

World Socialism

SOCIALISM, NEUTRALITY AND WAR

By HERBERT ZAM

With the opening of Congress, a new crop of neutrality resolutions has again sprouted with the administration and other groups competing for first-place honors. In view of the growing tenseness in international relations and the growing consciousness of the American people of the danger of war, there is a tremendous interest in all proposals dealing with the question of war and peace. It is therefore essential that we have a correct attitude toward all such measures in order that we may be in a position to give a proper lead to the working-class.

Remembering that wars are organically bound up with the very existence of the capitalist system and are inevitable under capitalism, it becomes quite obvious that real neutrality as a policy throughout the world is impossible today—quite as much as the elimination of exploitation is impossible under capitalism. The basic fallacy of pacifism is that it attempts to abolish war and maintain capitalism. (Of course pacifist Socialists also want to abolish capitalism but advocate pacifism as a method of fighting both war and capitalism. In the final analysis, this is Ghandiism with a Socialist goal.) This attempt has always been derided by Marxists, who insist that a genuine struggle against war presupposes a struggle against the roots of war, i.e., against capitalism. Thus, the slogan "Against War" is by itself incomplete and even misleading. It must be accompanied by the slogan, "Against Capitalism." And the slogan "For Peace" must be tied up with the slogan "For Socialism." Of course in the specific anti-war agitation, it is not essential that these slogans should be used in pairs in every leaflet and in every speech, but their political connection must be maintained.

IS NEUTRALITY POSSIBLE TODAY?

The danger of advocating a policy of neutrality is not so much that "we" are not neutral, or that people will think that we are mere pacifists. The real danger is that the advocacy of such a policy or of pacifism as such will create the illusion that neutrality is really possible under capitalism. The real struggle against war and the war danger therefore will be paralyzed because the masses will depend upon capitalist forces to maintain "peace" or "neutrality." It was no accident that this country was swept into the World War as the aftermath of a presidential campaign in which the main stock-in-trade of the successful candidate was "He kept us out of war." The Wilsonian myth served the purpose of diverting the anti-war masses from a real (proletarian) anti-war movement.

Of course, pacifists cannot be classed with jingoes. Pacifists (at least the sincere pacifists) desire peace and abhor war, but the course they advocate will make it easier for the jingoes to declare war because it will disarm the workers and prevent a really effective struggle against war. So that while pacifism may be considered as a step in advance of jingoism, it is many steps behind Socialism. For Socialists to give up their advanced position and move backwards towards pacifism would be a damaging blow to the cause of the working class, to the anti-war struggle. We must be interested in helping the pacifists move forward in their anti-war position and only the most merciless criticism of their fallacious position can accomplish this objective.

THE QUARRELS OF 'OTHER NATIONS'

One of the main reasons for the neutrality position is the apprehension that wars are always started by some other parties and peace for

any specific country can be preserved by keeping away from "other nations'" quarrels. Obviously this point of view not only ignores the interdependence of the entire imperialist world but is not even superficially reasonable if applied to more than one country; for every country in the world, war then becomes a matter beyond its own role and interests—a curse of God.

Assuming that American neutrality can be maintained in the conflict between Italy and Ethiopia, for instance, can American neutrality also be maintained in the conflict between the U. S. and Japan? It is obviously nonsensical even to pose the question in this manner. And yet that is how all neutrality proposals appear. They ignore the imperialist interests of the U. S. proper and confine themselves to talk of "neutrality in other conflicts." But for the American masses, the real danger of war lies in the rivalry between American imperialists and other imperialist powers. And this rivalry no neutrality bills can affect so long as capitalism lives.

It must be further remembered that almost all neutrality proposals are greatly dependent upon the League of Nations, which does not include the U. S., Japan, Germany, China and most of Latin America; or upon an obscure juridical definition of an "aggressor." All this approaches countries as units and ignores class relations. And yet for us as a class movement, as an international class movement, it is the class relations that are most important. For example, India rises in rebellion against England and the rebellion becomes a war between the two. The juridical analysis or the League statutes may stamp India as the "aggressor," but as Socialists our sympathies will certainly be with India's struggle for independence. Would we be bound by abstractions about the "aggressor" in such a case?

Some people, including the communists, advocate neutrality as a general policy, but insist upon exceptions in specific cases, such as a war between the Soviet Union and Japan. This must be realized. In any specific existing war, even a war involving the Soviet Union, we must fight bitterly to prevent U. S. entry.

A SOCIALIST POSITION

The Socialist position toward war and peace must be a positive one, however. We should have a Socialist neutrality position which must include, both in everyday propaganda form and in legislative form, the following demands:

Liberation of all American colonies and possessions; withdrawal of American troops from all Latin-American countries, China, etc.; abolition of the standing army and scrapping of the fleet; no interference by the American government or by private citizens in internal affairs of other countries, particularly Mexico and Latin America; prohibition of the manufacture, transportation or sale of war materials and munitions; no government loans to other countries for war purposes; no government backing to loans to other countries for any purpose; abolition of all tariff walls and establishment of a system of free trade.

Only if these things are done can neutrality be assured. But these things cannot be done by a capitalist government in a capitalist country. Only a worker and farmer government, building for Socialism, can ensure peace to a country and to the world.