

CAPITALISM AND THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

By J. T. Walton Newbold

II.

In the last article I endeavoured to show how the peculiar political conditions which history bequeathed to the German people combined with their economic evolution to make their revolutionary movement political rather than industrial in its formation and objective. I suggested that what was more probable than an immediate working-class upheaval in Germany, was a shifting of the political institutions now in existence there by the capitalist class, who might very well dethrone the Hohenzollerns, overthrow the evident rule of the Junkers, and replace the military caste by a civil bureaucracy, in theory responsible to a democratic parliament.

This "democratisation of Germany," this "destruction of Prussian militarism," would undoubtedly meet with the entire approval of those capitalist elements that now control the affairs of Britain, France, Italy, and the U.S.A., and that are now endeavouring to re-establish a monarchy in Russia, but along constitutional lines. This is the revolutionary change which certain Americans desire to bring about in the government of the Central Powers and would welcome in Japan. The War for the idealists of capitalist democracy is the completion of their task of human emancipation of world liberation. They really hope, and expect, to extend over the whole world the political system appropriate to the régime of Capital. They are fighting amongst other things to extirpate feudalism* and the economic and political power which springs from the hereditary tenure of land. Kings, Kaisers, and the whole aristocracy of lords of the soil are to be swept away, and the world made secure for the superior persons who own and manipulate capital. The capitalist class considers itself the expression of all that is fittest to survive and to flourish over the whole face of creation. Like the feudalists of land, the would-be possessors of absolute property in capital deem themselves to be the trustees of mankind. In days gone by the capitalists were weak and struggling. Then they were a revolutionary force, the pioneers of a new heaven and a new earth. They were to a great extent cosmopolitans, advocates of free exchange, free contract, free institutions. What this really meant was that they were hostile to the institutions, laws, and customs of landlordism and feudalism. They were class conscious and, as they did not control the power of the State, they

were not enthusiastic supporters of either its domestic, its financial, or its foreign policy. Now that the capitalists of Western democracy have gained control of the State power, they are directing it to serve their class interests. Over against them in Central Europe is their most deadly enemy—a union of property systems welded into a feudal capitalism, armed to the teeth, and supported by an enlightened monarchist régime. America faces Germany and around these great protagonists are grouped their political "allies," their economic vassal states. The two mighty capitalist countries, the two most highly developed productive organisations of the world are battling, first and foremost, for the market of Asia and for the labour power of 1,000,000,000 potential wage-slaves. If they can control the services of these, the capitalists of America and Germany will not mind what political "sovereignty" they acknowledge, what flag they salute, what Empire "owns" them.

The Capitalists do not desire "annexations" of land; what they mean to seize is labour-power. Because the feudalists have dominated government so long, because in the making of wars and treaties their law and their language have found expression, we talk of "annexations" and mean thereby transfers of land. To-day, however, in the proportion that the capitalist influence predominates over the landlord, the motive of conquest is the *annexation of labour-power* and of opportunities to apply it to natural resources.

Up-to-date, the German politico-economic system has had greater success than the mutually jealous, conflicting, and distrustful partnership of capitalist democracies, and the world has seemed to be threatened with a revival of feudal dominion. This menace, to the writer's mind, has always been far more apparent than real, and, to him, it has been evident that sooner or later the material superiority of the Allies must tell.† When feudalism begins to fail German capitalism, that element enormously stimulated by the demand for its products during war-time, will desert Kaiserism and do all in its power to save itself from ruin. With the prospect of world-power being entirely shut off, German capitalism will not choose to go down to ruin with German junkerdom. Neither will the capitalists in the Allied countries pursue a policy calculated to complete the *débâcle* of private property in Central Europe. By "the rule of public right and order," the diplomats of political

democracy do not mean Bolshevist Socialism.

When the danger of German world-dominion disappears the "Never Endians" will not be able to continue the War very long, because the destruction of militarism in Prussia will then become far less urgent than the holding down of the proletarian masses, who, in every land, are threatening to rise in revolt and sweep what capitalist politicians call "law and order, public right, and civil government" into the limbo of things forgotten.

At the present juncture it is doubtful whether peace would not injure the Russian Revolution and thereby, of course, harm the prospects of the Revolution all over the world. Lenin, far-sighted and resolute to achieve a world revolt against international capitalism, was no supporter of the Stockholm business. He believes—and with that view I myself, since my conversion to Marxism, have been in accord—that it is to our interest as Socialists that the Imperialist Powers should mutually destroy each other. For that reason I hailed the entry of the U.S.A. into the War.

The continuance of the War is producing spontaneous outbursts of revolt in every country. It is driving the governing classes to renewed efforts of reaction. It is spurring them on to increase the rate of exploitation until it becomes more and more unbearable. It is dragging the whole population into the industrial and, probably, yet into the conscript systems. It is destroying the middle class and private enterprise. It is identifying the State more and more with the exploiting class. It is breeding new industrial expressions of working-class action to take the place of officialised trade unions and atrophied political institutions. The one thing that concerns us as Socialists is not to agitate against the War, but to get ready for Revolution. We shall not occasion it. Conditions will produce the revolt, but it may well be abortive unless we are ready to give it form and system and to act as the willing and purposeful instruments of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD.

(TO BE CONTINUED).

* We do not agree with Mr. Newbold in this view. We believe that capitalism is not concerned to establish Parliaments, but to secure raw material, trade routes and, as he observes, labour power.

† This material superiority appears to us to be purely a question of labour power and raw material, not of governmental machinery. Mr. Newbold's view on this point is not quite clear to us.—ED. WORKERS' DREADNOUGHT.