

An Industrial Peace Plan

The fact that the United States has given to the world a peace plan—embodied in thirty treaties with governments representing three-quarters of the population of the world and in the covenant of the league of nations (described by the president as "the heart of the covenant")—makes it worth while to consider whether the plan may not be employed for the settlement of industrial disputes. I venture to add, if I may be pardoned, that I advocated the plan as a means of settling industrial disputes some fifteen years ago, before I thought of applying it to international controversies.

In all disputes there are three factors that enter into the selection of a remedy: First, the disposition of the parties; second, the recognition of the need for a remedy; and third, the machinery through which the desire for a remedy can find effective expression.

We may assume the existence of a desire, practically universal, for the peaceful settlement of all disputes between labor and capital. Even in international affairs there is no doubt that a large majority of the people of all civilized nations oppose war except as a last resort. They prefer peaceful means to the arbitrament of war, but it is difficult for the popular will to find expression.

Secret diplomacy has concealed the earlier stages of international controversies so that the people relied upon to do the fighting have been kept in ignorance until a sudden call to arms paralyzed the peace sentiment and subjected those who protested to the charge of treason. Then, too, long-standing race prejudices, prejudices between nations, and sometimes, religious prejudices, have made it easy for militarists to inflame the passions that developed, local clashes into armed conflicts. Manufacturers who make fortunes out of war contracts are quick to take advantage of the ignorance of the people and of popular passions, and their profits are so large that they can, when they find it necessary, control such newspapers as are purchasable. To these disadvantages under which the masses labor may be added the undemocratic character of many governments and the political influence of the military parties.

The hope of universal peace rests upon the progress now being made along all the lines above mentioned. Secret diplomacy, or at least the secret treaty, is abolished by the league of nations; prejudice will decrease as general intelligence increases and as a reduction of armaments lessens the force of the appeals made by militarists and manufacturers of munitions, while the growth of democracy constantly increases the relative influence of the average man in his government. And possibly the greatest change of all is the appearance of woman in the arena of politics, with her attachment for the home to inspire her to combat war, the enemy of her home.

The league of nations is launched upon the world at a most auspicious time. The late war, surpassing all previous conflicts in its cost, whether measured by blood, by expenditure of money, or by the mortgage that it lays upon the toil of future generations, has convinced the world that something must be done. The people everywhere are calling for machinery through which the desire for peace may find expression.

The league of nations furnishes the machinery, and, fortunately, the leading nations had been prepared for the plan by their recent agreements with the United States providing for investigation of all disputes of every kind and character before a resort to war. Whatever differences may exist as to the details of the covenant, a league of nations, established for the purpose of settling all international disputes by peaceful means, is one of the certainties of the future.

Likewise, in the matter of industrial disputes at home, we may assume, I repeat, that the sentiment is practically unanimous in favor of a peaceful settlement of such controversies. The strike and the lockout are, in the field of industry what war is between nations. Each

is an attempt at compulsion; one seeks to force the employer to terms by shutting off the labor supply and the other attempts to force employes to terms by withdrawing the opportunity of earning a livelihood.

Neither can be regarded as desirable, even by the side that employs it; it is in the nature of a last resort and is only employed when argument fails. And, even if the strike and the lockout were desired by either party to the dispute, or by both parties, what of the third party—the public? No strike can DIRECTLY affect any large percentage of the people, but the indirect effect may reach every one.

Take three strikes as illustrations. The coal strike, which threatened to paralyze a great basic industry and shut off the supply of fuel at the beginning of winter, directly concerned a few thousand mine owners and something like a half million mine workers, but it indirectly reached the firesides of a hundred millions of people and the furnaces that furnish power for all our factories. The steel strike, with a comparatively few stockholders and few hundred thousand employes, has partially paralyzed many branches of industry and indirectly laid tribute upon a multitude of homes.

At one time a railway strike seemed possible; that would have immediately touched the pocket nerve of capitalists who control twenty billions of railway stocks (partly water) and railroad bonds, and would have suspended the earning capacity of nearly two million persons, but it would have greatly inconvenienced nearly fifty times as many who patronize the railroads. The public, like the innocent bystander, gets hurt, even though the actual combatants are few in number in proportion to the entire population. A whole nation desires peace in industry, and the recent strikes and rumors of strikes have directed public attention to a great need, made apparent by society's helplessness.

