

II

THE LEAGUE MUST BE REPRESENTATIVE

A Peace Congress, growing permanent, then, may prove to be the most practical and convenient embodiment of this idea of a League of Nations that has taken possession of the imagination of the world. A most necessary preliminary to a Peace Congress, with such possibilities inherent in it, must obviously be the meeting and organization of a preliminary League of the Allied Nations. That point I would now enlarge.

Half a world peace is better than none. There seems no reason whatever why the world should wait for the Central Powers before it begins this necessary work. Mr. McCurdy has been asking lately, "Why not the League of Nations now?" That is a question a great number of people would like to echo very heartily. The nearer the Allies can come to a League of Free Nations before the Peace Congress the more prospect there is that that body will approximate in nature to a League of Nations for the whole world.

In one most unexpected quarter the same idea has been endorsed. The King's Speech on the prorogation of Parliament this February was one of the most remarkable royal utterances that have ever been made from the British throne. There was less of the old-fashioned King and more of the modern President about it than the most republican-minded of us could

have anticipated. For the first time in a King's Speech we heard of the "democracies" of the world, and there was a clear claim that the Allies at present fighting the Central Powers did themselves constitute a League of Nations.

But we must admit that at present they do so only in a very rhetorical sense. There is no real council of empowered representatives, and nothing in the nature of a united front has been prepared. Unless we provide beforehand for something more effective, Italy, France, the United States, Japan, and this country will send separate groups of representatives, with separate instructions, unequal status, and very probably conflicting views upon many subjects, to the ultimate peace discussions. It is quite conceivable--it is a very serious danger--that at this discussion skilful diplomacy on the part of the Central Powers may open a cleft among the Allies that has never appeared during the actual war. Have the British settled, for example, with Italy and France for the supply of metallurgical coal after the war? Those countries must have it somehow. Across the board Germany can make some tempting bids in that respect. Or take another question: Have the British arrived at common views with France, Belgium, Portugal, and South Africa about the administration of Central Africa? Suppose Germany makes sudden proposals affecting native labour that win over the Portuguese and the Boers? There are a score of such points upon which we shall find the Allied representatives haggling with each other in the presence of the enemy if they have not been settled beforehand.

It is the plainest common sense that we should be fixing up all such

matters with our Allies now, and knitting together a common front for the final deal with German Imperialism. And these things are not to be done effectively and bindingly nowadays by official gentlemen in discreet undertones. They need to be done with the full knowledge and authority of the participating peoples.

The Russian example has taught the world the instability of diplomatic bargains in a time of such fundamental issues as the present. There is little hope and little strength in hole-and-corner bargainings between the officials or politicians who happen to be at the head of this or that nation for the time being. Our Labour people will not stand this sort of thing and they will not be bound by it. There will be the plain danger of repudiation for all arrangements made in that fashion. A gathering of somebody or other approved by the British Foreign Office and of somebody or other approved by the French Foreign Office, of somebody with vague powers from America, and so on and so on, will be an entirely ineffective gathering. But that is the sort of gathering of the Allies we have been having hitherto, and that is the sort of gathering that is likely to continue unless there is a considerable expression of opinion in favour of something more representative and responsible.

Even our Foreign Office must be aware that in every country in the world there is now bitter suspicion of and keen hostility towards merely diplomatic representatives. One of the most significant features of the time is the evident desire of the Labour movement in every European country to take part in a collateral conference of Labour that shall meet when and where the Peace Congress does and deliberate and comment

on its proceedings. For a year now the demand of the masses for such a Labour conference has been growing. It marks a distrust of officialdom whose intensity officialdom would do well to ponder. But it is the natural consequence of, it is the popular attempt at a corrective to, the aloofness and obscurity that have hitherto been so evil a characteristic of international negotiations. I do not think Labour and intelligent people anywhere are going to be fobbed off with an old-fashioned diplomatic gathering as being that League of Free Nations they demand.

