
IMPERIALIST WAR AND "DEMOCRATIC" DEMAGOGY

BY GIL GREEN

WITH the extension of the theater of war to the Scandinavian and Low Countries, the imperialist carnage has entered a new and bloodier stage, in which the attempts to involve the United States as a belligerent will become even more brazen. This can be seen in the attempts to conjure up before the masses the nightmare of a Hitler victory and to misdirect their democratic and anti-fascist sentiments in order to weaken their resistance to becoming engulfed in the imperialist war.

The fact that 96 per cent of the American people want to stay out of the war does not offer in itself a guarantee that the warmongers may not succeed. For, despite this great anti-war sentiment, the Roosevelt Administration has already committed this country and its resources to the Allied imperialist camp. And it must be admitted that while larger masses view the foreign and domestic policies of the Administration with increasing concern, millions who want no part of the war do not yet see clearly that the Government's course is leading this country into the war.

The American bourgeoisie has not yet succeeded in selling the Euro-

pean war to the American masses as a holy crusade, but it has influenced many in the belief that an Allied imperialist victory is to be desired. Many workers who have no earthly use for the British Empire and its Tory ruling class, none the less honestly believe that a British victory would guarantee democratic rule.

This influence of pro-Allied war propaganda consciously disseminated by the Roosevelt Administration, the bourgeois press and the Social-Democratic lackeys of imperialism; this fallacy of the "lesser evil" is the hole in the dike through which are pouring the flood-waters of war involvement.

I.

A German imperialist victory would mean continuation and extension of tyrannical rule, national oppression, and capitalist exploitation. It would only bring new imperialist wars in its train. Of this there can be no doubt.

But would an Allied imperialist victory bring different results? Would it bring a lasting or just peace? Would it end fascism? Would it maintain or strengthen

democracy—even limited bourgeois democracy—in Germany and in Europe as a whole? These are the questions that need an answer; for, those who contend that an Allied victory would mean these things either willfully mislead the masses or betray a palpable ignorance of the causes and nature of the present conflict and of fascism.

The present European war is an inevitable product of capitalist society, particularly in its imperialist stage, when powerful monopolies and banks assume a dominant role. The *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, tracing the historical development of imperialism and the basic causes of imperialist conflicts, states:

"Finance capital became master in the capitalist states. Finance capital demanded new markets, the seizure of new colonies, new fields for the export of capital, new sources of raw material.

"By the end of the nineteenth century the whole territory of the globe had been divided up among the capitalist states. Yet in the era of imperialism the development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly and by leaps: some countries, which previously held a foremost position, now develop their industry at a relatively low rate, while others, which were formerly backward, overtake and outstrip them by rapid leaps. The relative economic and military strength of the imperialist states was undergoing a change. There arose a striving for a redivision of the world, and the struggle for this redivision made imperialist wars inevitable. The war of 1914 was a war for the redivision of the world and of spheres of influence.

All the imperialist states had long been preparing for it. The imperialists of all countries were responsible for the war." (pp. 160-61.)

From 1870 to 1900 alone, Britain added 4,754,000 square miles of territory and 88,000,000 people to her gigantic empire. From 1884 to 1900, France acquired 3,583,580 square miles and a population of 36,553,000. Germany, one of the last of the great European states to become a modern industrial power, got the leavings of the robber spoils, and in this same period gained 1,026,220 square miles and a population of 16,687,100.*

German imperialism, in striving for new markets, for new fields for the export of capital, and for new sources of raw material, was therefore at a disadvantage as against her older imperialist rivals, especially her main European rival, Great Britain. For there were no "unoccupied" territories left for her to occupy, as Britain had done a century before, since the whole world was by now divided among the imperialist giants. She could find her place in the imperialist sun only by seeking a redivision of the territories of the globe in her favor. As Lenin succinctly explained in his *Imperialism*:

"For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future *only redivision* is possible; territories can only pass from one 'owner' to another, instead of passing as unowned territory to an 'owner.'" (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, p. 76.)

* Cf., Major General J. F. C. Fuller, *War and Western Civilization*, cited by R. Palme Dutt in *World Politics*, p. 32, International Publishers, New York.

