

The Arms Embargo

By WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

"Under the hypocritical mask of 'neutrality' the American bourgeoisie, despite certain inner tactical differences, is united in its greed for huge war profits and imperialist aggrandizement. It is preparing to involve the U.S.A. in the imperialist war under conditions most favorable to strengthening the world hegemony of American imperialism."

In these words the Oct. 13 resolution of the Political Committee of the Communist Party, U.S.A., correctly characterizes the present aims of American imperialists. The decisive sections of American finance capital, in order to achieve their gigantic profits and pro-war objectives, are carrying on a wide press and radio propaganda to convince the masses that Great Britain and France are defending democracy, that the United States should aid the Allies, that American entry into the war is inevitable, and that the central enemy finally to be fought is the Soviet Union.

In line with this pro-war campaign, the United States Government recently has taken several diplomatic steps favoring the Allies and tending towards American involvement into the war, including its refusal to support the Soviet peace initiative, its establishment of the 300-mile neutral zone around the two American continents and its pro-British intervention in the Finnish-Soviet negotiations. Likewise, the Roosevelt administration's proposals to amend the present Neutrality Act, by repealing the embargo upon arms, munitions, and implements of war, will facilitate and not hinder this country's eventually being drawn into the war.

All the above potentially warlike acts are being carried on under the false flag of an American neutrality supposedly designed to keep this country out of the war. Especially has this peace pretense been emphasized in connection with the proposed repeal of the arms embargo. The present embargo, which was enacted to cripple Republican Spain, is now to be abolished in order to help imperialistic England and France, and at the same time to fatten the profits of American capitalists. This explains in large part the changed attitude of our Party towards lifting the embargo.

Obviously, if the embargo is repealed this will greatly increase the war danger for the United States. Hence, to allay the justified fears of the peace-loving masses, veritable oceans of argument have been put forth, in Congress and outside, to the effect that discontinuance of the embargo is necessary to enforce real American neutrality and to bring this country again under the provisions of international law. But as the present great national debate proceeds it becomes increasingly difficult for Administration supporters to maintain this shallow hypocrisy.

Clearly the whole business is one of President Roosevelt's "methods short of war" to aid Great Britain and France. This is borne out pointedly by press dispatches of Oct. 19, which state that the Allies are prepared to order 5,750 war planes immediately in case the embargo is lifted. Even the advocates of repeal are com-



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elled to admit more and more openly that their project is calculated to assist one side in the war, and many of them are now trying to justify the highly dangerous repeal with slippery arguments which contend that the United States can give the proposed aid to the Allies without running the risk of war. Characteristically in this vein, Senator Burke, speaking for repeal, says:

"Repeal of the arms embargo will not operate equally. To defend repeal upon that ground alone does not carry conviction. For myself I have crossed the bridge. I speak no more of repeal of the arms embargo as an expression of strict neutrality, for it is not that. It checks the belligerents I want checked. It favors the belligerents I want favored. . . . Our sympathies, our moral support, our material help within the restrictions imposed—everything we can do short of supplying men and money should be done on the side of the Allies."

Such pro-war arguments, which present truly and brutally the case for repeal of the arms embargo, are also widely and increasingly heard outside of Congress. The eminent Catholic divine, Monsignor Ryan, for example, speaking in the strain of many prominent news writers, radio commentators and other bourgeois public figures, delivers himself of the following (N. Y. Times, Oct. 16):

"In the present crisis our country is morally obliged to do all it reasonably can to defeat Hitler and destroy Hitlerism. To permit the sale of American munitions and other war materials under a 'cash-and-carry' system would not involve grave risk and might be decisive in the present conflict."

The cash-and-carry provisions of the proposed amendments to the Neutrality Act are primarily lures to win badly needed votes in Congress for the main objective, repeal of the arms embargo. Should repeal be achieved the imperialist bourgeoisie of the U.S.A. will lose no time in trying to whittle away the cash-and-carry proposition and will head for a program of extending war loans, diplomatic assistance, and other active help to the Allies.

We get a foretaste of all this in the Administration's own proposals to grant belligerents 90-day credits (later withdrawn under heavy mass opposition) and also to exempt various British and French dominions and colonies from the "carry" limitations. The present Neutrality Act, even were the cash-and-carry provisions added to it, is, of course, absolutely no guarantee of American peace; but the proposed amendment of it, by cancelling the arms embargo, is unquestionably a step which will be utilized by American imperialism towards the involvement of the United States in the imperialist war.

The class line-up, for and against, in the present great political struggle over the arms embargo is considerably complicated. This is true of capitalists and workers, as well as of other sectors of the population.

Supporting the Roosevelt Administration's proposals to abolish the arms embargo stand the most decisive sections of American finance capital, including big financial and industrial associations, the great bulk of the daily press, etc. The support of these great capitalist interests reflects itself politically by numbers of Republicans and Tory Democrats, exemplified by such figures as Al Smith, Knox, Taft, Glass, and other reactionaries, going over to Roosevelt's aid on the embargo issue and thus transforming his minority of the last Congress on this question into a majority in the present session.

Another group of imperialists, the chief spokesmen of whom are Hoover and Lindbergh, favor repeal but only in the case of war materials of a "defensive" character. And finally there is a strong section of capitalists, exemplified by such figures and spokesmen as Ford, Weir, Vandenberg, Hearst and Coughlin, who oppose repeal altogether. These ultra-reactionary elements are largely militant open-shoppers; they are especially fascist-minded and pro-Hitler, and they do not want to give the proposed aid to the Allies against Germany by lifting the embargo.

