
Labor and the War

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One of the peculiar paradoxes of the war has been that it has advanced the labor movement all



over the world. A great many factors have contributed to bring about this condition. In the first place, whatever we may think about the immediate causes of the war, wherever we may place the immediate responsibility for its outbreak, one

thing becomes clearer every day, and that is that the responsibility for this greatest calamity that has ever befallen mankind does not rest upon the workers. If 5 years ago we had not had an autocratic, militaristic, capitalist regime in Germany and Austria; if 5 years ago there had been no dynasty of Hohenzollerns or Hapsburgs; if 5 years ago England and France and Belgium and all other countries of Europe had been under the actual government of the workers of these countries, just as Russia is today, we may be sure this tremendous catastrophe would never have happened.

The millions of human lives that have been destroyed and wrecked, all the misery of the nations of the world, would have been spared if the people, the working class, had ruled instead of their employers.

This realization makes an ever stronger appeal to mankind at large, and the working class in particular, feel in an ever increasing measure that

in their unity, in their control, lies the hope and salvation of the world.

Another great feature in this war has advanced the labor and Socialist movements to first place — the natural instinctive democracy which the war has brought about. I do not mean that democracy which we find in the treaties or in programs; I do not even mean that democracy which is granted by laws. I mean that impulsive, human democracy which in the face of a great crisis sees the man and the woman behind the person of every class and rank. I mean the kind of democracy which comes from a community of struggle, from a community of suffering, and yes, from the grim impartiality of that leveler of all human conditions, death, who is no respecter of persons, and mows down the rich and poor, the distinguished and the obscure, with the same impartial, cruel sweep of his bony hand. I mean the democracy which in the face of a world struggle and world crisis instinctively discards the artificial distinctions which have been erected in the course of centuries between men and women and women and women.

Another great tendency in war times which strengthens the progressive labor movement all over the world is the institution of collective ownership, management, and control of industries, which has been established in all civilized countries as a war measure.

This so-called War Socialism is not the Socialism we are striving after. It is not a democratic

collectivism. It is not a working class collectivism. It is a collectivism imposed from above and meant primarily as a war measure. Still the world cannot remain blind to the great fact that in the face of national and international danger, all conventional slogans about the sanctity of private property and the right of the owning class have disappeared as if they had never existed.

The collectivity of the people — the nation as such — proclaims, if not by word, then by deed, that all that we have and own, all that we are, we own and have and are, in trust for the community, and not by virtue of any alleged sacred rights of the private individual; that all of the men and women of the world are entitled to the world and the fullness thereof.

This great recognition of the rights of the human race as such over individual rights is revolutionizing public opinion and is rapidly advancing the cause of the radical labor movement and of Socialism.

Another feature of the war important in this connection is that for the first time in the history of the United States the large masses of the American people have begun to be trained into an appreciation of the spirit of internationalism. Up to the beginning of the war, an internationalist, in the eyes of the average unthinking American, was a man without a country, a man who had not patriotism. Patriotism stood for the narrow love of one's own country, coupled with an implied opposition to all other countries.

Today we are fighting "to make the world safe for democracy;" not the United States alone, not our own country — the world! We are announcing peace programs which affect the entire planet. The principle of international adherence, the recognition that the world does not end with the United States, and that no nation can be free so long as a single nation anywhere in the world is enslaved, is daily growing upon the American people.

Estimate the symbolic value of even such

simple, prosaic things as our war-bread, for instance. When you get a roll for your breakfast, the composition of which you cannot determine, and when you reflect that all over the country similar bread is being eaten, and this means that every man, woman, and child in the United States is giving away part of his best food to people in different European countries who have no bread at all; when you reflect that we have come to the point of sacrificing our personal comforts for the benefit of foreign races whom we don't know personally, then you realize that the practical application of the principle of international solidarity has made more progress in this country within the last year than it made in a century before.

All these are not things desired or designed by anybody. They do not justify war. But they explain why the indirect results of the war have been to strengthen the radical labor movement and the Socialist movement all over the world.

With all the outcry of our reactionary press, and our narrow-minded statesmen, against the present regime in Russia, we know that that great country, which has heretofore been the strongest resort of the darkest reaction, is today the vanguard of democracy and social progress. It is from top to bottom in the hands of the people, the working class, the peasants.

And I believe I am safe in saying that for the historian of the future the revolution in Russian will be of greater importance than the war itself. The war will pass some day! It cannot last forever. But the fact that one of the greatest countries in the world has broken away from the old capitalistic moorings, has turned a new page in history and proclaimed the rule of the people instead of the rulers — this cannot pass without the most vital effect upon the whole future of the human race.

The present regime in Russia may change, but whether or not there is any chance in the administration, on thing is certain — autocracy, capitalism, and oppression are dead in Russia.

And Russia will recover what she has lost. A great country like Russia cannot be dismembered forever. The people who have known how to overthrow their Tsar after a subjugation of hundreds of years will know how to get rid of their Teutonic despots and of all other kinds of attempted despotism. Russia will remain the land of liberty, leading inspiration to all other countries of the world.

And Russia has not been the only country to undergo such a marvelous transformation. There has been another revolution, less spectacular and picturesque, but almost as significant. I mean the spiritual, moral, and political revolution which has taken place among the working classes of England. For years and generations the working class in England was very similar in type and spirit to that of the average organized workers in the United States. But within the last year the British labor movement, under the lessons of the great world catastrophe, has been regenerated. It has grown to gigantic stature, has become a power in the land, a power in the world. The British labor movement has given the world a new charter. It has turned to a bewildered mankind, in the midst of a general chaos wrought by the havoc of war, and has said in substance:

“Fellowmen and women all over the world, look what you have got yourselves into by this inhuman organization of modern society. Civilization will never survive if this form of world organization continues. We must begin remodeling the world. We must build it anew. We propose to build it on the foundation of true democracy, liberty, brotherhood, and equality among nations, with full rights and independence for every nation, and equality within each nation. Equality not merely in name, not merely as a political right, but equality in life, equality in opportunity. We must create a series of commonwealths based on

social justice, and a free federation of such commonwealths encircling the globe. We must build a world which will put an end to all strife and struggles within each nation, to all wars among nations. We must rebuild it radically from the foundation up — a world of cooperation, a world of labor, a world of freedom, and a world of enjoyment!”

And this new charter given to us by our fellow-workers in England is a charter given to the working class of the world. It is not a program for the diplomats in the various countries. It is not even a demand upon the governments of the ruling classes of the different countries. It is a resolve, a determination that the working class of the world will make over the world as a working class world!

And that is why the most progressive workers of all countries, of France and of Italy and of most of the neutral countries, have rallied to that great program. And that is why it becomes our duty in this country to make that program a living reality here.

We cannot overlook the fact that the working class movement in the United States, on the whole, has remained at this time the most backward in the world. Of all the labor bodies in the world, the organized labor movement in the United States is the only one that has practically forgotten nothing and learned nothing from this great world catastrophe. The average organized worker is repeating the old slogans in the old way. But if we are to retain our place in the great fraternity of international labor, if we are to do our share in the world reconstruction that is to fall to the task of organized labor, we must take up the task of regeneration, must give to the movement new inspiration, new ideals — call it to fight for the cause of internationalism and economic liberty.

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