

“We Need Not Be Pessimistic . . .”

Earl Browder speaks on the middle class and its stakes in the war. He foresees a socialist reorganization of Europe. And “an America of the people at last.”

On June 12 Earl Browder and James Ford, Communist candidates for President and Vice President, spoke on the subject of “The Middle Class and the War Crisis” under the auspices of NEW MASSES. Below we publish Browder’s speech. In subsequent issues we will present his answers to questions asked at the meeting, and Ford’s address.—THE EDITORS.

MR. CHAIRMAN and friends: When Joe North two weeks ago asked me to speak at a NEW MASSES meeting about the middle class and the world crisis, I immediately accepted the invitation and set frantically to work preparing a speech. But in the last couple of days in reading the newspapers, I became more and more dissatisfied with my speech and this afternoon I stuck the speech into a drawer of my desk and decided that instead of making a speech I would come down and talk a little bit.

America has the strongest class divisions in the world and it is least conscious of them. But whatever our lack of consciousness of the class nature of our society, the middle class and the working classes alike are going to realize that the world that we have known in the past is disappearing before our eyes. It is destroying itself. The news from Europe is so shocking that even those of us who could foresee the awful consequences of the logical development of the imperialist world system find ourselves somewhat benumbed by the rapid succession of the blows of the old world tumbling about our ears.

In America we are now being invited to join that mad game in Europe. The invitations, which a few weeks ago were still coming only from the less experienced, already come from the chief executive of the nation. President Roosevelt’s speech the night before last from Charlottesville practically was a declaration putting the US into the world war. What it lacked in that respect was due to the formality needed by the constitutional provision that war must be declared by Congress.

The middle classes of America together with the working class masses have displayed a stubborn lack of enthusiasm for this war. I have been through two war periods myself. I was quite a youngster at the time of the Spanish-American war but I can remember it quite clearly. I was not quite so young during the last world war. And I can remember that much more clearly. In the previous wars, regardless of the manipulations behind the scenes that threw the country into the war, the ruling classes succeeded in rousing great mass enthusiasm for the war. There is no such enthusiasm in America for this war. And in order to slip this country, step by step, into the war, they have had to resort to the most foul deceptions. Each step leading America

into the war was offered to the country as one of the means of staying out of the war. And even today they are trying to wring the last drop of profit out of this deception with the promise that America won’t have to go to war.

War today is what they call a “total” war. There isn’t such a thing as halfway in or halfway out. America’s middle classes, as well as working class, may just as well make up their minds to that, if they don’t want to be thrown head over heels into the war. If you don’t want America to go through the dreadful experience that Europe is now enduring, you had better wake up and understand what is going on. Either this country is going to be all in or all out and we would be better off if we stayed all out.

The war is being sold to the middle class on a promise that through entering the war we are going to preserve our way of life. The middle class is supposed to have found a comfortable way worthy of preservation. But the entrance of the US into this war, no matter what the outcome in terms of the victory of one side or another, is inevitably going to wipe out forever that old “comfortable” middle class way of life. That is finished by this war and if America gets into it, it is finished for the American middle class too. If the middle class wants to preserve a while longer its way of life, it better wake up to the fact that there is only one way it can be done: Keep out of this war.

This war is the death struggle of the capitalist system. If America is so deeply involved in the death struggle of European imperialism that it cannot avoid jumping into the middle of it, participating in it, America will be taking the hard way, the most painful way to the future.

We need not be pessimistic about the future of the world at all. It is a painful thing to have to go through this period in which the dominant social and economic system is dissolving about us. It is a very destructive experience. But however destructive it may be, it cannot destroy the human race. It cannot destroy its intellectual achievements, it cannot destroy the tenacity, the determination and courage of the masses and that greatest of achievements, the knowledge that a better world is possible and the knowledge of how to bring about that better world.

The war in Europe has definitely placed on the historical order of the day the socialist revolution. There is no other road whereby peace can be restored to Europe and the life of the peoples of Europe preserved. Peace can be brought to Europe only through the dethroning of the ruling classes of each and every belligerent country without exception. War-devastated Europe can be rebuilt only

if the yoke of capitalist profitmaking is removed from the neck of the European laboring people, and their creative ability is released; and the only way this is possible is through a socialist reorganization of Europe.

American capitalism is supposed to be stronger than that of Europe. It has achieved a higher development, so much so that America is practically equal in its productive forces to the rest of the capitalist world. American capitalist spokesmen and ideologists were of the opinion that the fate of this country is not necessarily and immediately tied up with the fate of the European systems. They used to tell us that the American way of life was superior and more stable than that of Europe. But these very same spokesmen are the ones today who come to us and tell us that the only way the American way of life can be preserved is by throwing America into the bloody imperialist mess in Europe. I would warn the gentlemen who give this message to America that they are accomplishing more in a few weeks than the Communist Party has been able to accomplish in twenty years in convincing the American people that we have got to think about a new social system for America. Because, if it is true that the only way to preserve the existing system in our country is through participation in this war, the American people, wanting no part in the war, are going to look for a system that will enable America to stay at peace.

