

Regeneración

English Section

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Shall America Also Be Forced To Militarism?

"Preparedness!" That is to say, militarism. That is to say, our governmental machine, whose portentously-rapid growth is filling all thoughtful men with deep alarm, strengthened incalculably and clamped on the world's leading democracy with rivets literally of steel. A tremendous transformation and one that will affect vitally the lives of every one of us. One that we have to understand, if possible, before we take the final plunge. I don't believe in the theory that jumping into Niagara Falls will bring us to our senses. I don't believe that a good, still dose of militarism will help the revolutionary movement. For I think the patient will find himself strapped down and helpless. I don't believe that State Socialism is a stepping-stone to freedom, for I am satisfied that when you have given Government a monopoly of everything and armed it to the teeth, you, the ordinary citizen, will find yourself owned, body, soul and breeches, by what is necessarily the most heartless of all despots. Bad kings we have had before, but we have also had good ones; to whose generosity we could appeal. But who would think of pleading to a tax collector? Good and bad masters we have had in plenty, but against the bad ones we have been able to rebel, and not always without success. But what railway worker, for example, will dare to strike against the Government, when striking means treason and the penalty is death by drumhead court-martial? That, as to the government-owned railroads and many other industries, was the situation in Germany long before this war. The Socialists, inclined—they include all the politicians and number millions—wish to produce similar conditions here. For more than thirty years I have had rather unusually good opportunities of studying the American politician, and I think that to clothe him with unlimited power is lunacy gone staring mad. It has passed into a proverb that corporations have no souls. By what process of reasoning, therefore, do we persuade ourselves that the one all-absorbing corporation, the Government, will prove an exception to the rule? Do you change the character of a machine by multiplying its power and size a thousandfold?

The masses think such talk as this mere theorizing. Is that so? Already, at the very threshold of this discussion, we have a billion-and-a-quarter dollar Congress on our hands. Do you understand what that means? It means nine dollars taken straight from the pocket of every man, every woman and every child in the United States. My next-door neighbor has a chicken ranch which gives him, as the result of constant work, a profit of \$300 a year. He has also a wife and four children, and his contribution to the Congress now in session, debating militarism, will be the modest sum of \$54; more than a sixth part of his income. And this is only the beginning. "If these things be done in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

Alleged Anarchists say I oppose Germany because I am by birth an Englishman. As if an Englishman could not see a truth that slaps one in the face! As if one's birth should blind one to the obvious fact that Germany, in

creating the most formidable military machine on record and using it invasively, is forcing the curse of militarism on all the world. That is Germany's great crime, and it is a crime the magnitude of which no man can hope to measure. The blood now being shed is bad enough. The suffering laid on millions and millions of blameless Belgians, Poles, Armenians and I know not how many more, is bad enough, but that will pass. Nature is prodigal and time can heal the deepest scars. What will not pass for many a year to come, is the massacre of civilization which militarism, forced upon the world, entails; the dominance of the professional killer in every walk of life; the assassination of the individual on the altar of the bayonet-governed State; the suppression of every thing that seems, even in the remotest degree, to threaten the security of the ruling and gun-supported class; the death, therefore, of all free thought, all free discussion, all virile and honest intellectual life; all that fearless exercise of mind which is our race's high prerogative and to which alone we owe it that we have been able to rise above the ape. All this is today at stake. All this is threatened by the military wave which now engulfs half of the civilized world, and represents a tragedy of the most sombre hue. I do not understand how any thinking man can blind himself to that.

