The 'Good Neighbor' Shows His Hand

Hull Note Reflects Real Aims of U. S. Imperialism

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

(The following article is a translation from the original Spanish in which it was written by Bertram D. Wolfe in Mexico for one of Mexico's leading journals of opinion.—Editor.)

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THERE is nothing so fragile as the kindness of the powerful who boast of being good as an act of grace. If the good conduct were the result of internal pressure of anti-imperialist elements (workers, farmers, liberals and progressives of other social groupings to whom imperialism represents a danger of internal reaction and war) and of external pressure on the part of a Mexico determined to resist openly any blow to its independence, and if this resistance were supported by the rest of Latin America, the kindness of the "good neighbor" would be less fragile. But the governments of Latin America have recently abandoned, with too great readiness, their reservations and skepticism towards the protestations of "good neighborliness." They have praised Roosevelt without criticism and without reserve. They have even printed postage stamps celebrating the United States Constitution and other institutions, going so far as adopting the fourth of July as a legal holiday (as in Cuba)! They have used adulation and flattery where they ought to have employed far different methods.

A Free Hand To Reaction

Much more dangerous, however, has been the attempt of the American Stalinites to convince the working class of their own country that they ought to support, unconditionally and without criticism, the President of the United States. Thanks to this systematic demoralization of the independent opposition in the United States, Roosevelt has been able to decree the blockade of Spain while arms are sent freely to Hitler and Mussolini for their Spanish adventure. Thanks to these same false tactics, the "kindness" of the "good neighbor" in foreign policy has been determined, more and more, by the caprice and arbitrary will of the President of the United States. A capitalist and imperialist government does not cease being capitalist and imperialist just because the chief executive conducts it subtly and intelligently. Does not Roosevelt himself insist that the aim of all his policies is to preserve and foster the interests of capitalism? This is the reason of the fragility of the virtues in foreign affairs of the self-styled "good-neighbor" policy.

The recent note of Secretary of State Cordell Hull obliges us to examine once more the policy followed up to the present, to test standards, to change tactics; and those who have neither been taken in nor surrendered completely to easy and false dreams will have to increase their efforts, strike out with greater confidence in the struggle for their point of view, now altogether justified by events, and extend greatly their field of activity.

If there were any doubts of the foreign policy of the "good neighbor," the recent note of the American government on the agrarian debt, completely dispels them. Let us examine the note and see what it says:

Violation Of Mexican Sovereignty

1. Despite the verbal protestations to the contrary, the new note attempts to dictate internal Mexican policy, thus violating Mexican sovereignty. The rapidity with which a government debt is paid is a question to be determined entirely by that country itself. England owes much money to the American bankers since the World War. It has suspended payment and, for many years, has not said a word about resuming payment. The American government has taken upon itself this debt and has

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casion to show his real attitude to Frankensteen even while participating on the side of the Stalinists in this recent outbreak which resulted in the suspensions As to the second "unity" man who failed to adhere to Stalinist caucus discipline

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Mexico's 'Good Neighbor'

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paid the bankers. But it has not dared to read England any lectures on "international law," nor to propose arbitration on the conditions or terms of payment. Why this difference in attitude? Can it be the closeness of the "good neighbor" to Mexico? Or the size of the British fleet?

2. The United States denies the Mexican government the right to expropriate land without compensation. (The note mentions at least three times, the "universally recognized principle of compensation.")

Here the observation must be made that this "principle" is not so universally recognized. The French Revolution confiscated the large estates of the feudal lords without any compensation whatsoever. The Protestant countries during the Reformation confiscated the estates and even the moveable chattels of the clergy, without compensation. The United States government itself confiscated a great deal of property of Englishmen or of Americans loyal to England during the Revolution of 1776. And, during and after the Civil War of 1861-1865, it confiscated without compensation the property in slaves of the landowners of the South. It also repudiated and prohibited the payment of debts incurred by the rebellious states and by the Confederate government, a very large sum, indeed, borrowed from the Southerners and from foreigners, especially the English. Finally, the Russian Revolution confiscated, without any compensation whatsoever, the property of both nationals and foreigners.

