Boycott, Embargo In Fight on War

(This is the sixth of a series of articles by Bertram D. Wolfe on the struggle against war. The final article will appear in the next issue.
—THE EDITOR.)

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A VEXED and confusing question that has arisen in the struggle against war is the efficacy of sanctions and boycotts. Much of the confusion is due to the mixing of two different things: treating consumers boycott and embargo as if they were of equal importance, even one and the same thing.

Consumers boycott action is, in general, a highly ineffective form of action. Girls throw their silk stockings and panties into a fire on the campus at Vassar and think they have stopped Japan in its invasion of China. It's a way of "getting something off your chest," but it builds facile illusions that you have really done something effective and can concentrate on that form of struggle.

Consumers boycott has the further defect that it does not begin with a struggle with one's own imperialism— doesn't even envisage such a struggle.

It has the further defect of being necessarily an all-class action, the consumers that count most being those that consume most. Where this may lead was shown recently in the case of East Liverpool, pottery center, where some trade unions, the Communist Party, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Pottery Manufacturers Association marched together in a joint parade under the slogans of: Defend China By Not Buying Japanese Porcelain Ware—Buy American! This shows the logic potential in every consumers boycott directed against a foreign country. It is easily turned into class-collaboration propaganda, into an instrument of whipping up a war fever. Our ruling class during the last war made effective and degrading use of the slogan of boycotting German goods; they even extended it to the German language and the music of Richard Wagner.

The Embargo

The consumers boycott, at best a deceptive and ineffective weapon, should not be confused with the embargo. This may be a measure

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mentary policy of the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union. Real internationalism means the genuine independence of each section of the international movement, as an equal among equals, independent thinking, independent discussion of problems, independent formulation of policy, independent leadership; Stalinist mock-"internationalism" means the political monopoly of the Stalin clique and the political subjection of everyone he, intellectual slavishness, the hero-cult and puppet leadership.

Stalinism is not internationalism; it is the most grotesque travesty of it.

(What we can do to help the Soviet Union and how Stalin's policies hamper and undermine its effective defense will be discussed in coming issues of this paper. —THE EDITOR.)

Boycott and Embargo in The Anti-War Struggle

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of real and fundamental importance, and the struggle for it one which may greatly strengthen the struggle against war, including the struggle against one's own government's war plans. There are two phases to the embargo. The first is demands on the government. We must demand of the government that it end the credits and war munitions shipments to Japan. With all this talk about enmity to Japan, Morgan has sent money to Japan, Ford has sent munitions and the United States government has sent scrap-iron, gun-cotton and other war materials! Instead of shouting "Support the President," we can and must attack the President and his policies on that. We must demand the end of these shipments and credits and the end of the embargo on Spain. The United States is supplying Italy with oil and munitions and credits for its war on Spain. It denies the Spanish government, in the name of a fake neutrality, the right even to purchase munitions from the United States.

So we must make the demand upon the government to stop credits to Japan and to extend credits to China, to stop helping Italy and Germany and to supply (sell) munitions to the legal government of Spain.

But the second phase of the embargo is the independent action of the masses. Its purpose: to stop the shipment of munitions and supplies to the other side and to give active aid to China and to Spain and support to the revolutionary forces that develop in those countries.

The Revolutionary Position on War

Now, a few words on our general work on the question. First, it is necessary for us to make clear to ourselves that our complete revolutionary position on war cannot be carried in a day into any mass organization. I do not mean that we are deceptively to hide it; but we must recognize that it can only be a general agitational and educational propaganda campaign at present. This is so because our complete position on war involves our complete position on the capitalist system. It is, however, a very effective point today to attack capitalism—the two main points of attack are capitalism's twin evils, depression and war—that is why the Communist Party has given up both! Because the attitude toward war involves the attitude toward the social order, it is our job to teach and make clear the inseparable connection between capitalism and war and to expose all the shibboleths used and the camouflage used in preparing the war in the name of "peace, democracy and civilization."

Secondly, in the mass organizations, while we cannot at any one moment carry this entire educational campaign into living realization, we can carry on a concrete campaign on slogans which tie up inseparably with this position. In the course of the fight for them, we can clarify their relation to the entire struggle. And it is our business to evolve concrete slogans that will make our position clear and then to mobilize labor to fight, thru its own organizations under its own leadership and control.

The Peace Movement

Third, there is the problem of our attitude towards the peace movement. I think it is our duty to develop, to support and to help to clarify every sincere peace movement. But first develop it and then you will have something to clarify. The main stress is on a broad movement that will learn by its own experience.

Our task is also to expose and destroy all movements masquerading under the slogans of peace that are really movements for the preparation of war. I think, roughly speaking, we can distinguish three types of movements in this connection:

There is the movement of reactionary bourgeois isolationism, the elements that say hands off in the Chinese and Spanish situation because they support Japan in China and Italy in Spain. There are not many who support Japan but there are those who support Italy because they believe Italy is doing a good "clean-up" job in Spain. Now, with them, we have nothing but direct war.

Secondly, there is the Stalinist war propaganda, poisoning the very name of peace. The test is simple—it fights Japanese imperialism but refuses to fight American imperialism.

Third, there is the unclear, sincere peace movement that wants the American Marines and the big-business interests to get out of the war areas. This is not so much because of a conscious opposition to imperialism and capitalism as because of a hatred for war and its consequences.

We have simple touchstones for testing all peace movements. The touchstone can be found in the following: Are you opposed to America's entrance into the war and, with it, to preparedness and the diplomatic moves which lead to entrance into war?

Test Number Two: Do you reject as the chief of these diplomatic manouvers, the "collective-security" swindle? Any movement that does those two things we must support and help to develop and clarify.

I emphasize that we must work with these organizations and elements that meet these tests because, out of them, will come those who will swell the ranks of the conscious revolutionary opponents of war and of the system that breeds it; out of them will come those who will provide a mass membership for our organization if we live up to our duties in this connection.

I emphasize again that our position differs from all of these positions that I have enumerated. Here are three single tests of the revolutionary position on war: (1) Opposition to your own imperialism first; (2) opposition to capitalism as the basic cause of war; and (3) for the sharpening of the class struggle in place of its abandonment, when the war is on.

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the German socialists, Noske and Scheidemann, it has affected me very deeply to hear of the death of Andres Nin at the hands of the Spanish Noskes and Scheidemanns. His only crime was to raise the slogan of "All power to the working class."

I have witnessed in horror and dread the slaughter of veteran revolutionists in the Soviet Union and have wondered when they will end.

For these reasons, I welcome the opportunity to help by my contribution the Workers Age and the Independent Communist Labor League in its fight for a sound revolutionary line based upon Marxism and Leninism. This is my hope for your success.

Fraternally yours,
Louis Ertman

PAUL BRISSENDEN, of Columbia University.

MAX DANISH, editor of the Justice, official paper of the I.L.G.W.U.

CLINTON GOLDEN, Pittsburgh regional director of the S.W.O.C.

ABRAHAM MILLER, of the New York Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

ROSE M. STEIN, author of "M-Day."

N. A. ZONARICH, president of the Aluminum Workers Union of the C.I.O.

ERNEST L. MEYER, columnist of the New York Post.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD, of the Nation.

HERMAN F. REISSIG, of the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.

One last question: How about SENATOR ROBERT M. LAFOLLETTE who is going to address the March 6th meeting at the Hippodrome arranged by the "Keep America Out Of War" committee? Is he also exerting his efforts in order to "give aid to Japan"?