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# ISOLATIONIST DEFEATISM!

BY WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

**C**OMMUNISTS throughout the world, ever since the fascist governments launched their campaigns of treaty-breaking and war-making, have insisted that these marauders could be stopped only by a solid and determined united front of the democratic, peace-loving peoples of the world. The necessity of this policy has been repeatedly dramatized by the retreats of the governments of the bourgeois-democratic countries before the fascist offensive, with the consequent invasions of China, Ethiopia, Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia, and the gradual development of a spreading second world war, which already has engulfed one-fourth of the world's population.

The sell-out at Munich by Chamberlain and Daladier emphasizes afresh the need of concerted peace action by the democratic peoples. Munich has greatly strengthened the fascist offensive and built up a threat to peace and democracy all over the world. It makes it more urgent than ever that the peace-loving peoples of the world develop a resolute stand against the fascist barbarians. Dimitroff, in his article upon the occasion of the twenty-first anniversary of the Russian Revolution, put the issue squarely:

"The defense of world peace, the defense of the peoples against armed fascist aggression, cannot be achieved by wordy pacifist declarations and invocations. What is needed is active struggle, determined resistance. The onslaught of armed fascism must be answered by the mailed fist of the peoples." \*

The truth of this statement would seem to be self-evident. But not to American isolationists. Whether reactionaries—Hoover, Hearst and Coughlin—or "progressives"—Beard, Dewey and Thomas—they oppose in principle any organized international resistance to the fascist war-makers. Their common policy is to break up all mass resistance to the fascist dictatorships. Their isolationism, when it is not active support of fascism, as in the case of the reactionaries, is surrender to it, as in the case of the "progressives." Indeed, many "progressive" isolationists are obviously preparing to accept the victory of world fascism as inevitable and are adapting themselves to this perspective. This is the central idea in Norman Thomas' new book, *Socialism on the Defensive*, and in a recent issue of the *Nation* Oswald G. Villard assures us that he will surrender to fascism *only* after he has made "every moral protest."

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\* See *The Communist International*, p 977.  
No. 11. Workers Library Publishers, New York.

**WOULD CONCERTED PEACE ACTION  
LEAD TO WAR?**

The isolationists of all stripes seek to prevent the people from taking a determined stand against fascism and in defense of peace by asserting that this would surely provoke the fascist dictators into war. Moreover, they add, for us it would also be a lost war, because of an alleged superior strength of the fascist powers.

Such argumentation goes directly contrary to the facts of the world situation in which we live. With regard to the first contention that concerted action by the democratic peoples to preserve peace would provoke war, just the opposite is the case. It is precisely because the democracies have *not* made a common stand that the fascist dictators have been able to carry through their murderous war plans. Only when such a united peace stand is achieved can the fascist aggressions be halted. The policy of isolationism is the surest way to prepare the way for fascism and to deluge the world with blood.

With regard to the second contention of the isolationists, that international concerted peace action would not only lead to war, but to a lost war—this too is without foundation or reality. It is significant that every fascist or near-fascist is singing the same song of the military helplessness of the democracies. It was with such arguments that Chamberlain and Daladier put across their infamous Munich sell-out; by their grossly exaggerating the strength of Germany and minimizing that of the democratic countries. The argumentation of the "progressive" American

isolationists fits right into this defeatist policy. Thus, says Villard in the *Nation*:

"Germany came near enough to winning the World War with a military machine which, I believe, was inferior to that of Hitler. Certainly, it was not backed by such adoration as the youth of Germany have for the Nazi government. Who knows what tactics, what devilish skill, what new weapons, what superior generals this new Germany may not produce?"

Contrary to this pro-fascist surrenderism, the democratic countries are overwhelmingly superior to the fascist powers in military potentialities. The capitalist democracies and the Soviet Union possess together a vastly greater strength in morale, men, money, industry, materials and strategic position. This remains true despite the great strengthening of Hitler's resources by the Munich pact. If the democratic peoples will but stand resolutely together they can stop the fascists by confronting them with the certainty of ruinous defeat if they dare to provoke war. The Communist International puts the question correctly in its recent manifesto:

"A defense cordon of armed peoples who have joined their forces with the great Soviet people will doom fascism to impotence and its inevitable ruin."

The superior strength of the democracies militarily was demonstrated dramatically in the Czechoslovakian crisis. When the peoples of the democratic countries, outraged by repeated fascist aggressions, showed a determination to rally to the defense of Czechoslovakia, this at once put Hitler in a dangerous crisis. With the French, British and Soviet peoples lining up against him, and with the United

States tending in the same direction, Hitler was confronted with overwhelmingly superior military forces. His European allies, Poland, Italy and Hungary, realizing this situation, displayed every indication that if it came to war they would not join Hitler. In this crisis Chamberlain, in mortal fear of a fascist defeat which would cause a great international democratic upsurge that might upset British Toryism, rushed to save Hitler by splitting up Czechoslovakia and by giving him a free hand in Eastern Europe.

