

THE SOCIETY OF NATIONS. By Charles Rappoport.

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In France three men in especial have moulded the mentality of the Socialist Party: Edouard Vaillant, diplomatist and finished revolutionary statesman; Jules Guesde, pitiless logician; and Jean Jaurès, a seer, combining a genius for intuition with robust common sense.

Jaurès was taken from us at the opening of the war. Vaillant, who lived through its first years, followed during these years a policy which contradicted the tactics of his whole life, for hitherto he had devoted himself to combating political and economic reaction. The only way to do full justice to the memory of Vaillant is to follow the advice of Renan, who hoped to be judged, not by the doings of old age, subject to the fatal and common law of human weakness, but by the vigorous activities of his entire life. Jules Guesde, again, in his new nationalist phase, is in flat contradiction to the Socialist and Internationalist trend of his life prior to the war, and has voluntarily renounced the role of guardian of the conscience of that party which he helped to found.

These few years of disturbance and pain cannot efface the activities of an entire epoch. How can we sum up, in a word, the general tendency of the life of Vaillant and Guesde? It has been devoted to the search for tangible economic and social realities; it has ever been characterised by contempt for vain and stilted phrases, for bourgeois ideology. But when a political party, instead of formulating its demands in concrete terms, instead of stating them simply, clearly, and directly, informs us that its entire programme may be summed up in the desire to realise right, justice, and truth—it cuts a ridiculous figure. For where shall we find the party to declare itself *opposed* to right, truth, and justice? These phrases are the small change of oratory. For all parties alike, the difficulty begins when we ask for a definition of the terms right, truth, and justice. The vaguer the politician's answer, the more suspect is his political creed. If he continue to take refuge in nebulous phrases, we write him down a humbug, and consider that his party exists only to trick the public.

Are we to believe that the French Socialist Party is in such a case, now that it has replaced its programme based upon unsparing analysis of realities by the catchword "Society of Nations"? I find it difficult to take so gloomy a view. For the

moment, indeed, the party is affected by the prevailing current of political and doctrinal reaction. In allying itself with the bourgeoisie, in allying itself with all the parties of reaction, the French Socialists, whom Guesde all his life has been warning against such dangerous alliances, adopt the whole stock of bourgeois phrase-making, sacrifice the substance for the shadow. It seems to me that to-day our party resembles one of those sanguine authors who think that their work is done as soon as they have found an imposing title for a new book. Let us be generous enough to concede to our opponents that *The Society of Nations* is an excellent title!

But it is a title without content. In times of peace all the nations form a "society." There exists a society within that society known by the sinister name of secret diplomacy.

At the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), when the nations, assembled in a society, were parcelling out the world, they formed something more than a simple society of nations; they formed a society of nations at a dance, a national ball which lasted for years. Masked by the sound of the violins, intrigues went on gaily. Talleyrand, one of the most gifted of the intriguers, was even able to impose upon Europe the will of France, France invaded and broken by the reactionary coalition. Net result: the celebrated Holy Alliance of the governments against the peoples; half a century of savage reaction; the congresses of Verona and Laibach, where the anti-revolutionary weapons were forged.

Why did all these things happen? They were the outcome of the economic and political forces of the epoch. These forces determined the content of the society of nations established at the Vienna Congress in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

At the forthcoming peace congress, the content of the Society of Nations which will there be re-established will inevitably be determined by the terrible struggle for the world market, by the struggle for existence, by the interplay of economic, political, and national rivalries. This struggle will determine the political and economic regime of all the nations participating in the new capitalist society.

The use of the word "society" does not suffice to annul the existence of a situation whose essence

is struggle. The struggle will continue as long as the causes which have led to it. Capitalist society, like feudal society, exists only by and for struggle. As long as the ownership of the globe remains open to dispute, the Great Powers, here constituting the owners, will strive one with another for dominion. Socialism alone, substituting for this struggle to acquire a larger property, to gain a larger share of power (Imperialism), an agreement to secure the ends of life, to secure the happiness and the unrestricted development of all—Socialism alone will create a positive and indestructible foundation for a true society of nations. Outside Socialism, we find nothing but words, words, words.

Worse than this. These words will serve as a trademark to promote the sale of doubtful wares, as a mask for politicians desiring to dispose of nonentities, and as weapons to be used by one coalition against another. Now, as always, such phraseology is a mere refuge of ignorance, an easy means of eluding reality. Words are the false assignats of bankrupt political parties, currency notes which cannot be cashed in gold.

Our criticism of the Society of Nations has nothing in common with the criticisms uttered by the reactionary parties. The champions of the international reaction declare that war is eternal, just, and divine. In their presumption they believe themselves to be eternal, and they infer the eternity of human folly and bad feeling. We take a different view. We are evolutionists and revolutionists. We are determinists, men who believe that effects will disappear when their causes disappear, and will not disappear before. War will continue as long as its causes continue in operation. Socialism explains its causes. Those who imagine that they can put an end to war by affixing to the brazen forehead of capitalist society a label bearing the inscription *Society of Nations* are not merely ignorant of the first words of our doctrine, but do not know what it means to study a problem scientifically.

Peace is no chimera. War is a crime and a folly; it is utterly insensate. But it is a crime and a folly for which mankind has paid too dearly to be content with a phrase which would leave things just as they are.

Socialist society organised upon an international basis is our Society of Nations. There is no other