

# A WORKING-CLASS PEACE POLICY

By HARRY POLLITT

[*As the issues raised in this article are considered by the LABOUR MONTHLY as of such vital importance to the whole movement, it has been decided to publish this article though it has been appearing in serial form in recent issues of the "Daily Worker," for it is felt that even those readers who have already perused the separate sections will welcome their availability in a collected form as this will facilitate the discussion that is likely to be raised. Certain abridgements have had to be made (indicated by . . .) and owing to pressure of space it proved unfortunately impossible to include certain of the concluding sections.*]

**I**T is commonly agreed that since 1914 the danger of war has never been so acute as at the present time. Yet we face an alarming state of confusion on the question of how to fight war resulting in an unpreparedness to take the necessary decisive actions that could certainly prevent the outbreak of war.

Never has there been such a general desire for peace amongst the peoples as now. But also never has there been such a lack of preparedness and organisation as would ensure peace through mass action against war. Undoubtedly this is known and realised by the National Government, and is utilised by them to speed up their war plans and preparations.

## *The War Danger has been no Unifying Factor*

Why has such a situation developed? Because it is no longer a matter of dealing with the question of war in general and in the abstract, but practically and immediately, in circumstances that are new and complicated, and which have raised many difficult problems. And also because there has been no clear working-class peace policy upon which all sections of the Labour and Peace movements could unite their forces against war in the actual circumstances of the present situation.

The whole position is a salutary reminder of Lenin's repeated warnings, that the fight against war is one of the most difficult tasks confronting the workers, and one that must be seriously undertaken with tireless patience and iron determination.

We have all tended too much to believe that the memories of the horrors and the suffering of the last war, combined with the menace of a

new world war, would itself become the greatest unifying factor in bringing workers and all friends of Peace together in a great mass movement to prevent war.

*Actually, experience has proved that the nearer we get to war, or when a war has broken out, the danger of war or the war itself can act as an increasingly disunifying factor that plays right into the hands of the war-mongers.* We shall show the proof of this later, both in regard to experiences in the Italo-Abyssinian war and in regard to the events arising out of Hitler's denunciation of the Locarno Pact, the march into the Rhineland, and his so-called 25-years "Peace" proposals.

It is necessary to face frankly the problems that have arisen if we are speedily to rectify existing weaknesses in the struggle for peace.

There has been no really serious attempt to explain the new changes which have taken place in the world situation and the altered relations of forces which have raised new problems so far as war is concerned ; no really serious attempt at clearly differentiating between the character that various wars may assume . . . . .

#### *Present-day Confusions in the Peace Front*

It will not be difficult to give some example of the disunity and the confusion that exists inside the Labour Movement and amongst the various Peace organisations when it comes to an actual question of preventing war.

Let us recall the significance of the Peace Ballot that was organised under the auspices of the League of Nations Union last summer. Here was a Peace Ballot organised definitely against the will and desire of the National Government. Eleven-and-a-half million people voted for Peace, and eighty per cent. of those who took part in this ballot *voted for action being taken against an aggressor.* When very shortly afterwards, arising out of Italian fascism's attack on Abyssinia it became a question of taking definite measures that could effectively restrain a clearly defined fascist aggressor, we at once saw the difficulty of the task which confronts those who are anxious to maintain peace.

The decisions of the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party in regard to the policy to be pursued to restrain Mussolini, because it completely identified the Labour Movement with the policy of the National Government and the League of Nations, without in any way attempting to organise independent working-class action, caused big divisions in the ranks of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party.

In the Socialist League, although they differed from the policy of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, there was a very substantial minority that was against the line adopted by the Socialist League Executive Committee.

The National Peace Council was so divided on the question of what should be done that it was unable to make any clear statement of policy and took refuge in a dangerous proposal for a World Conference to bring about a more equitable redistribution of raw materials, a proposal which in the present circumstances of Fascist aggression lends a certain support to fascism's aggressive aims.

Inside the League of Nations Union branches there were also big differences as to what was the correct policy to adopt.

The I.L.P. had a line which was different from all other working-class organisations, and which objectively helped Italy's aggressive policy against Abyssinia.

The line of the Communist Party, I believe, was absolutely clear and correct, and if it had been adopted by the whole Labour Movement and Peace organisations, the frightful holocaust that has taken place in Abyssinia would have been avoided. Our line was not only that economic and financial sanctions such as the closing of the Suez Canal and the stoppage of all loans and war materials to Italy should be operated, but that workers should refuse to load and unload Italian ships in this country, that support be given to the anti-Fascist fighters in Italy itself, that the embargo on loans and arms to Abyssinia should be raised, and finally, that the United Front be developed at home and on an international scale. Thus the peoples of the world could bring such pressure on their respective capitalist governments as would compel them, and the League of Nations, to carry out these real measures against Mussolini's predatory aims, measures that if adopted could have stopped the war against Abyssinia at the same time as they would have strengthened the anti-Fascist struggle in Italy itself.

Even more serious, however, were the disunity, contradictions and confusion that arose when Hitler made his so-called 25-years "Peace" Pact offer on March 7, denounced the Locarno Treaty, and marched his troops once more into the Rhineland.

