

WAR AGAINST WAR

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PART III

THE CONGRESS OF BASEL.

The Congress of Basel was a demonstration of the proletarian opposition to war, but such a demonstration cannot prevent war. As was said by Vaillant, the veteran of the Commune, "The international congress has finished its work; but the real struggle has just begun." What will be the plan of campaign of this battle? What weapons will be used? In what manner can the workers of the world prevent a war? These questions were not answered at Basel. As at Stuttgart, it was definitely declared that in each country the means employed are to be adapted to the conditions. In order to avoid even the appearance of a lack of unity, discussion of methods was avoided. The Congress contented itself with drawing the attention of governments and peoples to what has hitherto been achieved, our international unity and our unanimous opposition to war; it did not suggest any definite line of action. It showed to all the world the goal toward which we are bound, but failed to mark out the way which is to lead to it. The finding of the way has been left to the workers themselves.

Fortunately, our future line of march is not entirely unknown. In the actual practice of the labor movement, it has already been discovered. Both theoretically and practically the working-class has concerned itself with the methods to be employed in this phase of its struggle.

There are Socialists for whom political struggle and parliamentary struggle are identical. For them the entire political struggle of the working-class consists of political campaigns and speeches in parliamentary assemblies. The narrowness of this view has been demonstrated again and again. Wherever the right of franchise is a limited one, the representation of the proletariat necessarily remains in

the minority; the task of the workers is, then, the conquest of a democratic electoral law. This is possible only by means of political activity of the masses outside of the halls of parliament, what we have to come to call mass-action. The same is true of the struggle against war. This is a political conflict of the greatest importance, but it cannot be carried on inside the parliamentary halls. There the representatives of the workers can voice their protest, but they are in the minority against the bourgeois majority which supports the government. And the diplomatic negotiations upon which depend the great issues of war and peace are not carried on in the open before the representatives of the people; these matters, so vital to the nations' life, are debated behind closed doors by a small coterie of ministers. In order to prevent war the proletariat must bring to bear a sufficient weight of public opinion to compel the government to keep the peace. This can be done only through mass-action.

The mere existence of a Socialist proletariat constitutes a strong influence for peace. In view of the great influence exerted over the masses of people by a revolutionary party any government conceives at last a secret dread of war. For an unsuccessful conflict with a foreign power may always bring in its train revolutionary uprisings and the danger of complete downfall of the existing government. This fear of the proletariat has done much toward maintaining peace in Europe during the past forty years. But this gives the workers no excuse for deceiving themselves with a sense of security. The forces of international competition which make for war grow constantly stronger. And because the bourgeoisie, as the ruling class, is accustomed to command and have the working-class obey, and because

it knows that it has under its control a strong governmental machine, it feels certain of its ability to drive the masses of the people into a conflict with a foreign power which it points out as the enemy. On this account the workers must bestir themselves, must take the initiative. No one will take account of the desires of those who simply hold their peace. But if the masses of the workers make energetic protest and declare with all possible emphasis that they will not have war, then the government will be forced to proceed with caution. No government would dare at the present time to undertake a war against the energetically proclaimed desire of the great masses of the people.

This the workers have instinctively felt as they have been carrying on mass meetings and street demonstrations. These activities do more, however, than express the will of the participants. As a method of propaganda and agitation their effect is wide-spread. They attract the attention of those who have hitherto remained indifferent and waken hope and confidence in those who have remained aloof from the struggle. They draw increasing numbers into the struggle and so heighten the courage and enthusiasm of the entire proletariat. And the very fact that the government recognizes the effect of these demonstrations is reason enough for its fear of them and its tendency to give way before them.

But it is evident that in case bourgeoisie and government had definitely decided upon a war, such demonstrations as these would not suffice to compel them to relinquish their purpose. Such means as these could not force the will of the proletariat upon the government; they are effective only in case the forces making for war are not great. In the presence of them, governments will not declare war to satisfy a mere whim or to gain an unimportant advantage. They know how much is involved and whenever possible attempt to get on without war. If they do decide to declare war, it is because very important capitalistic interests are to be served. But the development of big business in the direction of new fields of investment is so persistent, so peremptory that they sometimes compel governments to go to war and plunge

the entire bourgeoisie into a war fever. When this happens the influence for peace proceeding from mass-meetings and street demonstrations remains ineffective. Against the peace agitation of the proletariat a wave of fanatic nationalism is set in motion. Street demonstrations may be forbidden. Patriotism serves as an excuse for the suppression of any opposition, and the mobilizing of troops places the most active elements of the proletariat under military law. Under these circumstances, what is to be done?