That the last World War was just such a conflict for a redivision of the territories of the globe, that it was a predatory imperialist war in which moral issues played no part whatsoever, except as demagoguery, was admitted by the bourgeoisie itself as soon as the war was over. Woodrow Wilson, on his return from Versailles, told the American people: "This war, in its inception was a commercial and industrial war. . . ." And we have none other than Lloyd George to thank for the admission that the present war is but a continuation of the World War of 1914-18. Nor does this latter die-hard imperialist bandit labor under any illusions as to the character of the last war, of which this is but a continuation. While still flushed with the victory of Versailles, Lloyd George thus summed up the "achievements" of four years of unprecedented slaughter:

"The truth is that we have got our way. We have got most of the things we set out to get."

Was he by any chance referring to democracy? To peace? Oh no! For these were not the things the Allied imperialists had set out to get. They were after far more tangible and prosaic objectives, as we can see from the following illuminating passage:

"The German navy has been handed over, the German mercantile shipping has been handed over, and the German colonies have been given up. One of our chief trade competitors has been most seriously crippled, and our Allies are about to become her biggest

creditors. *This is no small achievement.*" *

Thus did the war leader of British imperialism join hands with Woodrow Wilson in admitting, after the event, the imperialist, predatory character of the last war and of its "peace."

This Allied victory, and its imperialist "peace," together with the betrayal of the German revolution by Social-Democracy, laid the basis for the rise of German fascism and the victory of Hitler. German imperialism, which entered the last World War to redivide the territories of the globe in its own interests, lost the war. Instead of winning new colonies, new markets, and spheres of influence, it lost its mercantile fleet and its former world markets, colonies and spheres of influence. Instead of winning war booty at the expense of British, French and American capital, it was reduced to a second-rate imperialist power, German territory was annexed, and reparations to the tune of one hundred billion dollars were imposed upon the German people. Thus stripped and shackled by its imperialist victors, German capitalism could solve neither its internal nor external problems. Germany became the weakest link in the world imperialist chain.

There was but one basic solution for the German masses: social revolution. But the Allied imperialists who were so anxious to destroy the power of their German imperialist rival were horrified at the prospect

* From Lord Riddell's *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After*. Cited in *World Politics* by R. Palme Dutt, p. 58 (Our emphasis—G.G.)

of the destruction of German capitalism. More than the devil himself they feared the German proletarian revolution; for, as Lloyd George put it, "If Germany is seized by the Communists, Europe will follow." (House of Commons, November 28, 1934.) A similar reactionary class policy motivated all American foreign affairs, as proved by an assertion of Herbert Hoover, in 1921:

"The whole of American policy during the liquidation of the Armistice was to contribute everything it could to prevent Europe from going Bolshevik." (Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, Vol. I, p. 174.)

(Yes, everything, including the sending of American troops in the undeclared war of intervention against the new-born Socialist Republic.)

Immediately following the war, the Allied imperialists placed their faith in German Social-Democracy and gave it full support. When it became obvious that Social-Democracy could no longer keep the German masses in check, especially following the disastrous effects upon Germany of the world economic crisis which broke out in 1929 decisive sections of British and American finance capital threw their support to the fascists. Hitler came to power with the financial support of the Bank of England and with the political assistance of 10 Downing Street.

German fascism is not therefore the product of any individual's lust for power, as some would have us believe, or an expression of the "barbaric German people," as the

British arch warmonger Alfred Duff Cooper has so cynically declared. It is the product of capitalism in crisis and decay, of the reactionary bourgeoisie unable to rule except through a terroristic regime at home and an aggressive imperialist policy abroad.

Lenin, in his monumental classic, *State and Revolution*, taught that under normal conditions the bourgeoisie prefers to rule through a parliamentary republic because "a democratic republic is the best possible shell for capitalism." But for German capitalism this was no longer the "best possible shell." Referring to the rise of German fascism, Comrade Stalin said in 1934 that it was:

"A symptom of the fact that the bourgeoisie is already unable to rule by the old methods of parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy, and, as a consequence, is compelled in its home policy to resort to terroristic methods of administration. . . ."*

Hitler did not *win* power either by an electoral plurality or by force of arms. Power was *given* him by the reactionary German bourgeoisie through the instrumentality of Hindenburg, with the approval of British finance capital, and with the connivance and compliance of the leaders of German Social-Democracy, who, by their theory of the "lesser evil," paved the way for the victory of fascism.

