

WAR... WHY?

By **ARNOLD PETERSEN**



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“The governing classes do not really want war, but they do want to keep up a continual menace of war. They want the peril to be always averted, but always present. They do not want the cannon to be fired, but they do want it to be always loaded. Those who perpetually spread abroad rumors and alarms of war only half believe them, or more often do not believe them at all, but they see great advantages to themselves in inducing the people to believe them. You know, comrades, what those advantages are. They are political and financial. A people living under the perpetual menace of war and invasion is very easy to govern. It demands no social reforms. It does not haggle over expenditures on armaments and military equipment. It pays without discussion, it ruins itself, and that is an excellent thing for the syndicates of financiers and manufacturers for whom patriotic terrors are an abundant source of gain.”

—ANATOLE FRANCE.

“The attitude of the Socialist Labor Party toward antimilitarism is—‘Organize the working class integrally-industrially!’ Only then can the revolt against militarism result in a Waterloo to the [parasitic capitalist] class of sponge, instead of a massacre to the class of labor.”

—DANIEL DE LEON.

INTRODUCTION

When this essay on war was written in 1936, the global war was still only a cloud on the social horizon, though we all know now that the forces that led to the explosion in September, 1939, were shaping themselves, and that the chief actors were girding themselves for the struggle, plotting and counterplotting, scheming and maneuvering, and generally preparing themselves for the global contest. And this applies alike to the Nazi-Fascist gangsters, to the Stalinist bureaucrats, and to the international capitalist plunderbund in general. The ignominious role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy in particular, its prewar collaboration with the Nazi gangsters, has recently been revealed by the discovery of important documents in Nazi archives.

In the period of 1939–40, secret negotiations were conducted between Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and plans were formulated for the carving up of Europe, Asia and Africa, and the distribution of countries and areas between the two dictatorships. The documents (according to preliminary reports) reveal that Finland, Estonia and Latvia were to be yielded to Russia, with a tentative agreement concerning the partitioning of Poland between the two totalitarian powers. Later, Lithuania was added as a “gift” to Stalinist Russia. And though these countries were subsequently reconquered, or subjugated, by the Nazis, they are today incorporated in Stalinist Russia (in the case of the three Baltic countries, *in toto*; in the case of Finland, in part), and this in the name of Marxism whose founder declared

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that “No people can be free which oppresses other peoples”—in the name of Lenin who proclaimed the “right of nations to self-determination,” and who wrote that it is the duty of Marxists “to defend the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination in the political sense of the word, i.e., the right to political separation.” (!) (Lenin, *The Imperialist War*.)

The global war had three main “dress rehearsals”: First, the Japanese invasion of China; second, the Ethiopian bandit raid by the repulsive Mussolini; and, third, the Spanish civil war, ignited by the darling of the Vatican, Franco, who received the active aid (in troops and materiel) of the precious pair, Hitler and Mussolini. While these “dress rehearsals” were being staged, the Western capitalist powers stood idly by—idly, that is, in the sense that they did nothing to prevent the gangster governments and their puppets from igniting the flames of war. On the contrary, they did all they could to pour oil on the flames by supplying guns and ammunition, or the raw materials for these, in the true capitalist spirit of “business as usual.” Stalinist Russia supplied oil to Mussolini for his Ethiopian raid, and the United States supplied (to Japan and others) scrap iron, oil and similar products needed to carry on war. Morally, United States capitalism was as guilty as the rest of the world of capitalism with respect to making the war rehearsals the “successes” they proved to be.

And now, as the saying goes, the “pay-off”: the Japanese war lords are momentarily beaten, Japan is an occupied nation, though the ludicrous “God-Emperor” still struts on his puppet stage, fraternizing with his former “enemies,” at present represented by the reactionary General MacArthur. Mussolini and his

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papier-mâché empire are gone, the little sawdust Caesar having died wretchedly in the gutter of one of his once proud Italian cities. And the monomaniac Hitler and his “thousand-year world empire dream” have vanished like the soap-bubbles blown by a little child! But their spirits brood over the ruins of a one-time functioning world capitalism, and their successors and heirs (whether or not they realize it or acknowledge it) are as busy as “hell’s angels” fomenting the third world war, which, with its atomic bombs and bacterial weapons, will assuredly destroy what is left of civilization (if not the globe itself) if the workers of the world permit it to come to pass.

And so, all the stakes of the global war have turned to ashes, as have the millions of war victims the world over, and the dreams of empire have turned into the present-day nightmare as the Socialist Labor Party, years before the outbreak of World War II, predicted they would. And the final lesson is, or should be, that war and brute force settle nothing permanently. But power—the lust for power and the private property madness—is not subject to the salutary effects of lessons bitterly and bloodily learned. Power recognizes but one thing, yields to but one thing—a stronger power. And that stronger power is, or shall be, the organized power of the working class, the integrated power of Socialist Industrial Unionism, the power of powers. That power alone endures, because it is derived from, and based upon, the ancient heritages of truth, equity and freedom in the setting of our modern technological miracles. The other power, the power of the ruling class madmen and criminals, is, in the end, brittle, because it is derived from, and is based upon, the dead past, and on its

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inherited lies, and worn-out and discredited institutions.

The global war, then, lent confirmation to the analysis of war, its cause and inevitable course and ultimate climax, made in the first edition of this essay. The Second World War, nominally concluded in 1945, proved once again that modern wars are inescapable results of capitalism; it proved that all the claims and slogans were frauds or the vaporings of the fatuous reformers; it proved that the war ostensibly fought to destroy fascism has resulted in a temporary strengthening of the forces that make for fascism and ultimately for industrial feudalism; it proved once again that the world's workers have everything to lose, and little or nothing to gain, through wars; and that the only hope of the workers for a peaceful, happy and free world lies in the establishment of the Socialist Industrial Republic.

May the workers speed the day when the war drums shall throb no longer; when poverty and starvation shall remain as nothing more than an evil memory; when exploitation and slavery shall have been forever banished from the earth.

ARNOLD PETERSEN.

New York, N.Y., September 30, 1947.

FOREWORD.

There is, proverbially, no limit to “man’s inhumanity to man.” Of all living creatures man excels as a cruel, designing brute when he is bent on destruction of his fellows. “Man, biologically considered,” said William James, “is . . . of all beasts of prey . . . the only one that preys systematically on its own species.” It is doubtful whether in recorded history there has been a more horrible demonstration of the truth of this assertion than in the war proceeding with unabated fury in Spain at this moment. Here, with the brazen aid of the two chief European bandits, Hitler and Mussolini, and their gangster governments, the brigand Franco, traitor to his democratically elected government, and faithful servitor and defender of the Roman Catholic propertied hierarchy and its reactionary allies, is ferociously and wantonly murdering combatants and non-combatants alike—murdering them in the name of “holy war,” men, women and children, with such brutal cruelty, with such apparent blood-lust, with such absolute disregard of the opinion of the civilized world, that one stops for a moment to wonder whether this is really the year 1936! One wonders, that is, until one recalls that this is the closing era of a decadent, rapacious social system, capitalism, in which the acquisitive passion—the passion for private property derived through the exploitation of the working class—dominates the thoughts and acts of all members of the ruling class and their henchmen and lackeys, and, to a considerable extent, their deluded followers. Strike a blow for working

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class freedom, or move against a particular entrenched group, and you summon, in the words of Marx, “as foes into the field of battle the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interests.”

And the bloody slaughter by Franco and his mercenaries is, fundamentally, an assault on those who have set human and social interests above propertied interests. The bloody struggle is WAR carried to its logical extreme. It is *war* between the classes, desperate *war* between two diametrically opposed social philosophies, *war* to the finish. Hence, the line-up everywhere today, whether in actual war, or in sides taken through more or less peaceful demonstrations, is between the plutocratic and Ultramontane reaction on the one side, and the forces and representatives of the proletarian revolution on the other. National boundaries are ignored. From fascist Italy come the bellicose roars of the mountebank Mussolini; from Germany rise the hysterical shrieks of the slummist Hitler; and from elsewhere drift the applauding murmurs of their reactionary allies, who in this country are particularly and most noisily exemplified in the Hearst-Coughlin-du Pont holy trinity.