Despite their "inner tactical differences" on the embargo issue, however, as the Party's resolution says, all these groups of big capital are agreed on their fundamental war aims, including the reaping of huge profits from the war, the slashing of the workers' civil rights and living standards and the weakening of their trade unions, the exploitation of the war situation to capture full control of the government in 1940, the speedy imperialist conquest of Latin-America while Great Britain and Germany are "occupied elsewhere," the ideological preparation of the American people to enter the war at the moment and under the conditions most favorable to American imperialism, and the organization of a joint war of all the capitalist powers against the U.S.S.R.

The working class, farmers and city middle class are also divided in their position on the arms embargo issue. Great numbers of these classes are supporting Roosevelt's repeal proposals. They rely upon his record as a liberal, and they are also laboring under the double illusion that the Allies are fighting to defend democracy and that the United States government can give the proposed

arms aid to Great Britain and France without danger of being drawn into the war. Some are also politically naive enough to believe that doing away with the embargo is a necessary neutral act.

On the other hand, standing against repeal of the arms embargo are huge masses of the common people who correctly sense the repeal proposition as a pro-war maneuver and will have none of it. Significant of widespread working class opposition to and lack of support for Roosevelt's proposals are the facts that the CIO convention did not come out specifically for repeal of the arms embargo, and that the A. F. of L. convention, whose leadership stands for the Hoover imperialist brand of neutrality, also had to count with the attitude of the membership and refrained from endorsing repeal. Furthermore, the anti-repeal position of the big farm organizations and of such men as Nye, Frazier, Wheeler, LaFollette, and Lundeen is a reflection of the strong isolationism and opposition among Western and Midwestern farmers against doing away with the embargo.

In spite of this somewhat confused class line-up around the issue of the arms embargo, we must not lose sight of the fundamental facts: (1) that the proposal for repeal is a definite attempt to give United States support to one side in the war and it thereby increases the menace to our peace by threatening to involve this country in the war, and (2) that if the advocates of repeal win it will be utilized by the imperialist war makers to follow up with new measures designed to demoralize the peace forces and to push the United States further along the slippery path to war, and (3) the basic fact that the whole warlike project has the support of the most decisive sections of imperialist American finance capital.

From all of which facts the fundamental conclusion must be drawn that the struggle to defeat the repeal of the arms embargo is a vital part of the people's fight to keep America out of the imperialist war.

It is necessary, therefore, to defeat the effort to repeal the arms embargo, without in any way assuming responsibility for the present Neutrality Act, which will not and cannot keep us out of the imperialist war. While fighting against repeal we must also especially counteract the flood of insidious pro-war propaganda now going on in this country, particularly that which cultivates the false notions that Great Britain and France are making war to defend democracy and that American participation in the war is inevitable.

The masses must be taught that they have no interest in the present slaughter, which can only bring them suffering, oppression and death; that they should give aid neither to Chamberlain nor to Hitler; and that they, especially the trade union movement, can enforce a real policy of America's non-involvement in the imperialist war if they will but exert their organized peace strength.

It is no less fundamental, too, to fight against the present wave of capitalist-inspired anti-Soviet hysteria and slanders and to give solid backing to the Soviet Union's peace initiative and policies. Nor should the vast significance of developing active aid to China and of placing an embargo against war-making Japan be forgotten.

It is likewise absolutely necessary to support and stimulate the struggles of the workers and other toilers in defense of their civil rights and living standards against the attacks of the profiteering, fascist-minded capitalists. And last, but most important of all, the masses must be taught that the capitalist system as such is responsible for the war, that the war constitutes a great deepening of the world crisis of capitalism and that Socialism is the only system of society that can finally do away with war and establish peace and freedom. In all this work of mass education our Party bears a great responsibility.

The overwhelming majority of the American people are resolutely opposed to this country actually entering the war, and furthermore the consciously pro-war minority is rapidly diminishing. A Gallup poll, at the outbreak of the war, showed 16 per cent who wanted the U.S.A. to go to war immediately against Germany and 40 per cent who favored anti-German military action should it become clear that Great Britain and France were in danger of losing the war. Now, however, the Gallup poll of Oct. 19, shows that these pro-war minorities have declined to 5 per cent and 29 per cent respectively, a big shift in public opinion which would indicate that many millions of people have turned more definitely towards an anti-war position.

In the face of this widespread anti-war sentiment, therefore, to force the United States into the war will not be an easy task for the imperialists, in spite of all their propaganda tricks and even if they do succeed in repealing the arms embargo. And it will prove quite an impossible job for them if the working class is united and knows how to organize and lead the vast peace-loving masses of the people in struggle against their war-mongering imperialist capitalist enemies.

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sophistry, it then implies that any American who does not accept the political opinions of the Tribune is automatically in danger of its "resentment" in the form of persecution and suppression.

The Tribune, in its eagerness, gives the show away by editorially hoping the Dies Committee passport persecution will "rid us of Browder's INFLUENCE." That is precisely where the shoe pinches—Browder's political influence in the fight against imperialist war, for peace, Labor's living standards, and for America's democratic progress. That's what hurts. That's why they are out to "get" the Communists.

With a pose of innocence, the New York Times hopes editorially that "the spurious issue of civil liberties will not obscure" the towering problem of passport applications.

Its real hope is to obscure the burning issue of civil liberties under a fig-leaf of passport trivialities.

If ever there was a case where stupid technicalities masked far-reaching political persecution this case is it.

Indignant protest from every section of the American people in this case is merely an act of self-defense of the entire American people. Events will prove that to the hilt.