

Japan, America and the Soviet Union

EXTRACTS FROM THE SPEECH OF EARL BROWDER
AT THE PLENUM OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE,
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WE are meeting at a moment when tremendous changes are taking place in the world. It is not necessary for me to prove this fact by quoting long lists of statistics to show the unprecedented depth of the crisis. This morning's papers report the bankruptcy of the great Insull power interests—the greatest failure in the history of capitalism, more tremendous, more far-reaching than the Kreuger crash, more important, more devastating in its effects than the crash of the big banks in Germany last year. This is a corporation that rivals the United States Steel Trust in size, power and influence. About two and a half billion dollars is involved in this bankruptcy.

And this is merely one of the things that are becoming daily occurrences. The morning papers also report that the capitalist charity agencies admit themselves practically completely broken down—a complete break-down of the whole system of relief—and that in the coming month hundreds of thousands of people, who have been living upon charity will be thrown upon the streets with nothing whatever.

That is, the condition of potential mass starvation that has existed up to now is becoming actual mass starvation in the United States, and that instead of having to quote figures of 50, 100 or 200 people who died of starvation, we will soon have mass deaths from starvation in the United States.

ON THE BRINK OF A NEW WORLD WAR

There is no sign whatever of any factor appearing which gives any prospects of the capitalists stopping this downward plunge. And upon the basis of this unprecedented, deep-going crisis, we have the sharp, swift developments in international relations. On the basis of this sharpening of the crisis, we have the world on the brink of a new world war. No country in the world except the Soviet Union has escaped being deeply engulfed in the economic crisis. Capitalism has not one single *stable* point of support in its struggle to find a way out. The wildest, fiercest attacks upon the standards of the masses provided no halt to the deepening of the crisis. The sharpening of

all of the inner antagonisms and contradictions of capitalism has provided the basis for developing to the highest point yet known the international antagonisms.

War, which is the final and supreme arbiter of capitalism has already been invoked to cut a way out of the crisis for the capitalists. Japan, by the seizure of Manchuria, started a chain of events which is already out of all semblance of control by the imperialist world and which inevitably will engulf the entire world in war.

WE ARE NOT PASSIVE OBJECTS OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS

Capitalism is driven into war by the full force of all of the inner and outer contradictions which have reached a hitherto unknown intensity. Does this mean that we take a fatalistic approach to this question of war, that the forms that this war will assume and the date when it will burst over the entire world are fixed by the objective forces entirely outside of our control and influence? No—not at all. On the contrary. We more and more insist upon the positive role of the Communist Party determining the development of history. We are not passive objects of the historical process. We are one of the forces which make history and direct history. Our function is not that of observers, simply to register the progress of events and to understand them. Our function is to understand the progress of events in order to change and to control the development of these events. And this is true on the question of war as it is true on the simplest details of the life of the working class. Basing ourselves upon the examination and understanding of the objective factors, we have to seize upon and control the direction of developments and especially we must emphasize this fact in the question of war.

Why is it necessary to emphasize this so much? Because there is a tendency in the face of the tremendous world forces that are involved, with the comrades comparing our own puny organizations and our own weak abilities, to feel that the contrast is so great that we are mere chips on ocean waves when we face the problems of war and peace. And there is widespread a feeling of absolute lack of confidence in the ability of the Party to do anything except register the development of events on the question of war and to preserve our revolutionary record and integrity by having on paper a "completely correct" attitude towards these events. But comrades, we cannot be satisfied with this. We have to intervene in the stage of world politics as an effective factor. And this is possible. Small as our efforts have been in the struggle against war in the past weeks, we have already proven that the Communist Party of the United States is a factor in the development of world politics and that with

proper Bolshevik work on our part it can be a thousand times more effective factor. The demonstrations which we organized against the Japanese Consulates in Chicago, Seattle, and the Embassy in Washington, played a role far beyond the direct number of workers that were involved and shows us that we have not yet even begun to imagine the tremendous mass possibilities that are inherent in the energetic application of the slogans we have put forth.