We found on this occasion that those who claimed to be the strongest champions of sanctions against Mussolini, were loudest in their insistence that there must be no talk of sanctions, or of any kind of measures that could act as a restraining force upon Hitler's warlike acts. Not only this, but they became the most vociferous exponents of the need to accept Hitler's "olive branch" and take him at "his face value."

Especially is this so of the Liberal, Labour and Pacifist Press of this country. In one of the most dangerous moments in the international situation since 1914, all these influential moulders of public opinion became the strongest supporters of Hitler's policy. This was all the more serious because the National Government has been responsible for arming, financing, and placing Hitler in his present menacing position to the peace of Europe.

Large sections of pacifist opinion led by George Lansbury were also in favour of discussing the Hitler proposals. The National Peace Council was again undecided as to what line should be pursued. The League of Nations Union was unable to make any clear statement of policy. Alongside this, of course, we also saw the differences of opinion within the ruling class itself. Men like Churchill, Lord Eustace Percy, and Austen Chamberlain are in no doubt as to the serious threat of Hitler to European and British capitalist interests, but the dominant voice of British policy, of course, is represented by Baldwin and his Cabinet, which, having armed Hitler, did everything possible to prevent any real measures being taken to check Hitler at that critical moment.

Looking back on this situation it is clear that it was a most dangerous moment ; and the most disquieting fact we have to take note of is that, despite the years of steady and consistent propaganda for the defence of the U.S.S.R., despite the recognition that the U.S.S.R. is the one Workers' State which exists in the world and that from 1917 it has consistently worked for peace and has so far by its foreign policy been able to preserve the peace of the world, the *Daily Herald*, the Liberal press and pacifists, with regrettable rapidity and facility were all prepared to sacrifice the U.S.S.R. All these were prepared to do this for a "fancied security" to Britain by the acceptance of Hitler's proposals which offer "peace" for 25 years to certain countries in Europe, but leaving out the Soviet Union, and accompanied by the most vicious attacks on the Soviet Union.

No serious minded person, whether in the Labour Movement or interested in defending peace, can fail to be profoundly alarmed that such a situation could arise. Is it any wonder, therefore, that the *Daily Herald* was especially singled out for the doubtful honour of being the one British paper whose leading articles were daily quoted over the wireless by Goebbels.

Of course it is true that there was opposition to the line of the *Daily Herald* and the masses in the Labour Movement forced Labour leaders to speak out openly against it, and also forced it to modify its pro-Hitler line. *Nevertheless the fact remains that we can clearly see the divisions within the Labour and Peace Movements in this country in those critical March days. One section roused by Hitler's aggression would have supported any real measures directed to restrain him. Another section was for keeping out of the crisis at any price. Another section was for the acceptance of Hitler's Peace proposals, while still other sections were firmly behind the U.S.S.R. and prepared to defend it to the very death.*

But the point to which we have to give the most serious consideration is that in that literally eve-of-war situation, when one false step could easily have landed us into another world conflagration, instead of unity existing within the Labour and Peace movements against a fascist aggressor

whose incendiary war aims were plain as a pikestaff for all to see, *the Peace Front was almost hopelessly divided, uncertain and confused, and was thus (perhaps quite unconsciously) giving considerable help to Hitler . . . . .*

*Why we Fight War*

The peoples of the world feel in their very bones that their whole present and future is gravely menaced by the acute danger of war. They know that fascist war hounds are daily and hourly preparing to rush millions of men into war. Men, women, the youth and soldiers of all capitalist countries ask: "Is there no other future before us, only war?" They demand to know: "Is it not possible to prevent this terrible scourge which threatens humanity?"

We Communists must answer these questions. We must convince these millions that Peace can be preserved. We can give a reply which is in accordance with the daily interests of the masses and in accordance with their desire for peace . . . . .

Comrade Dimitrov put this aspect of the question quite plainly, when at the 7th Congress of the Communist International he said:

It is true that imperialist wars are the product of capitalism, that only the overthrow of capitalism will put an end to all war; but it likewise is true that the toiling masses can obstruct imperialist war by their militant action.

We Communists recognising this, declare that in order to hinder war preparations and provocation, and to prevent the outbreak of war, we are prepared to support any measures outlined in Pacts of Non-Aggression, Peace Pacts of Mutual Assistance and the League of Nations Covenant, that we are prepared to give full support to all measures aimed at building up collective security, and that we are for developing all forms of independent action on the part of the workers in the struggle to maintain peace. Whilst we support and utilise all these measures for the purpose of retarding and preventing war, we also openly state to the working men and women and peace-loving peoples, that the only final guarantee that war can be abolished for ever, is the conquest of power by the workers, the ending of capitalism, and the establishment of the workers' state and workers' rule . . . . .

*The Differences between 1914 and To-day*

It is said that the present situation is 1914 all over again. It is nothing of the sort. There are the most profound and fundamental differences between the situation in 1936 and that of 1914.

In 1914 no one could see which was the aggressive imperialist power. All capitalist governments involved in the last world war were equally to blame and equally responsible. In 1914 it was impossible to put one's finger on the open and avowed aggressor, but one can place it on Hitler in 1936.