Hitler came to power to achieve two objectives: to crush the Ger-

* Report to the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in *Socialism Victorious*, p. 12, International Publishers, New York.

man working class movement and to win back for German imperialism the position it had lost during the World War. Even in respect to this second objective Hitler had the cooperation of British finance capital. The British ruling class had not suffered a change of heart nor was it ready to share world power with its imperialist rival. Britain permitted Germany to re-arm, gave her loans and credits, encouraged her to one aggressive act after another with the sole objective of turning her against the Soviet Union. British imperialism hoped thereby to crush the Land of Socialism and at the same time to weaken its own German imperialist rival through a protracted war, without soiling its own lily-white hands or endangering its empire.

As the whole world knows today, Hitler went back on his original promise to Chamberlain. This is what makes Hitler a scoundrel in the eyes of British imperialism; for had there been honor among thieves this could not have happened! Hitler changed his mind because he realized that war against the Soviet Union would be the height of folly on his part. The Soviet Union had become the strongest industrial power in Europe. By its successful policy of collectivization it had destroyed the last economic foundation for class divisions within its borders. By ruthlessly liquidating the Trotskyite-Bukharinite scum of spies, traitors and agents-provocateurs, it had destroyed the "Fifth Column" of foreign powers.

British imperialism was now to reap what it had sowed. It had sowed the wind and reaped a

whirlwind. By its anti-Soviet, anti-working class policies, it only succeeded in rehabilitating its old, once defeated, imperialist rival.

It was then confronted with the alternative of sharing world power with Germany or fighting the imperialist war of 1914-18 all over again, but under less favorable conditions. It chose the latter.

II

Those who are foolhardy enough to argue the necessity of an Allied imperialist victory should therefore be prepared to answer the following questions: Will it end the struggle for world markets, spheres of influence, and sources of raw material? Will it solve the basic contradiction of capitalism, the irreconcilable disparity between the social character of production and the private ownership of the means of production? Will it abolish the general crisis of world capitalism, which expresses itself in more frequent and prolonged cyclical economic crises, in mass unemployment, in imperialist wars? And if an Allied imperialist victory does none of these, what sane reason is there for believing that the basic roots of fascism, of reactionary oppressive regimes generally, will either be weakened or destroyed? What reason is there for believing that any kind of durable peace—not to speak of a just peace—can be achieved?

In seeking answers to these questions, it would be well to recall the harsh lessons learned from the last World War, which was ostensibly fought to "end all war," to "save the world for democracy,"

to put an end to "Prussian militarism." Did an Allied imperialist victory achieve these professed objectives? It only succeeded in sharpening existing class relations, intensifying imperialist rivalries, and planting the very seeds which have now blossomed forth in this second imperialist war. Well did Stalin state at the Seventeenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

"What guarantee is there that the second imperialist war will produce 'better' results . . . ? Would it not be more correct to assume that the opposite will be the case?"

All the prattle about a "just peace" (as if any peace could be just under capitalism!), about "ending Hitlerism," about a "United States of Europe," cannot obscure certain essential facts. Will Britain, if she is victorious, give away colonies, markets and spheres of influence to the vanquished imperialist rival? It would be the sheerest nonsense to believe that she would. Every imperialist power holds on to what it has while striving to ensnare and devour more. Morals do not enter into this matter. Imperialism can survive only by continual struggle for a greater and greater *monopoly* of the markets and raw materials of the globe. This is even more true today than in 1914-18. British imperialism, which has had the lion's share of the spoils, possessing the greatest empire in the world, enslaving 500,000,000 colonial people, seeks *more* markets and spheres of influence in order to pull itself out

of the economic tailspin in which it has been ever since the last World War. Is it not then folly to think in terms of imperialist magnanimity?

The *whole* capitalist world is in profound crisis. World capitalism finds it impossible to overcome the ever-growing antagonism between the expanding productive forces released by monopoly capital and the constant shrinkage of world market possibilities. This shrinkage is due to the fact that the entire globe has already been partitioned. It is due to the fact that imperialism constantly lowers the living standards of the toiling masses of both the imperialist and colonial countries; standards which have declined catastrophically since the last war because of the existence of large-scale permanent mass unemployment in all capitalist countries. But it is also due to still another factor that did not obtain in 1914. Imperialism is no longer master over the whole world. One-sixth of the surface of the globe and 180,000,000 people have been removed from the sphere of capitalist economy and imperialist rule. Two antagonistic and irreconcilable social systems now exist side by side: the world of declining capitalism and the world of advancing socialism. This struggle between the two rival social systems is the main contradiction, the main conflict in the world today.