Why have we been so slow and so weak in developing our struggle against the Japanese Imperialist invasion of China and its bandit war on the Chinese people? Why have we been so weak and so slow in rousing the masses of the United States against the Japanese war provocations against the Soviet Union, against the Japanese mobilization of one hundred thousand troops on the borders of the Soviet Union, against the Japanese concentration of its naval forces on the Pacific maritime coast provinces of the Soviet Union?

There are many reasons for our weakness. The first one I have already mentioned, the lack of faith that we could do anything effective, the lack of understanding of the necessity of our positive active role. Second, theoretical immaturity and confusion on questions of Leninist theory in our Party. When we brought forward the slogans very sharply and concretely, directed against Japanese imperialism which is the spearhead of the development world imperialist war, concretized in the form of the demand for the expulsion of the Japanese imperialist representatives in the United States, for an economic boycott, many of our members did not understand this. In fact, these members had a reaction against these slogans.

Generally within our Party was felt the influence of the Lovestoneite and Trotskyist attacks against these slogans. The Party was not prepared to answer the attacks made upon our slogans by the renegades and by the socialists.

THE LENINIST UTILIZATION OF THE INNER IMPERIALIST ANTAGONISMS

Comrades, let us face this question very sharply and clearly and let us understand in this Plenum whether the raising of these slogans was correct or not; if they are correct, let us have a complete liquidation of all hesitation and all fear and a bold application of the line that these slogans represent.

What is this line? This line is the fullest possible utilization of the inner-imperialist contradictions for the purpose of preventing or hindering the establishment of the imperialist united front against the Soviet Union, and to use as the main instrument for this the mobilization of mass opinion, mass sentiment, mass protest, directed against the particular policies of our own imperialist government,

and especially against the war acts of the Japanese imperialist government which is already carrying through the war.

What does it mean—utilizing the inner imperialist antagonisms? The Lovestoneites and socialists say this means inciting war between the imperialists in order to prevent war against the Soviet Union. This is a very easy argument to make, and a very cheap argument; this is not a new argument. The same argument was made against Lenin in 1920; the same argument will always be made by every social-democrat in every instance when a Bolshevik policy is being concretely applied in international affairs. Let us recall just for a moment what happened in 1920. This was a year when the Soviet Union was in a most difficult situation; when armies of intervention still occupied a large portion of the territory of the Soviet Union; when industry was down to about 20% of pre-war; when famine was already beginning to raise its head in vast territories of the Soviet Union. In spite of all of these tremendous difficulties the Soviet Union was able, not only through the courage and sacrifice of the Russian workers and the Red Army, but, above all, by the masterly strategy of Lenin, to break through this imperialist ring and to secure for itself a long period of uninterrupted opportunities of socialist construction, the fruits of which we have today in the preparations for the second Five Year Plan which will place the Soviet Union next to the United States in world economy.

In 1920 one of the principal factors which was used by Lenin in achieving this long breathing space was precisely the use of the Japanese-American antagonisms. This was used to such an extent that at the Washington Conference, the nine Power Conference which broke the Anglo-Japanese alliance and which signed the famous, or notorious, nine Power Treaty regarding China—at this Washington Conference the influence of the United States was one of the chief factors used to force Japan to evacuate territory in Siberia and to turn the Chinese-Eastern Railroad back to joint Soviet Chinese administration. Is anyone so naive as to think that these results would have been achieved without the active intervention of Soviet diplomacy? The hand of Lenin directing the power of the Russian working class was a decisive factor in bringing this about. At that time Lenin was accused of inciting war between Japan and the United States, and in a speech to the Moscow Party Conference on November 20, 1920, he answered these charges.

“Japanese public opinion is already boiling against the Soviet Union, and today I read a news item saying that Japan accused Soviet Russia of trying to instigate Japan against America. We correctly evaluated the sharpness of the imperialist rivalry and said to ourselves that we must systematically utilize the differences between

them in order to make it difficult for them to fight us. The political disagreement between England and France is already clear. Now we can speak not only about a breathing spell but about serious chances of our new construction for a long period."

