

Truman's "State of National Emergency"

by William Z. Foster

[*A communication to Comrade Gus Hall, National Secretary of the Communist Party, U.S.A., under date of January 20, 1951.—Ed.*]

Dear Gus:

Inasmuch as the National Committee is putting the question of the "state of national emergency" on the order of business for a discussion at its coming meeting, may I take this means of saying a few words on the matter? It is very important that the National Committee is to hear and discuss a report on the question of the so-called state of national emergency. This question presents a number of important angles, both regarding analysis and policy, to which we should give close and careful attention. I would suggest that, among other phases, the following should be given consideration:

The proclamation of the state of national emergency flows basically out of the increasing difficulties and desperation in which American imperialism finds itself, out of the growing bankruptcy of United States foreign policy. It is, there-

fore, fundamentally a manifestation of American imperialism's political weakness, not of its strength.

The proclamation of the state of national emergency is, above all, a device for speeding up the drive toward war. It is a highly provocative semi-mobilization of the armed forces of the United States, a further stage in the warlike program of American imperialism, the next planned stage of which would be full mobilization and outright war against the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. By declaring the country to be in danger, the Wall Street warmongers, of whom President Truman is the political chief, are enabled to intensify greatly every current leading toward world war. The general political aims of the proclamation are to intimidate the anti-war opposition, and, by setting up a war hysteria, to facilitate the driving through of all phases of the war program. Its consequences in this general respect are graphically illustrated by the fact that since Truman proclaimed the national emergency the direct Federal bud-

get for war has been tripled—that is, raised from about 15 billions to about 45 billions—and it is still soaring. All the armed forces are now being built at a feverish rate, and the war spirit is being whipped into a flame. Among the worst of the many bad ideological effects of the proclaimed state of national emergency is that it especially cultivates among the masses fatalistic ideas that a world war is both inevitable and imminent. In carrying out the fight for peace, we must understand that the proclamation of the state of national emergency is in itself the most sweeping of all pro-war measures yet adopted by the government in this country.

The emergency proclamation sets up a new economic and political situation in the United States. We have not yet a full-fledged war economy—for such an economy, in the full sense of the word, could only exist in the event of a major war. Perhaps the most exact term for the present situation is that it is a developing war economy. By its huge stress on munitions production, by its very nature, if the masses allow it to go on, the proclamation of the state of national emergency implies a big reduction in the living standards, working conditions, and civil liberties of the people.

The proclamation of the state of national emergency especially constitutes an enormous strength-

ening of the Executive at the expense of the powers of Congress and the democratic liberties of the people. One of its most sinister features is that President Truman, under flimsy pretexts of legality, seized these powers himself, without asking Congress even for formal consent. Monopoly capitalism, of which Truman is the faithful servant, is tightening up its centralization in preparation for war. Meanwhile, the President is creating a whole series of sub-despots under his personal command and controlling various vital areas of our national life. Among them are General MacArthur, general-Mikado of the Far East; General Eisenhower, Governor-General of Western Europe; General Marshall, boss of the United Nations Armed Forces; C. E. Wilson, general economic dictator; Eric Johnston, Michael di Salle, and Cyrus Ching, dictators in the realm of natural resources, prices, and wages. And there is Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, dictator of the Presidential Commission on Internal Security and Individual Rights. Nearly all of these sub-dictators have been recruited from the most reactionary ranks of the Republican Party. Significantly, Governor Dewey, taking the tip from Truman, is also preparing for an unprecedented "state of emergency" in New York. Other Governors will doubtless soon follow suit. Even abroad, in Mexico,

President Aleman has proclaimed a state of national emergency similar to that of Truman.

Under his arbitrary proclamation Truman now possesses centralized powers entirely without precedent in American history. He is the boss in the vital sphere of American diplomacy. He is establishing price and wage controls and can set up rationing; he can call off strikes, and lengthen working hours; he can allocate materials and determine the general course of production; he has full charge of spending almost 50 billions yearly for arms production. And he is creating a vast machinery of agencies, under his personal control, to operate the developing war economy. At the same time, with the aid of the Taft-Hartley, Smith, and McCarran Acts, as well as the "loyalty" tests, and other thought-control legislation, the President is in a position to bring greater governmental pressure than ever against the Left and the peace-loving masses. It is in line with these dictatorial tendencies that Truman is arrogantly demanding the right to send American troops as he pleases all over the world without the consent of Congress. In the present tense international situation and in view of Truman's demonstrated war-making proclivities, this demand for arbitrary control of movements of the military forces amounts to nothing short of a demand for the

power to initiate war wherever and whenever he sees fit—and all without consulting Congress or the people. Truman's single-handed launching of the Korean war should be a sufficient warning to us that he would also, if given the opportunity, launch a third world war by hook or crook. This is a malignant danger which we must fight vigorously.

