

Radicals and War

A DEBATE

For Sanctions:

LUDWIG LORE

ON November 18, 1935 Article XVI of the League of Nations Covenant was invoked by the League Powers in a vain attempt to uphold the status of that body as defender of the smaller nations against aggression by the larger powers. In calling for sanctions against Italy after having found her guilty of violating the League Covenant, the signatories of that instrument, for the first time in history, used economic pressure in time of peace for political purposes.

As was to be expected, there has been much heated discussion regarding not only the effectiveness but also the validity of this method of bringing pressure to bear on a recalcitrant nation. These objections come from various sources and are backed by as wide a diversity of arguments as they are prompted by widely divergent motives and considerations. Sanctions are condemned in many quarters as an unprecedented interference with world business which, in its effect on the economic life of the nation against which they are invoked, would be tantamount to war. The citizens of such a state, so the arguments run, would be subject to the same profound misery as if they were at war with the entire world. At the other extreme there are those who, from a revolutionary standpoint, condemn the whole sanctions business as a vicious weapon in the hands of the great capitalist Powers—in this case England and France—to establish their supremacy over the smaller nations and to consolidate their imperial status.

I doubt whether anyone honestly believes in the altruism of the British government. Everyone knows that Great Britain proceeds from the most selfish of motives, that she fears the strengthening of Italian influence in East Africa as a threat to her own colonial empire. I am convinced that everyone—pro-sanction or against—feels a lively distrust for France's loud peace protestations. One would have to be credulous indeed to believe that capitalism in England and in France is resorting to sanctions as a weapon against the spread of fascist power. Mr. Baldwin made it very clear in his address to the House of Commons not long ago that the British ruling class would a thousand times prefer Fascism with all its unpleasant concomitants to a Socialist or a Communist government or, for that matter, to a pure and simple labor regime. The reluctance of these Powers to go the whole hog against Italy by

invoking an oil embargo is proof that neither has any desire to inflict serious injury on the Italian fascist state. All the way through, this fear of upsetting the political status quo on the European continent has been the dominant motive in the policy of Paris and London.

It is certain that Italy will not gain her full objective—the subjugation of Ethiopia to Italian rule. Mussolini will not ride through Rome like a modern Caesar with the King tied to his chariot wheels.

It is this, and the fact that labor, for the first time since the rise of Fascism to political power, has found an ally in its struggle against fascist imperialism, that has persuaded me and hundreds of thousands in the progressive and labor movements of the world, to support the League in its sanctions policy. It has decided the Socialist Labor International and the Communist International, the International Federation of Trade Unions (Amsterdam) and the Red Trade Union International (Moscow) to give the sanctions policy of the League of Nations their complete cooperation, a decision wholly in accord with revolutionary Socialist economic and political theory. Significantly, not a single major unit of the aforementioned groups has raised objections to the decision of the Internationals.

It is true that there are other groups in the labor movement which though they do not object to the idea of world action as a weapon against aggression, refuse to admit international labor's obligation to approve or support an action of this kind. This point of view which is represented in the U. S. A. by the Militants of the Socialist Party and by the Workers Party of the United States, objects to the support of sanctions imposed by world imperialism and pleads for sanctions by the international labor movement instead. To be specific, what they want is an international general strike against trade with Italy and an international workers boycott of its manufactures and raw materials.