Comrade Lenin in a report to the fraction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the 8th Congress of the Soviets analyzed the end of the intervention in Russia, and, referring to the conflicts developing between Japan and America, stated as follows:

"And so there has developed a gigantic, sharp struggle between Japan and America and thus there has developed undoubtedly a weakening of the attack of Japan and America against us.

"At a meeting of the responsible Party workers in Moscow where I had to refer to this fact, the following question was asked during the discussion: 'It appears, as was written by one of the comrades, that we are instigating Japan in a war against America, but the fighting will be done by the workers and peasants. And although these are imperialist powers, is it for us socialists to instigate a war between two powers and thus bring about the shedding of the blood of the workers?' I answered as follows: That if we actually did instigate a war of the workers and peasants, this would be a crime. But our entire policy and propaganda is directed, not to instigate wars between nations, but rather to bring an end to war. And our experience has amply proven that a social revolution is the only way to end wars forever. Therefore, our policy does not consist in instigating or creating wars. We have done nothing which would have justified a war directly or indirectly between Japan and America. Our entire propaganda and all the articles in the press are full of explanations regarding the truth that a war between America and Japan would be an imperialist war the same as the war between the English group and the German group in 1914, that socialists will have to think, not of the defense of the fatherland, but about the overthrow of capitalist rule. They will have to think of the proletarian revolution.

"But we, who are doing everything in our power to hasten the coming of this revolution, and find ourselves in a condition of a weak socialist republic which is attacked by imperialist murderers, is our policy of utilizing the differences between those imperialist robbers, of making more difficult their unity against us a correct one? Of course, such a policy is correct. We carried it on for the last four years. And the chief manifestation of this policy was the Brest Treaty. While German imperialism resisted the enemies, we having made use of the differences between the imperialist powers themselves, were able to hold out even then when the Red Army was not yet created."

In a speech delivered to the Moscow District Party Conference on the 20th of November, 1920, Lenin stated the following:

"If you will take, for example, two imperialist countries, Japan and America. They want to fight, they will fight for the supre-

macy in the world, for the right to rob. Of course, the defense of the fatherland in such a war would be the greatest crime, would be a betrayal of Socialism. Of course, the *support* of one country against another will be a crime against Communism. But we Communists must *utilize* one country against the other. Do we then commit a crime against Communism? No. Because we do that as a socialist government which leads Communist propaganda and which is compelled to make use of every hour given by the circumstances for the purpose of strengthening itself with the greatest speed."

Lenin further states in the same speech:

"It would have been still safer for us if the imperialist powers would actually be in a war with each other. If we are compelled to tolerate such scoundrels as the capitalist thieves who sharpen their knives upon us, our direct duty is to turn those knives against themselves. When thieves fall out, honest men get their due."

Comrades, it was precisely by understanding the sharpness of the antagonisms between Japan and America, (of course, not only by this,) that the Soviet Union was able to gain this long period of opportunity for construction, and precisely by boldly persisting along this course, and disregarding all social-democratic charges of instigation of war, that the war against the Soviet Union was stopped in 1920 and the achievements of the Five Year Plan were made possible.

Comrades, today the Soviet Union is facing the most dangerous point since 1920. Today there is taking place the most tremendous efforts to solve for the moment the inter-imperialist antagonisms on the basis of a united struggle against the Soviet Union. Such strong efforts were never made before, because never before did they have behind them such driving force of accumulated inner and outer antagonisms. And today when war has already become a question of weeks or months, we, the Communist Party, the Communist International, have a task which is very difficult to carry through, but which acquires the most tremendous importance that it shall be carried through.

