

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: International Arbitration

The “Arbitration Treaty,” like a strong fire under a big pot of dirty water, has boiled to the surface all the light-weights whose mission in life is to serve as makeweights for the ruling class. These light-weight make-weights are just now hustling to get up mass meetings to urge the “peaceful settlement of international disputes.”

When two competing Capitalist concerns, inside of one and the same country, decide upon war or peace between themselves they do not proceed upon any abstract principle of ethics, religion or morality. War, that is to say, a more fierce cut-throat competition, or peace, that is to say, a pooling of their joint interests, is decided on upon the matter of fact principle of dollars and cents. If both can see more money in “peace,” they fall in each others’ arms and become partners, fellow stock-holders or the like; if both, or either can see more money in “war,” the competitive hostilities are resumed with ardor. As with individual Capitalist concerns, so with Capitalist nations.

The Governments of Capitalist nations are essentially Executive Committees of politically successful Capitalist interests in each. Each is looking out to sell its own goods, and smoke the other or all others out of the world’s markets. These Capitalist Governments are nothing but “business” heads. The principles that guide individual business heads, guide also national ones. If a dispute arises—and all their disputes can be boiled down to the

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level of the disputes that arise between individual competitors—these Governments, whatever their pretences, decide upon war or peace according as war or peace may bring more money.

But Capitalism, united though it is against labor, is still very much of a house divided against itself. All the Capitalist interests of any one country never are at any one time in control of the political powers, except upon labor questions; on such questions they are all “in it.” Gold bugs and silver bugs, protectionists and free traders, prohibitionists and free rumists—all these warring Capitalist interests will ever be found united to administer the rifle diet to the working class. Upon their own specialized interests the Capitalists of any country are split up. Thence it will happen that sometimes one set and then another is in political power, and the set that happens to be on top politically runs things to suit its own business interests. The effect of this upon the attitude of each of these sets on the question of international peace or war is interesting to the watchful, though it upsets the light-weights.

If, at a given time, the Capitalist interests that happen to be in political power see more dollars and cents in war with their foreign competitors, they invoke “patriotism” to their aid: Brutus and Patrick Henry pale before them; “the flag” becomes their symbol and the gun their weapon. Simultaneously, however, with such outbursts of “patriotism,” one will regularly perceive a counter outburst of sanctimoniousness. The Capitalist interests, that are not in political power and that can see more dollars and cents in peace, are seized with a religious and moral spasm, they will hold mass meetings and otherwise pronounce for “humanity.” Yet the farce does not end there. By a turn of the industrial wheel, the very Capitalist interests that just before saw more money in peace, may find that their profits now lie on the side of war. Forthwith the two sets change sides; the former “patriots” become “saints,” the former “saints” turn “patriots.” At each turn, the light-weight make-weights fill the halls, and do the scurrying, and like the flies on the wheel imagine they are doing great things, whereas, as a matter of fact, they are being used alternately and played for suckers.

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The class-conscious proletariat wants peace, but wants it as intelligent men. It knows peace is an impossibility while Capitalism lasts, and that is the Upas tree at the very root of which it fells its blows with the axe of the Socialist Labor Party ballot.

The People, Vol. VI, No. 49. Sunday, March 7, 1897

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited for the official World
Wide Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America,
www.slp.org, by Robert Bills*

Uploaded October 7, 2001.