On the other hand, I do not contemplate this bi-cameral conference with the diplomatists trying to best and humbug the Labour people as well as each other and the Labour people getting more and more irritated, suspicious, and extremist, with anything but dread. The Allied countries must go into the conference solid, and they can only hope to do that by heeding and incorporating Labour ideas before they come to the conference. The only alternative that I can see to this unsatisfactory prospect of a Peace Congress sitting side by side with a dissentient and probably revolutionary Labour and Socialist convention--both gatherings with unsatisfactory credentials contradicting one another and drifting to opposite extremes--is that the delegates the Allied Powers send to the Peace Conference (the same delegates which, if they are wise, they will have previously sent to a preliminary League of Allied Nations to discuss their common action at the Peace Congress), should be elected ad hoc upon democratic lines.

I know that this will be a very shocking proposal to all our able

specialists in foreign policy. They will talk at once about the "ignorance" of people like the Labour leaders and myself about such matters, and so on. What do we know of the treaty of so-and-so that was signed in the year seventeen something?--and so on. To which the answer is that we ought not to have been kept ignorant of these things. A day will come when the Foreign Offices of all countries will have to recognize that what the people do not know of international agreements "ain't facts." A secret treaty is only binding upon the persons in the secret. But what I, as a sample common person, am not ignorant of is this: that the business that goes on at the Peace Congress will either make or mar the lives of everyone I care for in the world, and that somehow, by representative or what not, I have to be there. The Peace Congress deals with the blood and happiness of my children and the future of my world. Speaking as one of the hundreds of millions of "rank outsiders" in public affairs, I do not mean to respect any peace treaty that may end this war unless I am honestly represented at its making. I think everywhere there is a tendency in people to follow the Russian example to this extent and to repudiate bargains in which they have had no voice.

I do not see that any genuine realization of the hopes with which all this talk about the League of Nations is charged can be possible, unless the two bodies which should naturally lead up to the League of Nations--that is to say, firstly, the Conference of the Allies, and then the Peace Congress--are elected bodies, speaking confidently for the whole mass of the peoples behind them. It may be a troublesome thing to elect them, but it will involve much more troublesome consequences if

they are not elected. This, I think, is one of the considerations for which many people's minds are still unprepared. But unless we are to have over again after all this bloodshed and effort some such "Peace with Honour" foolery as we had performed by "Dizzy" and Salisbury at that fatal Berlin Conference in which this present war was begotten, we must sit up to this novel proposal of electoral representation in the peace negotiations. Something more than common sense binds our statesmen to this idea. They are morally pledged to it. President Wilson and our British and French spokesmen alike have said over and over again that they want to deal not with the Hohenzollerns but with the German people. In other words, we have demanded elected representatives from the German people with whom we may deal, and how can we make a demand of that sort unless we on our part are already prepared to send our own elected representatives to meet them? It is up to us to indicate by our own practice how we on our side, professing as we do to act for democracies, to make democracy safe on the earth, and so on, intend to meet this new occasion.

Yet it has to be remarked that, so far, not one of the League of Nations projects I have seen have included any practicable proposals for the appointment of delegates either to that ultimate body or to its two necessary predecessors, the Council of the Allies and the Peace Congress. It is evident that here, again, we are neglecting to get on with something of very urgent importance. I will venture, therefore, to say a word or two here about the possible way in which a modern community may appoint its international representatives.