In 1914 a number of countries in Europe did not stand directly under the menace of a military attack from a fascist aggressor. They do in 1936.

In 1914 there was no Soviet Union in existence. In 1936 the mighty Soviet Union goes from triumph to triumph in every realm of Socialist construction. It has carried out in the international arena a firm policy of peace because it has no interest in war, no imperialist aims, and because it menaces not a single inch of any country's territory in the world.

In 1914 every important capitalist state was interested in war. To-day, in 1936, there are a number of such capitalist states who at the present moment are not interested in war.

These are vital new factors in the present international situation which all thinking working men and women would do well to understand because they represent such a change from the situation of 1914 that they inevitably demand a change in our attitude as to how the peace of the world can be preserved.

#### *Who are the Aggressors To-day?*

Who can be blind as to who are these fascist aggressors in the world to-day? Japan, with its policy of conquest in Manchuria, and now capturing Chinese territory, becomes a menace not only to China and the Soviet Union, but to Britain and the United States of America. Italy, with its frightful devastation and destruction in Abyssinia. In the very heart of Europe, almost on our doorstep, but certainly on the doorstep of the peoples of France, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Belgium, stands the chief incendiary of war to-day—Hitler.

Isn't this a new situation? Isn't it clear that Fascism in Germany, having literally created a hell for the German people, having destroyed the German Labour Movement, having put back the march of progress and culture, having resorted to the most frightful measures to drive its people into the dust, now proposes to take exactly the same offensive against other countries, and to establish a similar regime to that existing in Germany over any country it is allowed to conquer.

Isn't it clear that this creates a new type of war danger, and if not resisted will result in destruction, oppression and death for the peoples of other countries?

We seem to forget that the victory of fascism over any country in Europe to-day not only means a military victory, but within the defeated country means the suppression of the Labour Movement, repression of all scientific and cultural thought. It means on a more intensified scale a repetition of the frightful atrocities and measures that have been inflicted on the German people which have already appalled the world.

Isn't this a new situation which demands a new approach to the whole question of how peace can be maintained and whether the fascist aggressor can be restrained and effectively checked ?

How correct was the characterisation of the rôle of Hitler as stated by Dimitrov at the 7th World Congress :

German fascism is acting as the spearhead of international counter-revolution, as the chief incendiary of imperialist war ; as the initiator of a crusade against the Soviet Union, the great Fatherland of the toilers of the whole world.

In the light of this situation, the restraining of Hitler, the prevention of any further acts of fascist aggression, the maintenance of the peace of the world, become the paramount duty of the international working-class movement, and, in the fight to achieve this, the workers will not only be defending all their own immediate interests, they will be defending the interests of mankind.

*New Forces and Factors for Peace*

Through the fulfilment of this duty they will be able to build up the power, the strength, the organisation, that can bring about the defeat of Fascism and ensure the final victory of Socialism. This great aim, the greatest the working-class movement can ever set out to accomplish, can only be carried out by formulating a working-class Peace policy in accordance with the situation in each particular country, with the driving power of the United Front firmly established in Britain and on an international scale. These are the indispensable means for the successful maintenance of the peace of the world.

To-day there are new forces and factors which can be organised to assist in the carrying through of this aim of preventing war. What are they ? Let me again quote from Dimitrov's speech at the 7th Congress :

The popular hatred of war is constantly gaining in depth and intensity. In pushing the toilers into the abyss of imperialist wars the bourgeoisie is staking its head.

To-day not only the working class, the peasantry and other toilers champion the cause of the preservation of peace, but also the oppressed nations and weak peoples whose independence is threatened by new wars.

Even some of the capitalist states, afraid of losing out in a new re-division of the world, are interested at the present stage in the avoidance of war.

This gives rise to the possibility of forming a most extensive front of the working class, of all toilers, and of entire nations against the threat of imperialist war.

The extent to which this world-wide front is realised and put into action will determine whether the fascist and other imperialist war incendiaries will be able in the near future to kindle a new imperialist war, or whether their fiendish hands will be hacked off by the axe of a powerful anti-war front.

Why has it become possible for German fascism to become such a menace to the peace of the world? It is because its way to power was not barred at the right time by the German Social Democratic leaders who refused to establish the United Front; because of the assistance that Hitler has received from the National Government, not only in the form of armaments and loans, but in their endeavour to prevent any effective measures being taken against him; because of the failure of the League of Nations to defend Manchuria, and the independence of China against the predatory wars of Japan; because of the waverings and vacillations and weak policy carried out by the League of Nations in defending the independence of Abyssinia; and finally, because of the refusal by the Labour Movement in a number of the most decisive countries like Britain, Czechoslovakia, and the Scandinavian countries of united action, which has led to the rejection of the repeated proposals for joint action against war made by the Communist International to the Second International.

These are the reasons why Hitler is the menace to the peace of Europe at the present time.

*What is Needed to Secure a United Peace Front?*

If the workers' ranks were united, if the policy of the Labour Movement had not been completely adapted and made subject to the policy of the League of Nations and the National Government, then there would be a different situation to face.