Pretense is cast aside—at least insofar as the European governmental *banditti* are concerned. Unblushingly Mussolini demanded Ethiopia (after a brief spell of pretended righteousness) because he needed it. Quite recently two books have been published, written by the two Italian generals (de Bono and Badoglio), who respectively initiated and finished the Ethiopian robber expedition. In these books (carrying the *imprimatur* of Mussolini) we are told that Mussolini

had decided to grab Ethiopia a couple of years before he actually began his hypocritical tirades, charging that that country had invaded Italian rights, etc., etc.¹ Recently Hitler, casting hypocrisy aside, openly “demanded” Ukraine, Siberia, and other “odds and ends” of Soviet Russia, because he needed them! And, before that, rapacious Japan had overrun China, grabbed huge chunks of territory, in complete disregard of treaties, agreements and solemn covenants, etc., etc. However much these brazen proceedings may shock the person who had retained illusions with respect to the capitalist system, and its ultra-reactionary representatives, the rest of us, at least, may heave a sigh of relief that we have reached the point when, as Abraham Lincoln said, “despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.” State papers, diplomatic agreements, are notoriously mere scraps of paper, when national capitalist interests decree that they should be so regarded. But it would seem to be difficult to find a more perfect example of ruling class

¹ Walter Littlefield, special writer for the *New York Times*, writes in the November 15, 1936, issue of that paper:

“How the plans for the conquest of Ethiopia were made in 1933, how they were executed in 1935–1936, are for the first time officially revealed by the protagonists in two books: *Preparations and First Operations*, by Marshal Emilio de Bono, who began the campaign, and *The War of Ethiopia*, by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who completed it.” That the butcher Mussolini gambled on Great Britain’s fear of a European war is clearly shown in a secret note written by him to De Bono, which the *Times* writer quotes: “If we get into trouble with the English we would naturally renounce our offensive and confine ourselves to the defensive in order to preserve the entity of the colony.” Mussolini’s bluff worked—Great Britain backed down, and the slaughter of the Ethiopian branch of Christendom proceeded to its final conclusion, with the blessings of the saintly Pope following the murderous bands of the Italian dictator!

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and governmental double-dealing and hypocrisy, or a more thoroughgoing disregard of solemn treaties and agreements, than the pact for the renunciation of war, signed at Paris on August 27, 1928, and proclaimed a binding agreement at Washington on July 24, 1929. It follows here, in all its supposed solemnity, with all its “sacred” promises:

“The President of the German Reich, the President of the United States of America, His Majesty the King of the Belgians, the President of the French Republic, His Majesty the King of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the sea, Emperor of India, His Majesty the King of Italy, His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, the President of the Republic of Poland, the President of the Czechoslovak Republic,

“Persuaded that the time has come when a frank renunciation of war as an instrument of National policy should be made. . . . Convinced that all changes in their relations with one another should be sought by pacific means. . . . Hopeful that, encouraged by their example, all other nations of the world will join in this humane endeavor. . . . Have decided to conclude a treaty.

“Article 1.

“The High Contracting Parties solemnly declare in the name of their respective peoples that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of National policy in their relations with one another.

“Article 2.

“The High Contracting Parties agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means.”

A “frank renunciation of war as an instrument of NATIONAL POLICY. . . .!” Scarcely was the ink of Japan’s signature on this precious document dry than

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the imperialist Japanese marauders invaded China, ravaging and partitioning the country, setting up a fake independent monarchy and “neutral” zones! And only a few short years later other “high contracting parties” trampled the “solemn” declaration under bloody military boots, the two outstanding examples, Italy and Germany, going so far as to proclaim WAR “as an instrument of National Policy.” With Mussolini and his criminal assault on Ethiopia in mind, remembering the effeminate hysterics of the unspeakable Hitler, and with their Spanish rebel gift cannons thundering in our ears, let us linger musingly over the last phrase in what the governmental bandits must now view as a “document in madness”:

“ . . . The settlement or solution of all disputes, or conflicts of *whatever* origin they may be . . . shall *never* be sought except by PACIFIC MEANS.”

What—never? That is, hardly ever!

It is customary for our pious plutocrats, or their scribes, to exclaim: “Thank God for 3,000 miles of ocean.” The ocean is not too broad for leaping when all Europe is ablaze. The United States is no more immune from war than is any other capitalist country. Quite to the contrary, it is even quite conceivable that from this side may be hurled the spark, across the ocean, that may set all Europe in flames, and in turn start a conflagration here. This depends less on individuals than on economic forces which, once set in motion, know no barriers, no insurmountable obstacles. Yet individuals are not without importance, if they have behind them wealth, power or a large following. We have had in the past, as we have today, our strutting tin-

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soldiers who would, if they could (and some could and did), gladly have plunged this country into war. One of the most sinister and ignoble among these martinets was the late Theodore Roosevelt. The writer George Seldes, author of *Iron, Blood and Profits*, quotes from a letter written by Roosevelt in 1895 (during the Venezuelan crisis) to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge:

“I most earnestly hope that our people won’t weaken in any way in the Venezuela matter. . . . As for the editors of the *Evening Post* [then pacifists], it would give me the greatest pleasure to have them put in prison the minute hostilities began. . . . Personally I rather hope the fight will come soon. The clamour of the peace faction has convinced me that this country needs a war.”

And in 1897 the same Roosevelt, the fifth cousin of the reigning Roosevelt, exclaimed: “No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumphs of war.” Only time and accidental circumstance prevented the blustering first Roosevelt from becoming a Hitler and a Mussolini rolled into one. Let those who speak with contempt of the European sabre-rattlers and who think such creatures have not appeared, and cannot appear, on Columbia’s soil, let them look at the record in which the first Roosevelt, posturing as the man on horseback, is by no means the only one of his kind.

*

At the present moment stronger forces than existed prior to 1914 are operating to plunge the world into a war which, once started in its all-embracing and all-consuming fury, would inevitably put an end to capitalism. But the end of capitalism (using the term in its proper sense as meaning a competitive system based on exploitation of nominally free labor, and resting on

private ownership of the industries, etc.) need not necessarily mean Socialism, or economic freedom for the workers. It may also mean the absolute and undisguised enslavement of labor, with a ruling caste in complete and undisputed control of the means of wealth-production, acting through a central coordinating agency which would be the collective expression of an industrial feudalism, i.e., of the will of the industrial lords and barons, much as the “crown” represented the collective will of the lords, high ecclesiastics and barons of the ancient feudal regime.

The tendencies toward Industrial Feudalism are sometimes mistaken for the tendencies that lead to Socialism, or the Industrial Union Government, yet the two are worlds apart. Industrial Feudalism might be said to be the Industrial Republic of Labor standing on its head. Industrial Feudalism would be a despotism such as the world has never seen. The Industrial Republic of Labor would be democracy in the fullest, broadest sense, and with results such as the most gifted imagination cannot visualize. To prevent the former, and to effect the latter, the workers must organize in Socialist Industrial Unions—first, in order to give force and power to the majority decision if and when expressed at the ballot box; and, secondly, in order to serve as the structure of the new industrial self-government of the useful workers. Political government would have no place in the new democratic industrial society. It would be as useless as the scaffolding around a building after the building is completed. By and through Socialist Industrial Unions may the threats of absolutism and war be averted.