OUR ACTIONS CAN POSTPONE THE WAR

Do we have any illusions that we can prevent war altogether? No, we have no such illusions. But our actions can postpone the war, provided we really mobilize the masses, making use of every opportunity for mass mobilization, to create every possible difficulty for the imperialists; we can force the postponement of this war, and postponement is not a small thing, comrades. In the present conditions, we must understand that in the revolutionary struggle of the world proletariat against world imperialism, our stronghold, our

fortress is precisely the Soviet Union, and its socialist construction. And we must understand that this socialist construction, the building of the socialist economy in the Soviet Union, is so profoundly important for the resistance to and the crushing of this imperialist war, that every month that is gained in postponing this war, means a change of the relation of forces in favor of us when the war comes. If the war can be postponed one month it means capitalism has been weakened that much, Socialism has been strengthened that much. It means that the Soviet Union has had another full 30 days to readjust all of its inner forces to meet the serious every day necessities that war will throw upon them.

When you understand that, you understand that not only every month is important, but every week is important, every day is important. You could almost even say that every hour is important. Our whole strategy is based upon the necessity to mobilize all forces by every means to postpone the outbreak of war, and the strategy of the imperialists is to force war as quickly as possible.

How can we mobilize the widest possible mass resistance to the entrance of the United States into war against the Soviet Union? Precisely by making use to the fullest possible extent of this certain historical factor, that the spearhead of the war is Japan and between Japan and the United States there is a long standing antagonism which, independently of us, has developed mass sentiment against Japanese imperialism. It is an absolute Bolshevik duty for the Communist Party of the United States to make the fullest possible mobilization of this mass sentiment no matter what its origin, against Japanese imperialism, mobilize this sentiment against the United States government to prevent it from entering into war against the Soviet Union together with Japan and the other imperialist powers.

The fullest possible mobilization of all such forces may not suffice to prevent whatever alignment will be determined by the capitalist class, by finance capital, upon the basis of their special specific understanding of their class interests. But even in the worst case, our mobilization can create additional difficulties for them, can weaken their mobilization to a certain extent, and thereby strengthen the capacity for resistance of the Soviet Union and the world proletariat. I do not think it is necessary to go into any long theoretical arguments to show how this is not only an immediate duty, necessity, in the struggle against imperialist war, but that this is a really Leninist, Bolshevik method of struggle against war. Of course, there are dangers and difficulties. There are always dangers and difficulties in Bolshevik mass work. It is impossible to carry through a real Bolshevik line at any time without constant struggle against deviations, a struggle on two fronts.

But if the struggle against deviations and against distortions of the line takes such forms as to unsettle the confidence of the Party in the line itself, then such a kind of struggle against deviations has a great danger not of strengthening and deepening the line, but of defeating the line. Our first task is to make the Party understand that this line is correct, and not only must there be no slackening in it, but there must be 100 times more energetic carrying through of this line and real mass mobilization for it.

SOME ERRORS

In this respect it is necessary for me to say a few words about some errors precisely on this point, that were made by the Political Buro and for which I am primarily responsible. I think that it is absolutely necessary that this be elaborated.

I think it is necessary for us to be very specific. I am going to assume that you comrades are all familiar with my article which was pretty generally discussed in the Party last October, and printed in pamphlet form.*

Wherein lie the mistakes in this article? The main and basic mistake of this article, which contained much that was correct, was that it tended to close the doors against the possibilities of developing precisely this struggle that we are developing now, a struggle to prevent the unification of United States and Japan against the Soviet Union, because the article assumed that this unification was already completed.

We brought forward and developed the interpretation of certain facts, certain events, in the process of the re-grouping of the imperialist powers. These events briefly were that in September-October, when Japan was carrying through the stroke of seizing Manchuria, contrary to our expectations, the United States instead of sharpening its relations with Japan, gave at that moment more open diplomatic support to Japan than even did the League of Nations. The further fact that while the United States warned Japan not to go South of the Great Wall, yet the United States definitely encouraged Japan to penetrate deeper into Manchuria and drive toward the Soviet border. At the same time, the United States, which had gotten into difficulties in attempting to seize the initiative in European developments by the Hoover moratorium, which had suffered a very sharp attack upon the dollar by France, was forced to make big concessions to France in the Hoover-Laval conversations. And it was quite clear from the first days that the French support of Japan in the Far East had a firm basis of under-

*Secret Hoover-Laval War Pacts.

standing between these two countries. This conjuncture, this momentary moving toward one another of Japan, France, and the United States, at a moment when Great Britain was comparatively isolated and suffering under its most intense difficulties of this period—these facts which were recognized by us, were interpreted by us, especially by myself, as a relatively fixed constellation of forces, and even some tendency to describe it as a definite bloc.