We have to formulate our Peace policy, not in a situation that we would like to exist, but as it actually does exist at the present time.

It is an eve of war situation, but we Communists believe that late as the hour is, it is not too late to maintain peace. Peace can be preserved. Fascist aggressors can be held in check. The working-class movement can gain a further breathing space in which it can continue to build up its united power and solidarity. But it goes without saying that all this depends upon certain indispensable conditions being carried out. These, we suggest, are as follows:

- I. The bringing about of a really effective and mighty mobilisation of the workers, that can lead to definite united action being taken to prevent war.
- II. The development of such united action amongst the workers that its power and strength will attract broad masses of people to its support and active participation, who are not directly connected with the Labour Movement, but who are opposed to Fascism and War.
- III. The convincing of all genuine supporters of Peace of the need to deliver powerful blows directly against Fascist aggressors like Hitler, and those who support him directly—the National

Government—or indirectly like those who believe in accepting his false “Peace” gestures.

- iv. The recognition of the new features in the international situation, and being ready to work alongside all those peoples and Governments who are interested (despite their immediate motives) in maintaining peace, and in carrying out Peace measures against Fascist war provocateurs.
- v. Above all, by acting upon the recognition, that only on the basis of the United Front of the working-class movement, can the workers take independent action, and the broad masses of the people be organised in such a way as can compel the National Government to adopt decisive measures to restrain Fascist aggression.

On such a basis as this a united peace policy can be achieved that would win important successes. No one will dispute that the people do not want war. They desire an end to the constant war threats, alarms, and menace to their security. As practical experience abundantly proves, where the United Front is effectively carried through by the whole working-class movement, as in France and Spain, the mass of the people are drawn into activity alongside the organised workers, and are able to check the advance of Fascism.

The mad dogs of Fascism will never be hemmed in and prevented from carrying out their devilish work by “olive branches” and “pacifists’ prayers,” by high-faluting talk about “only concerning oneself with one’s own capitalist class,” by “revolutionary” phrasemongering, now the hall mark of the I.L.P. The mad dogs of Fascism will only be securely leashed when a mighty United Front has been achieved on a national and international scale.

This is the fact that must be burned into the mind of every British worker because the greatest obstacle to this aim is the resistance of the British Labour leaders to the formation of such a United Front. Unless this resistance is definitely broken we shall never be able to strike decisive blows against the Fascists directly preparing war, or against those who by their policy directly or indirectly give support to the Fascist war makers.

#### *First Fight the National Government*

Against whom has the main blow to be struck in Britain? Undoubtedly at the National Government. If Hitler is a menace in Europe, it is because of Baldwin. I do not propose to go into detail to prove this statement by fact and argument; in the current issue of the *Communist International* there is an article of mine in which I believe I proved this point up to the hilt.

The price of peace in Europe demands the defeat of the National Government. The character of the Peace movement in Britain is the decisive factor in the international situation to-day. How can it be brought about? Only by a complete break with all policies of class co-operation involving identifying of Labour policy with the interests of the capitalist class, and through the bringing into being of a United Front of all sections of the working-class movement on the basis of a common programme of immediate demands, economic, political and social, to commence the organisation of the workers' struggle to achieve this by utilising every means of mass action.

In this way a formidable mass movement can be brought into being which will fight against the whole policy of the National Government, and by its power begin to force immediate concessions. What are the demands which will form a basis for such activity?

They are demands for wage increases; the abolition of the Means Test; shorter hours; better housing at rents within workers' capacity to pay; improved conditions in the factories; rigid application of all safety precautions in mill, mine and factory. Complete opposition to the whole defence programme of the National Government and that the proposed expenditure shall be used exclusively for Work Schemes of social value carried through in conjunction with the Trade Union Movement. Abolition of the Sedition Act; better pay, improved conditions, more leave, and pensions for the armed forces with full democratic rights and free participation in all working-class political activities. No industrial truce or co-operation in the carrying out of the Government's war plan.

In the field of foreign policy, the organisation of mass support to compel the National Government to use all the available resources of the League of Nations to safeguard the independence of Abyssinia, the workers at the same time taking direct action to prevent any trains or ships destined for Italy being loaded or unloaded. To force the National Government to stop its support of Hitler; to back the Franco-Soviet Pact and to sign a Pact of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union. To end the support given by the National Government to reactionary Governments in the Balkans, whereby they strengthen Hitler and increase the menace against the Soviet Union. To end the waverings and vacillations of the League of Nations, and to help it become a really effective instrument in building collective security of such a type and character that no fascist war provocateurs would dare to commit any further acts of aggression.

If alongside such a campaign there were carried out a steady recruitment into the trade unions with the election of shop stewards in the factories officially endorsed by the trade union branches, the whole working-class movement would not only steadily increase its united strength, it would be able to carry out its own policy, independent of any backstairs manoeuvring carried out by the various capitalist governments and League of

Nations. It would attract to its support all people who want to preserve peace and democracy, and would speedily bring about a change in the whole international situation lessening the danger of war.