It is at this point that the conflict really becomes serious. Then the workers must resort to more effective means than the ordinary ones. Concerning the exact form of the struggle, however, it is impossible to go beyond conjectures. At Copenhagen Keir Hardie and Vaillant proposed as the ultimate weapons to be used against war a strike of those employed on railways and in arsenals and ammunition factories. This form of tactics is adapted to the French and English conditions. In England the great mass of the working-class is indifferent to war, for to the English war means a naval conflict or a land campaign carried on by professional, hired troops. On the other hand, military operations would be dependent upon the groups of workers employed in the arming of troops and the carrying on of transportation. In France the situation is substantially the same, for small capitalists and farmers make up the bulk of the population. On this account the proposition of Hardie and Vaillant is a perfectly natural one for them to make. But the fallacy involved in it lies in the fact that it places upon a comparatively small group the burden which belongs to an entire class. Any such group might be easily overcome by the superior forces of the government; popular opinion would approve of any violent means utilized against it. Not by means of such rather mechanical devices can a war be prevented, but only through action of the entire working-class. The struggle against war is a political struggle of class against class; it can be carried on successfully only when the entire proletariat exerts its whole strength against that of the government and the bourgeoisie.

The strongest weapon of the working-class is the strike; the political mass-

strike is the great weapon of the revolution, the one most adapted to the conditions of the workers. Its tremendous power has been repeatedly demonstrated, especially in Belgium in 1893 and in Russia in 1905. Concerning the question as to whether it can be employed against war, and how it can best be used, there is great difference of opinion. In the countries of Western Europe where great meetings and street demonstrations are commonplaces, Socialists have discovered that a protest strike for a limited time is the least exhibition of power that will maké an impression. On the other hand, the leaders of German Socialism have little patience with the proposal to use the mass-strike as a means of preventing war. In part their opposition is due to the fear of precipitating unnecessary conflicts which might lead the government to such ruthless suppression of the labor movement as would set it back and postpone for many years the victory which it confidently expects. But another important element in the situation is the fact that the German labor movement leads the world in organization and power of numbers. Whereas a weak movement feels obliged to use immediately its strongest weapon, a strong movement may achieve the same result by the simple pressure of its mass. In addition, it must be remembered that street demonstrations, the right to make which has only recently been wrung from the police power, have in Germany a much greater influence than in other countries.

This does not mean that a political strike against war is impossible in Germany. It is not the desire of the leaders which gives the ultimate decision, but rather the force of circumstances, the masses may be compelled to act in a manner quite unforeseen, and in that case the leaders will be carried along despite their predilections and prejudices. In case the danger of war becomes really imminent, this will unquestionably take place. Such a socialistically trained working-class as

that of Germany will not allow itself to be dragged into a war at the command of the ruling class. The greater the danger, the more the working-class will be roused, the more energetically will it defend itself with any and all weapons.

Hitherto this has never been necessary; in every case the danger of war has passed away after a period of greater or less excitement. Germany has been the greatest trouble-maker in Europe, yet the fact that the workers have not been prevented from making their demonstrations shows that the government has not seriously and definitely planned for war. But the danger constantly recurs, and constantly in more threatening form. So, what is now but theory must eventually become practice. Then the conflict concerning war will become one of the most important features of the class-struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. In this conflict for peace the workers will be compelled to use their sharpest weapons and to perfect their fighting power for employment against the whole strength of the ruling class. Thus the development of imperialism is calling into being the revolutionary force which will put an end to capitalism.

A new epoch in world history is beginning. Hitherto wars have been a necessary element in the development of the race; under capitalism they have been inevitable. The ruling classes simply had the masses at their disposal and without opposition were able to lead them into war in the interests of capital. Now, for the first time, a new power has appeared as a force in world history, the power of the self-conscious workers. Thus far the working-class has not been strong enough to overcome the bourgeoisie. But against the militarism of the competing capitalistic governments they now heroically declare their determination to have peace. And this war against war means the beginning of the process of revolution which is to lead from capitalism to Socialism.