Well, I should not object when the gentlemen of the bourgeoisie take over the tasks of the Communist Party in convincing the people that we have to have socialism in order to have peace. But I also know that these same gentlemen of the capitalist class, no matter how big a majority of the American people want peace, are going to carry us into war against the will of the people if they are permitted to do it.

Regardless of how big a majority of the American people would determine, as they will determine, that they want peace, even if it is necessary to establish socialism in America, if this is the only way we can have peace—these ruling class gentlemen will no more permit the people to make democratic decisions on socialism than they are now permitting a democratic decision on the question of war. They are going to give you no opportunity to vote on this question under the formal democracy of the American Constitution. They are first going to present you with an accomplished fact. And everyone who votes “no” is already being notified in advance that he is a traitor to his country. We are going to have a Hitler plebiscite on this question.

As a matter of fact in the last few weeks we have traveled so fast on the road of fascism in the US that it won’t take us long to

overtake and surpass Mussolini and Hitler. America always does things in a big way. And we are certainly doing things in a big way now. The destruction that has come to Europe will be brought to America too, if we permit it. I say, if we permit it.

After all, Americans have not been in the habit in their past history of allowing entrenched ruling classes and cliques to put things over on them at a crucial moment.

Looking back at some of the most critical years of our history, it looked pretty hopeless for the future of our country as far back as 1850. It is very good to recall that history again. In the last four years of the 1850's we had a situation in which our country was at the crossroads: Were we going to develop as a slave nation or a free nation? And both major traditional parties of the country were agreed that America should in the main travel along the path of slavery. The masses of America were determined to take a different path, the path of free labor, the path of bourgeois democracy, and in that determination they represented that future of America which has been realized in the last eighty-five years and has made America economically the most powerful nation in the world. But in the 1850's they faced, in all positions of power, entrenched reaction, those who were determined to make of America a slave country. Do you remember that the President of the US in that period, Buchanan, was in league with the secessionists of the South, using the office of President to prepare the destruction of the US? Do you recall that the Congress in both houses was just as overwhelmingly in control of the slave powers as the present Congress is controlled by those who are directing this country into the imperialist war? Do you remember that slave interests had complete control of the Supreme Court? And when after years of civil war, in order to carry through the measures to enable them to win the war, Lincoln had to pack the Supreme Court, enlarge it sufficiently to appoint a majority to overrule the adherents of the slave power and allow the American people to take the road of free development? The American people took that road. They smashed through overwhelming obstacles, they wiped out the slave power. They united America.

Lincoln is great in American history because he was the leader of the nation in that fight. He entered into that struggle as a proponent of compromise. He was determined to avoid the struggle, to compromise the struggle. It was the slave powers that forced him. Only after years of civil war and as a war measure did Lincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation. But who can doubt today that, although Lincoln was not conscious in the first stages of the war of the tremendous cause that he was leading, the course of history and the will of the American people demanded the destruction and abolition of the slave system in America, even though this was carried through by a hesitating and reluctant instrument?

The American people can meet the present crisis with the same effectiveness as they met

that crisis, the struggle against slavery. The present crisis is a deeper one. It is not only a national crisis, it is an international crisis. It is not only a crisis arising from one phase of the economic system, it is a crisis that goes to the very foundation of the social and economic system of the world except the Soviet Union, the only country that stands outside of this crisis.

In so far as the crisis is bound to grow more far reaching and more all-embracing, it requires determination and courage in order to meet and overcome it. Regardless of the complete lack of leadership from the traditional dominant parties, regardless of the fact that these parties are in the hands of the enemies of the people who are ready to sacrifice the people in this war, if only they can maintain their system of profits—regardless of these facts, allow me to express confidence that the American people are going to solve the crisis. And if they don't succeed in preventing the warmaking capitalists from involving America in the war, they are certainly going to bring America out of the war, free from the rule of the warmakers, and it will be an America of the people at last.

EARL BROWDER.

Gibraltar of the Gulf

Key West, Fla.

REHOUSING, \$650,000 worth, is at last coming to this southernmost city, which six years ago handed itself over to government relief agencies for rehabilitation. First the FERA and then the WPA had their fling, in what was regarded as the Nation's Social Experiment No. 1. The idea has been to convert Key West—formerly an industrial cigar, sponge, and fishing center—into a self-supporting tourist resort. The relief programs include everything from muralizing bar rooms to beachcombing. Owners of establishments catering to tourists are accumulating handsome profits, while half the population remains unemployed.

Key West has always needed rehousing. More than half of its houses are untenable according to ordinary standards. Some time ago the several owners of the houses seized the opportunity of letting the government demolish many of them. The occupants were forced to double up with relatives or move to Tampa, where living conditions are decidedly worse.



Soriano