



Victor Berger, the Milwaukee Socialists and Civil Liberty

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Newspaper Article

"Why We Are in This War," Milwaukee Leader, 6/20/1917

WHY WE ARE IN THIS WAR.

It is, of course, superfluous to ask our government why we have entered this war. Any student of economics and observer of national and international politics, knows very well why we have entered.

There are at least six valid reasons. Here they are:

First. The Entente Allies were practically at the end of their rope. If the United States had not entered, the war would have been over by this time. All our capitalist papers admit this whenever it suits their purpose—they deny it when it does not. About \$3,000,000,000 of notes and other obligations which the allied powers owe to Morgan, Schwab & Co.—to the munition makers and exporters of all kinds of war material in America—might not have been worth much over 20 cents if the Allies would have lost this war.

Second. Industrial stocks of certain kind—commonly called "war babies" in Wall street—have reached fabulous prices. Their very existence depends upon the continuance of this war. The end of the war means the end of their prosperity. Incidentally we may also observe that there are lots of war glory and promotion to be gotten, too, out of this war—for officers and generals—sons of the capitalist and middle classes. That is a minor matter, however.

Third. There is absolute freedom from labor troubles during the war. All resistance of the working class is simply put down as "giving aid and comfort to the enemy" and, therefore, as treason pure and simple.

Fourth. Under the guise of fighting for democracy in Central Europe, our plutocracy and its government in Washington is now establishing an absolute autocracy in our country with the slogan: war necessitates autocracy. Even such a hot war patriot as Senator Reed of Missouri said this: "no king, czar, potentate, Caesar or kaiser ever exercised such power as President Woodrow Wilson."

Fifth. This is a wonderful chance to establish a big army in our country. After this war is over the United States will have to establish order in Mexico. We shall undoubtedly shift our borders down to the Panama canal. Already the capitalist press is unanimous in its verdict that the Mexicans are not fit for self-government. Some papers even now demand that Mexico be annexed. But we also need Canada's raw material. Therefore, after Mexico is annexed, we will find that Canada belongs to us by common language, common tradition and especially by "common economic interests." And after all our ruling class must have the standing army in order to hold down the "inner enemy"—the seditious, traitorous and rebellious working class at home. The war gives us an excellent chance to get that army.

Sixth. Last but not least—the immense economic and industrial development of Germany demands war. That nation aspired to extend its sphere from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf—an ambition which President Wilson has described so well in his flag day speech in Washington. This seems to threaten the trade of other countries including that of our American capitalist class, according to Wilson's flag day speech. Germany's commercial success evidently requires that Germany be extinguished. The Allies were not able to do it, therefore, Uncle Sam will undertake the job.

Anybody can see that the German submarines have nothing to do with the case.

Nor has Belgium.

The submarines and Belgium are results, not causes.

Nor need we be afraid of a German army landing in our country. The possibility of the kaiser landing an army in America to conquer us is as great as the probability that the inhabitants of the planet Mars will swoop down upon the city of Washington and capture our treasury department. The Allies absolutely control the seas. Yet it will take about a year before we can send an army over to Europe. The Germans—efficient as they are—were never able to land even a regiment in England—which is across the channel from Belgium.

As for democracy? We can not force any special form of government upon Germany any more than we could have forced it upon Russia. The German people will have to do that for themselves.

And does our government really desire that? Our ruling class very much prefers the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolievitch to the little Socialist Nicholas Leonin as ruler of Russia.

Lenin believes that the revolution in Russia should be repeated in Germany, Italy, France, England and in the United States.

Our administration in Washington is slowly beginning to understand that the only republic possible in Germany today, would be a Socialist republic.

A Socialist republic in Germany will have an entirely different degree of efficiency than the Russian republic has now. It might require so much more effort of Morgan and his allies to fight Socialist Germany than to fight the kaiser's Germany.

Moreover, if Germany is left alone for six months, there will be no kaiser and no Yunker class left there. And a few other things are liable to happen that the capitalists of the world may not like.

But what's the use? We are in the war—for a dozen reasons or for no reason. Now let's get out of it with real honor and as soon as possible—for the sake of democracy at home.

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