*Nothing that can do this can be rejected by any honest worker or lover of peace.*

Such a mass movement as this could not only result in a position of economic and political ferment in which the National Government would be defeated, it could also end any further possibility of Fascism taking the offensive because of the lack of unity in the workers' ranks.

It would end the support now being given to Hitler by certain Labour leaders and especially by the *Daily Herald* under cover of a hypocritical desire "to maintain peace by accepting Hitler's Peace proposals."

It would end the subordination of the workers' interests and policy to that of the National Government, and would open up the way to the British Labour movement taking the part it should in the international Labour Movement as the champions of international solidarity, and not as now, its disruptors.

#### *A Platform for International Solidarity*

Regrettable as it is to say so, it has to be stated that, apart from the propaganda and work of the Communist Parties, there never was so little international working-class propaganda and development of international solidarity as now. No one can declare with even a vestige of truth that the deliberations of the Second International and International Federation of Trade Unions ever reach down to the broad masses.

When does one hear of the Labour leaders of Britain arranging great international meetings at which speakers from the working-class movement of other countries could bring their greetings and experiences? At least these speakers would not be refused visas as the Communist speakers are.

Even in the critical March days when the whole of the leaders of the Second International and International Federation of Trade Unions met in London, no great demonstrations of international solidarity were held in the Albert Hall in London, the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, the City Hall in Sheffield, or the St. Andrew's Hall in Glasgow. Everything behind closed doors. Everything to fit in with the requirements of the National Government and the League of Nations Council Assembly.

Can anyone imagine, that if the Communist International were allowed to hold its Executive Committee meetings in London, that Dimitrov, Thorez, Cachin, Ercoli, Pieck, Pollitt and others, would not have addressed great masses of people and roused them to the struggle for peace, to a white-hot hatred of fascism? These meetings would have developed international solidarity of thought and action in not only leading a way to definite action to restrain a Hitler or a Mussolini, but would have helped

the German and Italian people in their struggle against Fascism within their own country.

Therefore it is urgently necessary to develop a platform of international action and solidarity, in which workers' organisations in every country can take part. But just as there are certain conditions to be observed before the United Front can be established on a national scale, so if it is to have real meaning, must there be a clear understanding upon what basis international campaigns and actions can be undertaken, and a completely unified international working-class policy carried out.

It seems to me that there are four essential points on which there must be agreement in arriving at such a platform of working-class international action :

1. Complete break with all policies of class co-operation and identification of working-class parties with the interests of the capitalists and participation in their Governments.
2. The greatest possible measure of support for the Peace policy of the Soviet Union, its recognition as the Workers' State and principal guardian for maintaining peace for the peoples of the world. This necessitates the most determined struggle against all counter revolutionary attempts to depict the foreign policy of the Soviet Union as having anything in common with the foreign policy of imperialist governments.

For all such propaganda plays absolutely into the hands of the Fascist aggressors and facilitates their aim of fomenting war and especially war against the Soviet Union.

3. Agreement on the necessity of taking action at the right moment and in the most telling way against the Fascist aggressor. But this also presupposes exposing every attempt to water down and nullify the undoubted differences that exist between Fascist and non-Fascist countries. And also against the theory "that all governments bear equal responsibility for the preparation and launching of war."
4. Organising the mass actions and struggles of the workers independently of the policy of the various capitalist governments and the League of Nations. This means ending the subjection of the interests and actions of the workers to those of their capitalist governments, and the backstairs negotiations and diplomacy of these governments and the League of Nations of which they are members.

If the workers of the British Labour Movement insist upon their leaders withdrawing their opposition to the united front and adopting such a platform of struggle nationally and internationally as we have outlined, a speedy change will manifest itself in the whole working-class struggle.

to improve immediate conditions, and to prevent effectively any further growth of fascist aggression, thus ensuring that peace can be maintained.

### *The Problems of the Fight for Peace in Britain*

In the preceding paragraphs we endeavoured to outline a Peace policy upon which all sections of the working-class movement, together with various Peace organisations, could unite. They indicated the general line of a working-class peace policy that could be adopted nationally and internationally.

In what follows we shall attempt to deal with some of the concrete problems and questions that inevitably arise in the struggle to maintain peace. This will be done strictly from the viewpoint of British conditions, for it should be self-evident that whilst there can be a common international working-class peace policy, there are many tactical questions in the various countries that have to be solved according to the actual circumstances and conditions prevailing in those countries.

In all countries, however, questions are constantly coming up to which it is the duty of Communists, especially, to give clear and definite answers, for whilst it is easy to make "general propoganda for peace," easy to limit oneself to phrasemongering about "fighting for Socialism," or "calling a General Strike when war breaks out," this type of "policy" simply deceives workers, and, because it remains only a mass of generalities without any relation to the concrete and immediate problems facing the workers, helps the warmongers and especially the fascist aggressors, and hinders any positive advance being made towards Socialism.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised in our opinion that the fight to maintain Peace is also the most effective contribution that can be made towards achieving Socialism.

The Communist Party attempts to give a clear, practical and concrete lead on how to fight the Means Test, how to run a strike, how to develop powerful trade unionism ; but it has also the duty of doing this in relation to the problems that inevitably arise in the struggle for peace.

