

American Capitalist Hegemony, the National Emergency, and "Isolationism"

(Message to the Convention*)

by William Z. Foster

OUR DRAFT RESOLUTION, and Comrade Gus Hall's report presenting it to the Convention, represent a strong and correct political line. They should receive the hearty and unanimous endorsement of the Convention. In these remarks, I wish to comment upon only three points in the Resolution and the Report.

These three points deal with recent significant political developments. Lenin taught us, upon many occasions, that one of the basic requirements for solid Communist leadership is to be able to single out promptly major new political developments, to analyze them theoretically, and to work out and apply practical policies accordingly. The great importance of new major political developments is that they are decisive indicators of future general trends that are beginning to take shape. Unless we are quick to grasp the meaning of such developments we run the danger of lagging seriously behind the course of political events.

The three questions upon which I want to make a few general remarks are: First, the dominant position, or hegemony, of the United States in world capitalism; second, the present "state of national emergency" in the United States; and third, the growth of so-called "iso-

lationism" in this country. In my remarks I shall not attempt to deal in detail with these very important questions. I shall, in addition to stressing their deep significance, merely point out a few high points to which we should give particular attention.

AMERICAN DOMINATION OF WORLD CAPITALISM

First, with regard to the important question of the hegemony of the United States over world capitalism. In my recent article in *Political Affairs* elaborating this question of U.S. domination, which has become especially obvious with the development of the Korean war, I indicated a number of key points which we should bear in mind. Among them are:

(a) American hegemony over the capitalist world is a product of the general crisis of capitalism. The United States could not possibly have established even its present limited degree of domination over world capitalism were it not for the fact that all the other big capitalist powers have either been smashed, as Germany, Japan, and Italy, or

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have been gravely weakened, as Great Britain and France, by the war ravages and the general crisis of capitalism.

(b) The relatively dominant position of American imperialism in world capitalism is not due, as the mouthpieces of Wall Street assert, to any "exceptional" or inherently superior qualities of capitalism in the United States. Far from it. American capitalism has achieved its present relatively strong position primarily because, strategically situated geographically, it was able to escape the destruction wrought by the two world wars, and even to profit by these holocausts. American imperialism itself is organically the same as capitalism all over the world, and is subject to all the laws of the development and decay of the capitalist system. In fact, with its unhealthy economic situation and its desperate international political situation, it is already hopelessly entangled in the bottomless swamp of the general capitalist crisis.

(c) The development of the capitalist hegemony of American imperialism does not signify the advent of "ultra-imperialism," "organized capitalism," or "progressive capitalism," as advocated by the renegades Kautsky, Bukharin, and Browder. On the contrary, itself a product of the general crisis, American capitalist hegemony greatly deepens that crisis, by sharpening the various capitalist contradictions and by creating new ones. It is not the cure for the general crisis, but a worsening of it. The most serious of the many capitalist contra-

dictions, either created or sharpened by American capitalist hegemony, is that caused by the ruthless attempt of the United States to force willy-nilly into war the war-weary, war-resisting peoples in Europe. This contradiction has become so acute from the resistance of these peoples that it might well explode the whole anti-Soviet military alliance now being so assiduously cultivated by American imperialism.

(d) The onerous conditions U.S. capitalist world hegemony imposes upon the people of other lands has brought in its wake a powerful resistance movement in all countries. This is because its ruthless policies of warlike expansionism rouses masses all over the capitalist world to act to guard their menaced living standards, to protect their civil liberties, to defend their national independence, and to preserve world peace. To join up, on a united-front basis, with these alarmed and aroused masses all over the capitalist world is a basic task of all Communist Parties, including our own.

(e) We must especially realize that American capitalist world hegemony constitutes a grave war danger which must be fought resolutely all over the world. This hegemony, itself a product of the general capitalist crisis, tends to further increase that crisis by sharpening many contradictions among the capitalist powers and by provoking vast masses of the peoples to enter actively into the struggle against fascism and war. It would be a grave mistake to consider that

the international anti-Soviet alliance now headed by the United States is unimportant and that it will automatically fall apart because of its own inner weaknesses. On the contrary, despite all its weaknesses, and its ramshackle character generally, this alliance represents a dangerous consolidation of reactionary capitalist forces for war. We must understand this.

