Peace---And After

By Louis C. Fraina

THE peculiar, the decisive thing about the many rumors of peace is that they emanate from German sources or from sources in sympathy with the German cause.

The German maneuvres for peace, or a separate peace with one of the opponents, are not new. At the time when Paris was in danger, Germany tried to detach France from the Allied cause by offering a separate peace. The answer of France was the Battle of the Marne, and the answer of the Allies to future overtures of that sort was to sign an agreement not to make a separate peace. The failure of these efforts was capped by a terrific offensive to destroy the military power of Russia and compel her to sue for peace. The offensive failed in its chief purpose; and then came rumors of German overtures to the Tsar for an advantageous separate peace. The answer of Russia was to repudiate the overtures, and re-organize her government and army preparatory to a new effort to crush the enemy.

The latest peace move is obviously Germanic in its origin. The Pope of Rome, by tradition and sympathy, is friendly to Austria and Germany. Their form of government appeals to his medieval conception of society, and his hatred of anti-clerical Italy and France is a necessity of Vatican politics. His conduct during the war has been distinctly pro-German, and any definite peace move he might make would be on behalf of Austria and Germany. The mission of Cardinal Gibbons as Papal envoy to discuss peace with President Wilson, if it was not simply platonic, means that the Central European Empires hope through the Pope and President Wilson to make overtures to the Allies without appearing in the role of suers for peace.

It must be borne in mind, however, that this is not an acknowledgment of defeat on Germany's part. On the contrary. Germany is seeking to capitalize her present victorious position. And this is indicated in the unofficial German peace proposals.

Apparently, the proposals were framed to create sentiment in favor of Germany. The demand for the "freedom of the seas"—nothing about the "freedom of the land"!—makes a bid for neutral sympathy; "co-equal rights and liberties for the Jews" has an obvious meaning; while the demand that Bessarabia be ceded to Rumania is a bid for Rumanian co-operation or "benevolent neutrality." The other proposals are the proposals of a victor; they demand the restoration of the German colonies, Austro-Hungarian dominance in the Balkans and an indemnity. It is inconceivable that under the circumstances Germany would be satisfied with the *status quo ante,* as many fatuously believe.

Germany is at present the victor. The fact cannot be denied, and as the days pass on, while eventuality of Allied victory strengthens itself, the task becomes all the more difficult. Each new victory of Germany strengthens her position.

The only hope of peace now would be a desire for peace expressed by the Allies. Is there any such prospect?

Barring Belgium, France has suffered more than any of the belligerents. In spite of obviously and grossly false rumors to the contrary, France gives no indication of moving for peace. The national determination to destroy the invader is unshaken. While others talk, France fights. The victorious German sweep in Poland, instead of destroying Russia, is shattering the reactionary and bureaucratic control which has been responsible for the defeats. An analysis of the Italian campaign shows conclusively that it has been mapped out with an eye toward two years more of war. And England hasn't put forward any great efforts yet, but is preparing steadily in spite of almost insuperable obstacles.

Under the circumstances, what is the duty of the Socialist?—The task of the American Socialist movement?

It is our task to *prepare* for peace, not to bring peace. No action of ours can affect the immediacy of peace.

It is our task to unite with the Socialists of the neutral nations to bring pressure to bear upon their governments, tending towards the formation of a League of Neutrals to demand as an international right a share in the peace negotiations.

It should be our task to formulate a peace programme which would be acceptable to the belligerent Socialists,—the *revolutionary* Socialists among the belligerents. The peace programme of the American party is apologetic, incompetent and pro-German.

It is our duty not to lie, not to distort facts in a stupid and unnecessary effort to create peace sentiment, as Morris Hillquit did in an interview in the New York *Evening Mail*:

"One of the important signs of peace is the way the labor convention now being held in England is fighting the militarist spirit and putting the government on notice that it will not stand for conscription. That is a very significant and helpful sign. It proves that the 3,000,000 organized workers have not been carried away by the spirit of jingoism."

British labor, as Hillquit perfectly well knows,

has always been opposed to conscription. The convention simply re-affirmed the opposition. *The day after Hillquit gave out this interview the Trade Union Congress overwhelmingly defeated a motion calling for peace.*

It is our task to follow closely and critically Socialist action and thought in the belligerent nations, as they will profoundly affect the future of the organized Socialist movement.

It is *not* our task to refrain from criticizing the actions of the belligerent Socialists, as Hillquit intimates in the interview mentioned:

"We here in America have an important duty to perform. It is to refrain from harsh criticism of our brothers in Europe and from thinking harsh things about them. We can best contribute by guarding ourselves to see that we maintain a strictly sympathetic and neutral attitude toward all of our suffering fellow workers and Socialists in the war zone."

This is truly the language of legal sophistry. Criticism must fit the need. Can any criticism of Eduard David and Wolfgang Heine, and the other German Socialists who agree with their advocacy of Imperialism,—can any criticism of these perverts of Socialism constitute "harsh criticism"? Hillquit's is a policy of extenuation by "impartiality," of justification by silence. Our task *is* to criticize these perverts of Socialism—in that we are *one* in the fight waged by the Liebknechts, the Mehrings, the Luxemburgs, and all the real Socialists among the belligerents. And in doing this, we are simultaneously fighting *our own* battle for revolutionary Socialism in *our own* movement.

The intellectual bankruptcy of the American Socialist party is very real and very pitiable. Nowhere does it show an appreciation of the magnitude of the task of the immediate future. Nowhere does it show any indication of the vast problems in process of solution in belligerent Europe. No effort is being made to study the trend of after-the-war conditions. Like the American nation and its president, the American Socialist party is chasing after the will-o'-the-wisp of peace and landing in the swamps of impotence.

Our task is to *prepare* ourselves, by intelligent study and organization for peace—and after.