### *Can we Oppose British Rearmament, but Support Sanctions?*

It is said that if you are in favour of applying economic and financial sanctions you cannot oppose the proposals of the National Government to increase the armed power and forces of Britain ; that it is illogical to demand collective security and oppose the National Defence plan of the National Government. This is the favourite trick of Baldwin and McDonald, and is simply used to deceive and confuse the workers and help the war plans of the National Government.

We oppose *all* the National Government's rearmament proposals, for we know the purpose for which this rearmament is taking place. It is

not to defend the interests of the mass of the people, but the profits, property, and Empire owned by a tiny section of the British ruling class.

Only when power is in the hands of the working class will it be possible to speak about a real and reliable defence of Britain, and in such circumstances it would be our duty to defend our own country, as the comrades in the Soviet Union are prepared to defend theirs. But power is not in our hands, and therefore the workers have no guarantee as to how the so-called "defence" forces will be used. What they do understand is that in these circumstances, the more powerful the development of the armed forces, the more powerful become the weapons of coercion against the workers at home and against millions of oppressed colonial peoples.

If the capitalist governments really had any intention of applying effectively the principle of collective security, they have sufficient economic and financial power now at their disposal to bring any fascist aggressor to heel *without any increase in their present armed forces at all*.

But observe what is happening at the moment. The chief war aggressor is Fascist Germany, yet it is precisely this country for which the National Government is most actively trying to secure further big loans, presumably in order to help Hitler to increase still further his armed forces, and then say: "Look what Hitler is doing! We must do the same."

The National Government has armed Fascist Germany and now attempts to use this as the bogey to carry through its own rearmament plans.

The workers should firmly oppose the whole of the rearmament plans of the National Government, and their representatives in Parliament should vote against all the Army, Navy and Air Estimates.

#### *Shall we Participate in Gas Drill?*

Some people, however, say: "That sounds fine, but what about protecting the people from bombing raids and poison gas?"

Here also, our policy needs to be adapted to the concrete situation. The Communist Party was the first to lead the opposition to gas drill and gas masks as an important means of organising the mass of the people against the National Government's war preparations. We did not do this from the academic point of view that gas masks could not be made effective or that there was no protection against bombing from the air. We did not enter into polemical discussions as to what various experts had to say about the efficiency of one form of gas mask or another. We did it as a political task that helped us to impress upon masses of people the nearness of war, and to use this as a means of organising mass opposition to the Government whose policy has so undoubtedly helped to bring war nearer. . . .

There can be no doubt that the campaign against gas drill and gas masks had a certain effect and won a certain mass support, but not sufficient to prevent the Government from beginning now to carry out its programme.

Already certain definite areas have been selected for gas drill, bomb-proof shelters and gas masks. These areas are stated to be those which stand in the greatest danger of attack and bombing from the air.

Now, however, we have to face the position that once this is organised, masses of people will take part. The organs of government propaganda and machinery will be got to work.

Can the working-class movement take up a negative attitude to this situation? Of course not. It is a new situation that calls for a working-class policy to meet it. What should that policy be? It should be to insist that any gas masks that are issued to the workers must be the very best that can be produced, and must be distributed free of charge, that any bomb-proof shelters that are constructed shall be as effectively built for the workers as for the rich in the West End of London, that gas drill shall be freed from all military control and propaganda, and that the local Labour and Peace Movements shall have the responsibility for ensuring the whole of these arrangements.

The workers must also insist that the whole cost of those measures which the National Government declare to be now necessary shall be borne by the rich, and not in any way be the subject of local taxation or indirect taxation through the medium of the State budget.

We must say to the National Government: "You have wrecked every proposal making for complete or partial disarmament, for the abolition of bombing from the air, or of any form of chemical warfare; you have financed and armed Hitler and given him his biggest political support. Now you say that our lives are in danger, that you want to carry out certain precautionary measures. Then carry them out at the expense of your own class, and we shall insist upon no dud gas masks, no shoddy bomb shelters, no military drill in connection with gas drill. We demand for those workers whom you say are in danger, the same type of gas mask and the same type of bomb-proof shelter as you will provide for the King and his family, and the whole circle in which they move."

If a terrific exposure of the whole line of the National Government's policy is also carried out, the very atmosphere they hope to create to stimulate recruiting and get the civilian population to support their war aims, can be used to develop mass opposition to the Government and to preserve peace.

It will, of course, be easy to say that the whole thing has nothing to do with the workers, and that they have no need to have a policy on it. This is bilking a difficult situation, instead of trying to solve it in such a way as

will very considerably weaken the Government and strengthen the cause of peace.

We can say to the workers, "Have nothing to do with it," but will that stop the carrying out of these measures "for protecting the people?" Any one who saw the rush to get down to shelters in London during the last war realises at once that a similar state of affairs can develop again, and unless such agitation is conducted as we have described, then it will be used to strengthen the political position of the National Government and to stimulate militarism and a hatred for workers of other countries . . . .

We should, therefore, campaign, without in any way supporting the National Government and its war preparations, for the whole control and direction of gas drill, etc., to be in the hands of those who believe in peace and who will prevent the natural desire of the people for protection against bombing from being exploited for military purposes.