THE "STATE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY"

Second, a few remarks on the general question of the proclamation of "the state of national emergency" in the United States. This is also a matter of basic importance and we must give it our closest and most urgent attention. Among the major points in this matter, I would like to signalize the following for our consideration:

(a) We must become keenly aware that the so-called state of national emergency, by laying the foundation of a war economy and by giving the President unprecedented powers, has qualitatively altered the general political situation. All the struggles of the people, for wages and price controls, for the rights of the Negro people, in defense of the legality of the Communist Party, against fascism and war, etc., will feel the weight of this changed political condition. It could also definitely affect the next national election. We, therefore, should carefully appraise the whole complex situation. In doing this, we must be on guard, on the one hand, against the Right danger,

which will see little or nothing new or important in the political changes brought about by the "state of national emergency" and, on the other hand, also of the "Left" danger, which will tend to conclude that this so-called state of emergency virtually establishes fascism in this country, which is manifestly not the case.

(b) As for the "state of national emergency" itself, its importance is that it definitely increases the danger of war. This is because it has given the warmonger President Truman vastly enhanced dictatorial powers; it has tripled the government expenditures for war preparations; it has given warlike monopoly capital an even firmer control over the government and the industrial system; and it has facilitated the cultivation of a wild war hysteria through the many propaganda organs of the bourgeoisie. It is the beginning of a war economy. The "state of national emergency" grew out of the national shock from the spectacular defeat of the U.S. forces in Korea. With large masses of the people (including the capitalists themselves), excited and confused over the unexpected news from Korea, the cunning leaders of Wall Street, with the complete acquiescence of the trade-union bureaucracy, were able to take advantage of the situation and greatly to intensify the offensive of American imperialism in all spheres on the home front, by putting this whole country on an emergency basis.

(c) The Wall Street politicians, journalists, and labor leaders are

trying to force the American people to accept the present so-called state of emergency, with all its spirit of reaction and intensification of the war danger, as a matter of course, as simply a logical development of the "cold war." But we Communists, and the masses of the people so far as we can influence them, should take a totally different view of the state of emergency. We must see it for what it actually is, a monstrous infringement upon the liberties of the people, a dangerous stride toward fascism, and a grave war provocation. We must fight it aggressively in this full realization. We are opposed to all preparations for imperialist war, and the greatest of all such war preparations was the proclamation of the "state of national emergency," as this has enormously stimulated the forces that are making for war.

(d) We must be very conscious of the deep political danger in the far-reaching dictatorial powers which President Truman has seized for himself in proclaiming the so-called state of national emergency. The general effect of this arbitrary action has been to clip the powers of Congress, to weaken the Bill of Rights, and increase the power of the national Executive. As things now stand some of the more important of Mr. Truman's dictatorial powers are the following:

The President has made himself into a sort of czar over industry, with the authority to direct production into war channels, to allocate scarce materials, to establish price controls, and generally to super-

vised agricultural and industrial production. He can also freeze wages, lengthen the workday and work-week, forbid strikes and otherwise dictate the conditions under which the workers, must work.

He also has in his hands the enormous thought-control apparatus that has been building up all over the country since the end of the war—F.B.I., "loyalty" test organs, Un-American committees, and all the rest of it. Under the Taft-Hartley Act he can throw recalcitrant strikers into jail, and under the Smith and McCarran Acts he can put the advocates of peace into concentration camps and penitentiaries.

He has supervision over the spending of the gigantic national budget, which in the coming year will reach the astronomical figure of over 70 billion dollars. This fact in itself gives him enormous power.

He has the right to appoint the new host of war-preparation officials who will operate under the war economy. Congress can do little more than to rubber-stamp the President's arbitrary appointments.

He is the big boss of American diplomacy. The Senate can intervene directly in foreign policy only when there is a question of passing upon a formal treaty. For the rest, Mr. Truman is in full charge personally, with the help of his obedient State Department. At present he is exercising his dangerously autocratic powers in this respect, at the risk of precipitating a new world war, by arrogantly rejecting the eminently fair proposals of the

Chinese and Russians for a settlement of the Korean war.

Most important of all, he has seized for himself, actually if not formally, the power of precipitating war. Mr. Truman, upon his own responsibility, plunged the United States into the disastrous Korean war, without even a shred of authorization beforehand from Congress. He has the right, under his dictatorial powers, to drop the atom bomb in Korea and China and thus to extend that struggle endlessly. Moreover, he is in a position to develop a third world war if and when he and his Wall Street masters should see fit to do so. To accomplish this, all he would have to do would be, by his diplomatic arrogance, to create such a tense international situation that about all that would remain for Congress to do, if even that, would be to endorse Mr. Truman's "fact-accomplished" war by a formal war declaration. To a militant imperialist such as the President, this war power is highly dangerous.

