
“Have We a Country to Defend?”

Letter to the Editor of the *New York Call*,

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by William M. Feigenbaum

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Editor of *The Call*:

I would like to add a word to the “Have we a country to defend?” controversy. Dogmatists like Edward Lindgren and M.D. Graubard employ the easiest method possible of reasoning. They work up a little formula, and apply that formula to whatever there is up for discussion.



Thus, axiom: The capitalist class owns the nation; hence, it owns everything within the nation; hence, the working class owns nothing within that nation; hence if another nation comes along, the workers have not the slightest interest in the quarrel, as it is a matter of indifference to them who exploits them; hence, we are not interested in a war of defense, even if the war is like that of Belgium in 1914, with literal destruction of the actual homes of the workers. (I can hear sneers. Homes! The workers have no homes.) Hence, we do not care, and we have no interest in repelling

invasion. Which was to have been proved, which is English for Q.E.D.

This reads excellently, but there are flaws in the reasoning. The poor worker — no matter how poor — HAS a home. It may be a few poor rooms in a tenement. It may be a shack in a mining camp. But he has a home, and the few sticks of furniture that he has purchased with so much sacrifice, the few ornaments, the few dishes, mean more in actual life stuff to him than all the palaces of millionaires, who have homes in every summer and winter resort in the land.

And, further, to say that there is no difference between the exploitation of German workers and Russian workers, and American and Japanese workers, is simply to write oneself down as an ass. And to say that it makes no difference who exploits us — Germans or Japs or Americans — is to write oneself down as an imbecile.

I don't want to be exploited at all. I don't want to have any capitalist class rule me. But we have capitalism NOW, and millions of us have come here as refugees from other capitalisms in other countries. The methods differ. I could not stand the diet of a Chinese coolie for one minute; and I suppose that the Chinese could not stand a

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New York sweatshop for a moment. The capitalist system that each country has developed is adapted as to details to each country and to each people. British workers would never stand for an "efficiency" system, but they stand for wages so low that it is a wonder that they live on them. To substitute Japanese exploitation for American exploitation, for instance, is a matter of terrific importance.

I am an anti-militarist, and I take the pacifist position; but not because of the cowardly stand that these worthies take: cowardly mentally, I mean, not physically. I take that stand because, although I see great harm in a (hypothetical and improbable) invasion and occupation of this nation by another nation, I see far more harm in international war. It is a choice of evils, and I see far more evil in the "civil peace," the conscription, the suppression of freedom, and the retarding of our revolutionary movement than good in fighting bitterly to defend our nation. Not that I love America and American institutions less, but that I love Socialism more.

It is unutterable cant to speak glibly of the workers having nothing. I venture to guess that Meyer D. Graubard would be the first to fight

against anyone taking his property from him. I venture the guess that Edward Lindgren would not let me take his watch, and that he feels a deep property interest in the late lamented caravan and the physical equipment thereunto appertaining.

Let us not be fools. We have a fine case against international war. Let us not spoil our perfectly good case by asinine "arguments."

Our great fight is against capitalism. Anything that hamstring us in that fight we are opposed to. And international war impedes us in that fight. So we are against international war, even if it takes the plausible form of "self-defense."

Is that not good enough reason, without spinning fine theological webs of pseudo-reasoning to back up our position?

Or, if I may venture a guess, is it because you are not happy unless you take a sideswipe at *The Call* and certain men whom you happen not to like, even at the risk of making fools of yourselves?

Fraternally yours,

W.M. Feigenbaum.

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