The idea is not a new one though it has never advanced beyond the status of a beautiful abstraction. I contend that the present situation cries for a more realistic policy. To take this intransigent point of view one must be youthful and optimistic indeed. Those who have learned to feel a deeper respect for the hard facts of the present situation, are not so ready to condemn what still remains of the international labor movement to fascist destruction with all the untold suffering and useless sacrifice that this would imply. They insist on something more than a Utopian solution divorced from all actuality. Where, may I ask, is the labor movement that is

prepared to call or capable of carrying through a general strike for such a purpose? Where is the political or trade union organization which would, or for that matter could, dare to attempt the calling of a world boycott movement against one or more aggressor nations? To be consistent such a movement would have to take a stand not only against Italy but against Japan as well. The mere fact that world imperialism took its stand behind Ethiopia but left China a helpless victim to Japanese aggression would not justify a similar stand by the forces of labor. Let us be honest with ourselves! That movement does not exist and, to all present appearances will not come into existence for at least a decade to come. It might have been said to exist three years ago or more. At that time Germany and Austria had powerful labor movements. Fascism in the other nations of Europe was in an embryonic stage. It offered no problem to a determined and united labor front. What happened? On the day that President Hindenburg announced the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor of the Reich, the Communist Party of Germany ordered a general strike. Not quite 50,000 workers responded. The other twelve million remained on the job. Today the most fervid supporter of "proletariat sanctions" would hesitate to suggest a general strike to Germany's oppressed millions. The total lack of a remotely effective underground organization automatically rules out that possibility. The destruction of the courageous Austrian Social Democracy tells its own story.

The English unions are powerful. But can they be depended upon to take real action? Not long ago they enthusiastically voted an embargo of Nazi Germany which was to be supported by the whole strength of the movement. The good intentions have come to naught, drowned in a sea of inaction. As to the Italian labor movement—on which, in the last analysis, the brunt of an effective general strike against Italian aggression would have to fall—he would be optimist indeed who could look forward to effective and organized action there under present conditions.

How about a world boycott of Italian goods? Have we forgotten the experiences gained in the boycott of Germany's products. Almost entirely individual in its application and to a large extent dependent on the help of world capitalism for its effective execution, the boycott is an even more utopian measure than the general strike.

But, so argues the anti-sanctionist, to support the League of Nations in the invocation of sanctions is equivalent to an admission of the degeneration of the great labor internationals. They compare the position of the pro-sanctionists with that of the German Socialists in the World War. They ignore the fact—and it is all-important—that the coming of fascism presents a new set of premises which, like it or not, must be taken into account. They fail to

consider further, that the strongest European labor movements—Italian, Austrian, German—no longer exist. They overlook a situation in which hardly a single nation in Europe today is free from the danger of immediate fascist conquest in some form or other. In 1914 the question that faced the working class was nationalism vs. internationalism. Today there is only one choice: fascism and the complete destruction of the entire European labor movement—including the U.S.S.R.—or the checking of fascism's onward march by supporting the League's international embargo.

Supporting League sanctions is not pacifism. On the contrary. To encourage a blockade of the Suez Canal, for instance, might easily provoke a European war. If war is to be prevented, if German and Italian fascism is to be blocked, there will have to be concerted action by the great Powers and their smaller associates. Under Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, England's tactic is unquestionably aimed at discrediting Italian world political influence by throttling her economic and military aspirations. True, London under those conditions might dictate peace terms which the working masses and their organizations could not approve. But the all-important thing would be that the father of fascism had met with defeat. It all boils down to this—that the world labor movement in its present state is in no condition to dictate. It can only choose between two evils. It must accept the one which offers the greatest likelihood for recovery to the Italian, Austrian and German labor movements and through them, to the international labor movement of the whole world.

To argue this question on the basis of abstract theory is futile. Whether international labor as a force is to be or not to be will depend on the degree to which the fascist onslaught can be met. Fascism is like a destructive weed. It has no boundaries. It can only be destroyed root and branch. One of its greatest assets has been its seeming invincibility. Show the world that Mussolini and Hitler are men of clay and the whole superstructure of world fascism will crumble.

