

The Protocol, Arbitration and Disarmament

A WRETCHED fate seems to dog the footsteps of the Labour Party politicians in their efforts to be statesmen. From the moment they framed a policy of "gradualism" and adopted the "ostensible war aims of the Allies" as the policy to be pursued to reach Socialism, bad luck seems to have befallen them. When President Wilson bellowed his fourteen points across the world, they hailed his programme as a heaven-sent message. It was regarded as a means of salvation and redemption for pursuing the practice of force on behalf of British Imperialism. When the Versailles Treaty was signed they denounced it as a war treaty, but seized upon the Covenant of the League of Nations, founded upon the Versailles Treaty, as the new hope. They accepted it as a fact, and made the fact a virtue, although it was obviously an Allied fraud, based upon a fraud from birth. It failed from the beginning. The provisions were wide enough for another world war to run right through and leave it intact with its rules unbroken. No power regards it seriously as a preventative of anything they want to do, but only a convenient vehicle for dirty work which they could not tackle promptly. The Poles ignored it over its Lithuanian invasion, Mussolini put his fingers to his nose at it concerning Corfu, while the British told it to go to its Biblical destiny when Egypt was mentioned.

When they became actual statesmen they went one better and accepted the Versailles Treaty as the basis of action. With this as a foundation and the Covenant as a platform, they proceeded to make an "atmosphere," when suddenly it appeared as if their luck had turned. The American and British bankers had organised a plan for the imposition of their will on Germany, well baited with reparations plums for the Allies, and profits for the German industrialists. Mr. MacDonald took what he called "the greatest step towards peace" since 1918, because of the agreement secured between the Governments. Suddenly the world saw clearly that he had been had. Another bubble burst, and to everybody with eyes to see perceived the truth of the old adage, "Money talks," and had created the real "atmosphere."

Undeterred by rebuffs, having not yet struck a single blow at capitalism on behalf of the workers, they took up the cause of "peace" on the basis of the Versailles Treaty and the amending of the covenant—the gospel of the Protocol. Now, even this bubble is pricked. They have not yet passed beyond a state of mourning for this evaporated affair but undoubtedly they will find some way of using the old themes as an echo of some capitalist plan or the other. The theme we know from their slogans—"Outlawing war," "Peace by arbitration," "Gradual disarmament." No doubt the Imperialist Coolidge will call up our chorus boys of capitalist diplomacy to sing these anthems again at an early date. It is, therefore, high time the workers took stock of these slogans as a means to grasping their futility, understanding the falseness of the hopes raised, and the grim reality of war preparation actually developing under the cover of the sentimental blether of peace, where peace is impossible.

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

What is this League? It is a combination of some fifty capitalist governments, most of them small governments under the domination of either Britain or France. Outside it are the great powers, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, Germany, and America. Its functions are limited to what the governments voluntarily refer to it, and its obligations are sheltered by reservations which leave the governments to do as they individually think fit. It does not begin to work on the basis of disarmament, of changing the social system which produces the problems, but accepts the *status quo*, the Versailles Treaty and what other treaties are existing between governments. Admission of the countries outside the League depend upon the unanimous consent of existing members, and acceptance of conditions governing the operation of "sanctions." The latter are the means to enforce decisions. Even in this case the powers can determine their own contribution of force. Hence we have the following pretty kettle of fish. The armed capitalist powers in the League invite another power like Germany, who comparatively speaking is disarmed, to join, and permit at the bidding of the League the forces obeying the dictates of the League to pass through the country. Each government can determine the degree of its help to the prosecution of a decision of the League, thus making a tool of a weak power like Germany, whilst the other powers are given a free hand to join in or otherwise on any issue which may be raised.

The League of Nations is, therefore, a loose aggregation of

capitalist governments doing nothing to interfere with capitalism; a body dominated by Britain and France, appealing for volunteers for arbitration with no means of enforcing its decisions without the consent of Britain and France, who are under no obligation to act together. If they did act together it would prove to all the world it was an instrument of the old alliance. If they don't act together, they can enforce nothing.

