

On the Eve of Disaster

By N. I. Hourwich

MORE and more often, more and more insistent, the alarming question of what will be tomorrow presents itself to capitalist society, the question of social reconstruction when the glamour of the war has passed. And as the final peace settlement approaches, more and more does "society" discuss this question in the pages of the bourgeois press.

This is quite natural. The war itself, coming as a logical product of the contradictions of capitalist society, the anarchy of capitalist production, has shown with striking clearness, and at the same time has extremely sharpened, those contradictions and this anarchy. Showing, in its concrete form, the whole organic inability of capitalist society to manage its "economics," the war has also extremely increased the difficulties Capitalism is passing through by presenting new, unheard of and hitherto non-existent demands.

While millions of the best workers have been torn away from the benches and machines—torn away from participation in productive life, and sent to the battlefields for work the very antithesis of productive, the work of mutual killing and destruction,—the demand for productive labor has increased to gigantic proportions. While the number of productive workers has decreased, industry has been faced with the demand to produce, not only for the consumption of humanity, but also for the destruction of humanity, to produce tenfold, at the expense of the energy and productive capacity of future generations. This knowing-no-limit production for destruction, production for war, ammunition production, became the center of all production and all productive activity.

All this has compelled Capitalism to brace up, to mend some of the holes which so glaringly have appeared in the shabby clothes that cover its uninviting nakedness.

In the very heart of industry gigantic grouping has been introduced—the re-distribution of productive forces. A number of new branches of industry have been formed. The ordinary indus-

tries have been forced to limit, and in some cases to discontinue, their usual production, and substitute production more suited to the needs of war. Industry has drawn to itself elements which in the past had taken relatively little part in its process—women, children and old people. Even the people with infirmities that would in normal times disqualify them have been in one form or another "made useful for certain tasks"!

And, finally, to crown all this "transformation," capitalist society in its efforts to "make both ends meet" has been forced to introduce the principle of state control and accounting, which contradicts all its principles and "best traditions." Many branches of industry have come under the control of the state, or have been declared state monopolies, little by little the state guardianship has extended over the private life of the individual. The "citizen" has been told what to do and what not to do, what labors he shall pursue and what he shall leave alone; following his productive activity, his personal activity has also been placed under control—the "watchful eye" of the administration has even entered his kitchen, peeped into his soup bowl. . . .

Have all these "extra" measures lessened the difficulties from which Capitalism is trying to extricate itself? Of course not! For, all these measures, all this "control" and "accounting," naturally could not be introduced in any but the caricature form which does not violate the "sacred principle" of private property. As a result, the difficulties not only have not become less, but they have increased, complicated, changing the problem Capitalism was facing into something very much resembling the fable of the "trishkin" coat—cut off one part to mend another.

Now capitalist society nears the end of the war it produced, not voluntarily, but under pressure of iron necessity, under the pressure of new social forces, awakened to life by the very existence of Capitalism, and which are now arising to take

its place. And capitalist society faces the fatal questions: how to act, what to do? How return to peace without any risk of "upheavals," adapting itself, however, to the new conditions which have been created and provoked by the war?

Will Capitalism succeed in solving this all-absorbing question?

Even a superficial analysis forces a negative reply.

It must not be forgotten, immediately following the conclusion of peace, capitalist society will be forced to pass through a process diametrically opposed to that just described—the gradual process of "inserting itself into the war," adapting itself to the needs of the war. It will become necessary to adapt again to labor the millions of workers who will return from the battlefield, and, at the same time, come face to face with that inevitable and quite natural fact—that those who during four years have taken the places of the absent workers will refuse to return to a "primitive existence," that women, for instance, now being engaged in industry will refuse to "return to the kitchen." . . . On the other hand, a number of industries, whole industrial sections which have been busy with war production, will be thrown "out of work."

All this will create an industrial-economic crisis unparalleled in history. Unemployment, the eternal companion of Capitalism, will reach unheard of proportions. The seemingly big industrial and financial institutions will "burst in the air" as soap bubbles. . . .

War, this time, will be faithful to its task of being a "locomotive of history," as Marx phrased it. At lightning speed it drives the capitalist "train" against the barriers of class contradictions which stand threateningly ahead! There is no salvation! To move backward is impossible. The train is facing inevitable, unavoidable wreck.

Little wonder, then, that the "engineers" and "conductors" are alarmed, and that their hearts are shrinking with alarm.