

SOCIALISM AND THE COMING WAR

By Bertram D. Wolfe

The Bauer-Dan-Zyromski Thesis And Its Relation To C.I. Line

The most important problem facing the international labor movement today is the problem of its attitude towards and plans for the approaching world war. It is a problem pressing for immediate solution before the war is upon us. Yet there is widespread confusion and disagreement where, above all, there should be complete clarity and unity. In such a situation, any attempt at formulation of attitude offered by any section of the labor movement, must be welcomed as a contribution to the need of discussion and clarification. In this light we must welcome the attempt of Otto Bauer of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, Jean Zyromski and Amedeo Dunois of the French Socialist Party and Theodor Dan of the Russian Social-Democratic Party to formulate a thesis on "Socialism and the War Danger" as a proposal of policy for the Labor and Socialist (Second) International.*

Their document is a significant one. Since the Second International collapsed on August 4, 1914 and dissolved into so many national sections each warring on the other in alliance with its own master class, this represents the first serious attempt within its ranks to substitute for innumerable national policies involving various degrees of servility to the interests of the various national bourgeoisie, a single uniform policy of international validity for all sections of the L.S.I. Moreover, a thesis advanced by Bauer, Dan and Zyromski and given general endorsement by Friedrich Adler is no mere three or four-man document. Such men are not rank and filers or local leaders. They are men of international reputation. Otto Bauer is the leader of the current, historically known as Austro-Marxism. Dan is an outstanding Russian Menshevik. Zyromski is a leader of the French Socialist Left, Friedrich Adler is secretary of the Second International. And a document so sponsored may be fairly regarded as the expression of the attitude of an important current of the Second International, a current which has been historically characterized as Centrist or Left Social Democrat.

NEW FEATURES OF THE THESIS

The thesis contains various new features. First, there is the attempt to formulate policy from a single international viewpoint, as already mention-

ed. Second, there is an attempt to examine the role of the Second International during the last war. Third, there is an attempt to base the policy proposed upon the recognition of two new features in the world situation that did not exist on the eve of the last world war, namely the existence of fascism in Germany and the existence of the Soviet Union. Lastly, there is an avowal of the pre-war aim of the Second International, expressed in its Stuttgart and Basle resolutions and abandoned by all but the revolutionary socialists or Communists in 1914, namely the utilization of the crisis caused by war to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society. Let us examine these features of the thesis.

THE MISTAKES OF 1914

The Second International can develop no sound position on war, nor can they win the confidence of any internationalist or revolutionist, until they make a frank examination of the errors (the word is surely charitable!) of August 4, 1914 and a clean break with all that those errors represent. This is all the more necessary since Bauer and Dan are no "spring chickens." They went thru the great betrayal of internationalism in 1914, not, to be sure, as its most energetic advocates, but at least as tolerators, conciliators and apologists for the Scheidemanns, Renners, Thomases, Renaudels, etc.

It must be said that the thesis does not make a clean break with the betrayal of 1914 but diplomatizes with it in unclear and unsatisfactory fashion. It declares that the Socialist Parties were "taken by surprise" in 1914. Yet Marx and Engels began predicting the world war in 1870 (see the warning of the consequences of the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in the Manifesto of the First International.) Engels indicated the outlines of the coming world war with fair accuracy in the 90's. And the exact character of the war was outlined and plans to meet it adopted at the Stuttgart (1907), Copenhagen (1910), and Basle (November 1912) conferences of the Second International. No, the Parties were not "taken by surprise." Neither were they, as the thesis maintains, "driven into a hasty, ill-considered attitude." They had formulated their attitude, laid their plans, and made their pledges, but abandoned and violated them upon the declaration of war. A

clear statement of this fact is the only guarantee that the leaders of the Second International understand what happened in 1914 and are determined not to repeat it or permit it to happen again.

