

No, Norman Thomas, Comintern Has Not Changed Its Revolutionary Stand on War

By A. B. Magill

ARTICLE I

Norman Thomas is worried. The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International has left him gasping for air. And being a man who seems to do a lot of thinking out loud, he spread his confusion over the last two issues of the Socialist Call, organ of the "Militants" in the Socialist Party.

It may seem surprising for a man with Norman Thomas' record—especially since the last meeting of the National Executive Committee of the S. P.—to say that "the present Communist Party line is one of extreme opportunism" (Socialist Call, Aug. 10). But no more surprising than to find the New Leader, organ of the reactionary "Old Guard," criticizing the Communist International from—believe it or not—the "left."

The Peril of Fascism

Because the confusion of Norman Thomas (who, incidentally, echoes many of the absurdities and distortions of the capitalist press) regarding the discussion at the Comintern Congress represents not his perplexity alone, but in all probability the confusion of a considerable portion of the Socialist Party membership, it is important to take up the issues which he raises in an effort to clarify them.

The Seventh Congress of the Communist International meets in one of the most critical periods in the world's history. The triumph of fascism in Germany and the rapid growth of fascist tendencies in all capitalist countries, together with the imminent danger of a new imperialist war, have placed before the masses of the world the question of immediate determined struggle against the advancing force of war and fascism. At the same time the successful building of Socialism in the Soviet Union and the increasing influence of the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries are raising the perspective of the permanent way out for the masses of the people everywhere.

The Comintern Congress is therefore faced with the necessity of developing in the most concrete form those policies and tactics that will lead both to the prevention of war and fascism and to the triumph of the proletarian revolution.

The Situation Today

These policies and tactics are determined not only by the changed objective conditions since the Sixth World Congress: the economic crisis, the triumph of fascism in Germany and Austria, the enormous growth of the fascist and war danger in all capitalist countries, the great strengthening of the Socialist fortress of the Soviet Union and the emerging of Soviet China, but also by the altered relations within the labor movement itself.

In the past seven years millions of toilers have been drawn into struggle against the capitalist offensive. Within the trade unions opposition to the class collaboration policies of the bureaucratic top leadership has assumed mass forms. Under pressure of their membership and followers, especially since the German and Austrian events, a new

Following Marx, Engels, Lenin, Communists Analyze Each War Issue from Point of View of the Interests of Toilers of Whole World

crisis has developed in the parties away, while in all Socialist Parties of the Second International. In a few cases, as in Japan and France, the extreme right wing has split a sharp differentiation is taking place, not only between the membership and the top leadership, but within the leadership itself. The appeals of the Communist International and the individual Communist Parties for the united front have crystallized the sentiment for united action among the members of the Socialist Parties, have led to partial and local united fronts in practically all countries and in France to a united front on a national scale on all issues immediately confronting the masses.

The People's Front in France

The altered relations within the labor movement have entered a new stage with the emergence in France of the anti-Fascist People's Front, a phenomenon of world-historic significance, pointing the path in all countries to the successful struggle against fascism and war.

It is against this background, in a world in which fascism and anti-fascism, war and anti-war are fighting desperately for mastery, that the Seventh Congress of the Communist International meets. Already the discussion at the congress shows that the Comintern has stood the test. The boldness of its decisions, the sureness with which it has grasped in all their complexity and diversity the tasks facing the masses of the world reveal once more that this is in truth the International of Lenin and Stalin, heir to the deathless traditions of Marx and Engels, a fighting, revolutionary International capable of combining the utmost flexibility of tactics with iron devotion to principle.

Communists and War

On the question of war:

Norman Thomas seems to think that the Communist International has gone over to the chauvinist position of the Socialist leaders in 1914. He is echoed by the Trotskyite and Lovestoneite renegades from Communism, who accompany their slanders with the big bass drum of "theoretical" pretense.

"Apparently," writes Thomas in the Socialist Call of Aug. 3, "the Communists have gone over whole-heartedly to the position that there may be good wars between nations. This was precisely the position of the majority of Socialists in 1914, a position which the Communists have bitterly decried."

The Communists have ALWAYS held with Marx, Engels and Lenin that there may be "good wars" between nations. Such just and progressive wars are wars for national liberation fought by an oppressed people against an oppressing country, wars for national unification which result in the destruction of the remnants of feudalism, wars for the preservation of national independence, and,

since 1917, wars for the defense of the Soviet Union.