To throw rhetorical mud at the millions of sober-minded Americans who are today in favor of a "Preparedness" program is worse than useless, because it is unjust, and injustice never pays. They have good arguments behind them; arguments such as no sensible person will try to kill with ridicule. When they tell you that Paris came within an ace of being sacked they state a fact. No sophistry can get away from it. When they tell you that but for her allies the great French nation, to which the world owes so much, would now be prostrate at the conqueror's feet, they state a fact which no Pacificist oratory can hope to hide. And when they tell you that they wish to guard their own country against a similar fate they take a position which no Anarchist eloquence can hope to combat successfully. In trying to do so we waste our breath. I call myself an Anarchist and believe myself to be as uncompromising a one as walks this earth. I call myself an Anarchist because I consider it barbarous to rule my fellow-man by force but civilized to deal with him on terms of equality and by mutual agreement. I call myself an anarchist because I am opposed to rule by force; and, seeing that Government stands for the quintessence of that savage domination, I say that the best government is that which governs least, carries one to the inevitable conclusion that the ideal is no government at all. Observing that government by force is at its zenith when dominated, as the government of Germany has been dominated, by militarism, I hate militarism; hate it as the enemy that blocks the way, as the philosophy that substitutes violence for reason, as the murderous power that puts back the clock and stops development.

Thus, militarism can have no more convinced antagonist than I am. I hate the stamp it sets on modern thought; hate its invasive philosophy, by which land-grabbing justifies itself; hate the martial character it imparts to what should be the peaceful, fraternal pursuit of industry and commerce; hate its protect-

ing tariffs, which are nothing but special privileges to the few at industrial declarations of war against other nations; hate the mould into which it has forced the entire labor struggle; hate the thing from top to toe. Yet I can understand the position of Americans who point to China and do not wish their country to be, as she has been so long, at the mercy of the wolves. I understand their fears, and, with all the good will in the world, I have found myself unable to ally them. It cannot be done. If militarism is to the universal game we cannot keep out of it. If the grenadier view of life, taught so assiduously by Prussia, is to rule world-thought it will rule the thought of America. Then the Dark Ages once again. Then good-bye to all dreams of social equality and freedom. The muck to India, with a caste system rigid as a bar of steel, from which no proletarian can hope to escape. For years past we have been plunging headlong toward what Helloc calls the "Servile State," in which the status of the workingman—his hours of labor, remuneration and so forth—is fixed automatically by the State. Thereby we set fixers also apart as a permanent ruling more caste, and militarism is once in the saddle, perhaps for centuries to come.

We should have the pluck to speak the truth—We should have the virile revolutionary energy to face the ugly fact, admitted frankly by the intelligent of all nations, that Germany is FORCING the world into militarism, and that this means death to all our hopes. Her very efficiency makes the danger greater. The success her military organization, elaborated untiringly for generations, has achieved should not fill us with admiration but with disgust; for in magnifying the momentary triumphs of a militarism based on stern discipline, slavish obedience to orders and the total subservience of the individual to the State, we belittle the far grander and infinitely more durable triumphs of freedom, which no Pacificist oratory can hope to hide. And when they tell you that they wish to guard their own country against a similar fate they take a position which no Anarchist eloquence can hope to combat successfully. In trying to do so we waste our breath. I call myself an Anarchist and believe myself to be as uncompromising a one as walks this earth. I call myself an Anarchist because I consider it barbarous to rule my fellow-man by force but civilized to deal with him on terms of equality and by mutual agreement. I call myself an anarchist because I am opposed to rule by force; and, seeing that Government stands for the quintessence of that savage domination, I say that the best government is that which governs least, carries one to the inevitable conclusion that the ideal is no government at all. Observing that government by force is at its zenith when dominated, as the government of Germany has been dominated, by militarism, I hate militarism; hate it as the enemy that blocks the way, as the philosophy that substitutes violence for reason, as the murderous power that puts back the clock and stops development.