Social evolution has so wrought as to make it within

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the power of the working class, *and the working class alone*, to create a basis—the only basis—for everlasting peace. It is within its reach to grasp the magic wand wherewith to bring forth the reign of liberty, abundance and peace, for all climes, and for all time. If the working class fails, humanity fails. Vain would have been the agony and suffering throughout the ages, meaningless the upward climb of the race, futile its thousand years of straining to rise permanently above the level of the brute and the brute's savage and circumscribed struggle to survive. If the working class turns down the opportunity to conquer now, at whatever cost, liberty with peace and plenty, and instead accepts (to avoid the price of the conquest) the paltry bribe of the contented slave's security, all that the thinkers and doers have wrought since the beginning of civilization will have been wrought in vain. But even as the vulgar drill-sergeants in power today must, and do, repudiate and reject all the arts and conquests of civilization, save those of destruction, pure and simple, so these arts and conquests are the rightful heritage of the proletariat, ultimately not to be denied. With such a heritage the working class, though at present disinherited of material wealth—rather despoiled of the immense riches produced by its labor—cannot, will not fail. Everything in nature, all that is normal to social progress, works in its favor. The usurpers have everything against them—everything except the blindness and ignorance of labor; the usurpers are strong only because the working class is weak, *and the working class is weak only because it is not organized*. But even as life persists, though individual lives perish, so social life will persist, even though a cause fail at the historically right moment.

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Eventually Liberty, Abundance and Peace will soar triumphantly—Liberty for all, linked to Abundance for all, and both riveted to Peace for all—

“Peace: dear nurse of
arts, plenties and joyful births.”

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New York, N.Y., November, 1936.

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War is the chief agent of civilization in the period which I have attempted to portray. It was war which drove the Egyptians into those frightful deserts in the midst of which their Happy Valley was discovered. It was war which, under the Persians, opened lands which had been either closed against foreigners or jealously held ajar. It was war which colonized Syria and Asia Minor with Greek ideas, and which planted in Alexandria the experimental philosophy which will win for us in time the dominion of the earth. It was war which united the Greek and Latin worlds into a splendid harmony of empire. And when that ancient world had been overcome by languor, and had fallen into Oriental sleep; when nothing was taught in the schools which had not been taught a hundred years before; when the rapacity of tyrants had extinguished the ambition of the rich and the industry of the poor; when the Church also had become inert, and roused itself only to be cruel—then again came War across the Rhine and the Danube and the Alps, and laid the foundations of European life among the ruins of the Latin world. In the same manner Asia awoke as if by magic, and won back from Europe the lands which she had lost. . . . [But] Famine, pestilence, and war are no longer essential to the advancement of the human race.

—Winwood Reade.

I.

ANY discussion on war in *general* (and a *general* consideration of war is rarely undertaken except when a *specific* war is anticipated or contemplated) brings out two main points of view: (1) that all wars are bad, and (2) that all wars are good—if they are “just wars.” (“*Justa bella quibus necessaria*”—i.e., wars are just to those to whom they are necessary!) Old Benjamin Franklin said that “there never was a good war nor a bad peace.” Friedrich

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Nietzsche insisted that “when the instincts of a society ultimately make it give up war and conquest, it is decadent.” And Bernhardt, the Prussian expounder of war and militarism, echoed and emphasized the Nietzschean philosophy when he said that “war is a biological necessity of the first importance . . . and . . . an indispensable factor in civilization.” We are here confronted with two concepts of war which apparently are irreconcilable. Are they, as a matter of fact, irreconcilable? The answer must be that they are not, if we take due account of the particular stage in social evolution, and the particular circumstances and objects of the war in a given society. And to leave out of account such important considerations is to remove from the question of war the very elements that in the final analysis explain the *reasons* for wars.

Viewing the question in the abstract, it is easy to agree that war is unqualifiedly evil, and particularly, of course, to those whose lives are forfeited in the bloody business. As Lowell’s Hosea Bigelow put it—

“Not but wut abstract war is horrid,
I sign thet with all my heart; . . . ”

But, thinks even Lowell—

“ . . . Civilization *doos* git forrid
Sometimes, upon a powder-cart!”

Considering war from the standpoint of the struggle for existence, the argument seems (and in given circumstances *must be*) convincing that it is a “biological necessity.” For war, in one form or another, has been the grim and inseparable companion of man since he first

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emerged from the brute stage to that resembling (however remotely) a rational or thinking being. Satirically Dean Swift observes:

“Hobbes clearly proves that every creature
Lives in a state of war by nature.”

Man, living in a state of nature (or practically so), is necessarily reduced to the most elementary means of making a living. Though he may be free from the domination of his fellow men, he is in such a state the helpless slave of nature. Nature provides abundance, whereby nature says: Thou shalt eat, and, eating (and being sheltered), thou art free! Nature shuts off the wherewithal of life, whereby Nature decrees: Thou art at my mercy, hence thou art a slave! In time men (and women) band together, toil together, husband available food and natural resources, and to the extent there are food and shelter, the group is one of free men and women. But at such a stage to *have* is to become the object of plunder and pillage by those less fortunate, or less provident. Hence, to defend material group interests at this stage is to defend all that man has ever associated with liberty—the right to enjoy unmolested the fruits of one’s endeavor, that is, the fruits of one’s labor. The ensuing struggle becomes, on the one side, a “just” war in defense of one’s right; on the other side, it is a “just” war for the right to subsist by whatever means possible. The struggle is necessarily ruthless, and the means the most unscrupulous. The groups surviving do so solely by reason of superiority in numbers coupled with the best means of attack and defense, i.e., the best tools. As man progresses from savagery through barbarism to civilization, the identical principle holds

good, however it may be concealed in ideological phrases. "This is ours, we mean to hold it," is the essence of all defensive arguments against the "foreign invader." And this word "ours," though it may denote essentially food, shelter and clothing, embodies whatever man may consider worth preserving as the means to that essential end. And the means were ever unscrupulous and necessarily selfish. "For," as Frederick Engels points out, "it is a fact that man sprang from the beasts, and had consequently to use barbaric and almost bestial means to extricate himself from [or defend himself against] barbarism."

The fundamental reason for war, then, and indeed its very essence, was the constant struggle against want, and all its concomitants. But eventually "want" ceases to express merely the need to satisfy purely animal cravings. As man rises he builds a superstructure (organized society), thus placing barriers between himself and stark nature. He is thus no longer directly governed simply by nature, but as much by the laws that come into being as a result of his own man-made social environment. Formerly the helpless victim of nature, he now becomes, more or less, the "slave" of this social environment. He comes to look upon his society as the necessary condition for his own present and continued well-being. Hence he stands ready to defend that society against the "barbarians" that threaten to destroy it. But his society is no longer the simple, one-class—i.e., classless—affair it was when he first, gregariously, banded together with his kin and fellows. As the tools and weapons improved, the capacity for creating wealth (and storing it against "hard times") increased. Property, as a social institution, came into being, and

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with that the division of society into classes, the possessing classes, and those stripped of all possessions. Hence, masters (owners) and slaves (non-owners). The ruling classes became the carriers of material and intellectual progress. They became the carriers of material progress because the furthering of their class interests became equivalent to the furthering of social progress. The interests of a new rising class have always been concurrent with the main line of social progress. This new class became the carrier of intellectual progress because acquisition of wealth is invariably accompanied with greater leisure, and leisure is indispensable to intellectual progress.²

II.

With the development of classes arose the Political State which is, always has been, and always will be, an instrument of class rule. The chief function of the State is to keep the subject class down by sheer force. Hence the State represents physical force, or the symbol of another kind of war, the *class war*. This species of war is not always spectacular, though not infrequently sanguinary. The ruled class, by sheer force of necessity,

² John Pierpont Morgan, international banker, and as such one of the chief promoters of the conditions that lead to war among nations, recently regaled the country with his comments on the necessity to civilization of the leisure class. "If you destroy the leisure class [read parasites]," said Mr. Morgan, "you destroy civilization." Mr. Morgan made the fatal error of identifying himself and his fellow-parasites with that leisure class of the past which actually made possible the advancement and maintenance of civilization and culture. Mr. Morgan and his fellow-parasites are as essential to modern culture, and the further progress of civilization, as is the potato bug to the health and growth of the potato!

