

Problems of The New Conference

THE Washington Conference has, Godlike, suspended its labors and refers its more practicable decisions to—Genoa. A camouflage, blending beautifully with the perennial verdancy of "public opinion." At any rate, it is much more pleasant to 'firmly resolve to find a solution for the European problem' under the genial skies of Italia, than in the somewhat strained atmosphere of the "greatest democracy." Besides, the new venue is at the heart of immediate trouble, and Italy, may be "wanted" by the diplomats.

The economic substance of victory presses sorely on Europe, dividing, rending, shattering all society in the callous struggle for commercial supremacy, threatening, more and more insistently, the whole polity of commerce. Tentative suggestions and proposals are put forward, aiming, more or less, at a U. S. of Europe. All such proposals ultimately resolve into a scientific exploitation of European peoples by Allied capital. But the beginning is continually voided by the unscrupulous ambitions of the Allies themselves. Commerce and profit are the concrete expressions of nationalism and individualism, and in the present stage of social development, such relics of ancient actualities are prolific with increasing dissensions.

But shifting the scene of discussion, does not exorcise the productive cause. That cause is constant, developing from its own inertia, its inevitable sequence of results. Delay, but fortifies the trouble and renders its fateful progeny more imminent. In the European question, Britain and France are opposing powers. Stripped of war morality, they face each other in defence of palpable, and urgent necessity. Both are dominant with prestige, both are trying to stave off bankruptcy, both are under bond to American Imperialism. To clear her feet from entangling social chaos, Britain required world wide interconnection of trade. But that requires a restored Germany, Soviet recognition, and Oriental tranquility.

But France wants the map of Europe of one color—La Belle France—i.e., the domination of Europe. Domination means power, and power means the control of the means of power. That is why the coal of the Ruhr is needful to the iron of Briery; that is why Silesia fell to Poland—the minion of France. That is why the bridgeheads of the Rhine are in French

hands, why the Supreme Council was dominated so long by France, and why France withdraws when that domination is countered. That is also why France is en rapport with the Turk (the violation of another scrap of paper). It helps to march the S. W. frontier of Russia; brings France into contact with Eastern oil, prospect, and resource,—and may offer a needful "base" to France in the Levant.

The French policy of recognition of Czarist debts by the Soviet Government isolates Russia—a policy, long countenanced by Britain in the hope of crushing that "haunt of tyranny,"—and by reparations, which now isolate Germany, comes at last, into open conflict with Britain. And conflicting interest entails—preparedness. The Allies, having failed signally at Washington to cheapen warfare, are now sternly confronted with European economics. Europe being in debt to America is, of course, under the thumb of her creditor, and America pipes a tune not at all to the liking of her quondam associates in democratic endeavor.

But the calm necessity of economic circulation takes no account of legal debt. Indeed, it opposes and transforms it into an actual handicap. Because, not gold alone, but trade (goods, bills and bonds) is wealth. If circulation stops with it stops the prestige of the circulating medium, and bankruptcy falls alike on debtor and creditor. Consequently the "open door," beloved of America, cannot awaken any sympathetic response in her commercial competitors. Trade where and how they will, is their common necessity, and trade they must, be it never so dangerous, and the claim of the creditor is thus weakened by the very urge of the debtor to meet his obligations.

Britain strives with redoubled subtlety—yet with a necessary increase of repressive force—to regain her normal financial supremacy, and with comparative success. America she consoles with flattering sentiments, while she turns her earnest attention to the immediate enemy at her gates, and in all probability, derives additional strength and assurance from the suspicions engendered at Washington to combat her rapacious rivals. She is at one with America on the submarine question, for a similar reason—the destruction of trade carriers, and although consenting to a reduction in capital tonnage it is perhaps reluctant, for, while costly, shipbuilding is a key industry in Britain, and any reduction there weakens her in the struggle for existence. Against her is France; strong with militarism, wide on the open sea, stalwart against a stricken Europe, more assured with her new possessions of coal and iron and seemingly confident of her strength in the

Near East, fatefully travelling in 1922 the tortuous paths of 1912. So perhaps do they pay court to the brunette senora of the olive groves—which that opportunist and frankly calculating dame may in good time upset. For to her the Mediterranean littoral is a goodly country—and mechanical power—like Jehovah—is no respecter of persons.