In the administrations of Hoover, Coolidge and Harding, when the neighbor did not pretend to be "good," the same claims were made on Russia. But now, Roosevelt has recognized the Soviet Union without insisting upon compensation for Americai citizens who had properties in old Russia. Why is a difference made in the case of Mexico? Can it be another symptom of the closeness of the "good neighbor"? Or is it the size of the Red Army? Or was it the result of the pressure exercised by the working-class movement of the United States and by the Communist Party before the disastrous tactics of the "Democratic and the Popular Front" set in, when it still pursued independent class tactics?

Lesson Of History

3. The historic truth on the question of expropriation with or without compensation, is very different from that which is insisted upon in the note of the "good neighbor." There are expropriations "at retail" on the part of conservative governments in normal times; and there are expropriations "at wholesale" on the part of revolutionary governments, that is, governments which have come to power as a result of a recent revolution. Now, then, the principles "universally recognized" or practised in the second case, differ entirely from the principles "universally recognized" or practised in the first case. Revolutionary law is always founded on the recognition of the fact that the prevailing property system itself is based on legalized injustice. Therefore, a government which has come to power as a result of revolution is in duty bound not to recognize the principle of compensation. For such compensation does not do away with injustice; it simply changes its form. It would be nothing more than a transformation of the unjust wealth and power of exploitation from the form of real property to the form of bonds or cash. The ruling class can thus continue ruling and exploiting by converting itself into a moneyed class.

When it is a question of a secondary need of a conservative government (building, bridges, roads, harbors, arsenals, irrigation, slum clearance, soil reclamation), then compensation is the normal thing. But, when it is a question of a system of property whose very basis has been challenged by the people (as in the case of the large estates in Mexico, slavery in the United States, capital in Russia, the property of the clergy during the Protestant Reformation), in all such cases confiscation without compensation is the normal thing, and compensation, far from being a principle, represents the exception —whether because of the betrayal of a so-called revolutionary government, or as a special tactic of the revolution for the purpose of buying some of its enemies or for the purpose of facilitating a somewhat less violent transition when the opposing forces are still too strong for elimination at one blow. Thus, the period of open struggle can be somewhat abbreviated, but the aim remains the confiscation of the property in question. The "principle" of compensation, as a principle, has no validity here. In short, the "principle" of compensation is a recognized one when we are dealing with expropriation "at retail" within a property system that has not itself been challenged. The principle of expropriation without compensation is a recognized one when we are dealing with expropriation "at wholesale," involving a change in the very property system itself. The aim of the recent note of the "good neighbor" is to conceal this difference, to force the Mexican government to forget that it came to power as the result of a revolution and that it has certain revolutionary duties.

Pity The Poor Trusts!

4. There is an amusing touch to the Hull document—unconscious irony, no doubt. We read:

"Just as within our own borders we strive to prevent the exploitation of debtors by powerful creditors, so are we justified in striving to prevent unfair and oppressive treatment of our people in other countries."

But the big capitalists who invested money in semi-colonial lands are no such "poor debtors"; they are the very powerful creditors. The "poor debtors" who need protection against exploitation and against forced payment by powerful creditors, are precisely countries like Mexico. How funny is the role of the "good neighbor" when he disguises himself as the poor exploited debtor! This unconsciously ironic theory implies the open return to the policy of "dollar diplomacy," to the policy of the State Department forcing payments to investing capitalists in semi-colonial lands. And how arrogant is the expression: "We urge that others follow the policy of fair dealing and fair play." The earlier administrations of the "bad neighbor" and the most open imperialistic policy never used more insolent language.

Finally, there are certain phrases in the note about the interest of Mexico in being a "good neighbor" as well, from the standpoint of its own future. Since the United States is preparing for another world war, the business of being a "good neighbor" implies for Mexico the danger of being tied to the chariot of its powerful imperialist neighbor.

The anti-imperialist struggle can no longer depend, if it ever could, on adulation and flattery of Roosevelt. This tactic has failed lamentably with the recent note. Nor can those Mexicans who love their independence expect any effective aid—if ever there has been any effective aid from such sources —from elements who do not wish to preserve their independence in relation to Roosevelt and the capitalist government of the United States. Effective aid can be secured only from the independent class action of the workers in the United States and from those elements who are able to exercise pressure on the Roosevelt Administration to force it to follow a policy which may somewhat deserve the name of "good neighbor." And Mexico must seek the support of all of Hispanic America.

rubber. He was a leader in the Douglas Aircraft sit-down strike,