ATTITUDE TO SOVIET UNION

The Bauer-Dan-Zyromski thesis comes out unequivocally in favor of the defense of the Soviet Union. It recognizes the economic and cultural achievements of the proletarian dictatorship (al tho it is intentionally vague on the question of whether that dictatorship was historically necessary or not). It recognizes that the defeat of the Soviet Union would be a calamity for the workers

THE birth of the Soviet Union, the split in the radical movement, and the foundation of the Communist International, grew directly out of the attitude of Socialism towards the last war. Once more the labor movement is in a ferment of discussion of its tactics in an approaching world conflict. On its decision hangs the safety of the Soviet Union, the future of the revolutionary movement, and, in large measure, the fate of mankind. On the occasion of this 18th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, it overshadows all other questions.—Editor

of the world and its victory a victory for world progress. "Therefore," reads the thesis, "if there should be a war, the interests of international Socialism demand that the Soviet Union should be victorious." This is a clear and unequivocal statement. It is reinforced by the following declaration rendered all the more significant because it is signed by the Menshevik Dan:

"Socialist parties," says the thesis, "who, during the war, should organize or assist nationalist insurrections against the Soviet Union or, for nationalist reasons, undermine the defense of the Soviet Union, would by so doing act contrary to the vital interests of the working class of the world . . . They would take their stand on the other side of the barricade. It is therefore necessary to make it quite clear, in time, whether the Ukrainian, the Georgian and the Armenian So-

cialist Parties** are prepared, in case of war, unconditionally and unreservedly to assist the defense of the Soviet Union and to subordinate their national claims to that defense. Only if they are prepared to act accordingly can there be room for these parties within the L.S.I."

This is indeed a remarkable acknowledgement coming from Theodor Dan! But its full significance only becomes clear in the further development of the thesis.

THE HEART OF THE THESIS

Three fundamental objectives are laid down by the thesis, as the aims of the working class in the coming war. These are:

1. "That German fascism shall be defeated."
2. "That the Soviet Union shall be victorious."
3. "That in all capitalist countries the war shall be used to win power for the working class and to abolish the capitalist system." In these three aims lies the heart of the thesis. They are all laudable objectives. The real question is, how does the thesis propose to accomplish them? Not by any lesser questions, however important, but by the soundness of the tactical and strategic proposals for attaining these objectives, must the thesis be judged.

QUESTION OF GERMAN FASCISM

One of the new features in the world situation is the presence of fascist countries. In them capitalism in a more advanced stage of decay presents most clearly the inherent logic of capitalism in its declining era. The most powerful and menacing, and probably the most brutal (if such distinctions in degrees of maximal brutality can be made) of fascist governments is that of Hitler. It has inspired the hatred of workers everywhere. This can easily be taken advantage of by the ruling class of such a capitalist-imperialist power as France, to attempt to harness the French masses once more to their war chariot in the event of a war in which France and Germany would be on opposing sides.

** These are the names of little groups of anti-Soviet emigres among which Dan and his group should be numbered, who have received and still receive aid, comfort, recognition and support from the Second International.

Add to this that France is one of the "sated imperialisms," that it came out of the last war victorious, with its belly full of German colonies, provinces like Alsace-Lorraine and new vassal states under its hegemony. While it is digesting its meal it can temporarily look as peaceful as a maw-crammed tiger. The sated imperialist powers are not less imperialist, they are only less hungry, less anxious for a disturbance of the status quo which may threaten their loot. But they prepare no less energetically for war, in a military, diplomatic, and moral sense. And their war for the retention of their loot is no whit less imperialistic than the war of the opposing brigands who attempt to make them part with some of it. Thanks to their sated condition, however they are strengthened in their "moral" preparations. They can pose hypocritically before their own masses as "less aggressive", "more peace-loving"—the old game of attempting to enlist mass support for imperialist war by masking it as innocent national defense, a game so skillfully practiced to take in the masses in all lands during the last war.

What is the duty of revolutionary socialists in this situation? Clearly to warn the masses against such hypocritical deceptions. To unmask sated imperialisms as imperialistic. To warn that the military dictatorship installed by a capitalist republic when war breaks will be in no wise distinguishable from fascism. To call upon the masses in countries like France (I use it only as an example, but an important one since Zyromski and Dunois sign the thesis) to wage relentless war against their own master class and its war preparations. To rob Hitler of the powerful weapon that would be his if he could declare that "all France, regardless of class, is united in a race war against Germany." To strengthen the German working class struggle against Hitler before and during war, by giving assurance that there is a like French working class struggle against its ruling class before and during war. Such are the duties of the revolutionary socialist.

And what does the thesis do? Essentially the opposite! Here are its proposals:

"In fighting against war, international Socialism must support the governments of those countries which, satiated by the results of the last war, want to preserve peace." (em-

(Continued on Page 5)

* Translated into English by Friedrich Adler, Secretary of the L.S.I. and printed in the *Socialist Call* of October 12, 1935.