Britain's war aims prove this. The British imperialists wish to see in Germany a regime, based on capitalism, that will subordinate itself to their policy, and complete

their plan of a march on the East. They wish Germany once more to become a spearhead against the Soviet Union, helping to destroy the Land of Socialism whose very existence world imperialism knows to be a mortal threat. Certainly, therefore, Britain would not want to add to the strength of socialism by permitting the establishment of a free working class in a socialist Germany. But if the German masses take that course none the less, as they eventually must, British imperialism would with its own hands, if possible, thrust into power a new Hitler, a new and even more brutal dictatorship over the German people.

This anti-Soviet design explains why Sir Neville Henderson in his recent book, *Failure of a Mission*, finds so much that is laudable in the Nazi regime and its leading personalities. His disagreement is solely with Nazi foreign policy—specifically with its refusal to honor the promissory note of Munich—the pledge to march against the East. That is also why Chamberlain and Churchill direct their main attacks against "Hitlerism" and not against fascism, for fascism has its "good" sides, you know!

In this connection something should be said about the "United States of Europe" panacea which has been welcomed with such alacrity in American "liberal" circles. As early as 1915, Lenin, in condemnation of Trotsky's position, pointed out that a federation of European states based on national independence and the equality of nations was a fantastic utopia under capitalism. Lenin wrote:

"From the point of view of the economic conditions of imperialism, i.e., capital export and division of the world between the 'progressive' and 'civilized' colonial powers, the United States of Europe under capitalism is either impossible or reactionary." (V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 269-70.)

This statement has special significance for today. What Lenin meant by "reactionary" he explained further:

"... the United States of Europe as the result of an agreement between the European capitalists is possible, but what kind of agreement would that be? An agreement to suppress socialism in Europe. . . ." (p. 271.)

Lenin's prognosis was proved correct by the events following the conclusion of the World War. Although a United States of Europe was not established, a loose federation of states was created—the League of Nations. A central purpose of the League was to combat socialism in Europe and in the first place the new-born Soviet state. The armed intervention against the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1921; the establishment of the *cordon sanitaire*, an encirclement of the first proletarian state aimed at isolating it from the revolutionary masses of post-war Germany and Central Europe—these were all part of this *reactionary temporary agreement* of the European capitalist states.

Can this slogan have any meaning other than this today? If anything, it has an even more reactionary meaning. In the twenty-two years that have passed since the conclusion of the last war much

has happened. The League of Nations is dead, even if not yet buried; the Versailles Treaty is worth less than the paper it is written on; the *cordon sanitaire* has been swept aside by the growing might of the Soviet Union; and the Munich four-power anti-Soviet agreement has been nullified by the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact. When these facts are seen against the background of a maturing European revolutionary crisis, the proposal for a United States of Europe takes on a particularly ominous and sinister meaning: first, because it can be realized only by the establishment of British imperialist hegemony over all capitalist Europe, especially over the dismembered and prostrate body of the German nation; and, secondly, because its two-edged purpose would be to subdue the revolutionary upsurge which is bound to sweep Europe as a result of the war and to turn a "united" capitalist Europe towards war against the Soviet Union.

The realization of this innocent-sounding slogan under capitalism would therefore have an effect opposite to that pictured by the master-minds of the *Nation* and *New Republic*. It would place Europe in the grip of counter-revolution of a White Terror more ferocious than any the world has ever witnessed. It would be "unity" ruled by the British Lion! It would be the combination of a super-Versailles and a super-Munich imposed by force over the states and peoples of Europe!

III

Nor can the Social-Democratic and liberal "champions" of bourgeois democracy claim with any truth that an Allied imperialist victory would benefit or promote the democratic aspirations of the peoples of Britain and France. It must be remembered that the present imperialist conflict is the logical culmination of the world crisis of the capitalist system and finds its sharpest expression in the imperialist belligerent states. The bourgeoisie in *all* of these states find it more and more difficult to rule in the old way, and this holds for the lands of traditional bourgeois democracy no less than for the others.

How does the internal regime of France today differ from that of Germany? French finance capital has destroyed the democratic liberties and the social gains of the toilers in the best Hitlerian fashion. Thousands of anti-war fighters are sentenced to prisons and concentration camps; the heroic Communist Party is hunted down; Communist deputies representing 1,500,000 French voters, are deprived of traditional Parliamentary immunity and thrown into dungeons; death penalty is the governmental threat for the distribution of leaflets calling for peace; the trade union movement has been transformed into a French replica of the German "Labor Front," into a government adjunct; and a moratorium has been declared upon elections. The only remaining point of difference between the internal regimes of Germany and France is

that in the former there is a parliament made up of only one bourgeois party while in France there is a parliament composed of all the bourgeois parties—and that most insidious lackey of the warmongering bourgeoisie, the Socialist Party. This is the sum and substance of French bourgeois democracy today. A fraud and mockery!

