
WE ARE SAILING INTO THE FACE OF GREAT STORMS

BY EARL BROWDER

(An address delivered at the Madison Square Garden mass meeting, on March 17th, honoring William Z. Foster, National Chairman of the Communist Party, U.S.A., on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.)

BILL FOSTER'S birthday furnishes a convenient occasion for looking back over the past, for estimating the present historical moment, and for expressing our appreciation of the role of Foster, whose name is permanently written into the history of our times.

The most far-reaching and significant development in American life in the period reaching from the First World War down to today, when the United States has entered the Second World War, is the emergence of the *organized labor movement* as a mass phenomenon, as a decisive force in the life of the nation. The growth in *volume* of trade union membership, to its present figure of nine to ten millions, registers an advance in *quality* which marks the emergence of the working class as a conscious participant on the stage of history, a fundamental change in the relationship of classes.

The qualitative advance of organized labor is registered by its pene-

tration and conquest of organizational strongholds in the basic and mass production industries, the citadels of monopoly capital, and by its emergence on the *political field* with its first steps as an *independent force*, divorced from the tutelage and domination of the bourgeoisie.

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It was the pioneering work of Bill Foster and his associates which laid the first indestructible foundations for these historic achievements. It was Foster's leadership in organizing the packinghouse workers in 1917-18, and the steel workers in 1919-20, which broke through the "open-shop" barriers so laboriously erected around the mass production industries by the combined forces of Wall Street and the Gompers labor bureaucracy, and thereby established the guarantee, despite all temporary defeats, for the ultimate victory of industrial unionism.

These achievements furnished the driving force for the first modern efforts for establishing a labor party as the expression of the political independence of the working class, the movement of 1920-24, in which again Foster played a central and indispensable role. The wrecking of that movement by the combined forces of the Gompers bureaucracy, the Social-Democratic leadership and the disorientated petty bourgeoisie furnished the lessons which enabled Foster to bring about the merger of the militant trade unionist circles with the revolutionary Socialist and Communist movements, which laid the foundations for the Communist Party of the United States and its development in life as the vanguard party of the working class, as the indispensable instrument of the masses for achieving their political independence.

Thus, it was no accidental decision when, upon the definite unification and constitution of our Communist Party upon a Bolshevik basis, from the year 1930, that Foster was our national chairman. Nor was it an accident that the ruling class took the occasion of the great mass movement of the unemployed of 1930, organized and led by our Party, to deal out a vicious prison sentence against Foster, along with Minor, Amter and others, as its response to the great step forward being made by the Communist Party. But the persecutions of the Communist Party at that time only drove our roots deeper among the masses, and steeled our membership for the greater tasks ahead.

But we have not the time tonight for an exhaustive review of the past, valuable and interesting as that would be. I cannot, however, on this occasion refrain from a few personal reminiscences and observations of my association with Foster.

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My first meeting with Foster, in the winter of 1912-13, was the direct result of our common activity in the American Federation of Labor, and of Foster's first efforts to establish national contacts and a center for such work. Soon after, in the summer of 1913, on Foster's proposal, I organized a meeting in Kansas City for Tom Mann, then visiting this country from England. In the same year, I first met Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. All three of these contacts were of greatest significance to me, and established political relationships as well as personal friendships which were never broken. But it was my association with Foster which had the greatest importance and continuity; he became my teacher and guide in the broad and complex field of trade unionism, over many years, without which I would surely not have found my way except at the cost of much loss of time, and which gave me indispensable contributions to equip myself for the later tasks that fell to me. How many thousands of young men and women in the United States have the same testimony to offer of the indispensable help and guidance they have received from Bill Foster!

One of Foster's outstanding char-

acteristics, from the days of my first contacts with him, was his keen sense of *proletarian internationalism*. I remember a visit he made to me in the first winter of the World War, in the course of which he received letters from active trade union leaders in several of the warring countries, part of a constant correspondence he had maintained ever since his extended visit to Europe in 1911, and how he discussed the problems of the working class in other lands with the same familiarity as those of our own country. Six years later I attended my first international labor congress along with Foster.

Perhaps it is a signal of my own advancing years that these old memories begin to have a special attraction and interest. But I like to think they also have a value for the younger generation, giving them a keener sense of values whereby to weigh their own experiences, and sift the more permanent from the transitory and unimportant. The great traditions of our movement have their roots in millions of such memories, and in the stormy days ahead we shall need to draw heavily upon our great traditions, and hold up the best examples of strength of character for the emulation of our younger generation.

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Yes, we are sailing into the face of great storms, and the world which will emerge will be radically different from the present one. The old world is gone beyond recall, and the new world will be built by

those who have the deepest understanding and the strongest character.

Roosevelt has committed the United States to "total" involvement in the war for the redivision of the earth among the imperialists. Our country will also receive the "total" consequences. Let there be no illusions on this score. And there are still illusions which must be dispelled.

The great illusion, now being elaborately built up by Roosevelt, and by his ideologists and scribes, such as Walter Lippmann, Dorothy Thompson, Henry Luce and Virgil Jordan—all the troubadours of the "great and glorious new American Empire"—is the illusion that American dollars, piled billions upon billions, will pave a broad and comfortable avenue to the "Americanization of the world." It is the illusion that Wall Street's dollars can and will purchase a world empire, as they purchase statesmen and political parties and industrial plants—and "great ideas" *a la* Lippmann, Thompson and Luce. It is a pitiful illusion, reflecting the profound ignorance and intellectual bankruptcy of the American bourgeoisie. It has the brilliant hues of a rotting fish, and is equally full of poison.