In all this the class conscious worker would have an important duty to perform. It would be the task of his organizations to show the masses that labor is supporting a policy of united League action as the only means by which capitalism can hope to stop impending wars. I am not blind to the dangers of this situation. It is possible that this effort to halt fascist aggression will lead to another war "to free the world from fascism" which may become just another imperialist war as was the "war to make the world safe for democracy." If we hold this to be inevitable however, we must believe that the workers have learned nothing and forgotten nothing since those fateful days of 1914. It is not defeatism to recognize that fascism today has labor on the

defensive. The defeatist is he who believes that international labor, must, under all circumstances, fall under the spell of the nationalist and imperialist influences, who sees world labor not as the prey of forces at present beyond its control, but as the victim of its own intellectual and moral disintegration.

Against Sanctions:

SIDNEY HOOK

LUDWIG LORE'S defense of sanctions has a strangely familiar air. Indeed he himself is compelled to admit that his argument rings like the old 1914 tunes about the necessity of defending German Kultur against Czarism (the "fascism" of its day) and French Democracy against German militarism. I vividly recall how Lore argued for an internationalist position in those days even against the Belgian Socialists who pleaded the necessity of defending a "small nation" against the unprovoked attack of an "aggressor." He pointed out that the real enemy of the worker was not so much "the foreign nation" but capitalism in whose economic development wars are a natural event. The real enemy, therefore, was at home and instead of slaughtering each other the workers would do well to attempt to acquire power in their own countries and build socialism together.

To-day Lore argues that the times are different and that to take the position which he regarded as valid in the last war is to be victimized by "abstract theory," is to surrender realism for youthful optimism. I do not have to remind Lore that these epithets were precisely the ones directed against him by the ardent Pro-war socialists. Nothing, however, is to be gained by *ad hominem* considerations, for I think it can be established by "realistic" analysis that working class support of the policy of sanctions is detrimental to the best interests of the international working class and that such support will be self-defeating in that it will constitute a factor in precipitating the advent of the war and fascism (in "democratic" countries) which presumably it sets out to prevent. Indeed, I shall not need much more than what Lore himself admits in the course of his article for my demonstration. And knowing Lore as I do, as a man who has given his best years to the cause of the international workingclass, and who has never hesitated to fight for the truth, even in a lost cause, I know he will not consider it arrogant of me if I say that I have hopes of convincing him.

But there is one preliminary matter which requires comment. I grant Lore that to-day times are different. But I insist that times are *always* different. Far from being an argument against 'theory' and 'principles', this is precisely why they are important. Otherwise mere habit could guide us. Just because

times are always different, we need certain leading ideas and doctrines to help us uncover uniformities, to distinguish between the relevant and irrelevant, to enable us to anticipate the probable consequences of what we do or leave undone, and to chart tentatively that area of relative indetermination in which we need *more* knowledge, *more* adequate doctrines and *better* methods. It is in *applying* theories and doctrines to times which are different that we discover their truth or efficacy in action. Theory without action is either religion or an excuse for running away. Action without theory is either trusting to blind chance or the support of whoever happens to be strongest at the moment.

Ludwig Lore is opposed to war and fascism. The question is whether the support of League sanctions against Italy will prevent either war or the spread of Fascism. Now, it is clear that if economic sanctions are effective, Italy will try to break the blockade against it. This means attempts to *enforce* the blockade against it. This means attempts to *enforce* the blockade by Britain or France, i.e., war. If economic sanctions are ineffective, the Suez Canal will have to be closed, i.e., war again. If war will be the probable result of strict sanctions, then the nations applying them *must prepare* for war. On Lore's own view, the victory of Italy and her allies would be calamitous. To insure against this victory, those like Lore who support sanctions must support, nay, urge, the largest possible navy, army and air force necessary to bring Italy to heel. But what does war mean for the working-class in France and England? Aside from the fact that it is they who will bleed in the war, is it not true that their strikes will be forbidden, their political agitation against the capitalist state suppressed and their militant organizations dissolved? Otherwise the war cannot be effectively prosecuted. But when these measures are adopted in France and England how will their governmental systems differ from Italian Fascism except in national color? War to-day in any country means a state consolidated organization to defend the national capital—in short, war means Fascism.

