

The False Peace

Protectionism Means
Endless Conflict

By

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Protectionism Means Endless Conflict

THE nations have "concluded peace." The vanquished have subscribed to the *protectionist peace*. The sense of insecurity among nations remains,—it is even accentuated. Everyone feels it, everyone deplors it and declares that after four years of immense military effort to overthrow autocracies, followed by ten months of study during which the leaders of both hemispheres discussed the problem of organizing the relationships of the democratized peoples, the chief result is a large scrap of diplomatic paper. It does not seem to be realized that if nothing is settled, if the future seems less certain than ever, it is doubtless because "the conventions of peace" are not based on any inherent and essential principle of international truth, justice and morality.

Necessity or natural law is superior to human will and custom. Nor could a popular "will to peace" prevent new and worse wars from following closely on the heels of the one just ended if it continued to disregard the law of unity as expressed and revealed by the nature of things.

To give a more concrete illustration of our meaning let us take President Wilson's Fourteen Points as an example. They were for the most part concessions to political empiricism, compromises with false conceptions which have hitherto prevailed in international relations. But the Third Point, inspired by philosophic truth, set forth the natural and permanent international requirements. It provided the necessary economic foundation for peaceful intercourse between nations. Since the economic needs of man are his most vital needs, his economic activities, interests and rights are immediate and fundamental. Harmonious intercourse must, from the very nature of things, be dependent upon the economic conditions. Is it not clear that nature has provided for the economic interdependence and unity of the nations by the unequal distribution over the surface of the globe

of the available materials of wealth necessary to mankind? Does not co-operation in the free exchange of economic services become for them a first necessity, and consequently a primary moral obligation? Harmony and peaceful intercourse, whether between individuals or nations, are impossible unless based on this first principle of freedom, justice and morality.

It will be recalled that the third of the Fourteen Points demanded "The removal, as far as possible, of all economic barriers, and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating together for its maintenance." It laid down the principle, the primary condition; it provided the very basis for a genuine association of peoples, a real League of Nations. Now, the various Wilson Points have received a broad application with the exception of the third, which has been utterly ignored. The peace lacks its natural and essential foundation. Therefore there is not, there cannot be, peace!

Germany is especially to blame, for, in the reply made by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau to the Allies' treaty proposal, while seeming at first to rely on the Third Point, the words he used were devoid of precision or clearness, but were couched in sibylline terms (a "universal commercial treaty" was proposed) which would have justified every suspicion, had they been able to challenge serious attention. Now, it was more incumbent upon Germany than upon any other nation to demand a thoroughgoing application of the Third Point, by means of a gradual inauguration of universal Free Trade. What she could have done, and ought to have done, was to make her acceptance of the peace treaty rest upon it, declaring herself ready for the immediate abolition of her own economic barriers. Had she done so, she would have taken an impregnable diplomatic position, a position that could not be attacked by the allied diplomats, and irreproachable before history. She lamentably, stupidly failed to do so.

This new blunder of Germany (of all nations the most imbued with false theories, the most "learned" in error and ignorant of truth) in no way excuses the serious fault of the rulers of the allied democracies. The British Prime Minister said recently in the House of Commons that he "defied anyone to show that the

peace treaty was lacking in justice or wisdom." I accept Lloyd George's challenge and affirm it to be without wisdom or justice.

The treaty is fundamentally and thoroughly unjust, since we deny our late enemies economic equality; that is to say, equality in fundamental human rights. It is unwise, because, while imposing indemnities on Germany, it forbids her the only two means of paying, viz.: either colonies in proportion to her needs, or, preferably, free trade with the colonies of other nations. It is supremely lacking in wisdom because war results from inequality of territorial possessions, of "places in the sun," of empires; and because, by its tendencies, its spirit, and the monopolies it sanctions, the treaty has greatly emphasized and aggravated this chief cause of wars, whether past or future.

The Paris "peace conventions" have too clearly the effect, if not the purpose, of sacrificing the civilization of the world in order to satisfy the predatory designs of a few Great Powers. Having waged endless wars against weak nations, and conquered an enormous part of the territories and natural resources which the planet offers to all mankind, they now propose to retain them by force. (This is called "reaping the fruits of victory.") If they persist in such enterprises of national plunder, sooner or later deserved and inexorable punishment will overtake them. In the meantime, it is a simple matter of self-interest for these nations, only too well provided with places in the sun, to proclaim their desire for peace, implying thereby a permanent territorial *status quo* as well as the possession and exclusive use of the natural riches which ought, by exchange, to be made the common possession of all mankind.

But will this peace of the Great Allies with its imperialism, its protectionism, its monopolies—its British, French, American, Italian and Japanese Imperial Preference—will it long satisfy the cheated and despoiled nations which comprise the rest of humanity? They will abhor it within ten years,—as soon, in fact, as they realize the iniquity which has been treacherously imposed upon them, unwelcome guests at Nature's banquet table.