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resists the exploitation, the repressions, and the indignities to which it is subjected by the ruling class. Its struggle against the yoke of slavery imposed upon it by the ruling class becomes in turn a lever for social progress. Thus for a time there may be in progress what maybe called a bilateral movement of social evolution: On the one side, the struggle of the ruling class to expand and solidify its class power serves as a vehicle for the enlarging of material wealth and intellectual enrichment; on the other side, the struggle of the ruled class makes for the development of the consciousness of class mission on the part of the suppressed class, which is destined to become the next ruling class; moreover, the concepts of liberty, of social happiness, of the higher destiny of the human race, become enlarged through the struggle carried on incessantly by the suppressed class against the master class.

As the tools and weapons became ever more perfected and complex, the locale of warfare was shifted— or rather enlarged. It was no longer merely a struggle between tribes for survival. It now became a struggle for conquest of territory. Feudal barons banded together to subjugate their weaker fellows and in time the most powerful among them became kings. “The wars of the barons,” says Lafargue, “may be compared to the industrial and commercial competition of modern times.” Here, as always, superior tools, superior weapons, superior resources carried the day, and those lacking these, or being deficient in these respects, were vanquished and invariably destroyed. As the means of warfare developed, the character, and eventually the objectives, of wars underwent profound changes. “The introduction of firearms,” says Engels, “had a

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revolutionizing effect not only on war itself, but also on the political relationships of domination and subjection. The provision of powder and firearms required industry and money, and both of these were in the hands of the burghers of the towns, and of the rising monarchy drawing its support from the towns, against the feudal nobility. The stone walls of the noblemen's castles, hitherto unapproachable, fell before the cannon of the burghers, and the bullets of the burghers' arquebuses pierced the armor of the knights."

Wars, then, reflected not merely definite stages in social evolution, but served, in most cases, as vehicles for advancing civilization in general. The battle of Hastings (in 1066) definitely established feudalism in England; resulted in the subjugation of the unruly barons to the crown, furnishing the basis for the subsequent development which made possible the rise of the bourgeoisie, i.e., the modern capitalist class, which eventually brought about the downfall of feudalism. Thus viewed, the battle of Hastings may be regarded as an instance of war serving as the carrier of social progress.

III.

With the rise to power of the capitalist class, wars again changed in character and form. While territory still remained a coveted object, it was not primarily territory that mattered so much. To establish spheres of influence, the right to exploit an undeveloped nation commercially and industrially—these became the important considerations. Hence modern wars became essentially wars for foreign markets, which often led to

the destruction of a former powerful industrial nation, or at least to its being demoted to a country of second or third class. The great World War furnishes a splendid example, as witness the reduction of the formerly powerful German Empire to a condition of virtual vassalage. But while these wars may be said to be hastening the downfall of capitalism, they cannot be said to be serving social progress in any proper sense of that term. For when a social system has exhausted all possibilities for further expansion within its politico-economic framework, any act committed by its ruling class (short of surrendering its power voluntarily, which it will not do) becomes a mere act of class aggression, tending to consolidate class power, i.e., the forces of reaction, of social retrogression. It is only in an age of scarcity that progress of a ruling class may spell progress of society—and then only up to a certain point. In an economy of scarcity classes are inevitable. Classes in turn presuppose struggle for supremacy, hence in such circumstances wars (inevitable as they are in the circumstances) are useful to the extent they aid in establishing or solidifying the power of the class which for the nonce happens to be the carrier of social progress, that is, the class which at a given stage is the revolutionary class. With the complete development of capitalism we are faced with an entirely different situation.

Modern, or fully developed, capitalism implies an era of abundance. It is no longer the age-old struggle for leisure for the relatively few at the expense of the many, in order that civilization may be maintained and advanced. It is now a question of an entrenched and reactionary class attempting to maintain itself, not

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merely against inferior competitors, but against general social progress, and against that higher civilization implicit in the fact of our modern, marvelous production machine. Hence, modern wars, far from serving as factors in advancing civilization, become means whereby a reactionary class is immeasurably enriched and strengthened, and, moreover, means whereby future social progress is definitely menaced. Modern wars, or capitalist wars, are wars that grow out of the necessity of protecting and strengthening particular capitalist class interests, and this, as said before, is true even though in the end such wars may accelerate the process which is making for the dissolution and eventual overthrow of the capitalist system. For however much capitalist wars may accelerate this process, the fact remains that the mere destruction of capitalism is in itself not enough.

Coupled with the destruction of capitalism must be the organizing of the class destined to succeed the capitalist class (the modern proletariat), and that organizing process is anything but furthered by capitalist wars. On the contrary, it is retarded, while the ultra-reactionary forces are strengthened. This is true particularly in ultra-capitalist countries where the class struggle is, clear and clear, between the capitalist class proper and the working class, with no other intermediate class present as an economic factor capable of exerting an important or determining influence in the issue of the proletarian revolution. Fifty years ago Frederick Engels said:

“And finally no war is any longer possible for Prussia-Germany except a world war and a world war indeed of an extension and violence hitherto undreamt of. Eight to ten

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millions of soldiers will mutually massacre one another and in doing so devour the whole of Europe until they have stripped it barer than any swarm of locusts has ever done. The devastations of the Thirty Years' War compressed into three or four years, and spread over the whole Continent; famine, pestilence, general demoralization both of the armies and of the mass of the people produced by acute distress; hopeless confusion of our artificial machinery in trade, industry and credit, ending in general bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their traditional state wisdom to such an extent that crowns will roll by dozens on the pavement and there will be nobody to pick them up; absolute impossibility of foreseeing how it will all end and who will come out of the struggle as victor; only one result absolutely certain: general exhaustion and the establishment of the conditions for the ultimate victory of the working class. This is the prospect when the system of mutual out-bidding in armaments, driven to extremities, at last bears its inevitable fruits. This, my lords, princes and statesmen, is where in your wisdom you have brought old Europe."

What Engels said then would apply equally to a world war today—though the results of the last great World War did not in every respect confirm the prognoses of Engels. But when Engels then goes on to predict proletarian victory as a direct result of a world war, we are compelled to emphasize that what then might have seemed to be a likely outcome of such a struggle can scarcely be conceived as possible today. Following the part quoted above, Engels adds:

"And when nothing more remains to you but to open the last great war dance—that will suit us all right. The war may perhaps push us temporarily into the background, may wrench from us many a position already conquered. But when you have unfettered forces which you will then no longer be able again to control, things may go as they will: at the end of the tragedy you will be ruined and the victory of the proletariat will either be already achieved or at any rate inevitable."

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The victory of the proletariat would, in such a situation, be inevitable only if at the same time the working class had organized into Industrial Unions—unions that would at one and the same time serve as agencies of the revolution, and as the governmental framework of the new Industrial Republic of Labor. In the absence of such revolutionary Industrial Unions, the outcome of the capitalist imperialist war would inevitably be industrial feudalism—that is, unqualified economic bondage for the workers. For, “Where a social revolution is pending, and, for whatever reason, is not accomplished, reaction is the alternative.”³ (De Leon.)

War, especially modern war, is force in its most ruthless, because most highly organized, form. “Force,” as Marx observed, “is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.”⁴ But let us not overlook the possibility of force (i.e., war) becoming the abortionist, destroying the new society before it is delivered from the womb of the old.

IV.

As we have seen, past wars frequently became the carriers of progress, ripening the prevailing, and accelerating the advent of the next and higher social system. But the very reason that made this possible (an economy of scarcity) decrees that this is not to be expected today, in a society resting on an economy of abundance. Hence, it is as foolish to say that *all* wars

³ [Daniel De Leon, National Platform of the S.L.P., 1912.—*Editor*]

⁴ [Karl Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 31.—*Editor*]

have been (socially) bad, as it would be to say that *all* wars have been, and will continue to be, socially good. No war today can result in aught but misery to the proletariat, and a retarding of social progress. Only a fool will argue that modern wars are fought for abstract social principles, or that they are inspired by lofty idealism. (No war, barring certain revolutionary wars, of the past ever was, for that matter.) Capitalist spokesmen are themselves frank in admitting the true object of modern wars—especially when they are talking among themselves. Thus General Leonard Wood, at the Lake Mohonk Conference held in May, 1915, stated to that conference: “We soldiers and sailors are merely your [the capitalist class’s] trained servants. You create wars, we try to terminate them. Nine out of ten wars are based on trade.” The ultra-capitalist paper, the *New York Sun*, ever a spokesman for plutocratic interests, said immediately following the outbreak of World War I that “In the present developed or over-developed system an economic war is waged all the time. The markets of the world are the prize.” And it added: “It [war] is the most obvious way of settling . . . the economic conflicts of nations.”