Contrary to the surrender isolationists, should the democratic peoples of the world be forced into war by fascist aggression, military defeat is not one of the terrors they must contemplate.

#### IS DEMOCRACY DEFENDABLE?

The theories of the isolationists that international concerted peace action would lead to war, and a lost war at that, are so unconvincing even to themselves that they have to push to its defense with further surrender arguments. In one chorus of reactionaries and "progressives," they argue that in the event of a fascist-provoked war, whether the democratic powers are finally victorious or not, democracy in any case would be annihilated and fascism would inevitably emerge the winner. Villard states this argument of both the Right and "Left" isolationists thus:

"... for it is of the very essence of war that the evils you seek to destroy by it are not destroyed but enter into your own life. . . . The right always wins! But not on the battlefield."

This surrender conception has nothing in common with the historical experience of the American or any other democratic people. It was not by such non-resistance that the masses through the centuries defeated their tyrants and conquered what freedom we now have. If Villard's childish theory were true then the American Revolutionary War should have strengthened British rule in the United States; the Civil War should have established slavery more firmly than ever, the Russian Revolution should have fortified capitalism and restored tsarism; and the Chinese, Ethiopian and Spanish peoples were to have lain down before the Japanese, Italian and German invaders and deemed all armed resistance futile—win, lose or draw. A fine thing indeed it would be for the fascist marauders were the masses imbued with such a sheep-like pacifism.

Throughout history the masses, who have to do the fighting and dying, have always hated war. Hence, the modern trade union, democratic and Socialist movements, with the Soviet Union in the lead, are the great enemy of war. But if, in spite of all their efforts to maintain peace, they are attacked by fascist forces, they, as in Spain, China and Ethiopia, will fight back with every resource at their command and with a justified confidence that, contrary to the isolationists' non-resistance pacifism, military success for them would mean victory for democracy and progress.

The isolationists' main argument in support of their theory that "right never wins on the field of battle" and that therefore there is nothing to do but surrender to the fascists, goes like

this—"We went into the World War to make the world safe for democracy and see what we've got: fascism." Thus, says Villard:

"In 1917 . . . we went to war to oppose dictatorship and autocracies, and now, after less than twenty years, civilization is in danger of perishing at the hands of dictators, and democracy everywhere has its back to the wall."

Ex-President Hoover, upon returning from his recent course in fascism in Europe, sang the same song:

"You will recollect we were once animated by a desire to save the world for democracy. The only result that time was to sow dragon's teeth which sprang up into dictatorships. We can never herd the world into the paths of righteousness with the dogs of war."

This argument is repeated interminably by the isolationists. Never does one make a speech but what he states this proposition, and in a dogmatic manner as though it were gospel from on high. Thus the railroad union paper, *Labor*, endorsing the above-cited quotation from Hoover, asks: "Who, for instance, would care to challenge it?"

Yet this whole isolationist contention is only a glib falsification. It completely misrepresents the issues and the outcomes of the World War. The war of 1914-18 was a brutal struggle between two rival groups of aggressive imperialist powers for mastery of the world. Contrary to the isolationists, as far as the warring governments on both sides were concerned, the question of defending democracy was simply not on the war's agenda. Wilson's famous slogan, "Make the world

safe for democracy," served the demagogic role of drawing the peoples into the imperialistic slaughter.

But if democracy was not the war objective of the "Allied" governments or the Central Powers, the masses, despite their chauvinistic liberal, Socialist and trade union leaders, who on both sides identified their aims with those of their governments, nevertheless seized upon the situation created by the war (and utilized Wilson's peace and democracy slogans) to develop a gigantic struggle for the extension of human rights. Consequently, the World War, instead of giving birth to fascism, as the isolationists from Hoover to Thomas are so cocksure in asserting, had as its first major result, contrary to the purposes of the war-makers, the greatest wave of mass democratic and revolutionary spirit in the whole history of capitalism.

In England, France, the United States and many other countries this vast democratic wave, caused by mass opposition to the war and to the existing conditions of capitalist exploitation, expressed itself in a huge growth of democratic organizations and struggles. In England, the trade unions increased from 3,918,809 members in 1914 to 8,023,761 in 1920; and in this country the American Federation of Labor, during the same period, jumped its membership from 2,020,671 to 4,079,740, despite the "no-strike, no-organizing" deal of the Gompers clique with the employers and the Wilson administration. There was also a large expansion of workers' political parties, cooperatives, etc., in many lands, together with innumerable huge strikes, extensions of social legislation, etc.