Without pretending to give a complete and thorough analysis of this very complicated problem, I only want to mention a few of the fundamental faults of this conception. First, it considered possible such a quick and painless welding of a fixed imperialist bloc of such large dimensions without the steel-hammer blows of actual war. Second, it underestimated the recuperative powers of British Imperialism and its ability to diplomatically intervene to prevent the consummation of this bloc. Third, it did not take into consideration the possibility, which later becomes a reality, when Japan took Shanghai in bloody battle, that Japan's appetite could not be satisfied with what the United States could agree to concede.

We did not take into consideration, for example, that Japanese imperialists undoubtedly argued with themselves somewhat to the following effect: "Why should we make this highly dangerous drive against the Soviet Union alone, leaving behind us the rich and easily plucked plum of Shanghai for America to take possession of when we busily engage in war on the Soviet Union?"

Fourth, it did not take into consideration the effectiveness of the peace policy of the Soviet Union in influencing the tempo of crystallization of this united front. It did not take into account that the Soviet Union is actively engaged in trying to prevent this consummation and did not take into account the influence of the revolutionary working class within the capitalist countries and its attempt to hinder this development.

Fifth, by implication we assumed that this imperialist united front was a pre-condition for the beginning of war, and did not show how the imperialists form their alliances mainly in the course of actual war.

Sixth, because of the general treatment of the question mostly from the point of view of the interpretation of the events of a short period, without consideration for the possibilities of changing this development and directing this development by the forces of the world revolution. Because of this, we failed to put as the foremost point, our task of smashing this united front of imperialism against the Soviet Union, by assuming that this united front was already a fact not only against the Soviet Union but on other chief

questions, when subsequent events showed that this was not so. Thus we tended to weaken the role of the working class in determining the course of events.

Seventh, we tried to simplify the task of simultaneous struggle against American imperialism and Japanese imperialism by imputing to them the unity of purpose in a common program which it was impossible for them to obtain under these circumstances. It is impossible for us to solve our problems by such simplification. It is necessary for us to find the forms of struggle whereby we mobilize the full measure of mass opposition against Japanese imperialism and at the same time against American imperialism which is in sharp contradiction with Japan. We cannot evade this difficult task by lumping the two together as expressing a non-existent united policy.

I have taken so much time to go into an analysis of this question because if it had not been corrected, it could have very seriously hindered the development of our struggle against war. But these errors become especially important now because analysis of them shows to us not only the character of our weaknesses last fall but also threw a lot of light upon the weaknesses of our work at this moment, and help us to understand how to strengthen our struggle against the war at this time.

The thing that we can never forget and which has to be emphasized every moment is that the weapon for the execution of this policy is the mobilization of the masses as an independent force, giving mass expression to the sentiments against the imperialist powers and bringing them into as sharp collision as possible with all the forces of American imperialism. We have proven that this is possible. We have proven the political value of it, a political value which extends to every phase of the struggle, from the daily struggles at home to the largest questions of world politics. The fight before the Japanese Consulate in Chicago was a real Bolshevik deed which echoed throughout the world. It profoundly embarrassed American imperialism. I hope the comrades have read several editorials that we have written about the Washington and Chicago demonstrations and the problems that they have already created for Mr. Stimson.

The struggle against war is concerned not only with these more complicated difficult problems. The struggle against the war danger, the defense of the Soviet Union cannot wield much force behind it unless it is intimately connected up with and based upon concrete struggles for partial demands of the workers in the United States.