President Wilson himself repeatedly emphasized the point that wars were caused by economic rivalries. At St. Louis, on September 5, 1919, he said:

“Why, my fellow citizens, is there any man here, or any woman—let me say, is there any child here—who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry? . . . This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war. . . . The real reason that the war we have just finished took place was that Germany was afraid her commercial rivals were going to get the better of her, and the reason why some

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nations went into the war against Germany was that they thought Germany would get the commercial advantage of them. The seed of the jealousy, the seed of the deep-seated hatred, was hot successful commercial and industrial rivalry.”

And earlier he had, in effect, pleaded with the workers of the nation to enlist in a war to be fought in the interest of the capitalist class of this country, when he stated that he did not doubt the devotion “either of our young men [workers] or those who give them employment [the capitalist class]—those for whose benefit and protection they [the workers] would, in fact, enlist.”

As already pointed out, the compelling necessity to seek (or protect) foreign markets (or “spheres of influence”) is the chief direct cause of modern wars. But a powerful factor, inciting to war, is the armament industry. That industry is, to be sure, an integral part of modern capitalist industry, for, as Engels sagely remarks, “Industry remains industry whether it is applied to the production or the destruction of things.”⁵ But apart from the armament industry’s being a factor in the general set-up making for war, it is, of course, also a special factor, since its very prosperity depends on war, actually in progress, or potentially imminent. Recent investigations by the United States Senatorial Committee confirmed findings from previous investigations, namely, that manufacturers of munitions and armaments are tirelessly at work to seize opportunities for the promotion of the ghastly trade in death-dealing war implements. Indeed, it has become natural to assume that where there is an armament

⁵ Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*.—Editor]

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industry, *there* will be found potent and active fomenters of war. The profits of these blood-soaked capitalist enterprises, though reckoned in dollars and cents, are actually computed in so many blasted human lives, in so much mangled human flesh, in so many measures of red human blood. The armament industry is international—like its parent, capitalism, it knows no fatherland. It is supremely impartial—the British “merchants of death” would unhesitatingly sell cannons, ammunition, etc., to Germany, even if the conclusion was inescapable that these very means of mass murder would be used against the compatriots of the armament manufacturer. A writer in the usually reliable *New York Times* (i.e., reliable in such matters) makes the following observation in a recent issue of the paper:

“It was also brought out that certain American and foreign arms makers have divided world markets under an agreement which provides for sharing of arms secrets and profits. Under this system American submarine patents reached the British Admiralty and then fell into the hands of the German Government, with the result that allied ships were sunk by U-boats equipped with British-American designs. In most instances the various governments involved consented to these arrangements.”

Yes, the governments of the warring nations, while exhausting their vocabularies in a mutual denunciation of each other’s fiendishness in warfare, coolly nod their heads at the ghastly business which results in the extermination of those who are sent out to oppose and exterminate the “enemy”—the “enemy” which mows down the very workingmen with the ammunition which these workingmen have themselves produced!

Discussing this subject twenty years ago, when the

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great “issue” was “Preparedness,” the present writer commented as follows:

“It is somewhat difficult to tell which is the greater motive back of the advocacy of preparedness—whether it is capitalism’s desire to defend interests abroad or whether it is to crush the working class at home. But besides the two motives outlined above, a third one is always present which at times may become quite a determining one, though it may be regarded as the least powerful of the three—namely, the greed for profit on the part of those who are engaged in the sale and manufacture of war matériel. Here again we have plenty of evidence at hand to prove that wars and militarism are encouraged and intensified by these armament interests.

“The Krupp scandal in Germany revealed by Karl Liebknecht, the German Socialist, remains classical. It was here shown that members of the Krupp firm (manufacturers of war matériel) had purchased French journalists to stir up a war scare in France, so that the firm might profit by the increased sales of instruments of murder. And it has further been shown that British armament concerns such as Vickers, Armstrong, and others were members of the same combine of armament concerns as the Krupp cannon firm of Essen, and other German armament concerns, all ‘patriotically’ coining gold out of the murder of their own compatriots. One of the greatest of the Revolutionary Fathers, Thomas Jefferson [now acclaimed by the representatives and allies of the American “Merchants of Death,” the du Pont interests], found it necessary to expose similar sinister interests in his day. For, in his first message to Congress he said: ‘ . . . Sound principles will not justify our taxing the industry of our fellow citizens to accumulate treasure for wars to happen we know not when, and which might not, perhaps, happen but from the temptations offered by that treasure.’”

During the first World War the five great arms manufacturers, Vickers, Ltd., Armstrong, Whitworth and Co., Ltd., John Brown and Co., Ltd., Commell, Laird and Co., Ltd., and the Nobel Dynamite Trust, impartially manufactured guns and ammunitions for

“friends” and “foes” alike. Of the firm Vickers it has been said that the sun never sets upon it. The famous German firm of Krupp supplied arms to fifty-two countries before the war, many of which turned these Krupp-made guns against the very German workers who had produced them. The French armament firm of Schneider-Creusot, through one of its holding companies, controls more than 200 armament and allied enterprises exclusive of its French establishments. These enterprises are distributed all over Europe. Fabulous fortunes are made, in peace as well as in war—but, naturally, many times more so in times of war. Our own du Pont Co. (with its subsidiary, the Remington Arms Co., which produces one-third of the total output of firearms and ammunition in the United States) modestly admits that “the du Pont Company lives by profits.” Translated, that means that the du Pont clan, and all the parasites adhering to it, subsist by the process of sucking the blood and marrow out of its army of wage workers. Bearing that in mind, it is of interest to note the further comments made by the company (through its president, Mr. L. du Pont, in September, 1934): “The normal first concern of its management, in justice to both its stockholders *and its employes* [!!] must be to maintain profits. *On the whole, its commercial relations with the government of the U.S. have been profitable.*” (Italics mine.) With this expression of smug satisfaction, the head of the du Pont concern goes into some detail about the profits made before and during World War I: “In convenient round numbers, your company’s profits climbed from a pre-War level of about \$5,000,000 or \$6,000,000 a year to an average of nearly \$59,000,000 for the four years of the

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War, or more than a tenfold increase.” Nearly a quarter of a billion dollars coined out of human carnage in the short time of four years! And this by the proud admission of the company itself.

These huge establishments of death and destruction include among their shareholders politicians, publicists—and clergymen. Thus, in England before and during the war the Bishops of Chester and Newcastle were shareholders in Vickers, Ltd.; the Bishops of Adelaide, Newport and Hexham were interested in Vickers, Ltd., Armstrong, Whitworth and Co., and John Brown and Co. Dean Inge, famous “gloomy dean” of St. Paul’s, was, and perhaps still is, shareholder in Vickers, Ltd. Others were the President of the Y.M.C.A., Lord Kinnaird, and Neville and Austen Chamberlain—the latter won the Nobel peace prize in 1925! Without a doubt we shall find the clergy similarly involved in other countries, the United States not excepted. The commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” becomes unreadable when covered with sufficient gold coin. For, as Lincoln once shrewdly observed, it is pretty difficult to perceive the plainly written word of God through a solid gold eagle!