In Russia, Germany, Austria and Italy the democratic upsurge developed into a revolutionary assault upon the capitalist system. The toiling masses, aroused by the monstrous war, toppled over the empires of the Romanovs, Hohenzollerns and Hapsburgs, and also threatened the capitalist system all over Eastern Europe. They set up Soviets in Russia, Germany and Hungary; and in Italy they also came to the very brink of the proletarian revolution.

That is what happened directly as a result of the World War—the greatest extension of democracy in world history. If fascism later came to power in various countries, the reason therefore is not to be found abstractly in the great war, as the isolationists state, but in the concrete fact that the reformist Social-Democrats in Germany, Austria and Italy refused to go through with the revolution. The war, by revolutionizing the masses, placed socialism on history's immediate order of business all over Eastern and Central Europe. The Bolsheviks proved equal to the situation in Russia, but the opportunist leaders of the Second International in revolution-ripe Germany, Italy and Austria did not believe in the revolution. After years of unchecked opportunism, they proved themselves counter-revolutionary when the great test came. So they betrayed the revolution and devoted their efforts to revive stricken capitalism. The end result of their policy is the fascism of today. These actual facts belie the superficial isolationist demagogic that, "We fought for democracy in 1917 and all we got was fascism."

WOULD A DEFENSIVE WAR AGAINST  
FASCISM MAKE AMERICA  
TURN FASCIST?

The surrender isolationists, to their unfounded allegations that international concerted peace action by the democratic peoples leads to war, to a lost war, to a war in which the cause of liberty must be destroyed, add the further gratuitous assumption that if the United States should be finally forced into an anti-fascist war by fascist aggression, it would, by its entry into such a war, inevitably thereby become transformed into a fascist dictatorship. Thus Norman Thomas, in his new defeatist book, says, "... the minute America enters war, democracy will yield to the totalitarian state necessary for totalitarian war, military fascism (or its equivalent) will win a major triumph." Villard says substantially the same in a recent issue of the *Nation*: "That we shall lose our democracy admits of no argument whatever. Just read the May Bill.... But even without the May Bill, we should still come out of the war a fascist state."

This argument the isolationists shout upon all occasions as a sort of heaven-sent truth. They consider it unchallengeable. It is a cornerstone in their whole structure of argument that the masses must do nothing to resist the war-making fascists. They seek to sustain it by declaring that the present international struggle is simply one between rival camps of imperialists, as in 1914, and that in such a struggle the United States could and would fight only for its own imperialist aims. Then, contradicting their previous argument that the United States

*did* fight for democracy in the first World War, they assert that, as in 1914, the issue of democracy could not be directly involved in such a war.

This whole conception of the isolationists is basically wrong. The international struggle now developing is fundamentally different from that immediately preceding 1914. Then the capitalist system was still comparatively strong and healthy; its general crisis was only in the initial stages. World markets were expanding; industry was developing and bourgeois-democracy was on the upgrade. Trade unions, cooperatives and Socialist Parties were growing, and ameliorative social legislation was being widely enacted. The war developed as a struggle between two groups of capitalist powers for imperialist aims; both were on the offensive and both were more or less equally responsible for the war. Neither group bore, appreciably more than the other, any special threat to or promise for democracy. While England, France and the United States were somewhat more democratic than Germany and Austria, this advantage on their side was offset by the reactionary weight of their ally, tsarist Russia. In such a situation obviously the workers had no stake in either side of the war and their correct policy, enunciated by Lenin, was to oppose both sets of warring governments and to seek to transform the imperialist war into the socialist revolution.

The world situation of 1938, however, presents a vastly altered picture. Today capitalism is far advanced in its general crisis. Socialism has conquered on one-sixth of the earth's

surface; capitalist world markets are shrinking, industry is stagnant, class and international tensions are acute, and everywhere the capitalists are on the offensive against the living standards, mass organizations, social legislation and democratic liberties of the masses. But the capitalist general crisis develops unevenly, and here, precisely, is the key to the world situation. In fascist Germany, Italy and Japan the capitalist crisis is the most acute; there the economic situation is the worst and class tensions the most explosive. In these countries the capitalists have abolished bourgeois-democracy outright, setting up naked terrorist dictatorships to intensify their exploitation of the toiling masses; they have also embarked upon a violent war-making offensive abroad to capture the world's markets and supplies of raw materials.

