

# THE LIVING AGE

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## IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONGRESS OF BERNE

BY KARL WEICHARDT

BERNE, in the middle of February. My readers may recall from some of their Swiss trips before the war the Alpine Museum in Berne. It is a little one-storied rococo building in Prison Alley not far from the clock tower, with two mansard windows in the roof and with a clock under the low round gables with a vase in which the winter snows have stuck a white bouquet. The little building has witnessed a full century of federation history, but a stranger reads with particular thoughtfulness a tablet printed with golden letters over the entrance: 'The Universal Postal Union was founded in this building in 1874.' Side by side with this building, but three times higher and four times as long, a great edifice has towered since 1914, lifting its dark, rough concrete façade, its twelve lofty pillars, and its vaulted gables far over the street and the city. It seems to say, 'I am the future.' It is the Berne People's Palace. Possibly in future years another tablet with a golden inscription will be fixed upon this building bearing the words: 'In this building the League of Nations was founded in February, 1919,' or 'In this building the first peace following

the world war was concluded'; for here in the Berne People's Palace and not in Paris were the first real peace discussions, and here almost at the very point where the pioneer of international coöperation — the Universal Postal Union — was founded, the foundation stones for the League of Nations were laid — for only the people can lay such foundations.

Like many important things, the first international Socialist congress following the war opened in a very unpretentious manner. The sharpened lead pencils of the hundred or more newspaper men from every country who were the first to arrive had to wait for some time after the opening hour announced to find employment. After that they were kept busy enough for the following eight days. For a long time it was not clear what the result would be. During this noncommittal, uninspiring confusion of the first sessions a silent, immovable man sat upon the platform. He was a man of fifty, faultlessly clothed, the glow of health in his countenance, with a short, scrubby moustache and clear blue eyes. The latter were wide open and fixed like those of a man musing pro-

foundly. They seemed to be regarding an object in the distance. This was Henderson. It was as though chaos gradually crystallized around this calm man, who emanated an atmosphere of repose and self-control. When he rose to speak, every word was a hammer stroke that hit the nail on the head and the congress realized that the deed was done. Whenever, after that the flames of national sensitiveness and irritation threatened to flare up or the spectre of Bolshevism stalked through the hall and seemed about to divide the members into two unequal bodies, a crisp, unemotional but strong word from this man that always hit the mark in the centre extinguished the flames, exorcised the spectre, reunited those who were drifting apart. To me, whose mother tongue is low German, his language sounded almost like my own, this crisp, clear, unadorned English, after we had been listening here for four long years to so much powdered, badly-perfumed, and poison-atmosphered French.

The conference table of reconciliation should be scanned carefully. During all the days of the session one never tired of studying the row of strong faces on the right and left of Henderson. Beside the dignified, round, gray-haired head of the Hollander, Wibaut, were the finely-chiseled features of the Argentine physician, Justo, with his black Van Dyke sprinkled with gray. In the centre sat Branting, the president. On the right was Huysmans, the secretary of the international. Branting, the Swede, with his gray Bismarck moustache, nearly always wore a long, yellow overcoat, for Berne was as cold as Greenland and the thick mantle of snow on the French church across the way threw a dazzling reflection into the hall. In the midst of all the stormy scenes that attended the congress, he

retained his urbane good humor. If a man exceeded his time limit in speaking — and before the congress was over the periods were limited to two minutes — he cast a sharp glance under his bushy eyebrows, first at his watch and then at the speaker, and fingered the papers in front of him with irritation. Huysmans's refined, sharp-cut, youthful head, poised upon his long, slender neck, with his lofty forehead, kept constant, active watch upon all the by-play of the debate. Often when the point under immediate discussion threatened to be lost sight of in the flood of speeches, this clear-thinking man with the certainty and lightning swiftness of a sharp-eyed bird picked the thread of business out of the snarl into which it had fallen. At first, there was little indication of peace and reconciliation. The German delegates sat well forward in the first row something like pupils in school who have been reprovved and made to take front seats. Far in their rear were the French. Between them were the representatives of the countries of former Austria, the delegates from neutral lands, and from many young and still oppressed countries, of whom it was difficult to say whether they were friends or foes. The English occupied the seats directly ahead of the French. An anthropologist could have studied the physiognomies of all races except the Black race at this meeting. By the side of the blond, full-bearded Danes, he would have noted the luxuriant black hair and beards of the Armenians or the head of a Madrid Socialist tanned by the Spanish sun. The last-named was the historian, Besteiro. In the midst of our English comrades the fair-haired Mr. Snowden sat, always looking fresh and wide-awake, always wearing a green sweater. Quietly and with a kindly smile on her beautiful face a Jewish