The League is in this absurd position. It proposes arbitration to eliminate the use of force as an instrument of settlement, and is totally incapable of acting as arbiter, because it lacks the force to enforce its award. The inequality of the powers constituting the League makes it impossible to create an "impartial" collective power, and leaves the League dependent on the dominant military powers amongst its membership for the advancement of its decisions, making all talk of equality in the League sheer moonshine. If France and Britain agree, against whom is the decision to be recorded and enforced—either Germany, Russia or America. If not these, whom? For the smaller powers within the League are already subject to one or other of the great powers—Britain or France. If the two latter are disagreed, then the League is helpless, its main supports torn asunder with nothing that could make them arbitrate or enforce an arbitration award.

THE PROTOCOL.

It is this anomalous position that the Protocol supporters try to overcome, and fail. It proposes that arbitration shall be obligatory. That the test of who is aggressor shall be determined by the preparedness of the government to submit to arbitration. That "sanctions" shall be employed against those declared as aggressors or violating the award. To carry out the "sanctions" each government must declare in each case what it is prepared to contribute in this direction, and in all cases the unanimous decision of the Council must be secured for action to be taken by the League. So if the British Government disagreed it could not only refuse to bring in its fleet, but make the League in-operative and its decisions a farce.

Especially is this obvious with the present relations of powers and the very limited number of questions that can be submitted to arbitration. But it is argued that this position would be altered were the United States, Germany and Russia to come into the League, and be parties to the Protocol. This is entirely chimerical as a moment's consideration will show.

The basis of the scheme is—every state has its armed forces, its frontiers, its interests, which are left inviolate. No two states

are alike in strength. Their interests are contradictory. Their frontiers temporary. Who, for example, would proclaim that Balkanised Europe can maintain its existing frontiers or that any one of the new states created by the Versailles Treaty will submit to change by arbitration, say, for example, Poland, *re* its Russian and German frontiers and the corridor. Not only is there no likelihood of this, but suppose for a moment that it did. Who would be the "impartial" arbitrators, when there is such vast inequality in the strength of the governments who make up or would make up the League of Nations if all the governments were in? So long as any of the great powers are not opposed by a greater power, how can the decision be other than what is approved by the great powers, each of which retain the right to maintain what they have got and the uncontrolled right to dispose of their own forces? Without the League had power to impose its will as expressed in arbitration, how can the League be the decisive power? If it is to create a superior power from what shall this power be created? Can we conceive of the great Powers voluntarily contributing to the creation of a supreme power to subordinate their own power which they consider inviolate? But without means to enforce awards, the awards have no value when great powers can make them inoperative.

It is the refusal to face these realities of world capitalism that make the sermons of the Reverend Ramsay MacDonald so nonsensical when stripped of their Bethelite draperies. It is the refusal to face these realities which makes Mr. Henderson's tub-thumping of arbitration so pathetic. They face up to stupendously organised military powers with the plea for arbitration, concentrating on a form of procedure instead of the power and interests lying behind all procedure, powers and interests which fight against all interference. This is where Chamberlain had the advantage over Henderson and MacDonald, and tore their case to shreds. Against realities they set idealism and forms of procedure and in the process became the tools of one Imperial power against another without being able to do anything for the workers beyond deluge them with pacifism and leave the pathway open for the imperialist power to proceed with its schemes for a bloc against the Workers' Republic of Russia.

Let us see. At the present moment, Russia is not in the League of Nations, is not likely to be. Its provisions do not fit its requirements. Its composition is in diametric opposition to the systems perpetuated by every state within the League. There is not a representative on the League who does not wish to see

a bourgeois counter revolution deposing the Soviet Government. There is not one who does not realise that the very existence of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics offering to make the final object of the League—complete disarmament—its first step if the other governments will do likewise, is a standing challenge to the hypocrisy which the League embodies. Capitalist governments are not such fools that they do not know their existence depends upon military power. Imagine for a moment the British Empire without its armed forces! Unthinkable!