What would a war against Italian Fascism waged by the imperialistic powers in the League achieve? Will it prevent Italian attempts at expansion in Africa? As a Marxist, does not Lore admit that wars are the outgrowth of socio-economic problems, that war is politics carried on by other means and that the guiding clue to politics is economics? Well, then, is it Mussolini who is driving Italy to war or is it the capitalistic demands of the Italian economy? Is it Hitler who is forcing war or the social and economic consequences of German capitalism? Lore admits that it is not moral nobility which is driving Britain to oppose Italy but the imperialistic needs of the British Empire. If Mussolini were overthrown to-morrow, and Italy remains capitalist, is there any guarantee she will not attempt to continue

her expansionist policy? For notice that bourgeois democratic France is doing in Indo-China, bourgeois democratic Belgium is doing in the Congo, bourgeois democratic England is doing in Egypt precisely the same thing which Italy wants to do in Ethiopia. Lore's distinction between 'good' and 'bad' capitalistic powers would logically lead him, in the event that Italy and Germany came to grips over Austria, to a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Fascist powers, which would be like making a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' executioners.

From the point of view of the working-class any measure which strengthens the military arm of the State power weakens the workers in their struggle for socialism. Was this not the lesson of the social-democratic debacle in Germany where the socialists voted military appropriations as "defense" against the enemies of Kultur in exchange for a mess of governmental pottage only to discover that the military machine would countenance no socialist agitation, and was used most ruthlessly against the working-class? Or does Lore share the consolatory dream of the French Communists who having capitulated to Stalin and abandoned their anti-militaristic activity now say that they can steal the power of the French army behind the backs of the French military staff?

Lenin who opposed all support of national capitalist governments during the war on principled and practical grounds was called a pro-German, an agent provocateur and a spy by social-patriots. To-day socialists who refuse to play the game of Great Britain and call for a struggle against *all* capitalist powers are called friends of Mussolini by those who are preparing to herd the working class into the shambles of another world war. Their arguments, however, remain unanswered, especially their denial of the basic premise, shared by Lore, of latter-day social patriotism, viz., that the choice is between fascism and bourgeois democracy. Since bourgeois democracy has not been able to prevent Fascism, since in the present era of capitalist devolpment to go to war for the bourgeois democracy of country *A* against the fascism of country *B* means the speedy advent of fascism in country *A*, Lore's choice reduces itself to an alternative between fascism of the home brew and fascism of an imported variety. Politically, economically and culturally the real choice is between *socialism* and fascism. Those who look for a lesser evil to escape the struggle for socialism will always find one at hand, relegating socialism either to the land of pipe dreams or to the inevitable processes at work which will deliver it some day *despite* anything we do. In either case it becomes *reine Zukunftsmusik*.

Fascism in bourgeois democratic countries is not inevitable. But it cannot be staved off by a united front for *bourgeois* democracy. Basic class differences will burst it asunder as soon as the political

temperature rises. Only a united front for *socialism* can defeat fascism. The German calamity was due not to the failure of socialists and communists to unite with the bourgeoisie in defense of the Weimar Republic but to their failure to unite for a socialist state.

Fascism in Italy and Germany is not invincible. Nor do I claim that an international labor boycott against Fascist countries will by itself bring about their downfall. But such a boycott is something that can be undertaken now independently of national governments and the League of Nations. Its full effects cannot be determined because, despite what Lore says, *it has not yet been really tried*. The Russian trade unions have not been permitted to join it, the economic support in the form of acceptance of credits which Russia gave to Germany, after Hitler's accession to power, and the continued shipments of oil to Italy have lowered the morale of the boycott movement. But if sufficient pressure was brought to bear by the world labor movement, Russia would have to reverse itself. The best defense of Russia against foreign attack is *not* capitalist France or England who, as events are rapidly proving, fear a red Germany more than they do a black one. If the Marxist analysis is sound, when their own economic and imperial interests are at stake, these countries will regard their pacts as so many scraps of paper. Only *socialist* states can wholeheartedly defend Russia. This is the fundamental fact upon which Stalin's misguided foreign policy will be shipwrecked. Those who are diverting the labor movement from the struggle for socialism to a support for nationalist sanctions and imperialist war may live to see the suicidal consequence of their policy, i.e., the destruction of the militant working-class movement. If their line is right, Marxist theory is wrong root and all! But the Marxian theory as applied to modern history has been confirmed on so many other occasions that it enjoys an overwhelming probability of being right even in these different times.

