The Menace of an American Militarism

By Louis C. Fraina

I

All of the belligerent nations disclaim responsibility for the Great War. All of them claim to be on the defensive. Germany is defending its "Kultur"—its civilization, its national achievements; the Allies are defending themselves against Militarism—German Militarism, the defeat of which they say means freeing Europe from militarist domination. They are using the idealism of the people to justify their actions and arouse enthusiasm for the war.

It is easy to sneer at all this. War has been an instrument of progress; but wars are seldom waged because of the impulse to progress—surely not this particular war. But it's absurd to dismiss the idealism of the belligerent nations as mere buncombe and hypocrisy: a large measure of it is that, a still larger measure is a sincere social passion which seeks to assert itself and use the war as an instrument of progress. The social significance of this idealism is a vital fact: *war in itself has lost its charm and justification, governments are compelled to recognize the progressive idealism of the people and use it to justify war and wage war.*

The precipitation of the war was a triumph of militarist barbarism; the justifications of the governments involved are a triumph of popular progressive idealism. And this fact offers a magnificent opportunity in the belligerent nations after the war, in the neutral nations *now,* for this popular idealism to assert itself

in an effort first of all to compel disarmament and then, which is much more important, to secure permanent peace.

Militarism must ally itself with this idealism to maintain its prestige. Our task, the task of all democrats, is to articulate this idealism and use it to smash militarism. But in spite of this magnificent opportunity our progressive idealism is allowing itself, consciously and unconsciously, to become the tool of an American militarism. And the responsibility for this impending calamity rests with the politicians and intellectuals of the Progressive movement and the Socialist party. Instead of a propaganda to warm the idealism of the masses; instead of an enthusiasm which throws dogmas and dickers to the winds; instead of a magnificent disregard for "limitations" and "the impossible"—instead of all this, these pettifogging politicians and impotent intellectuals coldly, stupidly weigh ends and means, party advantage, tactical logic. They are dead to life and its splendid passions, its "impossible" idealisms.

American Progressivism is allying itself with the most reactionary elements in a campaign for militarism. The *New Republic,* intellectual expression of Progressivism, is brilliantly weaving philosophy, sociology and science into arguments for militarism. Theodore Roosevelt is preparing to make militarism a dominant issue in 1916. The danger is acute. Militarism is generally popular with certain sections of the middle-class and aristocracy of labor—as in the France of Louis Napoleon and in Germany to-day.

A pitiable and despicable thing it is that the young and pragmatic idealists of the progressive movement should encourage the growing hysteria of American Militarism. Their actions are a final proof of the moral bankruptcy of Progressivism. It is not astonishing that Roosevelt should clamor for militarism—his Cæsarian traits and brute-virtues are characteristic of the militarist. Walter Lippmann is typical of the progressive idealist pitiably gone astray. In the *Metropolitan* he opens an article on "A Cure for Militarism" with a trenchant indictment of the evils of militarism. A really magnificent indictment. But the conclusion is a complete negation of the indictment:

"The first reaction is to cry, 'Away with it. We must have no more to do with militarism; Europe has armed, and there was a war; let's disarm and there'll be no war; we must have none of what Wells called the "drilling, trampling foolery in the heart of Europe." ' But is it possible to do this?

"It is possible if the American people are willing to pay the price. The price is a discarding of the Monroe Doctrine, the willingness to have Europe and Asia establish military power in this hemisphere, the admission of Asiatic immigrants, and an abandonment of almost all our ambition to play a leading part in the organization of the world's peace. We may not be in the slightest danger of invasion, but if in an armed world we disarm, or allow our armament to be enfeebled, we shall count less and less in the councils of the nations."

Lippmann justifies this time-serving conclusion in the way customary with the reactionary: "It is not a pretty doctrine, I know, but the world is not yet a pretty place," and insists that "unterrified, realistic democracy is not blind to the problem of defense." In the same issue of the *Metropolitan,* Morris Hillquit indulges in the identical language and illusion: the lofty ideal of Socialism "does not blind the Socialists to the implacable realities of present-day conditions." Hillquit refuses to say that Socialism is against armaments and militarism.

The Milwaukee *Leader,* of which Victor L. Berger is editor, holds the same point of view: Socialism is not pacifist, not against armament: "We must meet conditions as they are" "in an age of capitalistic competition for the world's markets." The jingoism of the *Leader* is as bad as that of Lippmann and bourgeois militarists:

"It is possible that if American industry should be scrapped, American forts could be dispensed with, American battleships scuttled, and American soldiers disarmed without inviting invasion or disaster. But until the American workingman shall be prepared to take the little brown brother to his bosom and until the American capitalist shall manifest a disposition to surrender his advantages, until the Monroe Doctrine shall be repudiated and American pretensions to the overlordship of two continents abandoned a reasonable amount of common sense would suggest that, at least, we should take such a reasonable and democratic measure for national defense as is found in a citizen soldiery."