To reconstruct Europe, in terms of capital, means credit—not the cancellation of indebtedness. To establish credit is to establish trade relations. But how can Britain, whose interests are in a restored Germany and a productive Russia, consort with France, whose interests are—the restoration of French finance, i.e., a disinherited Germany and an altogether un-Soviet Russia? And will—can—America leave Europe alone? If America refuses further credits, she will find herself all the quicker involved in the entanglements she is so fain to avoid. For Europe, left to stew in its own juice, becomes (seemingly) the vassal of France, exploited for the upbuilding of a French "Uber Alles." Thus cut off from common capitalist expansion it limits the activities of the rest; augments industrial chaos and hastens the march of the red god in the Pacific. On the other hand, if credit relations are advanced, the industrial stagnation may be partially and temporarily relieved, but Europe becomes then the vassal of the "great west"; her capitalists, but creditors' agents; her vanquished Germany (necessitously relieved) and Soviet Russia (implicitly victorious) admitted to the new comity of trade; and the last hope of France flickers out.

The latter course would seem the more obvious. Commercial interest, national equity. Imperialist ambition and (so-called) humanitarian sentiment seemingly converge on this direction. And France, seeing, prepares to meet it, albeit in vain. For the economic of today is a vastly different complex from its ancestor of previous days. Then the battle was for the gilded "glory" of nationalist supremacy, with scope for advancing accumulation. Now it is the naked Imperialism of international capital, straddling the world in completed development, of mechanical triumph, and social antagonisms. Empire faces empire in deadly rivalry and implacable necessity. Exist together they cannot; to amalgamate is an impossibility. There is no room for the one; no coherence for the other; no possible ground of common action against the rapidly ingathering forces of progress. And blindly, in the mad confusion of financial frenzies, the nations go,—probably—to their last accounting of war, but certainly to disaster, and through disaster to the democracy of proletarian supremacy.

ACTION FOR UNEMPLOYED.

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duty of a revolutionary body to lead the workers in these everyday struggles and to converge and co-ordinate their innumerable lines of action into one great stream of revolutionary progress flowing on to the social revolution.

Let the first of these two postulates for the time being pass for what it is worth, while our masters with the powers of State and the power of extending credits if need be, seek to negate it. But against the second I must place criticism. He would be indeed a conceited revolutionist who would suppose that he was necessarily capable of leading the workers in their everyday struggles and that the workers would be willing to be led by him. The mass of the workers so refuse to be led by anyone of their class as to belong to no organization. Most of those who are organized will not stand for radical leadership; they even resist radical membership, for radicals are irritating. Besides, to be honest with ourselves, the revolutionary element, jumping successively to the most diverse policies on the everyday

problems of the workers, have surely shown no capability for leadership, unless we confuse the securing of a small following with capability for leading.

There is further objection to be made. The labor movement in all its various phases does not lend itself to co-ordination, to unity of purpose. Let us look at some examples. In some places progressive workers are urging a thirty hour week; elsewhere equally progressive masters are enforcing a thirty hour week as short time, and the slaves are kicking. How here are the actionists to co-ordinate these efforts? Again, the tale has reached me that in a certain city the different tailoring establishments, in union assembled, voted for a reduction in wages; one very capable cutter, who was opposed, however, to cutting his own wages, approached the boss for increase and got it; he was practically branded a traitor by his union for not adhering to their policy. Where's the room for unity of purpose? One could fill reams with similar instances. The entire labor movement presents itself as an immense accumulation of contradictory activities, and in it there can be no unified action without closing off half of the

lines of action.

We are wage-slaves and cannot afford to be other than realists. We are, being class-conscious, united with our fellow slaves to secure better conditions under capitalism. We realize the hopelessness of any material improvement of our conditions, but at the same time we realize the necessity of keeping up the fight. In all our struggles conflicting policies present themselves. What are we to do? One thing, and only one thing is possible—to use our brains. It may be poor equipment, but it's all we have to use. Stereotyped orders even though they come by radio from Moscow, cannot help us. In all matters of policy, in the conflict of craftism and industrialism, of nationalism and internationalism, we can only apply what knowledge we have of the system to the situation, and strive to increase our knowledge to make it more useful; and above all things to keep the realism clear before us, to show our fellow-workers what it is that is worth fighting for. To make our fellow-worker a Socialist is of more importance than drawing up twenty perfect constitutions.

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