Now is the opportune time to consider an industrial peace plan. The harvest is ripe, the reapers are waiting; machinery is the need of the hour. The peace plan, that has made remote the possibility of war between us and the contracting nations and now promises to hasten the coming of universal and perpetual peace throughout the world, would seem to offer the easiest means of settling labor disputes before they reach the strike or lockout stage. The plan is simple; it provides for a public investigation before resort to any attempt at compulsion on the part of either capital or labor.

Compulsory arbitration does not meet our industrial needs any more than it does our international needs. Before we adopted the plan providing for investigating all international disputes we relied for security on our arbitration treaties, twenty-six in number, which provided for the arbitration of minor questions; but these treaties specifically excluded from arbitration questions of honor and independence, vital interests and the interests of third parties—the very questions out of which wars grow. The peace plan upon which we now rely closes the gap and leaves no dispute out of which a war can grow until after a period of investigation sufficient in length to permit passions to subside and questions of fact to be separated from questions of honor.

So, in industrial controversies, we cannot compel employers to pay wages that will be destructive of their business, neither can we compel wage earners to work for insufficient pay—the one would be confiscation and the other slavery. And, in the arbitration of industrial disputes, it is really a gamble upon the bias of the one man who decides the controversy. Arbitration boards are usually made up of representatives of the two sides about equally divided, with one man, supposed to be impartial, but—as no one is or can be absolutely impartial in such matters, everything depends on which side secures the umpire.

I am aware that there are some who will contend that every man OUGHT to be impartial but that which SHOULD BE is sometimes imaginary rather than real. We have to use the material we have; we cannot expect to find perfect men when we are in search of arbitrators. If we had any perfect men in this country they

would be in such demand for permanent public duties that they could not be spared for the occasional work of preventing strikes.

But, while compulsory ARBITRATION is as impossible as it is undesirable, compulsory INVESTIGATION is not only defensible, but unobjectionable. Public opinion is the final arbiter in all matters in a government like ours—that is, public opinion intelligently formed upon all the facts involved; and how can the public form an intelligent opinion until it is in possession of the facts?

The time has passed when either side to a great industrial controversy can demand judgment on a one-sided statement of the differences. However convinced it may be of the justness of its cause, neither side can foreclose discussion and demand an immediate verdict in its favor. While every one has a general bias on one side or the other, the great majority of partisans are open to conviction and desire to hear both sides before the jury is polled.

The peace plan proposed meets all the objections that can be raised to compulsory arbitration, provides for the fullest investigation, and assures representation to both sides. The commission contemplated by the plan should be a permanent board of, say, three members; two should represent the two classes, employers and employes, and the remaining member should be so disconnected from the two classes as to reduce his bias to a minimum. He should be free from business or social obligations to either side, so that he can represent the public rather than the parties to the dispute.

The commission should be empowered to investigate upon the request of either party, and should have authority to act on its own initiative in case the feeling on both sides should restrain the parties from making a request, and it should have ample power to call witnesses and compel the submission of papers, books, etc., bearing on the case. In each case investigated two members should be added to the board, one chosen by each side, to serve during the investigation, with authority equal to the permanent members and with equal prorata compensation.

This would insure a minority report if the investigation resulted in a disagreement, and each party to the dispute would have its side fully presented. As the report would not be legally binding upon either side, but rest upon its merits, the members of the commission would be even more apt to strive for equal and exact justice than they would if, by their findings, they could settle the question on the side to which they lean.

With such a tribunal always ready to act, the parties to the controversy could be restrained from strike or lockout for a reasonable time, while the commission is investigating just as under the peace plan the contracting nations agree not to resort to war until after investigation.

Public opinion would support the majority report and thus compel a settlement in accordance therewith, unless the reasons given by the minority members appealed more strongly to the judgment of the public. The creation of such a tribunal would not only furnish the machinery necessary and prevent strikes and lockouts in nearly every case, but the very existence of such a tribunal would tend to restore harmony between the two classes, just as an anticipated strike or lockout tends to create discord.

Such a tribunal, based upon fair principles and giving equal consideration to the claims of both sides, would also tend to cultivate confidence in the government and a respect for law, while it would, on the other hand, silence those who seek a pretext for declaiming against organized government.

I submit the plan (it can be used by states and by communities as well as by the nation) in the belief that it will contribute towards the end which all good citizens have in view, namely, the proper use of a people's government for the protection of the rights of each citizen and the promotion of the welfare of all.

W. J. BRYAN.

Eleven million dollars is to be spent in making good roads in Nebraska during the next three years, but it is strongly suspected that it will take much more than that to make the running good for republicans of that state.