How can the numerous small democracies into which Central and Eastern Europe have been subdivided live in peace? *How can they live at all* if, in imitation of the great protectionist and imperialist democracies of the old world and the new, they seek

isolation and "protect" themselves against each other? How can these young democracies enjoy economic and political prosperity, how can they survive if French, American and British protectionism monopolizes the greater part of the world's resources?

The protectionist peace of the "allied democracies" is anti-democratic, absurd and iniquitous. It is an oppressive peace, imposed by force in defiance of right. That is my reply to Lloyd George.¹

The statesmen gathered at Paris were the masters of human destiny. It was their duty, and it was within their power, to solve the international problem once for all, making further wars useless and conquest and annexation an absurdity. But they could only do so by making a Free Trade peace, gradually opening the world to free economic intercourse in which all countries would be on equal terms, thus making the whole earth a "place in the sun" for every nation. A *pax economica* is the only possible anti-imperialist and anti-militarist peace, the only democratic peace, the only fundamentally just, wise and true peace.²

¹ Also to M. Clemenceau who considers that the Treaty of Versailles "is nevertheless, a fine treaty" . . . since it consecrates "a peace of human solidarity." Thus, the statesman chosen as President of the great council of humanity at the gravest moment of history was, in common with those who surrounded him at Paris and Versailles, ignorant of the fact that human solidarity must in the nature of things begin with economic conditions, man's vital needs—food, clothing and shelter. And this happens in the 20th century, after fifty years of industrial civilization. And we are surprised at the disastrous results of such romantic politics!

² As long ago as 1908, during the discussions over the annexation of the independent Congo State by Belgium, the present writer proposed the internationalization of this colony, which might thus have formed the nucleus of a great international State, comprising the various colonies of the Congo, French, English, German, Portuguese and Belgian. This international colonial domain would have been open to the free economic activities of all nations on a basis of absolute equality. Although its adoption might have dissipated the black clouds then overshadowing Europe, the project did not meet with favor either in Belgium or elsewhere.

From that time to 1914 the writer has embraced every opportunity to explain that the adoption of the open door policy—or at least equal treatment for all nations—in all the European colonies would supply the means, and the only hope of escaping a European conflagration. He believes that this plan is still the only one capable of contributing effectively to the solution of the international crisis.

Immediate free trade with the colonies—while we are waiting for universal Free Trade—would brighten with the light of truth and justice a sky hitherto charged with the clouds of ignorance and injustice that overhang most of the nations and their governments.

During the whole length of the war Free Trade offered the desirable and practicable solution. As I never ceased by speech and pen to insist from the beginning of the great conflict, both in England and the United States, this principle was alone powerful enough to bring the war promptly to an end and create a definite sense of international security, thereby averting revolution and anarchy and saving the world from barbarism. It required, however, not only in Germany but in the Allied and Associated countries as well, an understanding that was everywhere tragically lacking—a comprehension of true international needs, of political wisdom, philosophy and foresight.

In all countries and in every circle in Europe everyone, from the Pope, the emperors, kings, presidents of Republics and heads of governments, to the lesser politicians, professors and writers,—everyone (or so we like to believe for the honor of mankind) sincerely tried from the first to the last day of the war to put an “honorable” end to the abominable and shameful international drama of mutual slaughter and destruction. But they all relied either on childish, artificial or insincere political combinations, or on territorial dickering or more or less oppressive economic machinations. They mistook for “realities” a base materialism which stimulated their appetites while exasperating their prejudices and passions. No one took the trouble to seek agreement in the only feasible way, by satisfying the natural, common and fundamental needs of the nations in acknowledgment of international morality, a course dictated alike by nature and the force of circumstances.

At the Peace Conference the Four did their worst. Instead of warning the civilized world against the old errors which were the underlying cause of the wars of the past; instead of instructing the nations in economic freedom, the fundamental truth of internationalism; instead of imposing Free Trade so sorely needed by the whole Continent upon Germany and Central and Eastern Europe,³ and promising to adopt it themselves in the near future, these great statesmen (themselves victims of the protectionist superstition, if not of contemptible schemes of domestic politics and party interest) seem to have done their best

³ Cf. Yves-Guyot: *Les Causes et les Conséquences de la Guerre.*

to avoid, either by word or deed, disturbing the Great Powers in the exercise of their shameful, wicked and criminal policy.

The Treaty of Paris has not succeeded in creating a sense of international security. It has not only failed to do so, but by giving the sanction of an international agreement to the violation of the primary rights of nations, it has greatly increased the sense of insecurity. It has thus compromised, perhaps irremediably, the possibility of a solution to the social problem. If it is not promptly amended so as to give a vigorous application to the Free Trade principle, permitting the association of all countries in a genuine League of Nations based on economic and political co-operation, this so-called treaty of peace will condemn the world to an indefinite period of wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions, and international and social anarchy, leading inevitably to barbarism.

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