Thus, we have a fundamentally different situation than at the outbreak of the 1914-18 war. Instead of two groups of powers, both on the offensive and both on approximately the same level of democracy, there is now one group of powers militantly on the offensive, while the others are on the defensive. Moreover, the offensive fascist powers, having themselves abolished bourgeois-democracy, are making a violent threat to the democracy of the non-fascist states. The war-making, book-burning, freedom-crushing, Jew-baiting, fascist barbarians constitute a malignant menace to the lives, liberties, organizations, culture and national independence of all other peoples.

In this situation the question of democracy becomes the very center of the international struggle. The work-

ers and other toilers, therefore, have a most decided interest on one side of the fight, armed or otherwise—that of the democracies. Common intelligence demands consequently that the popular masses in the democracies should press their governments, or secure control of them through people's fronts and democratic fronts, to take a firm and united stand against the fascist powers in order to prevent them from enslaving the world and drenching it in blood.

The foregoing analysis leads us directly to giving a negative answer to the isolationists' assertion that the United States, if forced into war by the fascists, would itself inevitably become fascist. For, to make any effective defensive struggle against the fascists internationally—economic, political or military—imperatively requires simultaneously a militant struggle against the fascists at home. Chamberlain and Daladier have made this fact perfectly clear. Hence, Dimitroff is entirely correct when he says that in order to curb the international fascist bandits "governments are necessary which base themselves on the masses of the people, which take their interests and their wishes into consideration, governments which are ready to fight against the fascist enemy from without."

In the first World War the great democratic upsurge, as we have seen, came mostly towards the end of the war and as a sort of by-product of it. But in the present developing world war the democratic surge forward of the masses begins at the very outset of the war, or even before, and is a central result of the anti-fascist struggle. This is because of the necessity, in

order to repel the foreign fascist invaders, to fight against the fascist copperheads at home. In China and Spain this tendency is clearly seen; for these fascist-invaded countries, far from transforming themselves into fascist dictatorships in the war, according to the theory of Thomas, Beard, Hoover, Fish and Co., have, on the contrary, developed a wide extension of popular rights and democratic institutions right in the very midst of their desperate defensive wars. And the same tendency may be expected in every other country which is compelled to enter into active struggle against the fascist warmakers.

#### THE WORLD AT A TURNING POINT

Human society is now at the most critical juncture in all its history. In the menacing fascist war threat it confronts the horrible danger of the mass butchery of scores of millions of people and of the violent extinction of the culture and democratic liberties which the people have fought for centuries to attain. The victory of fascism on a world scale would open up an unheard-of era of wars, tyranny, poverty and intellectual darkness.

Only by a determined stand of the democratic peoples of the world can this major disaster be averted. Through people's front movements in the various capitalist countries and the linking of these, together with the Soviet Union, into an unbreakable international chain can the fascist invaders be expelled from China, Spain, Austria, Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia, and the peace of the world be maintained. The struggle for international concerted peace action is the fight for

peace, for democracy, for progress, for socialism, for civilization itself.

In the world struggle against fascist barbarism the American people bear a heavy responsibility. Their own deepest national interests, as well as those of humanity generally, are at stake. In line, therefore, with its best democratic traditions, this country must stand four-square with the other democratic peoples to protect the world from the overwhelming disaster of fascism. Especially is it necessary for the United States to cooperate closely with the great anti-fascist, peace-loving Soviet Union, the two countries forming a solid core around which the rest of the democratic peoples can rally.

Americans cannot evade the fascist issue by sticking their heads in the sand, as the isolationists urge. Already this policy has done terrible harm by giving the German, Italian and Japanese fascists a free hand ruthlessly to overrun weaker countries. It is ob-

vious that our people must join with other democracies to resist the common enemy. More and more the masses are coming to understand this elementary necessity. The robbers' pact of Munich gave a rude shock to American isolationism. The intensified fascist threat to Latin America, which followed so fast after Munich, has brought the fascist menace right to our door. Great masses of people, hitherto lulled into inactivity by isolationist illusions, are now rapidly awakening to the need for active resistance to the fascist danger, both from within and without. To develop this awakening into active struggle against fascism is the supreme task now before the Communist Party. The time element is vital, the need for action is most urgent, and the weight of the United States may be decisive in the world struggle which is so rapidly developing against fascist barbarism.

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"Our Party has, from the time of its foundation, correctly recognized the question of the Negro people as being of the same decisive significance in the history of the United States as that of the Irish people has been for Great Britain. Karl Marx, whose bold and fundamental treatment of the Irish question laid the foundations for the modern Leninist-Stalinist policy on the national question, clearly recognized the position of the Negroes in America as occupying the same historic role, when he declared: 'Labor with a white skin cannot be free while labor with a black skin is branded.'"—Earl Browder, *Social and National Security*, p. 31.

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