
After the War Ends

by Anton Pannekoek

Translated by Lily Lore

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While the war is in progress, the highest duty of the socialist proletariat is the fight for its speedy conclusion. But even when peace has been declared, his struggle is not finished. For the effects of the war remain. New problems arise, and must be met.

When the soldiers return to their homes, new misery and new want are grinning at them. Awful as have been the sufferings that war has brought, in one respect the lot of the proletarians is still worse in times of peace. In war times the workers are needed; the bourgeoisie needs their enthusiasm, their willingness to sacrifice, their good will — the spirit of the army is an important factor in warfare. Money, therefore, becomes a secondary consideration, subservient to the aims of the war; aid and assistance are granted with unaccustomed liberality. The working class suffers, it is butchered, but those at home at least maintain a certain livelihood.

That ceases with the coming of peace. The workers are no longer needed as soldiers; they are no longer comrades, defenders of the fatherland, heroes. Once more they become beasts of burden, objects of exploitation. Let them look for work, if they are hungry.

But how about work?

After the war has stopped, the whole industrial economy of the country must again be readjusted. Conditions somewhat similar to the crisis at the beginning of the war will result. At that time the mobilization, in spite of the vast numbers that were drafted into military service, was followed by a terrible period of unemployment which lasted several months until industry had adjusted itself to war conditions, and war orders began to come in. After the war the situation will be exactly reversed; the country must pass from war production to peace production. But this crisis

will be much more severe. In the former case, the old market with its hundredfold demands upon production was replaced by the nation, by the army with its uniform requirements. In place of thousands of competing, haggling customers, there was a single buyer, and such a buyer! He did not haggle, he was exceedingly liberal with his money, for he had billions from which to pay his debts, billions raised by successive issues of war bonds. Small wonder that everyone soon found employment. But when the whole business of war ceases, production must once more be regulated to meet the varied demands of private buyers; and this presents the greatest difficulties.

The old markets are gone. New markets must be found, new connections established. All this takes time. The enormous antebellum export to the belligerent countries cannot at once be resumed, upon that subject we need entertain no illusions. National hatred, influenced to a white heat will continue, and will create bitter antagonism on the industrial field, as surely as they will leave their mark even in the world of culture and science. Each country will strive to become industrially independent and self-sufficient. In the neutral nations necessity, and golden profits have given a palpable impetus to industrial development, have encouraged them in securing foreign markets. The outlook for the rehabilitation of industrial conditions in the belligerent countries are anything but promising.

No doubt there will be periods of activity. The terrible ravages of war must be mended, while the replacement of war material, likewise, for a time, will encourage production. Enormous general losses have been sustained, and will, for a time, increase production on every hand. But this cannot mean a lasting

state of prosperity, chiefly because the destruction of capital itself has been so great Europe will emerge from this war, poor in capital, deeply in debt to America. It is generally conceded that we will meet a period of general industrial depression. The bourgeoisie will strive to accumulate new capital by intensified exploitation; low wages and unemployment will be the gifts that war will bring to the proletariat.

In the coming years the problem of unemployment will be the burning question, the weightiest problem in the struggle of the working class. The demand for *effective, and sufficient unemployment insurance* must, therefore, be one of the most important demands of the socialist proletariat. It must be raised immediately, must be impressed upon the nation during the great crisis of readjustment.

What, after they have fought and bled for imperialism, shall the workers return to, to lie hungry upon the streets? Is not this crisis a direct outcome of the war and shall not the government, having spent billions for the war, add a few more billions to its debt, in order to guide its erstwhile soldiers safely through this critical period? What shall we say of a government that allows its returning, victorious army, to starve on its way home through the desert?

To be sure, such arguments will not be nearly as effective as stern necessity itself, in forcing the bourgeoisie and the government to take heed. But they will maintain their old principle, that in a peaceful, capitalist state of society everyone must take care of himself. Their support will take the form of scanty, charitable gifts, enervating pauperization under humiliating conditions, entailing perhaps the sacrifice of important rights.

In view of this, the workers must demand security of existence for the unemployed as a right. This is a revolutionary demand, to be sure, one that will affect the very foundations of capitalism. Can the government, however, entirely refuse to consider its justification, if this demand is voiced by the millions of armed workingmen that constitute its armies? This demand unites the immediate problem of existence of every proletarian with the aims and problems of revolutionary socialism. For it will not suffice to simply give expression to this demand. If it is to be realized, it must be fought for with all the force of the masses that the proletariat can bring to bear.

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For the ruling class there is another way out of the difficulty. Reproduction of war material that has been destroyed, and new armaments, will be the foremost consideration for both governments and bourgeoisie. They will demand more effective preparedness for coming wars.

This will necessitate the employment of labor, labor that is about to be dismissed from the army only to be reinstated in a round about way, into military service. Were it not much more efficient to retain these workers in their military capacity, to retain them as soldiers under military discipline for the production of new war material?

The experiences gained from the organization of industry and trade under national control, have impressed the *idea of State Socialism* favorably upon many bourgeois minds. The advantage of uniform, controlled production, over chaotic private production have become too apparent.

The most important of the large industrial branches could be brought, easily, into national ownership. This could be done without difficulty with the direct war industry.

The question of employment for the returning soldiers, too, would be solved for the bourgeoisie. The danger that threatens, when great rebellious masses call for work, bread, assistance, could thus be averted, by drafting them immediately into the war industries, and then, gradually, as conditions in private industry become more settled, dismiss them from military service.