In this, as in certain other matters of policy, Berger and Hillquit are in full agreement with the reactionary elements of Bourgeois progressivism.

II.

The Socialist Party is now discussing a proposed peace programme. It is an utterly incompetent programme. While many locals of the party are adopting resolutions emphatically opposing all forms of war and militarism, the party officials suggest a programme not only reactionary but insidiously pro-militarist. Instead of demanding disarmament, it weakly urges "limitation of armament"; proposes an international police force—which would be a power for crushing "backward races" and proletarian revolts. It indulges in a lot of twaddle concerning "tribunals" and "arbitration." Its programme is "practical"—calls for "federation of all peace forces," and then makes this federation impossible by pro-

posing industrial democracy and Socialism as necessary immediate factors for permanent peace. It proposes the superficial political measures of bourgeois pacifism, and does not stress the fundamental remedy—economic internationalism.

And while this programme was being framed and is being discussed, the menace of an American militarism is growing stronger —and the Socialist Party programme completely ignores this menace! Instead of concentrating its power in a fight against the menace of militarism and its causes, the Socialist Party indulges in the farce of a propaganda to "Starve the War and Feed America!"

It is a cunning campaign our American Militarists are waging. They are demanding an investigation into "our defenses," and say they simply desire "adequate preparation." But what *is* adequate preparation? The answer is being given by those who demand a larger army and navy, some form of general military service. The clamor for investigation and "adequate preparation" is a prelude to worse things. Psychologically, politically, the public is being prepared for an American militarism.

All the European nations, except Belgium and England, were prepared for war—particularly Germany and France. The Great War has proven the fallacy of "adequate preparation" as a means of preserving peace. "Adequate preparation" is its own negation; all nations being equally prepared adequately, obviously neutralizes the preparedness of each. "Adequate preparation," by developing an illusion of power is, if anything, an incitement to war—a vital factor in Germany's precipitance of the war. But Roosevelt draws the opposite conclusion:

"The most important lesson for the United States to learn from the present war is the vital need that it shall at once take steps to prepare. Preparedness against war does not always avert war or disaster in war, any more than the existence of a fire department—that is, preparedness against fire—always averts fire. But it is the only assurance against war, and the only insurance against overwhelming disgrace and disaster in war. Preparedness usually averts war and usually prevents disaster in war; and always prevents disgrace in war."

"Adequate preparation," according to Roosevelt, "is the only assurance against war";—but what about the *causes* of war? Bourgeois militarist and bourgeois pacifist both ignore the fundamental causes of war; one says adequate armament is a protection against war, the other says armament itself produces war. Preparations for war are simply an expression of the latent impulse to war; and this impulse is a reflex of trade rivalry and privilege, protectionism, nationalism, militarism, the hysteria of fear—a synthesis of factors provocative of war, *which must be destroyed.*

Preparation against whom? The United States to-day has no enemy against whom to prepare—even Roosevelt concedes there are no grounds for fear of Japan—*unless our national policy produces an enemy.*

"Let us either put our army and navy upon a common-sense basis," says the piously Christian *Outlook,* "balanced, organized, and equipped for the task that confronts them, or let us withdraw from the Philippines, turn over the Panama Canal to Siam, and forget that we once had a president by the name of Monroe."

There is no possibility of having to defend the Panama Canal *unless the United States intends using it as a means of aggression.* Fortifying the Canal was an error, unnecessary; the United States can retain control of the Canal peaceably by making it clear that it will not be used as a means of potential aggression.

Shall the Philippines, which serve no rational purpose of national policy, serve as a pretext for militarizing the United States? The Philippines should be granted independence; even if that is not done, their possession constitutes no menace to our peace unless retained for purposes of aggression.