girl went about the hall distributing programmes and other printed material from table to table. But under the heavy gray ceiling of the meeting hall everything was tense with feeling, which must find a way to manifest itself. Naturally, the French, those masters of the dramatic, were the ones who brought the situation to a climax. They had sent two principal champions. Suddenly Albert Thomas ascended the platform and proposed in stentorian tones that rumbled through the hall the 'question of responsibility.' All the corners and distant passages of the building resounded with his 'responsibilities.' He clenched his hands. He raised them to heaven. His gestures became pathetic. Now and then he pointed an accusing finger at the German Majority Socialists. For the time being the front seats seemed truly to be the seats of penance. But Major Wells, as the movie posters call him here, had learned to despise danger in Berlin, and though he and matter-of-fact Hermann Müller and reticent gray-haired Molkenbuhr, have less of the art of inspiring eloquence and less dramatic ability than the French, they were able to adopt a tone of cordial, convincing feeling that made it impossible even for their opponents to deny their good faith. Their portrayal of the results of the war, of starvation in Germany, left no one untouched. Immediately afterward the second opponent of the former French majority rose. It was Renaudel. If Thomas impressed you like the baritone hero in an opera, Renaudel impressed you as a prize fighter. With his huge body bent forward, he seemed challenging the men on the front seats below to personal combat. A witty fellow countryman has dubbed the former veterinary surgeon *Jaurès pour les animaux*. But when his opponents shouted at him in

Parliament once that he was only a horse doctor, he answered quickly, 'At your service,' and, in fact, there is a quick mind in this huge body and an irritable temper. Hardly a session closed without Renaudel's high-keyed voice rising above the noise of the dispersing audience demanding insistently that something be made clear. When he thundered his first great speech of charges against the Germans, the thunder clouds seemed to gather darker and lower because his invective sounded more genuine than the dramatic periods of Thomas, in which our people could hardly distinguish where true feeling ended and artificial sentiment began.

The next morning a little man in a long and somewhat shiny black coat of a professor mounted the platform. In his long, gray beard there still lingered a trace of the radiance of his youth. For an hour or more he stood stiff and erect in his speaker's position. He spoke without a gesture but he held the audience motionless to the last man in the room. Harsh and sharp were Eisner's words but clear, unambiguous, precise. When he said 'truth' a man knew that if it is not ultimate truth, it is truth, nevertheless, and nothing but truth. Therefore, his words fixed attention quite apart from the views he expressed, concerning which opinions may vary. They cleared the air. They relieved the tension, so that, after all this thunder and lightning, a feeling of mutual confidence and reconciliation really pervaded the assembly. Then the bench of the briar pipes occupied by the Englishmen showed signs of activity. Red-haired Stuart Bunning, with his smooth-shaved countenance, with his brisk movement pushed the harsh word 'guilt' to one side and held the kindlier word 'peace' in view of the audience. Then after the wise old

white-haired Kautsky had seconded his friend Eisner with his unemotional practical statements — the Independents sent only old men into the battle arena at Berne — we discovered that there were even Frenchmen of a different kind: The unemotional Mistral and Cachin with his plain but powerful language and the amiable and elegant Longuet, whose black beard makes a strong contrast to his heavy white hair. As you regard this slender grandson of Karl Marx, who so cordially stretched his hands across the sea of blood for fraternal greeting, you feel here is a new and young France. The theme 'League of Nations' still further relieved the tension and warmed the atmosphere of the hall. The energy with which the English railroad labor leader, J. H. Thomas, demanded a real League of Nations one could not have read in advance from the expression of the eyes hidden behind the great blue glasses, but his gestures were only the more expressive. The right fist struck violently the palm of his left hand when he mentioned secret diplomacy. Both hands strained to the utmost to break an iron staff when he mentioned compulsory universal service. Ramsay MacDonald united with rare perfection force with loftiness and with beauty of gesture. He is a born leader of the fairest Scottish type, slender and powerful, of noble appearance, of youthful features, although his wavy hair is silvery white. He opened his address calmly and unemotionally, his hands holding the lapels of his coat. But suddenly one arm shot down as swiftly as lightning. Suddenly, with a great swing, the right hand meets the left with a resounding clap; and when this man insists with profound and passionate determination that the League of Nations shall constitute an entirely new page in the history of man; that it shall be written by new

writers and by the great democracies of the world, you almost imagine you can hear the rustle of the leaf, as he terms it. When Ramsay MacDonald states with the feeling that truly possesses him that we here are taking the first steps on the road to permanent reunion of all mankind, the whole meeting spontaneously applauds and would without a moment's hesitation select him as head of this League of Nations. From the point of view of personal impressiveness, the Germans had no representatives of such cosmopolitan training, who at the same time incorporated the best qualities of their own nation, to send to this congress. The man who approached most closely to MacDonald in emphasis of speech and in grasp of intellect was Fritz Adler, the German Austrian, but the revolution will certainly produce among us Germans a new generation of leaders which will send men fully representative of us to share the tasks of international labor.