Other advantages, too, might arise from such a plan. In the first place production would be greatly cheapened by the exclusion of all middlemen. Everyone realizes how much could be saved by government organization of production. All technical and organizational improvements of the war period would be applied. It would do away with the problem of unemployment insurance. Wages could be regulated; for against this powerful employer labor unions would be powerless, even if they were permitted to exist. It would mean for the workers increased dependence; would mean greater curtailment of their personal freedom than was possible under private ownership. National ownership of large branches of industry is synonymous

with their militarization. Unquestionably, the ruling class fears the day after the war, when military dictatorship, war-laws, press censorship and the state of siege have become things of the past. The militarization of the national industrial forces will present itself as the most effective means of keeping great masses in harness, and curbing their desire for political opposition.

To the proletariat this state socialism can mean only an aggravation of its sufferings and increased pressure upon the burden of life. Notwithstanding this, it is to be expected that a large part of our Social Democracy will not oppose this plan but will lend it its heartiest support. Their old ideals make them the prisoners of this new system of national exploitation.

Even before the war every proposal to pluck the consumers by new monopolies was heralded as a "beginning of socialism, which deserved our heartiest support!" *Socialism is not based upon national ownership, but upon the strength, the might of the proletariat.* In the past the conceptions of socialism and state industries have been hopelessly confused in the minds of our Social Democracy; in the future, this party will face the state socialist plans for the increased enslavement of the working class, with neither mental weapons nor a clearly defined attitude.

To the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement belongs the duty to strike the first blow at these new and dangerous shackles upon the proletarians. The fight against state socialism will bring in its wake a radical clarification of ideas concerning the relations between the proletariat and the new imperialism. It will usher in a period of new, practical conflict. As the new, imperialistic state more and more unmistakably assumes the guise of oppressor and exploiter, the proletariat will see in the nation its great enemy, against whom it must fight, before all others, by means of mass action. And the Kautsky tradition, that we must preserve the state in order to use it for our own purposes, will be practically shattered.

A third cause of coming oppression and new conflict will come to the working class out of the war. The nations of Europe will emerge from this war burdened with enormous debts. War loan has followed war loan, until the war debts of the belligerent nations amount, already, to more than two hundred billions. National economists and statesmen everywhere are asking the question: "Where shall we raise the billions

necessary to pay the interest? Where can we raise new taxes?" In the parliaments, in spite of civil peace, class is fighting class on the tax question. Every class tries to push the burden off on to the shoulders of the other; yet they all know that all must suffer, that it is at best but a question of who shall assume the greater, and who the lesser burden.

The Social Democrats consequently, with the exception of logical social-imperialists of the Cunow type, have reiterated their resolutions against indirect taxation, and insist that the burden of war be born by the possessing classes. Unquestionably they are right when they maintain that the masses cannot bear added burdens, that added taxation would reduce the standard of living of the working class even more than before. But they forget that the standard of living is not fixed, that it is determined by that which the worker is in a position to demand, and to win from the capitalist class. A militant, firmly organized working class, can win a higher plane of life; where it loses on the political field, by increased taxation, what it has won on the industrial field, this but proves its political weakness and ineffectiveness. Where since August, 1914, the social democracy threw itself at the feet of imperialism and kissed its feet, it so weakened the proletariat, and condemned it to such hopeless stagnation, that it must not be surprised to receive, as a reward for its actions, a rapidly sinking standard of living for its proletariat. Their resolutions are ridiculous and therefore promote opposition to their own actions. *The protest of the working class must express itself in actions. Active opposition against taxation on articles of consumption that must be born by the proletariat.*

Does that mean that we shall demand property taxes? Bourgeois representatives are partly right when they maintain that taxation levied upon all incomes derived from the interest on the loans will prevent the accumulation of capital, and will, moreover, encourage the capitalist to unload them upon his employees in the shape of wage reductions. Now the payment of war debts means, in the last analysis, nothing more than the robbery of the working population of all classes in the interest of the holders of war-bonds, by means of taxes of one kind or another. Had the propertied classes acted from motives of true patriotism, they would, when the state needed the money to carry on a war in their interests, have placed a portion of

their war profits at the disposal of the nation. Not having done this, shall they have the right to demand tribute for all future times from the population? Of all kinds of capitalist incomes, the interests that accrue from state bonds are, socially considered, the most useless. A revolutionary, socialist government will always tend to repudiate this tribute, to annul all national debts. Conditions are such that only this measure, the *annulment of the enormous state loans* can save the nations from the threatening financial debacle. It is not to be expected that capitalist governments will turn to this measure, for, to them, capitalist interests are holy. The more will it be the duty of the proletariat to raise this cry against every attempt to burden them with new taxes for the payment of war debts. Together with the *confiscation of all war profits*, this measure alone will make it possible to avert the most awful consequences of this war from the mass of the people.

When the proletariat, during and after the war, resumes its political struggle, it must have a *clear cut program of action*.

The struggle for socialism is always a class struggle for the momentary interests of the proletariat. The methods, the means employed in this struggle, determine its revolutionary character. Of course, a part of the old demands retain their importance in the new program of action, as, for instance, the fight for full democracy in the nation, and the fight against militarism. But both will be given a new meaning, a new increasing prevalence of state socialism will weld industrial exploitation and military enslavement together with political oppression into one reactionary whole. The above article has shown that the demand for the assurance of a decent existence for the unemployed proletariat, as well as the demand for annulment of all national debts, are direct questions of existence for the working class, and must therefore receive the most important place in the program of action of the reawakening proletariat.

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