President Truman's synthetic state of national emergency does not signify the establishment of fascism in this country. It is, however, a long step in that general direction. It is part and parcel of the general trend which has produced such ultra-reactionary measures as the Taft-Hartley, Smith, and McCarran Acts, the growing attacks upon the Negro people, the jailing of Gene Dennis and other Left and progressive leaders, the vicious attempts to outlaw the Communist Party, the multiplication of loyalty tests of all sorts, and the like. Of all these fascist outcroppings, the most sinister is Truman's new powers under the state of national emergency. Without drawing mechanical conclusions from the comparison, it is well for us to remember that Chancellor Bruening's emergency decrees immediately preceded the establishment of Nazi fascism in Germany.

In fighting against the war drive and for the defense of world peace, a most vital thing that we have to

understand clearly is that the proclamation of the state of national emergency, and the great speeding up of the war program that goes with it, have aroused deep fears of war among the masses of the people, in the United States, as well as in Europe; and therefore, have greatly broadened the basis for the peace movement. The disillusioning effects of the Korean war have also fed this growing American peace sentiment among the masses. It is largely to corral this developing peace spirit among the people that the aggressively imperialist Hoovers, Tafts, Kennedys, *et al.* are carrying on their demagogic isolationist maneuvers. In all our peace work we must be especially conscious of the much greater breadth and depth of peace sentiment developed lately among the workers and other democratic strata of the people.

In developing our struggle for peace, and concretely against the so-called state of national emergency, we must carefully avoid both the Right and "Left" dangers. That is, we must guard against the Right danger which would see nothing new or particularly alarming in the so-called state of national emergency, and would tend to accept this great war stimulus and provocation as a matter-of-course development of the cold war—which is precisely what the warmongers are trying to have the American people

conclude. On the other hand, we should also guard against the "Left" danger, which would tend to conclude that war is now inevitable and that fascism is already upon us, which is obviously not the case.

We must understand clearly, in fighting for peace and the people's general welfare, that the proclaimed state of national emergency is designed to hamper and make more difficult every phase of this peace struggle. Thus, barriers have been erected to block the fight against the whole gigantic program of militarization. Definite restrictions have been placed upon the right of the workers to strike. The so-called emergency has also served as a convenient pretext for ditching once more Truman's so-called program for civil rights for the Negro people. The other reforms in the President's demagogic Fair Deal program have also been unceremoniously dumped, in the name of the national emergency. The threat against our Party and all other progressive organizations has, by the same token, also been made more acute. The national emergency, so-called, has likewise resulted in intensifying the class-collaboration of the reactionary top trade-union officials, who have now, more than ever, become an integral part of Wall Street's war machine. Thus, the state of national emergency has seriously hampered the whole struggle of the working class

and of the peace-loving masses generally.

From all this it is clear that in prosecuting our struggles, the center of which is the fight for peace, we must, in each instance, conduct them with regard to the special limitations and handicaps placed upon them by Truman's emergency proclamation. But doing this, although vitally important, is not enough. We must also condemn in general, root and branch, the whole concept and workings of the so-called national emergency, as such. We must challenge the contention that the country is in danger and show that it is not being threatened by anyone except its Wall Street masters. We must demonstrate the great damage being done by the synthetic state of emergency to the workers' living standards, and democratic liberties. We must condemn Truman's emergency as a dangerous war provocation, and particularly point out that the tremendous impetus that it has given to war production and the development of war hysteria will make it all the more difficult to halt it short of an actual outbreak of war. We must

resolutely fight the whole concept of the inevitability and imminence of war. We must more energetically than ever champion the feasibility of the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. co-existing peacefully in the world. All of which, finally, makes it imperative upon us to demand the liquidation of Truman's manufactured state of national emergency, not only as utterly needless, but also as a grave injury to the people's living standards, to democratic freedoms, and to world peace.

In conclusion, let me remark that I consider the whole question of the proclaimed state of national emergency presents a series of specifically new problems. These are characteristic of this general period of wars and revolutions, of the decline of capitalism and the rise of Socialism. The question of the national emergency constitutes another serious test of our Marxist-Leninist ability, both to work out our theoretical analysis of it, and to develop effective policies for peace, in the situation set up by the President's arbitrary proclamation.

Comradely yours,

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