The strict allotment of places was gradually broken up. The hostile nations intermingled. Reconciliation made progress even without Esperanto. German even now proved to be nearest the universal language. The English and the French naturally spoke and understood for the most part only their own tongues, but as for the rest we were astonished and not unmoved to see that they practically all spoke German. The Czech, Nemeč, fought the Germans in German but received a decided defeat from the Vienna delegate, Ellenbogen, in one of the most brilliant speeches of the session. All the Russian border countries and even distant Georgia used German to fight for their freedom. The Russian Mensheviki with the universally-honored Axelrod used German to pour out the vials of their wrath upon the Bolshe-

wiki. Troelstra, the Hollander, expressed his deep sentiments in behalf of international justice in a powerful German speech. The Dane, Borgbjerg, and the young Swede, Engberg, made their wise observations in German. Huysmans speaks our language as perfectly as English and French, and even Branting, the many-tongued presiding officer, managed fluently with German, although he often got the wrong genders and although he frequently had to repeat *Bitte ums Ruhe!* Yet his method of presiding was only the more agreeable for that reason. Also, when a Hungarian complained of the seizure of a factory for making artificial limbs by the Entente troops and in this connection referred repeatedly to the hardships of the poor Hungarian wounded on account of the lack of *Künstlichen Mitgliedern* the congress was not able to avoid a laugh in spite of the pathos of the appeal. So mutual understanding continued to make headway. Bunning and MacDonald, after the fashion of the English, were getting the signatures of the Germans for their autograph albums and told them, 'When we get home the first man we'll show them to will be Lloyd George.' Albert Thomas was giving an interview to an Austrian newspaper man. The nations drew closer to each other. Within the national delegations there was evidence of more or less division. This was particularly obvious among the French. Thomas's round cheeks grew ruddier

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behind his black beard, but the interruptions of the Germans had less to do with it than Longuet's hectoring comments. Likewise, Renaudel, after his mimic prize fight with the Germans, had more occasion to direct incensed glances at his radical countryman at the other end of the bench, where, particularly in Loriot's eyes, the mysterious vision of coming reversals of authority was hovering. I did not notice any personal contact between the former French Majority Socialists (the pro-war Socialists) and the present German Majority Socialists, but the moment did come when Eisner's lean figure was seen side by side with Renaudel's round form as they discussed at length their joint resolution regarding prisoners of war, and at the end of the session it happened that quite unintentionally Germans, French, Austrians, and English were standing in a group and in their different languages, but so to speak, with a single voice, sang the song of the Socialist International. 'It has n't quite got that far yet,' observed dryly a reflective North German, 'but as we left the hall into the cold, clear February night we intuitively knew, even after cool reflection, that the white sheet of paper upon which was written that joint resolution of Eisner and Renaudel was the first foundation stone of peace and we were glad to recall the echoes of that first hesitating song of the New International. When will humanity at large sing its 'International'?

## WHY REVOLUTION IS SPREADING

### MR. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD IN A JUDICIAL MOOD

THE international meeting at Berne did not only discuss certain subjects of high political interest and pass a few resolutions for the guidance of Paris, it performed several other important functions, not the least of which was an exchange of opinion and information between the leaders of the Socialist movement in Europe. And it must be remembered that Socialism is no longer a critical anti-government creed, but a body of doctrine which is represented in, or is actually in control of, the governments of Russia and the whole of Central Europe.

The first thing one tried to discover at Berne was in what frame of mind were those leaders; and I can write of that without hesitation. They were gloomy. They saw nothing but trouble ahead. They agreed that the war had been over-fought, that it had not only shaken the airier structures of society, crowns, and thrones, but had cracked the very foundations, and that, therefore, the democracies which had raised themselves rested on insecure bases. Their view was that if the Allies, immediately military operations ceased, had bent their energies to secure the foundations of order upon which a speedy European settlement must stand, the talk would have been difficult; but, as they had turned away, leaving Europe to go through the sequels to the great earthquake as best it could, the position had become increasingly worse since the Armistice. On the one hand, the reaction, profiting by the inability of the governments to do anything but suppress disorder by

the precarious obedience of an almost independent soldiery, was finding abundant opportunity to rally itself; and, on the other hand, the more anarchistic Left, finding a steady reinforcement of unsettlement and violence nourished by the continuation of the blockade and the uncertainty as to the terms of peace, kept surging up, now here and now there, thrown back, but never suppressed, widening its influence all the time, and steadily sapping the prestige of every government.

Indeed, I gathered that these men were not much more than helpless spectators of the tidal wave which swept up after the cataclysm of the war, and that they knew perfectly well that such was their impotent position. They were all men of firm grip upon facts. Extreme (so they would be called) in opinions, they were moderate in methods, but they admitted, quite candidly, that all movements were being divided into Rights and Lefts, with no middles. The Girondins were being hustled off the stage or into extreme action on one side or the other. One of them put it to me: 'There is no middle course between reaction and Bolshevism'; another, 'I am not a militarist nationalist and not a Bolshevik, and so I can but look on and wait, doing small, but I hope necessary, things in the meantime.'

None of these men had any complaints to make because they were to suffer for the sins of their old governments; none of them went out of their way to excuse these governments. On the contrary, they joined in condemn-