SOCIALISM AND WAR

(Continued from Page 1)
phasia mine.—B.D.W.)

And again:

"Desirous that Hitler Germany—if it went to war—should be defeated, it has no reason to desire that Germany's opponents should be lacking arms."

Of course there are attempts to mitigate or rather veil the crassness of the above declarations. There are phrases about "dispelling illusions" while supporting those governments. Platonic declarations about the policy of the supported governments being "not our policy". And so forth.

But these qualifying phrases do not improve the thesis. To the extent that they obscure its true character they make it worse. But they are not very effective. The logic of the thesis on this first objective is only too clear. It is a logic which if followed will cause French "left", socialism under the lead of Zyromski and Dunois to support French militarism and imperialism under slogans about the "menace of Hitler," no different in essence from French capitalism in 1914.

The thesis is not a document for revolutionary struggle against war, each working class to vie with the other by seeking to excel and win first in the struggle against its own master class, its own war-makers and exploiters. It is a document of Alphonse-and-Gaston politeness in which Zyromski and Dunois say to the German working class, "After you, my dear Hans! After you defeat your ruling class, we will start to break with ours." The thesis provides a splendid weapon in the hands of the Comite des Forges. And at the same time a useful weapon in the hands of Hitler.

WHERE U.S.S.R. COMES IN

The second objective proclaimed by the thesis is the defense of the Soviet Union. Here too, a closer analysis reveals, that just as the "struggle against fascism" is used as a pretext for the support of capitalist-imperialism in the

non-fascist countries, so the "defense of the Soviet Union" turns out to be, not another reason for defeating your own bourgeoisie and thus giving the Soviet Union dependable allies and comradesly countries, but another reason for supporting your own and defeating the other fellow's bourgeoisie.

The thesis declares:

"If Hitler Germany and the Soviet Union face each other in a war, the International must take its stand against Hitler Germany and its allies; it must wish to see her defeated by the Soviet Union and its allies." (emphasis mine.—BDW).

And again:

"In the countries allied with the Soviet Union, Socialists cannot and must not hinder the conduct of war; all sabotage would be a help for Hitler Germany and a blow to the Soviet Union. Socialists must appeal to the workers to do their duty as soldiers as well as in the war-industry." (emphasis mine.—BDW).

Such statements are only too clear. They are not improved, only made more dishonest and hypocritical by a subsequent declaration that Socialism in those countries "must not enter into a civil peace with the government." What is civil peace if not just this: "do nothing to hinder the conduct of the war"; "all sabotage would be a help for Hitler Germany" (the last civil peace was because "all sabotage would be a help for Kaiser Germany"); and Socialists "appealing to the workers to do their duty as soldiers as well as in the war-industry"?

To be sure, if one of these alliance treaties such as that of France with the Soviet Union should actually continue after the outbreak of war, the task of the French proletariat would be somewhat different from that of the proletariat of the countries fighting the Soviet Union. The German workers, assuming Germany was one of the opposing countries, would strive to overthrow its own bourgeoisie in order to end the war against the Soviet Union. The French proletariat would strive to over-

throw the French bourgeoisie in order, if successful, to continue the war against Hitler Germany as a dependable ally of the Soviet Union. But both proletariats would have this in common, a continuance and sharpening of the class war against their own bourgeoisie, for the sake of the interests of the proletariat in the respective countries and in the Soviet Union as well. Can it be that Bauer, Dan, Zyromski and Adler are becoming such ardent defenders of the Soviet Union because it provides a new "revolutionary" excuse for an old anti-revolutionary crime, support of one's own master class and abandonment of the interests of the proletariat in an imperialist war?

FIRST OVERTHROW KAISER!

In the last war one of the means of allied offensive was the demand that the German masses overthrow their Kaiser if they wanted a "just peace." After the German front collapsed by revolution, the German masses got—the Versailles peace! If working class revolution should take place in Germany, says the thesis, "in this case, Socialism in the capitalist countries fighting against Germany will have to oppose by all means . . . any attempt to impose on Germany another imperialist peace which would maim or dismember her."

And if Germany does not make a revolution, will you not oppose an imperialist peace? And, if she does, how will you oppose an imperialist peace if you have not developed your fighting force but have been supporting the war? The "overthrow Hitler first" is the "overthrow the Kaiser first" formula, brought up to date. And its results would be identical. All the more so because the thesis opposes a general strike in the capitalist countries fighting Germany, upon the outbreak of war. Says the thesis:

"An appeal of the International to prevent war by an international general strike would find no way into Germany and would not meet any response. For that reason no such appeal can be made; for since it could only be answered in the democratic countries opposed to Germany, it would mean a help to fascism."