To conclude. Lore sincerely opposes war but he advocates a policy which will hasten it; he opposes fascism but he does not see that the day war is declared the fascist emblem will flutter over the nation's capital—be it France, England, or our own United States.

Rebuttal:

LUDWIG LORE

MUCH as I appreciate my good friend Sidney Hook's sincerely meant admonishments, I am afraid that they will not move me to change my position. I do not see myself, as does my opponent, as an erring sinner who must be brought back to the paths of proletarian righteous-

ness. Nor do I feel that in supporting sanctions, I am praying to the gods I tried to destroy in a "better past." I have always been proud of my world War record. I opposed the war in those stormy days of 1914, with the deep conviction that revolutionary labor in the warring countries of Europe was strong and powerful enough to carry out a policy of its own and might, had it so willed, have prevented that bloody holocaust. I never shared the view of the pacifist who condemns war on purely dogmatic or sentimental grounds, although I realize that anything less than dogmatic absolutism inevitably involves the possibility of compromise with capitalist aims. But European labor has outgrown the period of theoretic isolationism. It has grown to manhood and is dealing with tragic realities.

My viewpoint is not as unheard-of as Comrade Hook's analysis might lead the uninformed reader to believe. It was held by Marx and Engels in the latter part of the nineteenth century and more recently by Lenin and Trotsky and other revolutionary Socialists of our times.

On September 5, 1870, the Social Democratic Party of Germany issued a manifesto written by Karl Marx "To the German Workers" in which the founder of scientific Socialism stated his position as follows:

"So long as the mercenaries of Napoleon threatened Germany, it was our duty as Germans to defend the independence of the Fatherland. Such a defensive does not exclude offensive measures. It includes the necessity, as does every war, of forcing the enemy to accept peace."

In a letter discussing Bebel and Liebknecht's refusal to vote in the Reichstag for the war loan of 1870, Marx explained that every attitude toward war must be determined by immediate conditions. The time for demonstration against war on principle cannot last indefinitely, he declared, and this applies also to the period of recognition and support of war. He expressed his unqualified approval of an answer given by the First International to the Executive of the German Social Democratic Party which Engels laid before him at his own request:

"I think the Social Democracy can: 1) Take part in the national movement in so far as and as long as it limits itself to the defense of Germany (which under certain conditions does not exclude the offensive, until peace is declared); 2) Emphasize the difference between German national interests and dynastic Prussian interests; 3) Work against any annexation of Alsace Lorraine; 4) As soon as a republican, non-chauvinist government is at the helm in Paris, to work for an honorable peace with it . . ."

I could present similar Marx and Engels quotations regarding the Russo-Turkish and the Austro-Prussian wars to prove my point.