By applauding the momentary triumphs of such a militarism as Prussia has organized we sign our own death warrant, for we give the rein in every country to the strong and unscrupulous, the tigers of our race. Already we may see the poison actively at work. Wilson, the Democrat, succeeded Taft, the Republican, and Taft is on record—I noted it long ago in these columns—as having declared that it was the mission of the United States, to rule from the Canadian border to Cape Horn. Wilson, at the beginning of his reign, was careful to disavow all such imperial ambitions, but Wilson, forced into "Preparedness," has gone back on all his earlier program, and only a few days ago he made this public statement: "It is absolutely necessary that this nation dominate the Western Hemisphere, and to maintain its supremacy the army and navy must be placed on a footing that will defend not only the United States but the nations making of an increased income tax and

common cause with this country." This paper is devoted nominally to Mexican affairs, but it has the good sense to understand that the Mexican Revolution is part of a world-wide problem; that Mexico does not and cannot separate her fate from that of other nations; that the struggle is international and is moving on a colossal plane, being at bottom the bitter fight between those who still hope to hold humanity in chains and those who are determined that, cost what it may, man shall break his way to freedom.

WM. C. OWEN.

Such Is Life

President Wilson has read his address to Congress. It criticizes most caustically the "Hyphen-Americans" who have plotted against the United States—surely their stupilities merit the criticism—and proclaims the doctrine of "America for Americans." That naturally calls for "Preparedness," and on that platform he will go before the country. Also Congress proposes to spend more than a billion and a quarter dollars, which means nine dollars from every man, woman and child in the United States! That talks.

While the President's message to Congress abounds in appeals to Liberty and denunciation of aggression, the pith of it is this, which I quote from the "Thrice-A-Week-World": "The estimates of expenditure submitted to Congress for the next fiscal year call for approximately \$132,300,000 for the Army and \$211,500,000 for the Navy. This is the world into militarism, total for both services of \$343,800,000 exceeds the recent appropriations by \$24,000,000. If these plans are carried through, the United States next year will be spending on army and navy more than Britain was spending for the same services, including an enormous navy, before the present war."

A war message from first to last, clothed in language sweeter than honey. A fervent plea for Pan-Americanism, "with a dom, even such limited freedom as, thus far, we have won. Gross as are the injustices of our Euro-pean civilization we cannot go back to Asia or Africa. Central and South America and there the stagnation of centuries still broods. There the guardian but a full and honorable association, as of partners, between ourselves and our neighbors, in the interest of all America, North and South."

This lays the foundations for an appeal to patriotism, for unless patriotism is deeply stirred there will be rebellion against the military expenditures proposed and the great increase of taxation they will involve. Congress is asked to vote appropriations totalling \$1,285,857,808, which beats all previous records. In his statement of the money needed the President said: "The deficit in the general fund of the Treasury on June 30, 1917, will be nearly two hundred and thirty-five millions. To this sum at least fifty millions should be added, to represent a safe working balance for the treasury, and twelve millions to include the usual deficiency estimates in 1917; and these additions would make a total deficit of some two hundred and thirty-seven millions."

It takes politicians to spend money, but then they have the power of all ways of getting it. Congress is urged to raise the enormous sum required by means of an increased income tax and

by added indirect taxation on iron, steel, gasoline and a number of articles the workingman will classify as luxuries. Accordingly he will shrug his shoulders indifferently, under the delusion that such taxation will not touch. As a matter of cold economic fact every cent of it will come out of his pocket.

Mexico occupied first place in the message, the President claiming that his treatment of her exemplified this country's determination not to interfere with the political independence of any nation. On that head he said: "We have been out to the test in the case of Mexico, and we have stood the test. Whether we have benefited Mexico by the course we have pursued remains to be seen. Her fortunes are in her own hands. But we have at least proved that we will not take advantage of her in her distress and undertake to impose upon her an order and Government of our own choosing. Liberty is often a fierce and intractable thing, to which no bounds can be set, and to which no bounds of a few men's choosing ought ever to be set."