(e) All these unprecedented powers, however menacing, do not make President Truman into a fascist dictator. They do, nevertheless, constitute a long stride toward fascism in this country, another of the many measures of recent years to establish a police-state in this country. They comprise the most dictatorial powers ever exercised by any U.S. President—and, consequently, by the reactionary clique of capitalists whom Mr. Truman represents and obeys. In the face of this dangerous usurpation of dictatorial powers, we must make a

vigorous appeal to the people to fight for the re-establishment and strengthening of democratic controls and procedures. This is a decisive political task.

(f) The "state of national emergency," like world capitalist hegemony and the disillusionment over the Korean war, will arouse the mass peace forces in this country. The working class and the toilers generally will not submit tamely to having their living standards reduced and to having new fascist-like restrictions placed upon their already very circumscribed freedoms—and all for a war program for which they obviously have very little enthusiasm. They will not accept a no-strike and shut-your-mouth program. Despite all the smothering efforts of the top trade union leadership and the Government, they will fight to defend their immediate interests. It is our task not only to give all possible aid in these daily struggles, but also to deepen them politically and to link them up with the broad struggle for peace.

THE NEW "ISOLATIONISM"

Third, a few remarks upon the final question: namely, the recent growth of "isolationism" in the United States. This development has especially been signaled by the recent speeches of former Ambassador Kennedy, and ex-President Hoover. Major points that we should bear in mind about this tendency are the following:

(a) The outburst of Kennedy-Hoover "isolationism" has been

caused by the series of serious defeats lately suffered by American foreign policy. That is, the so-called Asia First-imperialists got a heavy blow by the defeat in Korea, the arrogant MacArthur undoubtedly having felt that he was well on the road to Peiping, if not Moscow, until he ran into the revolutionary Chinese volunteers. The "Europe First" imperialists also suffered hardly less of a setback by the recent display of growing reluctance of the capitalist governments, under the peace pressure of their peoples, to follow the lead of ultra-militant American imperialism. And, finally, the atom-bomb maniacs also got a heavy reverse from the world outcry of protest that followed President Truman's threat to use the bomb in the Korean War. This three-phased defeat greatly disoriented American jingo-militarists.

(b) The Kennedy-Hoover "isolationists" would apply the hard lessons of these serious defeats by shortening somewhat the imperialist lines. They would get out of Korea, at least for the time being; they would condition their aid to Europe, and, as Hoover indicated, they would place less reliance upon the atom-bomb. An important feature of their proposals is their attempt to blackmail Europe into making more active efforts at militarization by threatening to cut off all American economic and military assistance.

(c) This Kennedy-Hoover "isolationism" does not imply that American imperialism is abandoning its policy of aggression, expan-

sionism, and world conquest. The reverse is true. Hoover is quite as much of an imperialist as Truman or MacArthur. Although he would take into consideration the hard defeats of recent months, he would not, as he would wish the gullible to believe, simply concentrate upon a defense, so-called, of the Western Hemisphere. As before, his policy for the United States would remain an aggressive expansionism into Europe and Asia, with the ultimate end in view of an all-out war against the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies in Europe and Asia.

(d) The sharp disputes now going on among the bourgeois politicians do not mean, therefore, that the Republican Party has adopted a peace policy while that of the Democratic Party remains one of war. These disputes are only over questions of tactics, not over the main line of American imperialism. They do indicate, however, the growing bankruptcy of American foreign policy and the ensuing moods of confusion, pessimism, and desperation in American capitalist ranks. These inner-capitalist quarrels, even if they are only over secondary questions, nevertheless are very important and we must pay close attention to them.

(e) The most important thing for us to understand, however, about the outburst of Kennedy-Hoover so-called "isolationism" is that it is an attempt to use demagogically the growing peace sentiments among the masses of the people. The Korean war, with its highly disillusioning military defeat and its

heavy casualty lists, has come as a great shock to the American people. They are getting their first bitter taste of the murderous and futile war that Wall Street is organizing, and they do not at all like the taste. They distinctly do not relish the idea of American boys dying in remote parts of the world for causes in which they have no interest. They would undoubtedly welcome the return of the American troops to this country, where they belong, and they are in a mood to support slogans to this effect. We must draw a sharp line of distinction, therefore, between this peace sentiment of the masses, and the phony, imperialist "isolationism" of Hoover and his like. The growing anti-war spirit of the masses greatly broadens the basis for the peace movement. We must, at all costs, take this seriously into consideration in our struggles for peace.

The three recent major political developments that I have been dealing with: namely, American world capitalist hegemony, the proclamation of a "state of national emergency" in the United States, and the growth of a new American "isolationism," are not in themselves isolated phenomena. They are all tied together in one general political pattern. They act and inter-act upon one another. American capitalist hegemony worsens the general crisis of capitalism, and sharpens the war danger. The "national state of emergency," itself a product of alarm and panic, in turn also intensifies the crisis and the danger of war. The growth of a broad mass peace movement, is the

natural reaction of the people against the fruitless and adventurist military policies now being carried out by American imperialism.