"In the last stages of the (Brest-Litovsk) negotiations," writes William Henry Chamberlin in "The Russian Revolution 1917-1921," Trotsky had based some hope on military aid, at least of a passive character, from the Allies. . . . About the same time Trotsky told Lockhart

(unofficial British diplomatic agent), that if an Allied promise of support were forthcoming, he would sway the decision of the Soviet Government in favor of war. In view of the closeness of the division in the Central Committee Trotsky might easily have carried out this assurance. But the British Government was unwilling to commit itself and Lockhart's inquiry went unanswered. The question of the propriety of accepting military instructors and supplies from the "imperialistic" Allied Governments was hotly debated within the Party Central Committee on February 22 and Trotsky obtained a majority of one vote for his view that aid should be accepted on condition that the Bolsheviks retained complete independence in foreign policy and gave no political promises. Lenin was not present at this session, but, characteristically enough, he agreed with Trotsky's practical view on this question and put himself on record with a scribbled note which read: "I ask to add my vote in favor of taking potatoes and arms from the bandits of Anglo-French imperialism. . . ." Even after the peace had been signed Trotsky seems to have kept in view the possibility of Allied military cooperation. On March 5, two days after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been signed, but before it had been ratified, Trotsky gave (Colonel Raymond) Robins, head of the American Red Cross Mission in Russia, a written statement asking whether, "in the event of a Soviet refusal to ratify the Peace or of a subsequent breach with Germany," the Soviet Government could rely on the support of the United States, of Great Britain and of France in the struggle against Germany"; what would be the nature of this assistance; what would America do if Japan should occupy Siberia. . . ."

But none of the Allies was willing. . . .

I agree with Comrade Hook that a united front of anti-Fascist elements will not defeat or destroy the inherent imperialism of the capitalist class. Imperialism is indissolubly a part of the capitalist system and cannot be destroyed unless capitalism itself is overthrown. I would not dream of arguing that the problems of the working class will or can be solved on the basis of an understanding with liberal elements. But I do contend that a People's Front of all anti-fascist elements can defer the victory of fascism in countries where it has not yet achieved supremacy as in France and in giving the working class in those countries time to build a united proletarian force to strengthen its organizations and spread its ideology by homogeneous education and propaganda. In the present crisis time is everything. Labor must have time to build up the resistance of the working class. Sidney Hook admits that "Fascism in Italy and Germany is not invincible." But split up and totally unprepared as they are for that colossal struggle, it will take the Italian and the German labor movements many years to gather sufficient strength to launch a successful offensive.

We need collective action now—and not when it will again be too late. This action can take two forms: maintaining peace, if that is at all possible, forcing peace on the aggressor—in this case German and Italian Fascism—if it is not. That both

wings of European labor agree on the question of sanctions should make Sidney Hook and his political friends a little less sure of their position. It was Lenin, was it not, who declared that Communism must take its stand with, and not outside, the working class.¹

FOOTNOTE BY SIDNEY HOOK

1 In his rebuttal Ludwig Lore has studiously evaded answering my arguments that a capitalist war against Fascism will bring fascism in capitalist countries not yet Fascist. Instead he has retreated to the argument from authority. The 1870 citations from Marx are irrelevant in this connection. They were quoted by the pro-war socialists in 1914 to defend their social patriotism. If they were inapplicable, as Lore believed, already in 1914, it is astonishing that he should seek to revive them in 1936. Again Lore is simply neglecting my analysis of the concrete situation to-day. Certainly,

Lenin and Trotsky were willing to accept military aid from the Allies *but at the same time they called upon the socialists in Allied countries to overthrow their capitalist governments.* That is a far cry from calling upon socialists, as Stalin has done, to support capitalist governments. It is no accident that the Allied powers refused to help Socialist Russia in 1917. To chain the international working class to their national governments in hopes that the latter will really help Socialist Russia to-day is madness from a Marxist point of view. Of course, one must take one's stand with the working class but it was Lenin, was it not, who with Trotsky and a handful of others opposed the entire official Socialist movement in 1914. Who was right? Lore confuses allegiance to the working class with the validity of policies undertaken to implement that allegiance. The validity of a policy is not decided, as Lore seems to think, by numbers. The choice of policies, however, whether right or wrong, must be made by the masses. That is why discussion of the new social-patriotic policy of the 3rd International and some sections of the 2nd International (happily not the Socialist Party of the U.S.A.) must be carried on everywhere.