
First Minority Report of the Committee on War and Militarism: St. Louis — April 11, 1917

by Louis Boudin

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In this grave hour in the history of this country, we, the representatives of the Socialist Party of the United States, in special convention assembled, deem it our duty to place before the membership of the Socialist Party and the working class of America a succinct statement of our position on the questions involved, and to outline a program of action which we believe to be in the interest of workers of this country to follow.

At the very outset we desire to declare our unalterable opposition to all wars declared and prosecuted by any ruling class, no matter what the ostensible purpose. We believe that the interests of the great toiling masses can not possibly be served by any such war. And we particularly warn the workers against the snare and delusion of so-called defensive wars and wars for the alleged furtherance of democracy.

No Danger of Subjugation.

Modern wars are not — except under very exceptional circumstances — waged for the purpose of subjugating free peoples which have achieved such a degree of civilization as to have a modern working class as one of its competent elements; and none of the great civilized nations are in danger of being subjugated by any other nation. There can, therefore, be no question — at least in so far as the great civilized nations are con-

cerned — of any nation needing defense against actual subjugation. The defense needed — even in the case of a genuine defensive war — is almost always of some interest of the capitalist class, usually a trade interest or the right and privilege to subjugate or exploit some backward race or country.

In the few exceptional cases where the danger of actual subjugation may exist — the case of the few small civilized nations occupying a sea-coast coveted by their stronger neighbors, the right of self-defense would be unavailing, and they would never dream of asserting it against one of the great powers but for the help which they may expect from small nations, mere pawns in the game of world politics played by the big modern nations — a game in which the working class has nothing to gain and considerable to lose whenever it attempts to play it in partnership with the ruling class.

Socialists Not Indifferent.

This does not mean that we are not indifferent to the independence of small nations; or to the right of all nations, great or small, to live their own life in their own way and to work out their own destinies. On the contrary — we feel very strongly on the subject. Socialism can only be brought about by the efforts of free men, and must

be based on the fullest liberty of all races and nations.

But we believe and assert that the only security for the independence of small nations lies in the ethical concepts and economic interests of the revolutionary proletariat.

The same is true of the progress of democracy. We are not indifferent to the fate of democracy. On the contrary, we believe that the Socialist movement is particularly charged with the duty of preserving and extending all democratic institutions. But we also know that the revolutionary working class is the only social force either willing or capable of doing it.

No Fight for Democracy.

We deny that any of the nations engaged in this war fight for democracy, or that the ends of democracy in any way will be served by either side to the conflict winning a complete victory. This war is primarily the result of economic forces which have brought about the imperialistic era in which we live, and of the general reactionary trend which is one of the most essential characteristics of this era. Modern imperialism is a worldwide phenomenon, although it may be more pronounced in one country than in another. Similarly, the reactionary trend which accompanies it is as broad as our "civilization," for the time being, although in some countries it may assume more obnoxious forms than in some others. The only hope of democracy, therefore, lies in those revolutionary elements of each country which are ready to fight imperialism in all its manifestation and wherever found.

The entry of the United States into this worldwide war does not in any way change the situation. On the contrary, it proves conclusively that no capitalist government, whether monarchical or republican in form, can be depended upon to fight for democracy, or, indeed, for anything but sordid capitalist interests.

When the great war opened with one of the most lawless and ruthless acts in history, the invasion of Belgium by Germany, an act not merely abhorrent in itself, but striking at the very roof of those international arrangements for which we have contended so long and which must lie at the foundation of any international order that will put an end to all wars — the President solemnly enjoined upon the people of this country the duty of remaining neutral not only in deed but also in thought. By that declaration President Wilson officially and authoritatively announced to the people of this country, as well as to the world at large, that the existence of international law, the dictates of humanity, the fate of small peoples and of democratic institutions, were matters that do not concern "us."

The war of the United States against Germany can not be justified even on the plea that it is a war of defense of American rights or American "honor." Ruthless as the unrestricted submarine war policy of the German government was and is, it is not an invasion of the rights of the American people as such, but only an interference with the opportunity of certain groups of American capitalists to coin cold profits out of the blood and sufferings of our fellow men in the warring countries of Europe.

No War on Militarism.

It is not a war against the militarist regime of the Central Powers. Militarism can never be abolished by militarism.

It is not a war to advance the cause of democracy in Europe. Democracy can never be imposed upon any country by a foreign power by force of arms.

It is cant and hypocrisy to say that the war is not directed against the German people, but against the imperial government of Germany. If we send an armed force to the battlefields of Europe, its cannon will mow down the masses of the

German people and not the imperial German government.

Our entrance into the European conflict at this time will serve only to multiply the horrors of the war, to increase the toll of death and destruction, and to prolong the fiendish slaughter. It will bring death, suffering, and destitution to the people of the United States and particularly to the working class. It will give the powers of reaction in this country the pretext for an attempt to throttle our rights and to crush our democratic institutions, and to fasten upon this country a permanent militarism.

The working class of the United States has no quarrel with the working class of Germany or of any other country. The American people did not want and do not want this war. They have not been consulted about the war and have had no part in declaring war. They have been plunged into this war by the trickery and treachery of the ruling class of the country through its representatives in the national administration and national Congress, its demagogic agitators, its subsidized press, and other servile instruments of public expression.

We brand the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world.

In all modern history there has been no war more unjustifiable than the war in which we are about to engage.

No greater dishonor has ever been forced upon a people than that which the capitalist class is forcing upon this nation against its will.

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