

# World Socialism

## THE COMMUNISTS, OIL AND WAR

By HERBERT ZAM

No matter how critical one may have been of the communist movement, no one could possibly have expected the communist case to be so empty and unprincipled as it was presented by Earl Browder at the debate between Norman Thomas and Browder in New York. Even granting (as one of the communist papers claimed) that Browder deliberately refused to meet the points Thomas raised because he did not want to "sharpen" the situation, the defense of the present communist situation must still be a little stronger and more consistent if it is to be even taken seriously. After all, a movement which claims to be the vanguard of the world proletariat must have more to show in its favor than simply the desire to establish a united front! We are not Christians, and borderly love does not make a very dramatic appeal.

Some of Browder's attempts to show the difference between communism and reformism were really ludicrous. The communists, he declared, believe in proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power, the reformists do not. This repetition of ancient formulas is absolutely meaningless under present circumstances. Since when do we judge a movement by a few phrases in its program? Do we not remember Lenin's warning: "He who believes in words is an idiot?"

Browder well knows that today, as in the past, some of the worst forms of opportunism in practice can cover themselves with revolutionary phrases on paper. Did not the two-and-a-half International include belief in proletarian dictatorship and Soviet power in its program? Even Kautsky and Hilferding at one time professed agreement with these ideas. But the communists today no more apply a policy consistent with this belief than did Kautsky when he was applying for admission to the Comintern.

### Phrases and Action

A glance at the events of recent years will further demonstrate the futility of judging a movement by a couple of phrases in its program. The communists had for years been talking about proletarian dictatorship, Soviet power and armed uprising. But was their action in Germany consistent with such talk? Quite the opposite. When the crucial moment arrived their action was complete capitulation in practice. In Austria and Spain, on the other hand, there were big Socialist Parties which had never included belief in armed uprising in their program. But when a crucial moment arrived and the interests of the proletariat demanded armed resistance to reaction, these parties were found at the head of the workers.

If such a situation could develop at a time when the communists were still shouting about "proletarian revolution," how much more probable is it today, when the communists have forgotten all about revolution and are concentrating on defending democracy against fascism and supporting capitalist governments in good wars?

Naturally no such discussion could take place without an airing of the Communists' new position on war. On this point, no one can accuse Browder of having been equivocal. *Should the Soviet Union, he declared, be attacked by Japan and Germany, it would be treason to advocate neutrality for the United States. The revo-*

*lutionists will have to insist that the United States enter the war on the side of the Soviet Union! And naturally, in such a war, it will be the duty of the workers to support the American government which is conducting a "progressive" war!*

So all the charges of chauvinism revolutionary Socialists have been directing at the Communists are not manufactured. Not only are we to be asked to support a war once it is declared, we are to go about *agitating for a war* when there is no war. And Browder wants the American Socialists to believe that after the American capitalists, for their own imperialist interests have entered a war, somehow or other we will be able to maneuver them to participate in such a war only for the benefit of the Soviet Union!

### The Sale of Oil

How the minds of those who depend for their ideas upon the Soviet Union operate was shown nicely in Browder's attempt to defend the Soviet Union's continued sale of oil to Italy even after the application of sanctions. Browder completely justified the Soviet Union's declaration that only if all other countries discontinued selling oil will it also discontinue. This Browder explained as a clever use of the Soviet Union's international power to compel capitalist countries to stop selling oil to Italy. What Browder and the Russian leaders fail to see is the discrediting of the Soviet Union as a result of its practice of what looks to the international working class as pure capitalist diplomacy.

The Soviet Union's dependence upon a declaration of sanctions before it stopped selling wheat, coal and other articles, its continued sale of oil even after the application of sanctions, give the impression that the Soviet Union is willing to do only the things that the capitalists do. It is no wonder that the Yipsels left the hall referring to Browder as "Oil" Browder.

It is undisputable that a consistent Socialist position on war must include criticism of such acts by the Soviet Union and rejection of the advocacy of American participation in any war. And yet Browder sees no inconsistency in demanding a united front precisely on the issue of war, when he knows very well that Socialists will never agree to accept the policies he advocates. Is it not just a little unprincipled to raise the roof for a united front and refuse to recognize such basic differences as obstacles to be removed?

### Whose "New Line"

Even on the more favorable aspects of the Comintern's new line Browder left a cloud of doubt. Thomas wanted to know whether the new line is really a new line or just a temporary moratorium. Browder not only refused to answer, he even refused to acknowledge the newness of the line. He contented himself with making facetious remarks about "Thomas' new line" which may or may not have been funny. This is one of the worst manifestations of the unprincipledness of the Comintern.

In spite of the poor case Browder presented, the debate was of great value. It really demonstrated to skeptical comrades that the present communist position is undefendable, and that no salvation can be looked for from that direction.