the war, the excesses of both ends of the scale, the luxury at the top and the destitution at the bottom, must be sloughed off by the State. New habits will bring new horizons, as the war has brought to so many already; and England, fortified by a more firmly knit association of all classes of her citizens, may yet lead the way in the solution of the industrial problems with which the civilized world will be everywhere confronted. The "sophists and the calculators," the subjects of Burke's everlasting derision, may demonstrate by their statistics that England after the war will be an immeasurably poorer community. The duty rests upon Englishmen to show that her loss of riches has made her richer in the things that count.



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