

The New World.

I.

Four years of war have wrought a decisive change in the nature of the world. A new world is surrounding us, though but few of us have as yet realised what it is that has changed.

The proletarian world revolution has begun. Everybody is aware of it. The bourgeoisie sees it or guesses at it, — panic-stricken, it tries to save what can be saved and endeavours with all its might to keep its old power or to build it up anew. The vanguard of the revolution forthwith accepts the challenge, and large masses of working men get ready for the fight, though not as yet clearly seeing, only instinctively feeling that the hour is coming. The working men's revolution has begun and goes steadily on. But the conditions under which it takes place are new and altogether different from those before the war. That is where the former social democrats are mistaken, who believe they live in the old world and thus do not perceive to what extent the conditions of struggle have altered. They firmly keep to their old tenets and programme; they pride themselves upon having remained what they were. Thus they lead the workmen who follow them astray. It is therefore imperative to inspect the new world, the scene of the proletarian revolution more closely.

The war has made the world international — that is its first great result. Capitalism had created national states, great political units of the bourgeoisie, to all appearance sharply isolated from one another, yet steadily ever more and more tending to abolish the contrasts and divergencies of national character, customs, ideas and laws within their own borders. Each state was sovereign independent, in relation to the others; none admitted intervention of the others into its internal affairs; each concluded treaties and alliances at its own discretion. As armed class organisations of the bourgeoisie they stood side by side or opposite one another, settling their conflicting interests by war. In consequence of this, all further human relations were kept within the boundaries of the state. Legislation

was an internal affair of the state. Class-war was waged on a national basis, as a struggle between the bourgeoisie of a given country and its proletariat. There were, of course, subsidiary influences flooding in from beyond the frontiers; at international congresses counsel was taken and resolutions were adopted. But that was only one aspect of the actual case. Each party was sovereign in its own country; each working class — such was the general opinion — had to get the better of its own bourgeoisie.

Imperialism at length led to the formation of state groupings that finally crystallised into two great hostile coalitions. One of these has been smashed by the war. The victorious coalition has no more opponents. The defeated have partly dissolved into smaller nations that in their distress implore the conquerors to put an end to their sufferings; the neutrals had willy-nilly to do the same. The coalition grew into the League of Nations. For the Wilsonian League is after all but an extension of the Entente, brought about by the annihilation of the remnants of the neutral and defeated states.

Little is left in the «League» of the former sovereignty and independence of the old states. Even the leading countries, Britain and America, are no longer their own masters with regard to home politics. Loans and war contracting, the political measures taken by the supreme war council have left deep traces. France and Italy have become vassals to the «League» to a still higher degree. These states can no longer direct their internal politics according to their desire. Most of all, however, does this hold true of the weaker, and of the defeated countries. Britain, America, Japan can still keep their strong autonomic position, for they are the conquerors, the rulers of the world. They are even at liberty to start a new quarrel among themselves. But all the rest are independent states only outwardly. As soon as the League of Nations will lay down theoretically what is already the case in practice, they will be deprived of their right to make treaties with one another, to keep permanent armies. The leading powers will not fail to see to it that the internal life of those states be carried on along the lines prescribed by them.

The sharp isolation of the states no longer exists, but the chasm between workmen and exploiters yawns none the less wider for that. As an international unit the bourgeoisie of all countries is pitted against the proletariat of all countries. Not only theoretically, out of class-sympathy, but in practice—in deed. In 1871 Bismarck still kept aloof from the struggle between the Commune and Versailles and was content to support the latter merely indirectly and morally. In the year 1918, however, the armies of the Allied powers invaded Russia in order to restore the rule of the bourgeoisie, the generals and the nobility, in order to deliver over the people to the nagaika. It is not a war of Britain or France against Russia; it is a war of the bourgeoisie against the revolutionary proletariat, of capital against socialism.

He who observes the events in his own country only, fails to see the most important points. The German proletariat must keep it in mind, that it is the fate of German socialism that is being decided in the far-away steppes of the Ukraina; just as the Soviet Republic of Russia depends for its existence on the issue of the street fights in Berlin and Hamburg. The revolutionary proletariat of all countries forms a united mass, a united army; unless it realizes this and takes active part in the struggle, it will be smashed to pieces and dispersed. The German proletariat has absolutely nothing to win by isolating itself out of fear lest the help rendered them by the Russian revolutionaries call down the wrath of the Entente bourgeoisie upon them. For if it should try to free itself by its own force, it will have to stand the brunt of the attack as an isolated unit. It has to remember that there is only one battlefield in the whole world—that of capital against the proletariat. Whether it wishes to or not, it stands in the same line of battle with the Russian people and by its efforts supports its comrades everywhere—in Russia where they have already liberated themselves, in Great Britain, America and France where they are only just beginning to.

The International of Capital, the Wilsonian League of Nations is confronted by the International of Labour; communism rallies its forces and gains strength.

II.

The war has devastated the world and thrown it into utter destitution, into **Chaos**—that is its second great achievement.

For four whole years all productive forces were enlisted in the service of War. All raw materials, machinery, means of communication, all hands were wasted, unproductively. They were turned into instruments of destruction; they were not used for productive purposes, but for overthrowing the enemy. This had to result in a total lack of everything that society requires for its further existence. Such a state of things could continue for a period of four years only by screwing down the requirements of the masses to a minimum.