It is amusing and instructive to watch how the hard-boiled and experienced British imperialists inflame the ambitions and egotism of their more naive American cousins, and cultivate the illusion that the Americans are "buying" a senior partnership, a commanding position, in the "new Anglo-American

Empire." Far from resenting the high-and-mighty attitude of "mastery" which Wall Street's scribblers—and Roosevelt—take toward them, the rulers of Britain welcome, encourage and stimulate it.

This illusion is priceless for the British imperialists. It has given them "total" command of all American resources, including manpower whenever they demand it, and it costs them very little. For Churchill, "Holyfox," Bevin & Co. have a little secret among themselves; they know that the American bourgeoisie has entered the game too late and ill-prepared morally and politically to become in reality the "masters," that the real trend toward "American mastery" over Britain, represented by Lindbergh and Hoover, has been decisively put into the background for this most crucial period in which real power is being redistributed. American money is "buying an empire" much as the traditional yokel on his first visit to New York buys the Brooklyn Bridge. But the American people will pay the bill, just the same, plus millions of lives and their democratic achievements. The mirage of "Empire" is a costly one, and the people must pay the total cost.

In taking their ideas and inspiration from the British rulers, Roosevelt and his associates have taken over an illusion which their British cousins fully share with them. That is the illusion that they are going to find a way out of the war *at the expense of the Soviet Union*. It is the old idea that led to Munich in 1938, that has led to so many dis-

asters since then. The original anti-Soviet scheme of Chamberlain has more lives than the traditional cat. It refused to stay drowned after Munich, and as a consequence Europe was plunged into war. It dramatically stalked back upon the stage with the Mannerheim adventure, and Britain, France and the United States promptly forgot their war with Germany, to whoop it up for Mannerheim and strip themselves of arms and men on his behalf, still under the illusion that they could "swap the wrong war for the right one." They paid for that by losing all of Western Europe. Now the old cat is stalking through the Balkans and the Near East, and is leaving similar disaster in that region.

And, incredible as it seems, Roosevelt's central strategic conception was and remains essentially the same as that which led Chamberlain to Munich—namely, that the chief aim of the war is to force Hitler to march against the Soviet Union, with the threat of sustained war if he does not, and the promise of help and amnesty if he does. That idea remains the key, without which it is impossible to unlock the riddle of London's and Washington's policies. It is the same old will-o'-the-wisp, and America's rulers are following it as blindly as did the French and British before them. It is a policy of catastrophe.

This is the great illusion. It is the too-clever scheme which comes to wreck upon the rock of a simple fact. That fact is that Hitler and the German High Command know it is less costly for them to fight

all the rest of the world put together than to fight the Soviet Union. And not all Roosevelt's billions can change that hard fact, disagreeable as it may be for the bourgeoisie of all lands.

The truth of the matter is that the dream of American world empire came upon the scene of history too late for its realization. Monopoly capitalism is strangling in its own contradictions even while it inflicts misery and death upon millions of people. The revolutionary working class has accumulated too much understanding and wisdom to be much longer used as cannon fodder for imperialist wars. The colonial and semi-colonial peoples are awakening and organizing too quickly for them to be reliable pawns any longer in the game of imperialist world politics. The great and ever more powerful land of socialism is too bright a beacon showing the oppressed and lowly of the world how they can take control of their own destinies. And in every important country there are Communist Parties, steeled in the struggle and in the scientific teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. No, today there is no future for "dreams of empire"; they are all idle illusions, even when backed by all the billions of Wall Street.

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Perhaps the greatest illusion of all among the bourgeoisie is the idea that they can conjure away the coming revolution by oaths and incantations, by witch-hunts and forced recantations, by reviving the

spirit of the Inquisition. We see this expressed in all its hideous obscenity in New York universities and colleges today, in connection with the infamous Rapp-Coudert investigation of "subversive influences." What a revelation of the intellectual vacuum that dominates the ruling class! What a revelation of the reactionary obscurantism, surpassing the middle ages, that rules America through the bourgeoisie! Into what an abyss of fear and hysteria have the rulers of America fallen! Never was the old Greek adage more fitting: "Whom the Gods would destroy they first make mad."

But throughout the world, in every land, there are people who are immune from this fear and hysteria, who have shed all illusions, who are organizing the masses to achieve a new and better world. In the vanguard of such people are the Communists. In honoring Comrade Foster tonight on his sixtieth birthday, as the Chairman of the Communist Party of the United States, we are also honoring the great leaders of Communism throughout the world, who represent the Communist Parties that will rescue the world from imperialist war and oppression.

Let us recall the names of a few of them. There are our close neighbors, Tim Buck of Canada, Dionisio Encina of Mexico, Blas Roca of Cuba. There is Carlos Contreras Labarca, who led the Chilean Popular Front to its new victories. There is the great giant of the German proletariat, who will observe his fifty-sixth birthday next month while beginning his ninth year in

a Nazi prison—Ernst Thaelmann. There is Thorez in France, and Gallacher in England. There is the glorious leadership of the Spanish people, José Diaz and Dolores Ibaruri. There is that magnificent group of men who galvanized the great body of China into life, Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Wang Min, Chou En-lai, Yeh Ting. There is the mighty Bulgarian who, single handed and in chains, met and defeated the Nazi machine in the courts of Leipzig, Georgi Dimitroff.

There are the surging battalions of the land of socialism, and the great Stalin. There are the spirits of Marx, Engels and Lenin, who live and grow more powerful in their disciples.

With such men and women, and the millions who are molding themselves upon these models, we march forward into the coming battles with calm confidence in victory, with deep enthusiasm for the new world which will flower out of that victory.