THE HEART OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The present key to U.S. foreign policy is to be found in the frustration and desperation of the big capitalists and their hangers-on, brought about by the hopeless decline of world capitalism and the irresistible rise of world Socialism. Although repudiating the Marxist-Leninist analysis of the general crisis of capitalism, the capitalist spokesmen nevertheless know that their own system is desperately sick and they do not know how to cure it. They are thrown into deep alarm and panic by such developments as the great war record and tremendous postwar recovery of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the People's Democracies in Eastern Europe, the historic victory of the Chinese People's Republic, the chronic sickness of capitalism in many countries, and, now, the frightening exposure of capitalist weakness in Korea and throughout Asia.

Their panic and alarm are impelling the Wall Street capitalists on to the fatal gamble of another great war. They seek to accomplish by world war what they have hitherto not been able to achieve through policies of economic penetration, political intimidation, atom-bomb diplomacy, and the cultivation of civil war in China, Greece, and Korea. This is why,

with their "state of national emergency," they are trying so feverishly to fascize and militarize the United States, and also, through their domination of the United Nations, to rush the capitalist countries of the world into an anti-Soviet war.

But this world war, were Wall Street able to launch it, would be even more disastrous for capitalism than the "cold war" which American imperialism has been deliberately waging, with such unfavorable results, ever since the end of World War II. Warlike capitalism could never mobilize the latent fighting strength of its peoples, comparable to the strength of Socialism fighting for its existence and the right to grow. Jim Crow, the Taft-Hartley slave-labor Act, the McCarran police-state Law, General Motors' billion dollar dividends, Wall Street's drive toward world domination, however demagogically masked with pretenses of peace and democracy, is a poor program indeed, around which to rally the toiling masses to suffer, fight and die. Ideologically confused soldiers fighting for decadent capitalism, no matter how heavily armed, would prove no match, if unfortunately it should come to the test, for the revolutionary soldiers of Socialism fighting clear-headedly for a new and free society. An anti-Socialist third world war would bring about the end of the obsolete capitalist system.

Socialism is both inevitable and invincible. It is bound to come, war or no war. We Communists are tireless defenders of peace, and we are unshakable opponents of war.

This is because, unlike the capitalists, we do not need war to advance our cause. We are against war because it would needlessly and brutally slaughter scores of millions of the toiling masses and it would ruinously devastate the cities and industries of the world. It would make the work of Socialist reconstruction immeasurably more difficult. We do not consider war to be inevitable. The American people, peace-loving and democratic, have the power to halt the Wall Street warmongers if they will but make their peace will felt. We are also firmly convinced of the possibility of the peaceful co-existence of capitalism and Socialism in the world.

THE NEED FOR A STRONG COMMUNIST PARTY

Our main resolution and the reports to this Convention, laying down detailed policies and evaluating our past successes and failures, give a clear line to our Party for its work in carrying out its central, all-decisive task, the fight for peace. And the basic key to success in all this is a strong Communist Party. Never in our history have we had such urgent need as now for a broad and disciplined mass Marxist-Leninist Party. This means that we must build our Party, however great the difficulty. Especially must we fight against all attempts to weaken the Party whether these come in the shape of violent attacks from the outside, or of destructive liquidatory trends from within. While we must be

doubly vigilant now against spies and all other anti-Party elements in our ranks, our major attention must be directed toward bringing into our Party those splendid workers who want to fight for peace, and toward raising the ideological level of the Party's membership.

As we are holding this historic Convention of our Party under full fire from the forces of reaction, the bourgeoisie and its Social-Democratic lackeys are howling in fright and consternation all over the world, and especially in the main citadel of world capitalism, the United States. The exploiters are in mortal fear that their beloved capitalist system, under which they have so long robbed and oppressed the peoples of the world, is doomed. And they are very right in this conclusion. Capitalism is on its way to historical oblivion.

Civilization itself, however, is not

dying, as the mouthpieces of capitalism would have the people believe. On the contrary, a new and higher civilization is being born. Capitalism, with its sickening mess of exploitation, destitution, illiteracy, superstition, and war, is in fatal crisis, and the new order of Socialism, under which man will flourish as never before, is taking its place. The intense crises and struggles of the present period signify the death agony of capitalism and the birth pangs of oncoming Socialism. The peoples of the world are making a gigantic leap forward. We Communists are fighting on the side of history. This is why we face the situation calmly, clear-headedly, and unafraid, amidst all the capitalist storm of frenzy, despair, and desperation. The future belongs to the peoples, with the Communists at their head.