As our readers know we do not consider that the Wilson administration has left Mexico free to steer her own course. On the contrary we consider that it has on its head the blood shed in the Vera Cruz invasion, and that Carranza has had, and is having, from it direct support of the most powerful kind. Carranza is President Wilson's choice and most assuredly not that of the Mexican people, which no one has consulted, Carranza is merely a military conqueror, temporarily triumphant, as Diaz was. One observes that Great Britain has recognized his government, but does any one suppose that Great Britain, now fighting for her life has taken the trouble to consult the Mexicans? Of course not. On the showing made Great Britain has decided that the interests of British investors will be best protected by acknowledging Carranza. Just that and nothing more. And so it is with the present administration of the United States.

Here is a long passage from the President's message which every Anarchist can indorse most cordially; for, indeed, it is a plea for individual liberty and resistance to invasion. Introducing his plans for "Preparedness" the President said:

"No one who really comprehends the spirit of the great people for whom we are appointed to speak can fail to perceive that their passion is for peace, their genius best displayed in the practice of the arts of peace. Great democracies are not beligerent. They do not seek or desire war. Their thought is of individual liberty and of the free labor that supports life and the uncensored thought that quickens it. Conquest and domination are not in our reckoning, or agreeable to our principles. But just because we demand unmolested development and the undisturbed government of our own lives upon our own principles of right and liberty, we resent, from whatever quarter it may come, the aggression we ourselves will not practice."

"We insist upon security in prosecuting our self-chosen lines of national development. We do more than that. We demand it also for others. We do not confine our enthusiasm for individual liberty and free national development to the incidents and movements of affairs which affect only ourselves. We feel it wherever there is a people that tries to walk in these difficult paths of independence and right. From the first we have made

common cause with all partisans of liberty on this side the sea, and have deemed it as important that our neighbors should be free; we are witnessing the breakdown of all moral, social, artistic and economic values, hitherto have set America aside as a whole for the uses of independent nations and political freedom.

"Out of such thoughts grow all our policies. We regard war merely as a means of asserting the rights of a people against aggression. And we are as fiercely jealous of coercive or dictatorial power within our own nation as of aggression from without."

Alas! (that and of necessity under our present institutions) the promises of politics should be so fair and the performances so foul! Doubtless President Wilson, as an admirer of Emerson, is theoretically strong for individual liberty, but politics are bearing him along a course directly away from it. Doubtless the vast majority of people wish sincerely that labor should be free, but they still uphold monopoly in production and distribution, and pride themselves on the creation of those strong, centralized government behind which monopoly finds shelter.

Naturally I myself have no sympathy with the German intrigues now being exposed so thoroughly, both because I consider Germany a red-handed invader whose cause is indefensible, and because the money spent on purchasing the support of labor leaders points to a corruption, unspeakably deplorable. Nevertheless the language used by the President upon this head does not ring true, to me. No one who has observed and reflected on proletarian life in the United States can wonder at the absence of that loyalty which shocks President Wilson so deeply and fills him, as he declares, with "humiliation and scorn." Such language, I repeat, does not ring true. Dickens might properly have put it in the mouth of Pecksniff or Molier in that of Tartuffe; but, in my opinion, it does not become the lips of a President of the United States or any honest seeker after truth. We speak of "The European War" but, in reality, we have entered the vortex of a vast social upheaval, and today we are starting to reap the inevitable harvest that greed and ambition, brutality and cowardice, ignorance, superstition and mental indolence have sown with so prodigal a hand.

WM. C. OWEN.

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REVOLT

Comrades and Co workers in

the struggle for a free humanity; we are living in a period of tremendous transformation of society; we are witnessing the breakdown of all moral, social, artistic and economic values, hitherto have set America aside as a whole for the uses of independent nations and political freedom. We need a new medium of expression. We need a live weekly revolutionary organ. A weekly paper which will interpret the new tendencies in art, science, literature and in the revolutionary labor movement. A Free-lance which will fight the battles of ALL workers. No affiliation with any particular organization. Independent expression and uncensored information. A resume of weekly happenings. Real news and no cumbersome dissertation. Here it is!

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