The Monroe Doctrine is an anachronism. A necessary policy of defense against monarchical Europe and the "Holy Alliance" in the early days of our Republic, the Doctrine is now as impudent as it is useless. None of the European nations have designs on the American Continent; the self-reliant Republics of South America resent the Monroe Doctrine as an insult to their sense of independence, and fear it as a potential agency of *United States* aggression. As things are now, the Doctrine must either be discarded or serve as the tool of an American imperialism and militarism seeking to impose its own "Kultur" upon our neighbors. Europe and Asia establish military power in America? Absurd! Asia has a sufficiently mighty task developing her own resources; and none of the nations of Europe, particularly after the Great War, can contemplate American aggression. The only danger of a conflict with Asia lies not in Asiatic desire to establish military power in America, *but in the plans of certain of our imperialists to conquer "spheres of influence" in Asia.*

The only real factor which might precipitate a war is the anti-immigration policy popular among our aristocracy of labor and certain sections of the middle-class. This policy is a threat to the peace of the world. Here, indeed, is the one potent reason for an American militarism. For if the United States is seriously proposing to keep Asiatics completely out of the American con-

tinent, possibly Europeans as well, we will eventually have to fight Europe and Asia in arms against this reactionary policy. Is it wise, is it necessary to invite the evils of militarism and the prospects of universal race-war in order to pander to the prejudices and illusory interests of the aristocracy of labor and middle-class?

There is no valid argument in economics for anti-immigration. Immigration has been one of the great constructive social forces in America. The identical arguments made to-day against the admission of Asiatics and south-eastern Europeans were made against the Germans and Irish half a century ago. Only temporarily, if at all, does the immigrant lower the standard of living —and even that is not due to his being an immigrant; his wages as an unskilled worker are about equal to the wages of the American unskilled worker. The A. F. of L. refuses to organize Asiatics, and then brands them as "unorganizable." Most of the revolutionary impulses in the labor movement in recent years have been an expression of immigrant workers on strike. Our policy should not be to exclude immigrants, but to assimilate them.

But even if the immediate economic interests of the workers were at stake, the dangers of racial exclusion are too gigantic, too real, too inhuman for us to favor anti-immigration.

Baiting the "Jap" and the "Chink" is a dangerous sport. Japan is making it clear that she has no quarrel with the United States unless we insult her people beyond human endurance.

A rational immigration policy would avert the one real possibility of war and the one real argument for an American militarism. It is the task of the Socialist movement to act accordingly; and *its campaign against militarism necessarily implies a campaign against all conditions provocative of war.*

III

Hillquit claims that "Socialists are not indiscriminate pacifists" because our lofty ideal "does not blind Socialists to the implacable realities of present-day conditions." Militarism and nationalism are "implacable realities:" Capitalism, industrial oppression, wage-slavery are all "implacable realities:" and if we can combat the latter why not the former? Our task is not to be "practical;" the German Social Democracy was "practical," and its collapse is a practical demonstration of a dangerous fallacy. Only the "impractical" can justify Socialism: our task is not to accept but to transform "implacable realities," to articulate an idealism which shall arouse enthusiasm and action. Socialism should express conditions *as they are becoming,* not conditions as they are.

The issue is clear: *Socialism must oppose all forms of war and seek to remove all causes of war—oppose militarism and nationalism, protectionism and racial exclusion, and demand universal disarmament.*

Socialism, runs an argument, has not the power to compel disarmament, hence should not advocate disarmament. *Ergo:* Socialism has not the power to abolish Capitalism, hence should not advocate the overthrow of Capitalism.

Our campaign against militarism and for disarmament can secure the co-operation of non-Socialist sections of the people. The abolition of militarism and war is a democratic issue and concerns humanity, democracy and Socialism alike. Socialism can convert this issue into a revolutionary issue: its potential educational and political value is tremendous.

Conservatives in our movement generally appeal to the past for justification. They prattle of "implacable realities," but are really slaves of the past and its illusions.

Eduard Bernstein argues that Marx was not a pacifist. (Marx was not a reformist, but that doesn't prevent Bernstein being one.) He points out that Marx urged the Germans *after the Franco-Prussian War had broken out* to support Prussia, as the victory of Prussia would mean German unity and the collapse of Bonapartism. It may be remarked, however, that war was not indispensable for that consummation. Economic development would have united Germany without war—the Prussian victory simply achieved that unity a few years sooner, *and was a direct historical cause of the present Great War by making Junker and militarist Prussia supreme in United Germany and humiliating France.* Bonapartism, which desired war to prop up its tottering dynasty, would have crumbled under the weight of its own corruption and incompetence without a Prussian conquest.