Once more the old argument of "pro-German", "helping the Kaiser", in a more modern and pseudo-revolutionary dress. Perhaps the authors of the thesis think that the military dictatorship in France would be less ruthless in suppressing the call to a general strike than

the dictatorship in Germany?

It is impossible to reproduce the whole thesis with all its deceptive trimmings, all its "revolutionary" disguises for its basic policy: support of "your own" bourgeoisie in the event of a war with Germany under the new excuses of overthrowing Hitler and defending the Soviet Union by supporting "your own" master class. One more specimen will suffice, and cannot be omitted since it raises another side of the question. The thesis declares:

"In the democratic countries fighting on the side of the Soviet Union against Hitler Germany Socialism cannot refuse nor undermine national defense. But it must try to make use of the war in order to transform it into a Jacobin revolutionary defense of a working class and Socialist country."

What meaning has the phrase "Jacobin revolutionary defense" if you are unwilling to sabotage "national defense", that is imperialist offense? What is the meaning of "Jacobin", what is the lesson of the Jacobin tactics in revolutionary France if not this: you cannot conduct a revolutionary war without first having a revolution? Is it not clear that only by overthrowing the capitalist class can the workers of any country make possible a non-capitalist, non-imperialist war? That only thus can they prevent their imperialist government from uniting with Hitler against the Soviet Union as Bismarck did with Thiers against the Paris Commune, as the Allied Powers did against their own ally, Soviet Russia, after the Revolution of 1917. Has history taught Bauer, Dan, Zyromski and Adler nothing? Or is theirs the blindness of those who will not see?

At any rate, whether conscious or unconscious this surrounding of the support of your own bourgeoisie with the halo of revolutionary phrases such as "Jacobin" is objectively but an aid to the French ruling class to dupe the French workers with distorted echoes of French revolutionary traditions. And whether consciously or unconsciously Adler, Bauer, Dan, Zyromski and Dunois are once more playing the classic role of centrism, that of cloaking anti-revolutionary actions in revolutionary phrases.

RESPONSIBILITY OF COMINTERN

We cannot close this analysis of the Bauer-Dan-Zyromski thesis without indicating the responsibility which the Communist International incurs and will con-

tinue to incur, if it does not hasten to correct and clarify its stand—responsibility for helping indirectly to inspire and giving direct aid and comfort to the dangerous and anti-revolutionary views proposed in the thesis.

Are not the germs of these very errors contained in the declarations on "mixed war" and on the Franco-Soviet pact made by Thorez and others immediately after the Stalin-Laval declaration? Have not the Communist Parties of France and Czechoslovakia made declarations based on the mechanical transference of the tactics of Soviet governmental diplomacy to the tactics of the class struggle in France and Czechoslovakia? The Soviet government must and should diplomatize with the government of "sated" imperialist France. But the French working class cannot diplomatize with the French bourgeois government. It can only wage relentless war upon it, redouble its efforts to overthrow it, so that the Soviet government will no longer have to diplomatize with such treacherous, less than scrap-of-paper allies, and can conclude genuine and unbreakable agreements for revolutionary defense directly with the French workers organized as the ruling class in a Soviet France.

And does not the Seventh World Congress share responsibility for the danger that this thesis may influence wide masses, since the Seventh World Congress issued vague and worse than vague formulations on "weak and small nations," on the defense of bourgeois democracy against fascism? And above all, does not the Seventh Congress bear the responsibility of not having spoken clearly on the French and Czechoslovak errors, of having tried to correct some of them by just dropping them without analysis, thus leaving loopholes for their repetition? This state of affairs gives aid and comfort to such theses as Adler, Dan, Bauer, and Zyromski have sponsored. The Comintern must hasten to clean house. It must correct its errors openly in germ, else it cannot fight them adequately when they have developed, as they have in these theses, into their full flower and fruit. For politically speaking, the Bauer-Dan-Zyromski thesis is based upon those germs of error, has magnified them as if thru a great microscope, has enlarged and developed and fitted them into a system, and has done one great service, shown all the dangers to the proletarian revolution inherent in those germs of error if they are not promptly destroyed.

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