Talking It Over:

The Enemy Within

by Bertram D. Wolfe

THE real meaning of the fine words in the President's message to Congress on the state of the nation was revealed the very next day in his supplementary budgetary message proposing the expenditure on armaments of $1,609,588,000 for the coming fiscal year. This fantastic figure, the greatest in nineteen years, the greatest in all history of all lands in times of peace, is incomplete. If we add expenditures on merchant marine, harbors and coasts, the military budget comes closer to two billions, and if the C.C.C. is militarized, and commercial and postal aviation, railroads and power are subsidized and developed on concealed military lines as the President plans, the expenditure on waste, destruction and fresh mass misery runs higher still.

The President himself forecasts a deficit of $3,326,000,000 for 1940. Even if there are no deficiency appropriations (as was the case this year), that would bring the national debt up to forty-four and one-half billions of dollars ($44,500,000,000), a burden of $1,875 per family of five for every man, woman and child in this land. To this we must add staggering state and local indebtedness. These things must bring backbreaking burdens of taxation upon the worker and farmer and small-income earner. The message itself proposes the continuance of all existing direct taxes and import duties plus "moderate tax increases" to finance new armament and soil conservation (how neatly they are tied together!) Thus bankruptcy or inflation comes ever closer, and, unless it is repudiated, our children and generations yet unborn will have reason to curse our generation for saddling them with this staggering debt.

THE President will make further revelation of his new super-armament program in a supplementary message to Congress next week. It is rumored that he will ask for 10,000, perhaps even 13,000 new planes, tho the rate of change in military plane construction is so rapid that most of these will be delivered only in time to go directly to the scrapheap, and tho military experts declare that, thanks to the two oceans that line our shores, we have an ample number of planes already. Thus, in October 1938, that is less than three months ago, Major General Henry H. Arnold, new chief of the Army Air Corps, declared that the country did not need many more planes but needed faster ones to replace those that were obsolete when they were delivered to the army. And, under the program then contemplated, the army was to have only 2,320 craft by 1940! General Arnold called this "a very good figure as things now stand." Of course, General Arnold has since been silenced and doubtless Earl Browder will soon comment on the resemblance of his name to that of "the Leon Trotsky of 1776."

Other experts, too, hard-boiled military men all of them (Major General Moseley, Major Eliot, Major General Rivers, whose mouths are unsealed by the fact that they have retired), have been even more explicit. "Fear and hysteria," General Moseley declared a few weeks ago, "are being engendered in support of heavy expenditures for national defense."

ALMOST a year and a half ago, when President Roosevelt made his Chicago "collective-security" speech, this paper warned that the New Deal program, like the "New Freedom" of President Wilson, might soon be converted from an uncertain good into a certain evil, might be used in fact as bait to harness labor and the liberals to the war chariot of the American ruling class headed for fresh imperialist adventures in the far corners of the earth. To some, the warning may have seemed unduly suspicious. Now the President himself declares: "Our nation's program of social and economic reform is therefore a part of defense as basic as armaments themselves. . . . Never have there been six years of such far-flung internal preparedness in our history."

Bear in mind that the six years of the New Deal have not solved the problems of the depression—nor could they because they are predicated on loyalty to private profit as the first consideration, so that unless they yield a profit to the handful of their owners, the wheels of industry and the muscles of men will not be permitted to move. Bear in mind, too, that the six years of the New Deal have not put the 10,000,000—in permanent round numbers—of the unemployed to work. Now the President would distract attention from these failures, would steal a leaf from the book of fascist dictatorship. "However we abhor their methods," he declares, "we are compelled to admit that they have obtained substantial utilization of all their material and human resources. Like it or not, they have solved for a time the problem of idle men and idle capital." Their method, the method which, surrounded by a haze of glittering phrases, the President's message now proposes to imitate, is the method of gearing their economy to armament economics and war preparations. There are no fitter words to characterize his new proposals than those he used himself two short years ago: "Employment thru rearmament is false employment; it builds no permanent structure and creates no consumers goods for the maintenance of a lasting prosperity. We know that nations guilty of these follies inevitably face the day either when their weapons of destruction must be used against their neighbors or when an unsound economy, like a house of cards, will fall apart."

ONE more thing the dictatorships have "accomplished" which the President envies: they have put labor under the control of government, established virtual conscription and compelled "national unity," that is, support to plans for an industrial conscription in wartime (the May Bill), class. With this in view, the President has long debated in secret schemes "to end employer-employee disputes" (from his message), given open support to plans for a industrial conscription in wartime (the May Bill), and for suspending the class struggle for the sake of "national unity."

In the light of these aims must we judge all the phrases concerning democracy, the bill of rights, and the New Deal, just as we had to estimate the similar phrases of Woodrow Wilson in 1916. The real attack, then as now, upon our pitiful fragments of freedom and the miserable standards of welfare of the masses, comes not from without, from neither Germany, nor Japan, nor Mars, but from within. The main enemy, then as now, is at home. That enemy is the depression and the system that produces it. That enemy is the profit system and the ruling class that lives by profit at the expense of the rest of us, the system and class to which the President once more pledges allegiance in his message. That enemy is the misery that springs from a system which makes profit a condition without which the wheels will not turn and the rest of us may not live. That enemy is militarism—the super-armament program—which under whatever fair words is bound to breed reaction at home and lead to war abroad. That enemy is the "industrial-conscription" bill which the President sponsors and which, by itself alone, is sufficient to test the fair words about the "defense of democracy." That enemy is imperialism—the attempt to police North and South America, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the China seas. That enemy is class collaboration, the preachment that the masses of workers, farmers and middle class (the "entire nation"), should get behind the imperialist and armament program and war plans of the government and the ruling class. "The general welfare of the American people," as the President's message itself declares, "is the first line of defense." But the fantastic arms program that the message proposes is the severest attack upon that welfare that we have ever known in time of peace. Thus, the main line of battle is drawn within the land, and we must take up the defense of the welfare of the mass of our people, there where it is most threatened. Else freedom and welfare alike will be but words on the lips of men who seek to rally the nation for war.