World War an Imperialist War

The imperialist war of 1914-18, however, did not fall into any of these four types of progressive war, but was, on the contrary, as Lenin pointed out, a war "waged among the slave-holders for the strengthening and consolidation of slavery." Here it was not a question of which side fired the first shot, but of the aims of the two imperialist groups, which were equally predatory.

The Socialist leaders, therefore, who as early as 1907, at the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International, had solemnly pledged to utilize the crisis created by the expected war to work for the overthrow of capitalism, betrayed Socialism when they voted war-funds, declared class truce and actively supported their own bourgeoisie.

The confusion of Norman Thomas and the slanders of the renegades from Communism center around a statement by Wilhelm Pieck in his report for the Executive Committee of the Communist International at the opening of the congress. Pieck declared:

"Should German fascism attempt to conquer the small European states, their war against fascism will be a righteous war which we will support."

Lenin on the World War

Does this mean that the Communist International has degenerated into social-chauvinism as the Trotskyites and Lovestoneites howl? By no means. On the contrary, Pieck here applies concretely the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin regarding progressive wars. Even in the last war, in which two clearly defined imperialist groups came to grips, Lenin, who always thought concretely, instead of by abstract formula, saw intertwined certain elements of progressive national war. While denouncing the Socialist leaders who distorted the teachings of Marx and Engels by defending one or the other group of the imperialist pirates, he declared:

"The German imperialists shamelessly violated Belgian neutrality; this has always and everywhere been the practice of warring nations which, in the case of necessity, trample upon all treaties and obligations. Suppose all nations interested in maintaining international treaties declared war against Germany, demanding the liberation and indemnification of Belgium. In THIS CASE THE SYMPATHY OF THE SOCIALISTS WOULD NATURALLY BE ON THE SIDE OF GERMANY'S ENEMIES." ("Socialism and War.")

And in his pamphlet, *The Collapse of the Second International* (also known as *The War and the Collapse of the Second International*) Lenin noted the fact that

the war of Serbia against Austria was also a progressive war for national liberation.

Cannot Isolate Wars

But, pointed out Lenin in both these instances, it is impossible to isolate these two progressive wars from the general reactionary imperialist war, Belgium and Serbia are both pawns of the big imperialist powers. He therefore came to the conclusion that to justify the war on the ground of the defense of Belgium and Serbia is nothing but the vilest deception of the people.

Is there any reason for supposing that today a war of Nazi Germany against some small European country can be isolated?

To answer this question let us ask ourselves concretely what form such a war would take. The war moves of Nazi Germany are directed primarily, as even capitalist observers admit, against the Soviet Union. Today no other country is being aggressively threatened by the Nazis. Should German fascism, therefore, attack some small country, let us say, Latvia and Lithuania or Czechoslovakia, which either border on or are close to the Soviet Union, it would only be the first step toward war against the Workers' Republic.

The possibility of such a war is very real, and undoubtedly it was this possibility, and not the situation of Belgium and Serbia in the last war, which Comrade Pieck had in mind. In such a war the Latvian or Lithuanian or Czechoslovak Communists will be fighting both to defend the national independence of their country and to defend the Soviet Union.

Revolutionary Position the Same

No, Norman Thomas, the Communists have not abandoned their revolutionary positions. The slogan in all wars fought for imperialist predatory ends remains the slogan of Lenin and the Bolsheviks: transform the imperialist war into civil war for the overthrow of capitalism. The Communist International, speaking through Wilhelm Pieck, the comrade-in-arms of Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Thaelmann, shows that it is a living, revolutionary International, not by repeating generalized slogans, but by developing those concrete tactics that facilitate the struggle against war and, should it break out, the transformation of imperialist war into civil war for the destruction of capitalism.

Tomorrow's article: The question of democracy, fascism and the united front—a continuation of the reply to Norman Thomas.

WHAT'S ON

Philadelphia, Pa.

Angelo Herndon Defense Picnic, Sunday, August 25th, at Claus Farm. Angelo Herndon, main speaker. Tug of War, Pie Eating Contest, a short play on the Georgia Chain Gang. Prizes to winner. Direction: Take Frankford El, change to Car 59, go to Rhawn St., or take Car 50, change for Car 26, go to Rhawn St.

Local 50 United Shoe & L. W. Union invite all to huge Trade Union Picnic Sunday, August 18th at Beechwood