In other respects the clergy (with few honorable exceptions) share with their fellow-capitalists the spoils of war, emerging from war enriched and strengthened in authority. Speaking of the effects of protracted wars, Henry Thomas Buckle points out that the influence of the clergy is invariably strengthened “by a long and dangerous war, the uncertainties of which perplex the minds of men, and induce them, when natural resources are failing, to call on the supernatural for help. On such occasions, the clergy rise in importance; the churches are

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more than usually filled; and the priest, putting himself forward as the exponent of the wishes of God, assumes the language of authority, and either comforts the people under their losses in a righteous cause, or else explains to them that those losses are sent as a visitation for their sins, and as a warning that they have not been sufficiently attentive to their religious duties; in other words, that they have neglected rites and ceremonies, in the performance of which the priest himself has a personal [material] interest.”⁶

And the pious du Ponts observed: “Another measure of success of these War-time undertakings, *since your company has its place in a capitalistic and not in a communistic organization of industry* [i.e., Cooperative Commonwealth of Free Labor], is in the profits earned.” No wonder, then, that the shareholding clerical gentlemen are so strongly in favor of capitalism, and so vehement in their denunciation of “communistic organization of industry”!

V.

Modern wars, then, being fought exclusively at the behest of commercial and industrial interests, the ultimate result of which is to strengthen capitalism and the forces of social reaction, are emphatically not the concern of the working class except to terminate them as far as it lies within the power of the workers to do so—and this power under capitalism is naturally limited. But any serious attempt at stopping a war of major magnitude (assuming that the workers are

⁶ [Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, 1866.—Editor]

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industrially organized) must necessarily lead direct to revolution. The foe of the American working class resides, not across the seas, or to the north or south of the United States, but right within the country's boundary lines. The foe of the American working class is the American capitalist class, and the allies and lackeys of capitalism. The American plutocracy is fully aware of this. One of the outstanding spokesmen of plutocratic interests in this country, the *New York Sun*, made this significant statement during the World War:

“Britain is for the first time conscious of the presence of the real enemy, the great one, at home [organized labor] . . . Britain no longer entertains the delusion that the chief foe is oversea. She has found him on British soil, millions strong, under the flags of anti-conscription, anti-nationalism, anti-devotion.” (*New York Sun*, January 7, 1916.)

By “Britain” and “British” we are to understand capitalism of Great Britain, and if we substitute for Britain and British the words United States capitalism, etc., the above statement fits this country today as perfectly as if so originally intended. The top-capitalist class and its agents are tirelessly at work designing ways and means of coping with the menace presented to their privileged position as parasites which rests on the present capitalist system of exploitation. Their ideal of a social system is one wherein labor is reduced to complete economic serfdom, with their positions as industrial feudal lords secure. Hence it is necessary to their purpose that the workers should be gagged and hog-tied before they have fashioned their *revolutionary* Industrial Unions through which alone they may derive strength and, ultimately, emancipation from economic bondage.

One of plutocracy's favorite slogans of the moment is that in "the next war" (they are so sure there will be one!—They have even computed its cost at ten billions a year; see *New York Times*, February 12, 1936) industry as well as labor must be conscripted! By putting it this way the industrial feudalists hope to create the impression that they are impartial—that "industry" as well as "labor" must sacrifice alike. The fraud is too apparent to deceive intelligent workers. The "conscription" of labor and industry will mean nothing less than that one portion of the working class will be bound hand and foot, chained to the machine, and mercilessly driven to hard, ceaseless, and cruel toil, with no respite; while another portion will be put in uniform, equipped with tools of murder, and sent out to slaughter and to be slaughtered. The "conscription of industry" means the consolidation of plutocratic interests.

Every now and then there is sent up from the camp of the reaction a trial balloon in order to test the mood of "the country"—to ascertain, if possible, whether the time is ripe for the *absolute* enslavement of labor. Such a "trial balloon" has recently been released from a group calling itself the "American Union Men," a group of self-appointed guardians of American labor. Impudently this group proposes that the workers be organized into unions which are to be run by five "high ranking Army officers." An elaborate scheme is worked out for the absolute and detailed control of the workers thus organized, one part of the proposed law declaring that "the provisions of this act shall apply to all unions of wage earners, and shall apply to any . . . association attached to . . . unions and shall apply to all organizations . . . in which wage earners are

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contributing to the support and maintenance of either directly or indirectly.” The avowed purpose is to prevent the organizing of workers into unions “that represent Russia, I.W.W. or other radical plans. . . .” Anger at the impudence and reactionary character of this proposal should not blind us to the possibility of its becoming law in a not distant future. It is decidedly one of the straws which show that the wind is blowing in the direction of industrial feudalism.

If war comes, some such scheme will undoubtedly be worked out, with prospects of an early emancipation from wage slavery considerably darkened. For, once again, if war in the past served as an “agent of civilization,” in the present period of decadent capitalism, and nascent industrial feudalism, it will inevitably serve as an agent of reaction, of social, intellectual and moral retrogression. And let not the workers be seduced into accepting absolute economic bondage on the pretext of “security” from mere animal wants; let them beware of that “happiest slavery which ever fattened men into obedience,”⁷ to use the graphic expression of that virile American, Wendell Phillips.

VI.

Slowly, painfully, through rivers of blood and tears, the human race has climbed to its present stage in civilization. Throughout the ages, since the downfall of ancient communal society, the workers (chattel slave, serf, wage worker) have borne the brunt of the struggle for existence, thus serving as the carriers of an ever

⁷ [Wendell Phillips, “The War for the Union.”—Editor]

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higher form of civilization. Well might they say, paraphrasing the poet:

“If blood be the price of freedom from want,
Good God—we have paid it in full!”

There lies before us a promise of a social life of such infinite richness, of such beauty and nobility, of such equity and harmony, as to defy the descriptive powers of those gifted with the most imaginative minds. Against it stands the threat of a system of such intensified slavery, of such darkness and continued horror, as to make the most phlegmatic shudder. The decision lies in the mighty, all-potent hands of labor. Industrially organized, there can be no question what the decision will be.

Many problems need to be solved even after the workers have established the Industrial Commonwealth of Labor—problems created by the past systems of class rule, particularly by the now dying capitalist system. But these problems, to which may still be clinging the tears and blood of those who suffered through “famine, pestilence, and war,” can only be finally solved when capitalism has been utterly destroyed, and the sun of Socialism sheds its beneficent rays on all who live and labor. In the noble words of the great Daniel De Leon:

“Socialism, with the light it casts around and within man, alone can cope with these problems. Like the sea that takes up in its bosom and dissolves the innumerable elements poured into it from innumerable rivers, to Socialism is the task reserved of solving one and all the problems that have come floating down the streams of time, and that have kept man in internecine strife with man.”⁸

⁸ [“Anti-Semitism,” *Daily People*, July 5, 1903.—*Editor*]

“THE BRAZEN THROAT OF WAR.”⁹

But war’s a game, which, were their subjects wise,
Kings would not play at.

—*Cowper.*

Among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite war whenever a revolt was apprehended. . . . It is perhaps questionable whether the best concerted system of absolute power in Europe could maintain itself in a situation where no alarms of external danger could tame the people to the domestic yoke.

—*James Madison.*

Mussolini and his cohorts have been credited with brutal frankness in their designs on Ethiopia. It is quite true that brutally and without any assumption of virtue Mussolini, and the capitalist-imperialist interests, whose agent and spokesman he is, have asserted that they need Ethiopia for Italy’s teeming millions and that they are going to take it regardless of what this means to the supposed rights of the assaulted nation. Incidentally, the concern of Mussolini over the fact that the Italian population is spilling over and that more room for them is needed receives an interesting setting when it is recalled that one of Mussolini’s chief hobbies is to have as many Italians produced as possible, having even offered “prizes” to the couples with the most numerous offspring!

However, despite this acknowledged brutality in stating frankly the predatory designs of Italian capitalism, Mussolini found it necessary to endeavor to

⁹ Reprinted from the *Weekly People*, October 26, 1935.

cloak his robber expedition in the usual morality claims of marauding capitalist powers. Thus, in one of the despatches published in the early stage of his present bandit excursion, he is quoted to the effect that he wants "to civilize Ethiopia." Mussolini may have in mind the particular "civilization" enjoyed by Italy at present or he may have in mind general capitalist "civilization." Italian "civilization" is sufficiently well known by this time; it is a civilization which has reduced the working class of Italy to the status of practically absolute slavery, with absolute power vested in a small body of capitalist feudalists, nominally headed by Mussolini.