Hillquit cites the fact that in 1848 Marx called for "a general war of revolutionary Europe against the stronghold of European reaction—Russia." But should this be an argument against Socialist advocacy of disarmament to-day? Conditions have changed since the stormy days of 1848; observe that Marx called upon "*revolutionary* Europe." There is no such situation to-day. Marx had in mind popular democratic wars,—wars waged by democratic revolutions against feudal tyranny, as the wars of the French Revolution; and wars waged for national unity, as those of Italy and the Balkans. Wars of this character, however, are largely a thing of the past. Hillquit admits that "national and civil wars of independence or emancipation and the 'holy wars' for humanitarian purposes are rare and becoming ever rarer." The Great War, particularly if Socialists and Democrats use the opportunity, should settle once and for all the Balkan and Turkish problems

and the problems of national autonomy, drive Europe to abolish tariff barriers and develop a real economic internationalism; together with the task of economic reconstruction in Europe, that should mean disarmament; *and military preparations in America give the militarists of Europe an argument against disarmament.* After peace is made the one real danger of war will probably be the Far East, *and that danger should cease if Europe and America give up their attempts to dominate the Far East.* To fight against these attempts at domination will be an important task of the new Socialist International.

The silliest argument of militarist Socialists is the claim that some day Socialism may need war to overthrow Capitalism, and a "Citizen Army" would provide the necessary tool. This should really be an argument for disarmament. The more armaments Capitalism has the greater its power against the proletariat and revolution. If the revolutionary proletariat of Paris went down to disaster before the relatively toy artillery of Napoleon, one shudders to contemplate what would happen to the modern proletariat marching against 42-centimetre guns *which under any plan of armament would be in the hands of the master class.* This prattle of armed revolution, usually indulged in by reactionary conservatives, is a survival of the insurrectionary ideology of 1848; the revolutionary proletariat to-day recognizes revolutionary class unionism as the force necessary for the overthrow of Capitalism. *Disarmament means disarming the Capitalist class;* consider what that means should it come to Socialist insurrection!

The ghastly tragedy of some American Socialists advocating a "Citizen Army"! Roosevelt advocates the same thing. Modern war is waged with machines—the modern army itself is a machine. "The 'armed nation' (Citizen Army)," says Wibaut, "now and henceforth means a nation equipped with all the machinery human spirit has invented for the destruction of man." A "Citizen Army" would lessen the burdens of miltarism in times of peace and ease the Middle Class burden of taxation, but it would not and could not destroy militarism. Nor is a "Citizen Army" necessarily democratic; being in the control of the ruling class it is a weapon against democracy and the proletariat. In Switzerland the "Citizen Army" is un-democratic; possesses a plutocratic officers' caste; and is used to suppress strikes. Many Swiss Socialists cite these facts as arguments against voting the military appropriations.

Socialists hitherto have accepted the criterion that only a defensive war should be participated in by Socialists. But the complexity of forces precipitating wars to-day makes it appear that all nations are on the defensive—as in Europe. Kautsky years

ago proposed a different criterion: proletarian and democratic interests. But Kautsky now concludes, and rightly, that this criterion is also inadequate: the French and German Socialists applied the democratic and proletarian criterion and arrived at opposite conclusions. Kautsky's new criterion, that all nations being on the defensive justifies all Socialists in supporting their governments, is preposterous and impossible. Clearly, emphatically, Socialism must adopt the criterion: *against all wars because in all wars national interests are the decisive factors.* This criterion implies anti-nationalism and Socialist advocacy of complete disarmament.

Socialists who oppose disarmament are nationalists—they place national interests above class interests. Hillquit, in the *Metropolitan* article previously quoted, again clearly indicates his nationalistic bias:

> "What lies at the bottom of the Socialist attachment for the fatherland is not so much the abstract ethical sentiment as the solid material motive. The same, of course, holds true of all other classes of the population. The country is the economic unit of modern society. It supplies the food and sustains the lives of its inhabitants. The ancient and true formula of internationalism *Ubi panis ibi patria* may with equal justice be reversed into *Ubi patria ibi panis:* Where the fatherland is there is the bread."

This reactionary doctrine supplants Socialist Internationalism as a proletarian tactic with economic nationalism. It is a complete abandonment of the revolutionary Socialist stand-point. When one says the nation provides a living for the workers one means the Capitalist class dominant in that nation; and for the workers to protect national interests means protecting the interests of the Capitalist class. The obvious and menacing implication is that the class struggle must be subordinated to the struggle of nations, if not completely abandoned, particularly if the bourgeois Socialist party controls the nation by means of State Socialism.

This economic nationalism of the Socialist conservatives is more reactionary than that of the Capitalist, because Capitalist nationalism by the very law of motion of its development tends to economic internationalism.

The struggle against militarism and nationalism, accordingly, assumes an intensely revolutionary significance. It means a struggle against the emasculation and practical abandonment of Socialist principles.

Our immediate revolutionary task is to fight the menace of an American militarism, as this menace constitutes a menace to revolutionary Socialist integrity.