This should be combined with mass pressure upon the National Government to conclude a Pact of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, to abandon its alliance with Hitler, and to give real support to the principle of collective security in order to maintain peace.

*Are we for the Redistribution of the Colonies or for their Independence?*

One of the most dangerous proposals along which the mass struggle to maintain the peace of the world is being sidetracked, is that there should now be a "more equitable distribution of colonies, mandates, and access to raw materials and undeveloped countries" amongst all the advanced capitalist countries, having especially in mind Fascist Germany.

It is argued that if there was a more equitable redistribution of raw materials and markets, then one of the main causes of war would disappear and peace would thus be assured.

Now can anyone imagine a single imperialist power agreeing to give up any of its possessions? Never was the competition for the world market, for spheres of influence, for control of the sources of raw material and cheap colonial labour so intense as it is now.

Can anyone imagine American imperialism agreeing to share its exploitation of the Philipines with Japan, or British imperialism sharing parts of Australia or Africa with Japan or Germany? Or France sharing its colonial possessions with any of its rivals?

Haven't we had one World Economic Conference in 1932, and didn't it end in complete failure because of the inability of the imperialist powers to solve the contradictions their own system breeds?

Even if any such ideas of redistribution of raw materials, etc., as certain advocates are busily popularising, were carried out, so long as capitalist economy remains, it would only intensify still further capitalist trade rivalries and antagonisms.

Are those who so glibly argue for this supposed panacea aware, that even if it could be applied it would result in strengthening the basis of the Fascist aggressors, would improve their economic and military position and render them still stronger to carry out their war plans on an even bigger scale in Europe itself ?

And who, if you please, gave the Labour Party, Trades Union Congress and National Peace Council the authority to make proposals for a World Economic Conference to be called to effect "the international control of the sources and supply of raw materials" that affects countries over which we have not the slightest right to presume to settle their destinies ?

Just as the *Daily Herald* and the pacifist press were prepared to sacrifice the Soviet Union to Hitler in the hope that his eyes would turn permanently East, so they believe they can buy off Hitler by giving him opportunities to share in the imperialist exploitation of colonial countries.

But has not experience shown that Fascist appetites are only whetted by what they feed on ? Has Japan stopped its aggression with the capture of Manchuria ? Doesn't she now threaten the whole of China, and, as the Tanaka Memorandum set out, the whole of Asia—a policy which is likely eventually to involve Britain and America in a war with Japan ? Was Mussolini restrained by promises of certain parts of Abyssinia, or has experience shown that he is after the lot.

The proposal to give Hitler a share in the imperialist booty would strengthen his whole economic and military position and make him a greater danger than ever to the peace of the world.

The workers, whilst repudiating all responsibility for imperialist robbery and for the mandate system, cannot give any support to these proposals for a redistribution of colonies, mandates, and raw materials. Not a single inch of ground should be given to any section of the Labour and Peace Movements on this question. If it is, it will incur still more hatred by the oppressed colonial peoples, whom we have done little enough to help in the past. To support any proposals, however "well meaning," that involve the handing of colonies and mandates to a Mussolini or a Hitler would indeed be a direct encouragement and incitement to further aggression. The robbery, butchery and repression carried out by all imperialist powers with the aid of armed violence against colonial countries is dreadful, and we have to do a thousand times more than we are doing to fight against it.

The working-class movement must, therefore, have nothing to do with such a policy. It is not the workers' business to occupy themselves with these questions ; their duty is to help the colonial peoples to throw off the yoke of all imperialist powers. It is especially the duty of the British working class to do everything in its power to help the colonial peoples

enslaved by British imperialism to obtain their complete national freedom and independence.

To help achieve this fundamental principle (a vital test for any Socialist and democrat), we should demand the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist armed forces from the colonies and mandated territories and work to organise workers' action to prevent the transport of troops and munitions to the colonies.

We must actively assist and support the struggle for national liberation of the oppressed peoples, fight against the suppression of colonial risings, against the growth of military aggression, against the extension of the mandatory system which gives the right to imperialist countries to rule over millions of people in order to plunder them and their country.

The workers should also demand the right of the colonial people in the mandated territories to be fully represented on the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League, and the right of the Commission and the League to send Commissions of Investigation into the mandated territories.

Alongside this general campaign, the workers must demand for the oppressed peoples of the colonial countries complete freedom of press and opinion, the legal existence of Trade Union and political organisation, universal adult suffrage, the repeal of all repressive measures such as Press Acts, Sedition Laws and Special Ordinances, immediate improvement in housing, sanitation and health conditions and the right of British workers to send their own organisers and helpers to the colonial countries to assist in the organisation of the people for the realisation of these objectives and as a gesture of real international working-class solidarity.

This is the policy to oppose to the misguided attempts at sidetracking the real mass fight against war by airy talk about redistributing the colonies which do not belong to those who advocate this action.