If the dictator had in mind capitalist "civilization" in general, then here too that civilization has been sufficiently exhibited. The newspaper (*New York Herald Tribune*) which conveyed the information that Mussolini wanted to civilize Ethiopia carried, on the same page, and immediately underneath the Mussolini item, a news item sent from Newburgh, N.Y., under the headline, "Widow Drowns Starving Baby, Carries Him to Police Station." Questioned, the young widow explained that because of ill health and unemployment she was unable to provide for the baby and, she added, she took the child to the creek and let him wade until he got tired. "Then," she said, "I led him out into the middle and held him under until he stopped moving." A social system which reduces mothers to such despair that they choose as the lesser evil, and as a merciful act, the drowning of their babies—such a system, such a "civilization," is lower than any which can possibly exist even in Ethiopia! And this is a typical sample of the civilization which Mussolini and his capitalist-imperialist masters desire to impose upon that African kingdom!

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The function of the clergy in any war invariably has been and is today that of finding divine and moral sanctions for the war, and to bestow the blessing of their particular deity on the arms and the soldiers. The Catholic Church (Ultramontanism), with its headquarters in Rome, apparently found no difficulty in conforming to the regular custom in this respect. Thus the Pope, chief of the Ultramontanes, is reported (in the respectable capitalist newspaper, the *New York Sun*) to have told 1,200 Catholic nurses that “a war which was only a war of conquest would be obviously an unjust war, something which passes beyond imagination, something unspeakably sad and horrible.” The Pope, however, found no difficulty in deciding that the Italian robber expedition was the very opposite of a war of conquest, for, in the *Sun* article, he is further quoted as having said: “In Italy there is no question of a just war, because a war of defense to assure frontiers against continual and insistent danger, a war made necessary by a population which increases day by day, a war undertaken to defend or assure the moral security of a country—such a war is justifiable.” Now that the head of the Ultramontane politicians at Rome, in keeping with the practices of *all* politicians (whether in war or merely in the normal processes of exploiting the workers), has decided that the robber adventure of Mussolini is a moral war, a just war and a war to protect Italian frontiers against “aggression” from a weak country a thousand or more miles distant, nothing should prevent the complete success of Mussolini’s efforts, for everybody knows that God is on the side of the moral and the just!

Few men of letters have more graphically and effectively delineated the process of lending moral

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sanctity and popular approval to a rapacious war than our own Mark Twain. In his posthumous work, *The Mysterious Stranger*, he writes, vividly and truthfully:

There has never been a just one [war], never an honorable one—on the part of the instigator of the war. I can see a million years ahead, and this rule will never change in so many as half a dozen instances. The loud little handful—as usual—will shout for the war. *The pulpit will—warily and cautiously—object—at first*; the great, big, dull bulk of the nation will rub its sleepy eyes and try to make out why there should be a war, and will say, earnestly and indignantly, “It is unjust and dishonorable, and there is no necessity for it.” Then the handful will shout louder. A few fair men on the other side will argue and reason against the war with speech and pen, and at first will have a hearing and be applauded; but it will not last long; those others will outshout them, and presently the anti-war audiences will thin out and lose popularity. Before long you will see this curious thing: the speakers stoned from the platform, and free speech strangled by hordes of furious men who in their secret hearts are still at one with those stoned speakers—as earlier—but do not dare to say so. And now the whole nation—*pulpit and all*—will take up the war-cry, and shout itself hoarse, and mob any honest man who ventures to open his mouth; and presently such mouths will cease to open. Next the statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception.

The Pope has done exactly what Mark Twain said the clergy would do. To be sure, the *bandito* Mussolini has got him in a cleft stick. If the Pope objects too strenuously (assuming he had any desire to object) Benito will probably give him a kick in the pants, and make him sound the depths of the Tyrrhenian Sea!

It is also of interest to observe the efforts made by

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British and other propagandists to alienate the Pope and the Roman Church in relation to the Italo-Ethiopian war. Possibly these efforts, however, are chiefly intended to expose the alliance between the Church of Rome and the Italian industrial feudalists, without definitely charging that this alliance has already been formed. Thus Lord Dickinson, president of the World Alliance for International Friendship, in an appeal broadcast recently “to the Pope and Roman Catholics of the United States and other countries,” urged the Pope to speak out against Mussolini, asserting that “by so doing they can end the massacre of Christians by Christians in Ethiopia and assert the ecumenic character of the Church of Rome, WHICH IS IN DANGER OF BECOMING A PRO-ITALIAN AGENCY.” The phrase, “in danger of becoming,” is rather humorous in view of the Pope’s statement quoted above which was made nearly two months ago, long before actual war operations had begun.

Brazen as have been the announced designs of Italian capitalism against Ethiopia, which designs have been echoed, if not promoted, by the Pope himself, it is obvious, nevertheless, that it is felt that efforts should be made to clothe this mad and savage adventure in the garment of idealism and disinterestedness—efforts which, in effect, constitute unwilling tribute rendered to that higher civilization which is struggling to establish itself in a world blighted by wage slavery and ravaged by capitalist exploitation and its accompaniments, wars and crime.

Never before has there been a spectacle such as that presented in the present situation. On the one hand, we find Italian capitalism, desperately pushed to the wall

by economic necessity, reaching out for relief and grabbing it where it thinks it finds it; on the other hand, there are the opponents of Italian capitalist interests, with predatory British interests in the foreground. With British capitalist-imperialist interests the struggle is one of life or death to the empire. Apart from the immediate British interests at stake (in Egypt, Soudan, the control of the Blue Nile, etc.), there are the far vaster imperial interests involving control of undisputed access to India, the Far East, and other oversea British spheres of control or influence. Moreover, Great Britain must eventually control absolutely the Mediterranean (where she already has her strong hooks) or yield the place to Italian (and allied) capitalist interests. To yield in such circumstances is to go down in crushing defeat, and the British Empire has evinced no desire to tread the path of the Pharaohs, the Caesars and the Kaisers. Thus, the struggle is one similar to that of the two goats midway on the narrow plank suspended over a yawning chasm: neither can go back, both want to go forward, but *one must, and both may, be plunged into the chasm below!* It is “war even to the knife.” Hence, even as Italian capitalism is seeking “moral sanctions,” so British capitalism is exerting every effort to frustrate the designs of Italian capitalism and to invoke the moral support of the world in order ostensibly to defend a poor, defenseless country, presumably with the noblest aim in view! The fact that Ethiopia itself is nothing short of an inferno for the masses of the people evidently does not enter into the consideration of the “noble” defenders and allies of the Ethiopian ruling class.

Again it is well to record the fact of the communist-capitalist alliance with respect to Ethiopia. Abandoning

completely the class struggle, the Anarcho-Communist adventurers and reformers are openly taking sides in this capitalist-imperialist conflict, thereby undoubtedly writing the finishing chapters to a career of unscrupulousness and imbecility which has been without parallel in the history of the labor movement.¹⁰

¹⁰ In its relations with foreign capitalist powers, Soviet Russia has entered the game for all it is worth. While Communist parties were calling for a “united front” with the Ethiopians against Italy, Russia was blithely supplying the gangster Mussolini with oil so that he could continue his marauding expedition in Africa. A dispatch in the *New York Times* of September 8, 1935, states the facts succinctly: “While officially condemning Italy’s Ethiopian campaign as an imperial attempt to subdue a free people, the Soviet Union is furthering Fascist aims and profiting from them by exporting supplies to the Italian camps in Africa.” And the dispatch goes on to give particulars.

“Most of the freighters carry cargoes of wheat from Sebastopol and coal tar from Nicolaiev for new roads destined to cross the Ethiopian frontiers. The shipments were sold by the Soviet through the federal monopolies. Coal is also shipped from Theodosia and oil from Batum; but most of the fuel goes to Italy.”

The Soviet Government insisted on cash, and the typical capitalist psychology is revealed when it is added that “the war business with Italy is more profitable to the Soviet than the trade with other Mediterranean countries. . . .”