The articles produced for the purposes of warfare were so much deficit in the primary necessities of the population. But the waste of war did not stop at that; all means of production and transport were completely neglected, and, instead of being kept up and renewed, were merely used up. Thus at the end of the war we had to face a total disorganisation of economic life; there was a scarcity of means of production, raw materials, as well as of labour; for mankind was bodily exhausted with long privation. To this one could, of course, raise the objection that capital had increased and become concentrated to an enormous extent. But this capital consists mainly of paper bonds, not of productive capital. It is but a right of ownership in manufacturing concerns that have no possibility of immediately renewing production. It is made up in the first instance of war loans, as such demanding exorbitant interest to be paid to the capitalists in the shape of taxes by the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants. The increase of capital determines the distribution of commodities; the result is that the articles of production are distributed as unfairly as possible, but no increase of production is attained by it. The great enrichment of the few leads merely to the still greater impoverishment of the many, for the blood-suckers with their increased incomes seize the greater part of all stored-up commodities for their own needs. From a purely economic point of view, the world is on the eve of an unheard-of bankruptcy, standing before an empty desert, faced by economic chaos.

This applies more or less to all countries, least of all to states like Japan and America, most of all to those of Central Europe, just as it was formerly true of Russia. Germany has expended her last resources for the war, to a greater extent than England has. Matters would have been different, had the working classes already begun their revolution in February of last year. Now that Germany has been defeated, she is being deprived of the last remnants of her possessions. Her adversaries want by all means to prevent her rising once more to the position of a great capitalistic Power. After the speeches made by British statesmen there can be no doubt whatever about it, that Germany is to be robbed to the last, stripped of everything she possesses. The gold required to regenerate production by purchases abroad, has been seized by the conquerors; Germany is cut off from foreign raw materials; foreign markets are closed to her; her most valuable iron and coal districts, Lorraine, the Saar-district, Silesia, are to be taken from her; of the available means of transport and engines a considerable part is to be given up—thus there is a complete absence of everything that could revive capitalistic production. Capital can no longer provide a livelihood for its former slaves of toil; terrible unemployment stares the proletariat in the face,—for capital as such no longer exists. The mighty industrial development undergone by Germany within the last half-century has been suddenly cut short. This

war just as three hundred years ago the 30 years' war, has thrown Germany back to a lower stage of economic development. Like the whole of Central Europe she is forced once more to start at the primitive stage of agricultural life, and it may take decades before she can rise again to a higher level of development. Such are the prospects if bourgeois production were to go on, that is to say, if the bourgeoisie were to retain the control of the state.

Still worse is the outlook for the immediate future. Food supplies and means of communication are available in such limited quantities that only strictest execution of the most punctilious regulations made by a strong government may keep body and soul of the population together. As long as the Ebert government that tries to be on good terms with both parties, remains in power, no such measures will be taken, and the approaching disaster will merely be the graver. A government can only be strong if it is a class government; it must be either a frankly bourgeois one, possessing sufficient power to be able, by means of minimum wages, to lead the proletariat to the brink of starvation and keep it there (as the former governments did before the war); or a genuinely proletarian one, relentlessly taking all resources and privileges from the bourgeoisie and honestly distributing among the masses everything that is or can be obtained.

Capitalism has nothing more to offer to the proletariat. Necessity drives the proletarians to socialism.

Prior to the war capital was still able to make some sort of provision for the workmen, to ensure them, a if not a stable, still a fairly quiet, if indigent existence. Revolution spelt chaos for the workman disturbing and paralysing the highly developed process of production. That is why the proletarian masses shrank from a revolution; they were content and nursed the illusion that everything would for ever remain as it was. Socialism to them meant a leap into darkness, into chaos.

It is that chaos and empty darkness that are now facing the world. Capitalism can no longer continue its quiet existence, its peaceful work. The people has to choose between leaving world rule in incapable hands that have brought forth this chaos, — in the hands of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, and then perishing in order to enable them to rescue their system of exploitation; or taking power into their own hands and setting production going. In the former case production will hardly be able to recover,

for it is hampered by want of capital as well as by the interests of gain, and, in its last results it will merely be instrumental to a renaissance of capital. In the latter case production can be energetically taken up again as a means of self-provision for the whole working population. Necessity forces the workmen to make their choice. Not clear insight, nor theoretic calculation of the advantages to be derived, but pressing need made the workmen stand up for socialism.

Ebert — or was it someone else? — has said that this time of pressing need was not propitious to the realisation of theories. For them socialism as such has always been but an abstract theory, while for the workmen it is a practical necessity. They dreamt, as many do, of an ideal capitalism with a judicious socialdemocratic majority in parliament that thanks to abundance of production and general prosperity could bring about a peaceful change. But reality has proved somewhat different; socialism had to come as a deliverer from dire distress, as the only possibility for the masses to save themselves from utter ruin. And it did come and did do the work of rescue. But for socialism the people in bankrupt Russia would irrevocably have fallen a prey to starvation and ruin. The first steps of socialism have saved the masses of the population in the hardest time, have strengthened them, in spite of all attacks from within and without, attacks that most of all threatened the supply of food. In the same way can socialism rescue the masses in this acute crisis in Germany and in the other Central European states, by means of systematic and strict organisation of production and distribution of food-supplies, simultaneously laying the foundations for a new form of production, the germ of a new freedom.

In 1847 Marx said to the proletarians: „You have nothing but your chains to lose“. Ten years ago the spokesmen of the workers, in opposition to Marxism, said: „The workmen have something to lose now, therefore — no revolution“. And, indeed, as long as times were prosperous and the workmen thought they, had something to lose, they paid no heed to Marx, they passed his sayings by in silence. Now his words have come true once more. All that capitalism could or seemed to be able to offer is irretrievably gone. The workmen have nothing more to lose. Robbed of everything, they stand naked in a wilderness before the gates of the future. They have a world to win.

Anton Pannekoek.