And here, again, I turn from any European precedents to that political outcome of the British mind, the Constitution of the United States. (Because we must always remember that while our political institutions in Britain are a patch-up of feudalism, Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian monarchist traditions and urgent merely European necessities, a patch-up that has been made quasi-democratic in a series of after-thoughts, the American Constitution is a real, deliberate creation of the English-speaking intelligence.) The President of the United States, then, we have to note, is elected in a most extraordinary way, and in a way that has now the justification of very great successes indeed. On several occasions the United States has achieved indisputable greatness in its Presidents, and very rarely has it failed to set up very leaderly and distinguished men. It is worth while, therefore, to inquire how this President is elected. He is neither elected directly by the people nor appointed by any legislative body. He is chosen by a special college elected by the people. This college exists to elect him; it meets, elects him, and disperses. (I will not here go into the preliminary complications that makes the election of a President follow upon a preliminary election of two Presidential Candidates. The point I am making here is that he is a specially selected man chosen ad hoc.) Is there any reason why we should, not adopt this method in this new necessity we are under of sending representatives, first, to the long overdue and necessary Allied Council, then to the Peace Congress, and then to the hoped-for Council of the League of Nations?

I am anxious here only to start for discussion the idea of an electoral representation of the nations upon these three bodies that must in

succession set themselves to define, organize, and maintain the peace of the world. I do not wish to complicate the question by any too explicit advocacy of methods of election or the like. In the United States this college which elects the President is elected on the same register of voters as that which elects the Senate and Congress, and at the same time. But I suppose if we are to give a popular mandate to the three or five or twelve or twenty (or whatever number it is) men to whom we are going to entrust our Empire's share in this great task of the peace negotiations, it will be more decisive of the will of the whole nation if the college that had to appoint them is elected at a special election. I suppose that the great British common-weals over-seas, at present not represented in Parliament, would also and separately at the same time elect colleges to appoint their representatives. I suppose there would be at least one Indian representative elected, perhaps by some special electoral conference of Indian princes and leading men. The chief defect of the American Presidential election is that as the old single vote method of election is employed it has to be fought on purely party lines. He is the select man of the Democratic half, or of the Republican half of the nation. He is not the select man of the whole nation. It would give a far more representative character to the electoral college if it could be elected by fair modern methods, if for this particular purpose parliamentary constituencies could be grouped and the clean scientific method of proportional representation could be used. But I suppose the party politician in this, as in most of our affairs, must still have his pound of our flesh--and we must reckon with him later for the bloodshed.

These are all, however, secondary considerations. The above paragraph is, so to speak, in the nature of a footnote. The fundamental matter, if we are to get towards any realization of this ideal of a world peace sustained by a League of Nations, is to get straight away to the conception of direct special electoral mandates in this matter. At present all the political luncheon and dinner parties in London are busy with smirking discussions of "Who is to go?" The titled ladies are particularly busy. They are talking about it as if we poor, ignorant, tax-paying, blood-paying common people did not exist. "L. G.," they say, will of course "insist on going," but there is much talk of the "Old Man." People are getting quite nice again about "the Old Man's feelings." It would be such a pretty thing to send him. But if "L. G." goes we want him to go with something more than a backing of intrigues and snatched authority. And I do not think the mass of people have any enthusiasm for the Old Man. It is difficult again--by the dinner-party standards--to know how Lord Curzon can be restrained. But we common people do not care if he is restrained to the point of extinction. Probably there will be nobody who talks or understands Russian among the British representatives. But, of course, the British governing class has washed its hands of the Russians. They were always very difficult, and now they are "impossible, my dear, perfectly impossible."

No! That sort of thing will not do now. This Peace Congress is too big a job for party politicians and society and county families. The bulk of British opinion cannot go on being represented for ever by President Wilson. We cannot always look to the Americans to express our ideas and do our work for democracy. The foolery of the Berlin Treaty must not be

repeated. We cannot have another popular Prime Minister come triumphing back to England with a gross of pink spectacles--through which we may survey the prospect of the next great war. The League of Free Nations means something very big and solid; it is not a rhetorical phrase to be used to pacify a restless, distressed, and anxious public, and to be sneered out of existence when that use is past. When the popular mind now demands a League of Free Nations it demands a reality. The only way to that reality is through the direct participation of the nation as a whole in the settlement, and that is possible only through the direct election for this particular issue of representative and responsible men.