The lying Anarcho-Communist organ, the *Daily Worker*, has not dared to deny the substantial truthfulness of this account. The best they have been able to do is to try to belittle the significance of this unprincipled action by people who are supposed to be governed by Marxian standards. In its January 31 issue the sheet argues that Soviet trade with Italy has declined, that oil shipments have been cut, etc., etc. Its very effort is an acknowledgment that Soviet Russia is supplying Italy’s marauding gangs with the means to carry on the war—in conjunction, of course, with capitalist countries. Whether this is done in greater or lesser degree, as compared with previous years, is immaterial. Competition with such powerful combinations as Standard Oil has no doubt caused Soviet Russia to lose oil trade; this, and no other cause, is undoubtedly responsible for the falling off. The point of the Communist sheet is as imbecile as anything else emanating from that camp. For if it means anything it can only mean that Soviet Russia will sell *so* much, but no more, to the Italian bandit! What the *Daily Worker* in effect is saying by making this unique explanation is

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Again the Socialist Labor Party asserts that the interests of the working class and of civilization are served neither by the victory of Italian capitalism nor by the victory of backward and utterly reactionary Ethiopia and the latter's British and allied defenders. The interests of the proletariat can be served only by organizing for the extermination of the social system which is the sole cause of all present social disorders, including the present war now raging in Africa and which is threatening to draw in the rest of the capitalist powers in Europe, with the possibility of engulfing the entire world, with the further prospect of destroying such civilization as we now possess and destroying also the possibilities of an early realization of the Socialist goal. Again and again the Socialist Labor Party, its organizers and its members, must emphasize this obvious and simple truth which, applied to the present situation, means that greater and greater efforts must be made by the Socialist Labor Party to reach the working class of America to the end of effecting an early organization of the workers into Industrial Unions so that the cursed system of capitalism may be wiped from the face of the earth and the Socialist Republic of Labor established.

that it was *only* such a *leetle* bit of a baby!—(From report of N.E.C. to Socialist Labor Party National Convention, 1936.)

Flashlights on War by Daniel De Leon

While British “Liberals” and “Conservatives”; while French “Republicans,” “Legitimists,” “Bonapartists,” and “Radicals”; while German “Agrarians,” “Imperial Liberals” and “Centrists”; in short, while the several shades of the ruling class in Europe convene “International Peace Congresses,” and set up “Hague Courts of Arbitration”;—while the bourgeois thus indulge in sentiment, one and all their potentates pull the wires for the wholesale homicide of wasteful war; their orators and statesmen inflame national hatreds; their ecclesiastics—as was notably and recently done by the Pope on the occasion of the Italian war in North Africa—“bless” the deadly arms of their respective nationalities; and the “pillars” of their society, the merchant princes, keep paid agents in foreign countries there to fan the embers of war-breeding fears, in order to drive their own governments to invest more extensively in their own goods, wares and merchandise—guns, swords, cannon, powder, bayonets. . . .

DAILY PEOPLE, April 25, 1913

*

Thus, while the bourgeois declaim Peace, yet manufacture War; while clericalists pray with lip-service devotion for human brotherhood, yet bless the weapons of fratricidal strife; while the revived Spirit of Napoleon III—who proclaimed “The Empire means peace,” yet raided Italy and Mexico—has been reincarnated in a Big-Stick Roosevelt, who declares “the Progressive party is peace”;—while, in short, at one side of the line, Hypocrisy

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reigns supreme, Slaughter being promoted under the pretenses of Peace, it is on the other side of the line, in the Socialist camp only, that Peace is a cardinal principle, a religion, a goal earnestly, sincerely and devoutly pursued with all the intelligence at the command of the race.

DAILY PEOPLE, Nov. 15, 1912

*

There is a nation closer at hand that the powers that be are getting ready to fight in the hope of putting it down—and keeping it henceforth down under the iron heel of military despotism.

That Nation is not all white of skin, nor all black, nor all yellow. That Nation is cosmopolitan. It is the Working Class of the land. . . .

The Nation that the land's Plutocracy is foe to, and is arming against is our own Nation's vitals—its Working Class.

DAILY PEOPLE, April 26, 1911

*

Here is the cat all out, from whiskered nose to tassled tail. Commercialism deals in war as it deals in potatoes, rum, bibles, etc. It matters not that the effect of owning a navy is to render a nation readier for war; what of it? War feeds commerce, commerce feeds war, and the end of the song is larger wealth for those to luxuriate in who neither bleed on the battlefields nor swelter on the industrial fields of toil

Capitalism means war; one plank of capitalism means the whole of capitalism. To oppose one plank only is to leave all others standing, and thus render abortive all seeming success against the monster.

THE PEOPLE, Nov. 28, 1897

WAR—WHY?

*

When Bryan attacks “militarism” and yet upholds the capitalist system, he is fighting an effect while defending the cause. He and all others of his kind in attacking “militarism” merely imitate the farmer who knowingly planted cockleseed and then complained at the nature of the crop.

DAILY PEOPLE, Aug. 11, 1900

*

Punchinello-like the political heads of the capitalist class move as their masters, the capitalist class, pull the strings. According as the strings are pulled, Presidents and Kings, Congresses and Parliaments, shut their eyes to infractions of the law, or rattle their sabers. Obedient to capitalist dictation, laws are superseded, or passed; and war clouds are pulled upon the scene, or pulled off.

DAILY PEOPLE, Sept. 17, 1911

Words for Sir Basil Zaharoff

[This powerful and strangely moving poem by the brilliant playwright, Maxwell Anderson, was originally published in F.P.A.'s¹¹ *Herald Tribune* column. The Conning Tower. It is reprinted with permission of publisher and author. It is a fitting footnote to any discussion on war, and in any reference to war-makers and "merchants of death" (munition manufacturers), among whom the late Sir Basil Zaharoff was the outstanding figure. Zaharoff's immense fortune was made unscrupulously, without regard to race, religion, politics or language, out of the mangled flesh, and rivers of red blood, from millions of the flower of the world's youth—A.P.]

Where is the grave of Sir Basil Zaharoff,
Where may the bones of the old man lie,
Within what borders, under what far-off
Trim God's acre look up at the sky?

Ride the spot well, you sextons and keepers,
Carve obscurely his epigraph,
For the earth about him is thick with sleepers
Dead but to profit that cenotaph.

Lap him in lead; let the groins end girders
Jointing the marble be bronze and steel
Where he lays him down with his million murders,
Hated by inches, from head to heel.

Picket the night, lest a ground swell rising
Along the numberless cross-marked mounds
Vomit the forms of his dead, devising

¹¹ [Franklin Pierce Adams.—*Editor*]

WAR—WHY?

Spectral, a spectral fox and hounds;

Basil Zaharoff, with fox mustaches
Blowing back toward a storm of ghosts,
Flying forever the hate that lashes
Quenchless from these pursuing hosts;

Seen by night, when the long lights blind him,
Torn by the hedges, wet with the rains,
With his million dead in cry behind him,
His whiskers blowing, leaping the lanes.

Weight him with granite, Sir Basil Zaharoff,
Dig him in thoroughly, set him deep,
Secret, silent, alone and afar-off—
But his dead will find him; he shall not sleep.

—*Maxwell Anderson*

The Illusion of War

War
I abhor,
And yet how sweet
The sound along the marching street
Of drum and fife, and I forget
Wet eyes of widows, and forget
Broken old mothers, and the whole
Dark butchery without a soul.

Without a soul, save this bright drink
Of heady music, sweet as hell;
And even my peace-abiding feet
Go marching with the marching street—
For yonder, yonder goes the fife,
And what care I for human life!

The tears fill my astonished eyes,
And my full heart is like to break;
And yet 'tis all embannered lies,

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A dream those little drummers make.

O, it is wickedness to clothe
Yon hideous grinning thing that stalks,
Hidden in music, like a queen
That in a garden of glory walks,
Till good men love the thing they loathe.

Art, thou has many infamies,
But not an infamy like this—
O, snap the fife, and still the drum,
And Show the monster as she is.

—*Richard Le Gallienne*

(New York *Evening Post*, August 29, 1914)