
The End of War.

by C.E. Ruthenberg

Published in *The Ohio Socialist* [Cleveland], whole no. 55 (Feb. 12, 1919)
as Part IX of the series "After the War — What?" Earlier portions not extant.

One of the strongest arguments used to secure support of the war by the masses in this country was that it was a "war to end war."

In deciding upon our program of reconstruction it is of paramount importance that we know whether the principles we adopt will lead to realization of the ideal of a society in which there will be no more war.

At the present time an effort is being made to reach this goal through the organization of a League of Nations. This is the means through which the supporters of the present industrial order hope to make war impossible in the future.

The structure of the League of Nations is just emerging from the council of statesmen representing the Allied nations and the United States, but the lines on which the supernational organization is to be built are clear enough to warrant a conclusion in regard to whether it will prove a barrier against future wars.

There are two ways in which the League of Nations is to prevent future wars. It is to be the trustee of the capitalist nations of the world in charge of the backward countries, which are to be administered through "mandatories" under its direction, and there is also to be set up as part of the supernational organization machinery for conciliation and arbitration of disputes which arise between nations.

There is nothing in either of these proposals which will eliminate the cause of wars.

Let us examine the situation we face by considering the relations that will exist between two

groups of countries after the peace treaty is signed and the League of Nations organized.

On the one side will be the United States and Japan; on the other Russia and Germany.

It is fairly certain that in the United States and Japan capitalism will still flourish, and we will presume that in Russia and Germany Socialist industrial republics will be established.

We would then find that in the United States and Japan the machinery of production would be in the hands of a relatively small class which would operate the industries for its profit. The workers would be able to secure the opportunity to work only by consent of the owners of industry. When they did work they would receive in wages only a small part of the product of their labor. They would work eight or ten hours per day, but would receive in wages only the product of two or three hours work. The remaining hours after they had produced their wages they would be producing "surplus value" for the owning class.

Since the workers received only part of the value of their product in wages it would naturally follow that they would be unable to buy and consume all of the goods they produced. The capitalist class, relatively small in number, could not consume the goods the workers could not buy and would be compelled to seek foreign markets in which to sell these goods. The capitalists would also amass new capital as a result of the profits they took and this would lead them to seek colonies and "spheres of influence" for development and exploitation.

Thus we would find the capitalists of the United States seeking to control the markets of China and the capitalists of Japan endeavoring to gain control of the same markets; we would find the capitalists of the United States and Japan seeking to exploit the Philippine Islands and the countries of South America. The capitalists of both countries would be driven by the inexorable conditions of capitalist production into bitter competition with each other and the history of the past tells us that such competition begun on the commercial field would lead inevitably to the battle field.

Will the League of Nations be able to prevent the logical development of commercial rivalry which capitalism produces?

It is an effort in that direction. The capitalists of the world realize the danger for them which accompanies war. Aside from the great destruction of wealth and the piling up of huge mountains of debts, there is always the threat that war will precipitate a revolution, such as took place in Russia, and which, although not yet complete, followed the defeat of Germany. So the League of Nations is being organized to act as the international agent of capitalism and to minimize the possibility of the recurrence of such a conflict as this through which the world has just passed.

The League of Nations, as trustee of the backward and undeveloped countries, assigns to each certain territory for exploitation. When disputes arise the League of Nations will seek to prevent war through conciliation and arbitration.

Can it succeed?

One of the favorite arguments of the supporters of the League of Nations, in support of their scheme, is to point at the fact that the thirteen colonies, after the break with England, were each separate, independent states, which federated as the United States, with resulting harmony and peace.

This argument overlooks the fact that an economic question about which two groups of states

differed was left unsettled, and that in spite of all the machinery for settlement of disputes provided in the Constitution of the United States there resulted the bloodiest civil war of modern times over the question whether chattel slavery or wage slavery should prevail.

Just so capitalist Internationalism presenting itself in the form of a League of Nations will have to deal with commercial imperialism — the logical product of the exploitation of the workers in modern industry — which in spite of all the machinery of arbitration and conciliation will drive the capitalist countries to an appeal to arms in the struggle for survival.

Now let us consider Soviet Russia and Socialist Germany, supposing that in the latter country the social revolution is completed and the workers take control of industry.

In each of these countries the industries will no longer be the private property of the capitalists. The industries will be owned by the people. The workers in each industry will organize for the management of the industry in which they work. They will select their representatives in city councils, or state or national councils, in which the workers from the various industries will meet to decide matters of common interest. There will be no exploitation of the workers and therefore no need to seek foreign markets in which to sell surplus products. There will be no economic motive to push the workers of Russia into a war with the workers of Japan to decide whether the capitalists of Russia or Japan should exploit the markets and resources of Manchuria, such as took place some fifteen years ago. There will be no economic motive to force the workers of Germany into the struggle to secure control of the spheres of influence in Asia Minor in which to sell surplus products and make more profits for capitalists.

The workers of each country will enjoy the wealth they produce. If, after supplying every family with good food, good clothing, a comfortable home, and the opportunity for education and rec-

reaction, they find they have surplus products on their hands, they will simply cut down the hours of labor. If the workers of Russia find they are producing too much wheat and need machinery and the workers of Germany produce too much machinery and need wheat, they will arrange for an equal exchange of these products on the basis of their value. The economic motives which drive nations to war will have ceased to exist with the end of exploitation.

Why should the workers of any country wish to ship the goods they produce to foreign countries? Don't they need them? Can't the workers of the United States use the goods they produce in raising the standard of living in this country? Don't we need these goods to abolish poverty? Don't we need more comfortable homes? Can't we take more of the workers from the work of producing commodities and train them to improve our educational system?

The danger of war will exist as long as capitalism exists. The end of war will come with the end of insecurity, exploitation, and industrial conflicts when capitalism is abolished. Not a League of Nations but Industrial Democracy is the way to permanent peace.

Edited by Tim Davenport.
Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.