Outside Russia, France dominates Europe. It desires to maintain the Versailles Treaty frontiers sacrosanct, to maintain the *status quo* in Europe with Germany reduced to her knees, with the cordon sanitaire stretched between Russia and Germany and most of the smaller states under her thumb. Obviously under these circumstances French imperialism could subscribe to any procedure and any ideals which increased the difficulties of every country wishing to alter the present situation. In fact, it would thereby secure all the "moral" values of the scheme to perpetuate her power, especially when all the vexed questions such as the alteration of Polish frontiers, etc., would not come within its scope. This is exactly what would be the situation were the Protocol superimposed upon the present apparatus of the League without considering for a moment the vexed question of the role of the British navy in the application of "sanctions."

To think that British Imperialism could subscribe to such a position is to reveal an incredible lack of understanding of the problems of British Imperialism. The dominant power in Europe has always been regarded as a danger to Britain. She combined against Napoleon when France previously controlled Europe. She combined with France and Russia when German Imperialism was the dominant power. Has the transfer of the military hosts and power of the Kaiser to French Imperialism made it more virtuous and pacifist than its predecessors or its interests more in accord with the interests of British Imperialism? Not at all. Debts, reparations, frontiers, aeroplane predominance, submarine development, the transfer of economic resources and power from Germany to France and her satellites, the bridging of the English channel make the British Imperialists a thousand times more conscious of the significance of the role of French Imperialism in Europe, much as she is conscious of the greater power facing her across the Atlantic. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that British and American capitalism, scared with the effects of

economic disintegration in Europe and Germany in particular, had already decided that it were better to restore to life German capitalism than face a proletarian revolution in Germany.

But at a price. They want a return for money sunk in the Dawes Plan and are conscious that revival to pay, means also the growth of a determination to break existing limitations of frontiers.

No wonder, therefore, that the British government punctured the Protocol, and pushed Germany forward with proposals which checked the jubilation of French Imperialism. The proposals seized upon the virtuous regard for arbitration, security, etc., but in effect the proposals meant that British Imperialism had side-stepped French Imperialism, not simply with a view to lining up as an enemy of France, but with a view to a pact of a limited nature that could form the basis of a wider policy. The limitations inclusion indicated, a four-power to seven-power pact, are as eloquent as the exclusion.

Against whom is the pact directed, if not Soviet Russia? Russia stands first in the line, for what problems of frontiers and interests can be touched East of the Rhine, which do not involve Russia? Indeed a perusal of the Continental press will reveal this, although little is said in this country as to the implications of the Pact prepared by Chamberlain. From the most reactionary anti-Bolshevik down to the German Social-Democrats (the MacDonalds and Hendersons of Europe), the Pact is regarded and welcomed as diplomatic strategy aiming at producing a wide European basis for attack on Soviet Russia. Is it this to which MacDonald and Henderson subscribe? They will declare no. But the only difference between the Pact and the Protocol in this respect lies in the role of Britain and France.

In the Pact Britain comes to the fore. In the Protocol France takes the lead. Such is the fate of utopian politics of arbitration, "outlawing war," when Labour politicians play the role of capitalist statesmen.

DISARMAMENT.

The same futility dogs their footsteps in relation to disarmament. The power of the capitalist class rests upon military force in every country. Instead of attacking the power of the capitalists at its foundations by marshalling the fullest possible power of the only class that can defeat the capitalists—that is the working class—they accept the present relations of power of

the capitalists in each country and place the problem of disarmament as one to be reached after agreement among the capitalist governments on forms of procedure which exclude the fundamental questions of imperialism and disarmament. Is it conceivable that any capitalist government knowing full well that its existence depends upon its power to impose its will in any direction is likely to agree to dispose of its power in response to humane appeals? Each would reply that they would do so if there was a guarantee that their positions would not be jeopardised thereby. Put the question to any government controlling colonial possessions. What is the guarantee they ask for? It is that the millions of colonial slaves will be content to remain slaves in utter degradation. The position is absurd. The slaves cannot and will not be content to remain so. What then can be the answer of any imperialist power in a world of cut-throat competition, themselves based upon the power to grab all they can get? Only the scoffing note of contempt for utopias.

