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WORDS OF FORECAST FOR 1887.

THE war-rumours are solidifying and it cannot be denied that there is great probability of this year seeing the long-threatened war which will embrace all the nations of Europe. There have within the last few days been stories of alliance between Germany and Russia. This seems at first sight highly improbable, considering the strong race animosity between the Slav and the Teuton, and also the difficulties which dealing with Austria would offer to both the great reactionary states; because Austria, if not used as the tool of Germany against Russia, would probably in the case of a successful expedition of the two great robbers, have to submit to the doom of partition.

One thing may be noted in reference to this rumour about Russia, that it points the fact that there are two developments of the European struggle possible—the one springing from the forward impulse of Russian aggression in the East, the other from Bismarkian or German bourgeois aggression in the West.

As regards the effects of such an alliance on the popular movement. At first sight it would seem to be the most disastrous event that could cross the path of progress, meaning little less than crushing the various and often-disappointed aspirations of the nineteenth century with the weight of a new influx of the post-feudal absolutism which has survived into our epoch; but on the other hand it may be hoped that it would stir up a fresh force of resistance from all the elements which tend towards liberty, and that the struggle would develop in the proletariat a more definite consciousness of what real liberty means, so that the onrush of a mere reactionary current might be met with the rising flood of revolution, and the attempt, even if partially and temporarily successful, might inflict a mortal wound on the Bourgeois World.

In the other contingency of war beginning in the West, it is a matter of course that Germany, with what allies she can muster, would fall upon France. As was said in last week's issue, in that case Germany would probably hope for England as an ally; but obviously the best method for Germany to gain that advantage by would be to involve this country in a quarrel with Russia, which might possibly, although not necessarily, develop into direct hostility with France. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, for Socialists to watch the situation carefully and closely so as to avoid any possibility of their being dragged into a false position by the recrudescence of jingoism which is quite certain to be one result of even the advancing shadow of a European war.

It ought not be forgotten that for some time past there has been a steady attempt on the part of the bourgeois press to embitter public feeling in this country against France. If Germany attacks France, she will attack her not as the enemy who is plotting a war for the regaining of Alsace and Lorraine, but as the dangerous home of revolution—a country whose proletariat may at any moment unite actively with their brethren the German proletariat—which is the real danger of the monstrous absolutism bound together in slavery (for the time so successfully) by the ceaseless care and energy of the Prince of blood and iron.

Our readers must not think that in mentioning these matters we are merely smiting the air. It is true that a rumour published one day in the papers is discredited the next; but then as often as not it is reasserted on the day after that, and certainly the general tone of the news everywhere, joined to what Socialists must know of the economical necessities of the European states, betokens the coming of the great war, in spite of the fact that our English press has little time for the consideration of European affairs in face of the eagerness with which the public fall on tidings of the wretched intrigues and petty squabbles, party and personal, of the Tory, Unionist, and Gladstonian factions.

E. BELFORT BAX.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

PUBLIC WORKS UNDER SOCIALISM.

FOLK who do not understand Socialism, and who are therefore unable to recognise in its fulness the real significance of the economic and social revolution, sometimes imagine, and urge against the acceptance of our beliefs, that large works of public utility, such as railroads, canals, and so on, will have small or no chance of being constructed after the direct stimulus of personal and private profit has been removed. Still more impossible do they think it will be for such an enterprise to be undertaken as the embankment of a river or the building of a harbour where the immediate necessities of the men then living do not dictate it. Under Socialism all things necessary to the production of wealth will be held and possessed in common; there will be no special prerogative to one or to the other whereby he may take or claim for himself the benefit accruing from any work done for the community; private property will have perished, and with it the power of extorting a revenue from those desiring access to any of the means of life. Thus to those who are unable to project themselves in thought beyond the present system, or who, in other words, when thinking out the details of society in the future are unwittingly warped by considerations drawn wholly from that of to-day, it seems as though nothing beyond men's immediate daily, or at most monthly and yearly, necessities will be attended to when the work that should supply a want, to be pressingly felt only at some further future time, cannot be undertaken by men who may reckon upon exclusive and large profits arising from it to themselves. And again, they say, when no man possesses a large accumulated "capital" there will be none capable of entering upon any great work, even were the public conscience so fully developed that men undertook a work because it was good, and waited for no other reason. Further, it is claimed that when competition is abolished and rival contractors no longer bid in a devil's dutch-auction for the privilege of exploiting the construction of a public work, it must of a necessity be done in an expensive, wasteful way, and the gain to the labourers engaged upon a work be a loss to the community at large.

These be objections worth considering, for that their putting forward shows at least that the objector has tried to think on the subject, sees nought repulsive in Socialism itself, and is endeavouring to reason out its ultimate effects.

To-day, when a tunnel, railroad, or canal is found to be required, a number of capitalists, large or small, are banded together to form a company—that is to say, to combine their resources and command enough money to pay for its construction. These men receive tenders from sundry contractors, each promising more work or a lesser price than his fellow. Then that one is selected who unites these two desiderata in the greatest degree, and the work is handed over to him. He, again, subdivides and contracts with other men for this and that portion of it. When it is completed and has been handed over to its "owners" they appoint a manager or superintendent, who, with a staff of employes of all kinds, does the real work of the concern, while the shareholders simply perform the helpful function of consuming its profits among them. The charges for the use of the railroad or what-not are regulated solely by what can be got out of the public without making the demand so exorbitant as to provoke competition by making it worth while for a rival shoal of sharks to struggle for the spoils.

When some part of the sea-coast is being eaten away, or a river overflows its banks frequently, causing a constant loss or inconvenience to the community, recourse is again had to the capitalist. Whatever public body it is that must see to the construction of the sea-wall or river-embankment, borrows money from whoso will lend it at interest, and therewith sets to work in the same way as above described. This money, with the interest agreed upon, is afterwards repaid to the lenders from the labour of the community.

Now what is done in all these cases is this: A certain thing, be it a building, railroad, canal, or sea-wall, is seen to be required by the community. It is estimated that so much labour will be required for its construction, such and such tools and plant to render the labour effective, and an ascertainable amount of food, clothing, housing, and so on for the labourers. The tools and plant are simply the embodiment of stored-up labour, and the food and so on produced while the work is proceeding, and furnished to those employed upon it, must be paid for from some other store of past labour. The "capital" then that is expended upon any public work or improvement is the past labour of the community, which has not been needed for present consumption, and has been stored in enduring form for future requirements. It is a mere accident, and belongs only to the present system,