This is the policy which would weaken *all imperialist exploitation*, encourage the national liberation movement in the colonial countries themselves, and prevent the Fascists from extending their power through the help given them by Labour leaders playing at being statesmen, and pacifists unblushingly condemning millions of people to a worse terror and bloodier violence by handing them over to a Mussolini or a Hitler.

This is the way to strike blows against the National Government, to weaken its hold on the colonies and to help develop a common struggle against a common enemy and lead up to the final conquest of power, when, on the basis of Socialist economy, the peoples of the world will freely exchange their products, raw materials and foodstuffs for the common well-being of the working population of all countries.

*The Peace Policy of the Socialist and Trade Union Internationals*

What should be our attitude towards the decisions taken at the recent London Conference of the Labour and Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions ?

As is well known, last October, Comrade Dimitrov, General Secretary of the Communist International, addressed a proposal for joint action between the Socialist and Communist Internationals to end the war in Abyssinia. That appeal was rejected under the influence of the British Labour leaders.

Who can doubt that if it had been accepted, the organised workers of the world by their own independent actions and mass pressure of their Governments could long ago have stopped this war ? Who can doubt that such a check to an avowed aggressor would have had a salutary effect upon Hitler ?

The vacillations of the League of Nations and its shameful refusal really to apply economic and financial sanctions, especially oil sanctions against Mussolini, has been the strongest factor in helping him achieve his present position in Abyssinia, and the frightful slaughter he has carried out.

The International Federation of Trade Unions and Second International also bear a heavy responsibility for they had the power to organise the direct action of the workers themselves, who could have operated working-class measures that would have rallied the people of the whole world behind them.

They did not do this, and this fact has to be connected with their refusal of the united front also.

It was a criminal weakness on the part of the international Labour leaders that after all that has happened since, and especially after Hitler's acts of war on March 7, they did not invite to the London Conference of March 20 and 21, representatives of the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions.

However, we now have to define our attitude towards the decisions of this conference, for they have been unanimously adopted by the National Council of Labour, representing the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, and Co-operative Party, and thus have become the official platform of the Labour Movement of Britain.

The essence of the resolution adopted at the London Conference reads as follows :

The peace of the world is threatened. . . . There is only one means by which it can be safeguarded. We must resolutely organise collective security. The League Pact should be extended and be applied through the League of Nations as widely as possible.

Peace is indivisible. All must rally unhesitatingly to the support of any state attacked by an aggressor and an agreement must be made to this end.

This agreement must provide for prompt and united support for any victim of aggression. It should be general and open to all in conformity with the principles of the League of Nations and consequently must not include any discrimination against Soviet Russia, such as Hitler's proposals imply.

We can support the general aims set out here, and also declare our readiness to campaign jointly for them, because without a mass campaign they will remain aims, and lack concrete mass support and force. We can also accompany such support with propaganda amongst the masses to develop a much more effective peace policy and one which does not place full reliance on the capitalist governments and the League of Nations, but also organises the independent actions of the workers against an aggressor, one that will demand an all-round reduction in armaments and the adoption of effective measures at the right moment against an avowed aggressor, *i.e.*, stoppage of financial loans and commerce, refusal to load and unload ships, and will demand the signing of a pact of mutual assistance between Britain and the Soviet Union, one that will put life and meaning into the aims set out in the London resolution through the medium of these actions.

We Communists will support all measures that help to maintain peace, however inadequate we think they are, because the maintenance of peace overrides every issue facing the workers. At the same time, we shall endeavour to strengthen all such weak measures by our positive proposals and actions.

Unless such a campaign as we have in mind is undertaken, the masses will never know that such a Declaration of Policy has been made in their name. Its popularisation needs great united meetings, demonstrations, conferences, leaflets, pamphlets, endless propaganda, and explanation wherever workers are gathered together.

#### *A Still Stronger Peace Policy Needed*

But we have also the duty to point out clearly to the workers the weak side of the London Conference, for we cannot remain silent on questions which affect the entire future welfare of millions of the world's workers.

The London Conference evaded its chief task in the struggle to preserve world peace, that of ending the opposition and resistance to the establishment of the United Front on a national and international scale. It did not take any steps to organise the workers' own action against Mussolini and Hitler, but restricted everything to the League of Nations. It made no practical effort to mobilise in a common movement for genuine mass struggle, all those who long for peace and hate war. It did not openly

condemn those of its leaders who were the chief opponents of the United Front at the same time as they were clamouring through the *Daily Herald* and the Scandinavian Labour papers for "accepting Hitler's peace proposals," thus helping Fascist aggression at a most fateful moment in the international situation when peace or war was literally in the balance. It made no protest about Japan's carving up of China, and outlined no policy whereby the workers could assist the magnificent struggle of the Chinese people in resisting Japanese aggression in China.

The explaining of these facts to the workers will not impede the fight for peace. It will rouse their vigilance, it will cause them to pay more attention to decisions taken in their name, and the more enlightened the masses of the workers become, the greater the guarantee that even inadequate resolutions which are only tiny contributions to the cause of peace will be carried out.

This should be the workers' attitude to the London Conference, and we believe that if it is popularised amongst the masses, could exercise a profound effect upon the workers and bring nearer the realisation of a united front capable of maintaining peace on a national and international scale.

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