The futility of approaching the problem of disarmament in this inverted way is already proven to the point of demonstration. The Hendersons, the MacDonalds, the pacifists hailed the Washington Conference as a great step to disarmament. They are looking with open mouths to such another as a further step. But what are the realities of Washington and after?

It dramatically scrapped large battleships as a demonstration of the capitalist world's will to disarm. It agreed to prohibit the use of poison gas. It left untouched the development of smaller craft. It set before the world an increased programme of submarine building, and left the armies and aircraft untouched. What then since the Conference? Britain has spent in 1922, £169,700 on poison gas experiments, in 1923, £150,300, in 1924, with a Labour Government, £165,620. The U.S.A., the initiators of the Conference, have spent on the same deadly business, £198,926 in 1922, £138,528 in 1923, £157,046 in 1924. "All over the world," says Mr. Bridgeman, "352 ships of war are being built—an increase of 50 per cent. more than last year." There is not one of the great powers but is racing each other in the development of aircraft to which there can be no limits. Racing each other in the development of submarines and the building of naval bases. Singapore is not isolated. Australia is tackling Port Darwin. The American Congress is asked to provide money on a very large scale (estimate £70,000,000) (1) for building eight light cruisers of 10,000 tons class; (2) for building and perfecting naval bases on both coasts; and (3) for increasing the range

of the guns in a number of the fleet battleships, and for converting the boilers from coal burners to oil burners. In spite of the fact that Germany and Austria are powerless against the Allies, the latter are spending £100,000,000 per year more on war preparations than before the war. The traffic in small arms is enormous. The League of Nations reports that war material excluding warships, aeroplanes, tanks and armoured cars, to the value of £50,000,000 was exported from twenty countries in the three years, 1920 to 1922. Then look at the Washington Programme—cruiser building :—

STRENGTH IN CRUISERS AND LIGHT CRUISERS LESS THAN 20 YEARS OLD FROM DATE OF COMPLETION ON MARCH 31 OF EACH OF THE YEARS GIVEN

	1914			1921			1924			1928 Built
	Built	Bldg.	Total	Built	Bldg.	Total	Built	Bldg.	Total	
British Empire	108	18	126	55	10	65	50 ^a	4	54	57
United States	30	—	30	19	10	29	25	3 ^b	28 ^b	24 ^c
Japan... ..	27	—	27	13	7	20	17	6	23	28 ^d
France	30	—	30	20	—	20	11	3	14	14
Italy	30	3	23	15	—	15	14	—	14	15

- (a) Includes "Courageous" and "Glorious" now being converted into aircraft carriers.
- (b) Excluding 8 projected but not authorised.
- (c) Includes 8 projected but not yet authorised (Sept. 1924)
- (d) Assuming that all cruisers of present authorised programme have been completed by March 31st, 1928, except for two 10,000 ton cruisers which are to be completed by March 31st, 1929.

This table indicates the naval increase even under the Washington Agreement and takes no account of the concentration of every country to bring every conceivable scientific improvement and every possible increase of fighting capacity into every vessel. How utterly hopeless is the policy of parroting liberal pacifist appeals to powers based upon force! Washington indicated neither the will to peace nor the will to disarm. It indicated only a departure from the old methods of warfare to new under a cloud of sentimental vapourings of peace. It was a clever capitalistic use of the mass repugnance to war for the purpose of applying the military lessons derived from the war.

There is no path to peace but that of striking at the roots of capitalism, the mobilisation of the working class against the capitalist class, the owners and controllers of war materials, and the makers of war. Neither capitalist Protocols, nor arbitration for capitalists nor disarmament propaganda can avail. The only path to peace, permanent and real, is the path of revolution. They who avoid this in the name of peace are consciously or unconsciously perpetuating and developing war.

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