Britain is likewise following in the footsteps of its imperialist partner in crime. If its actions against the anti-war forces have not yet been as sweeping as those in France, this is not to be explained by the "liberalism" of its bourgeoisie, but by its reliance upon the relatively stronger influence of British Social-Democracy to keep the masses in check. As soon as the British reactionary bourgeoisie finds it necessary to duplicate the French example in all its sordid details, it will not need to look to Hitler for advice; it will but fall back on its own experience garnered from hundreds of years of oppressive dictatorial rule over the Irish and colonial peoples of the Empire. For the vaunted bourgeois democracy of Great Britain weighs like a feather in the scale against the dictatorial violence directed against the colonial hundreds of millions.

In the United States as well, this same anti-democratic trend is to be noted, despite the fact that this country is still a non-belligerent. Hence, the new reactionary program of the Roosevelt Administration, the witch hunts and persecutions undertaken by the Dies Committee and the Department of Justice.

Let no one make the mistake of thinking that these repressive ac-

tivities can be explained by the exigencies of a war situation alone. Who ever heard of democracy being fought for through the destruction of democracy? Progressive wars base themselves on the popular will of the people and are won only by encouraging and harnessing the revolutionary initiative and enthusiasm of the masses. Only reactionary wars, wars waged against the interests of the people, are faced with the necessity of curbing the democratic movement of the masses and destroying the rights of the toiling millions. This is the lesson of the American Civil War, of the historic fight of the Spanish Republic, of the present heroic struggle of the Chinese people.

In the second place, if the present war ends in an imperialist victory—whether Allied or German—does anyone seriously believe that the capitalist system, both economically and politically, could return to so-called normalcy? Only the deluded or the smug philistine can believe that the masses, if again dragged through the inferno of a gigantic slaughter, will politely refrain from venting their indignation upon those responsible for the war, or will quietly accept the starvation and even greater mass unemployment inevitable in the wake of the armed conflict. That did not happen after the last war, and it certainly will not happen after this war, for the present conflict is far from a carbon copy of that of 1914-18. First, the people on both sides of the imperialist conflict have not been infected with war hysteria and super-patriotism. Secondly, in all imperialist countries there now

exist Communist Parties that have proved their mettle and who will never surrender to their ruling classes. Thirdly, the colonial masses are preparing to force the issue of independence during this crisis of world imperialism. Fourthly, capitalism can no longer rely upon Social-Democracy to the same degree as heretofore, even though Social-Democracy and its pernicious influence still remain the chief and most dangerous enemy to be fought in the ranks of the working class. Finally, and most important of all, there exists this time a powerful working class state, the greatest force for peace in the world, the land which, under the leadership of the Party of Lenin and Stalin, has shown the toilers of the whole world the way to end imperialist rule and capitalist slavery.

All of the above-stated factors point in one direction and one only. If the war continues for some time, and that seems certain at the moment, the working class and all the toiling masses will have something to say about the final peace and in a score of countries will take their fate into their own hands. Can there be any doubt therefore that the bourgeoisie, in order to maintain its rule, will act as have all previous dying classes, that it will resort to every means

at its command to hold back the revolutionary tidal wave?

Only one conclusion can be drawn from the foregoing: An Allied imperialist victory is no "lesser evil." A victory for either imperialist camp would constitute a defeat for the people. The only democratic way out of this war is to bring about an imperialist defeat and a people's victory! An imperialist victory by either side would result in tyrannical rule throughout the capitalist world, in hunger and slavery for the working class and the people, in national oppression and national chauvinism, in new and more horrible imperialist wars to come. The way out has been pointed by our great comrade and leader, Georgi Dimitroff:

"The imperialists of the warring countries have begun the war for a new partition of the earth, for world domination, dooming millions of people to destruction. The working class is called upon to put an end to the war after its own fashion, in its own interests, in the interests of the whole of laboring mankind and thereby to destroy once and for all the fundamental causes giving rise to imperialist wars." (The War and the Working Class of the Capitalist Countries, p. 23.)