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

by John Spargo

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The Congress of the United States has declared that a series of illegal acts on the part of the German government constitutes war against this nation. We are now actually at war with Germany and her allies. The great struggle which for nearly 3 years has been waged between the principal European nations, a war of unparalleled magnitude and frightfulness, has at last drawn in this republic, until now the greatest of neutral nations.

The Socialist Party is compelled now to state, with greater definiteness and precision than has been done heretofore, the position of our party toward the war and upon the problems which the war inevitably presents.

In the presence of this dire calamity we proclaim our unflinching allegiance to the principle of internationalism. We have no quarrel with the people of Germany or of any other nation.

Internationalism is Guide.

Our guiding principle in all that concerns our relations to the people of other lands is internationalism. We are internationalists and anti-militarists.

But internationalism does not mean anti-nationalism. Nor has it anything whatever to do with the vague doctrine of world-organization, for which no accurately descriptive name exists, symbolized by the picturesque ceremony of flag burning. This much exploited ceremonial was a crude attempt to symbolize a conception of a nationless world.

We repudiate the claim made by some that loyalty to this nation is inconsistent with true interna-

tionalism. Those who say that Socialism involves the view that the working class has no nation to call its own, that all nations are alike, that there is nothing to choose between a militarist autocracy and a democratic republic, do not preach Socialist internationalism, but pernicious reactionary nonsense.

Difference in Ruler.

To say that there is no difference between governments is at once demagogic and untrue. Between the old Russian regime and the new is a vast difference, even though the new regime is not a fully developed Socialist republic. Not to have a choice between them is to be a political imbecile rather than a social revolutionist.

Internationalism presupposes nationalism. It is the interrelation of nations. The maintenance of national integrity and independence is an essential condition of internationalism. This principle has never in the past been seriously questioned in our movement. It has been the guiding principle of our policies in the Socialist International.

Upon that basis we have always defended the small nationalities and supported their struggles for independence. We have championed Ireland's struggle for national independence; we protested against the denationalization of Poland and aided the Poles in all their struggles and revolutions; we supported the Finns in their resistance to Russian despotism; we vigorously protested against the destruction of the national independence of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bohemia. Our international policy has been uniformly consistent with

this record.

Invasion Was Crime.

From this point of view, the wanton invasion of Belgium early in this war was a crime against Socialist principles of fundamental importance. It was, furthermore, a blow at international law and good faith, the basis of whatever internationalism in world organization yet exists.

As internationalists we unequivocally assert the right of nations to defend themselves, their institutions and rights.

As a corollary to that statement, we assert the right of Socialists to participate in such defense. Marx, Engels, Bebel, Liebknecht, and practically all the great founders and teachers of our movement have taught this.

We do not mean that Socialists must defend their nation in all circumstances. We have no tolerance for the false patriotism which cries "My country, right or wrong," nor for the equally false attitude that Socialists owe no loyalty to their nation, even when its cause is right and just.

In some circumstances it might be a Socialist duty to defend some other nation against one's own. We believe it was clearly the duty of the Social Democrats in Germany to defend Belgium's sovereignty against their own government's brutal and lawless assault.

Nations Do Exist.

That nations exist is a fact. That they will long endure is certain. It may be that at some remote time there will be no separate nations. With that we are not concerned here and now. Our present interest lies in promoting good will and understanding among nations. We aim to develop in each nation friendship and respect for all other nations and a scrupulous regard for their rights. To bring about a federation of independent and free nations is the Socialist ideal.

We accept the fine declaration of the martyred Jean Jaures, that a petty nationalism leads away from internationalism; while a profound nationalism leads to internationalism; a petty internationalism leads to a petty nationalism, while a profound international-

ism leads to a profound nationalism.

The theory of national rights which we have outlined leads to the question of the means of national defense. Admit the right of a nation to defend itself, and the right of Socialists to join in the defense, and it follows that we must admit the right of Socialists to create the means of national defense. National defense with broomsticks for armaments is impossible!

May Vote for Armaments.

To bind the representatives of our party not to vote for any kind of defensive armaments, regardless of existing circumstances, and to provide rules for expelling a representative of the party who votes for such armaments, no matter what the conditions, is in direct opposition to Socialist internationalism, and can only be explained as a surrender to a shoddy pacifist philosophy quite distinct from and unrelated to Socialism.

This is not a concession to militarism, by which we mean the organization of the human and material resources of a nation primarily to serve military purposes. A defensive system of armament is not necessary militaristic.

This principle has been fully approved by our international Socialist congresses, as for example, at the congresses of Stuttgart [1907] and Copenhagen [1910]. Acceptance of it does not commit us to any particular plan of military or naval preparedness which has been or may be proposed.

Believe in Disarmament.

We unequivocally believe in universal disarmament as the central feature of the Socialist program on this question. But this does not mean that we believe that democratic nations should disarm themselves, even when surrounded by armed autocracies. Such a course would be suicidal and worse. It would be retrogressive.

If a Socialist republic should result from the recent revolution in Russia, and the autocratic governments of Central Europe should continue to exist, the democracy of Russia would soon be destroyed.

Militarism menaces democracy in two ways: within a nation it imperils democracy in that nation;

outside the nation militarism is, to a defenseless people, and equally serious menace, not only to democracy, but to national life itself.

As Socialists, we are in general against war and in favor of peace. But we are not peace-at-any-price pacifists. We reject the doctrine of non-resistance, so called, and contrary to Socialism and to sound morality. From the days of Marx and Engels our movement has stood for peace, because peace is normally to the interest of the working class movement and to the development of Socialism. But Marx and Engels clearly showed, on many occasions, that wars might, in certain circumstance, be defended or even advocated on the ground that the interest of the working class movement and the development of Socialism would be furthered thereby.

Marx Urged War.

It is worthy of note at this time that Marx opposed the pacifists of 1853 with great vigor, and waged an active propaganda to force England to make war on Russia. Marx was in favor of that war because he believed that it would stimulate political and economic progress and the interests of the workers.

The present war, which broke out in the summer of 1914, had its origin in the economic conditions and the political institutions and national ideals prevailing in Europe. Germany began the war, and rejected all attempts at arbitration, because of the peculiar conjunction of economic conditions and political institutions and national ideals characteristic of her national life.

The die for war was cast by the triple powers dominating Germany — the autocratic monarchy, inspired by a great imperialistic vision, the great military class, and that section of the capitalist class closely associated with militarism.

Foes of Socialism.

When this relentless triumvirate spurned the means of international arbitration, which the Entente nations proposed, and followed that by the invasion of Belgium and the repudiation of all international agreements and organization, the attitude which Socialists must take toward it was determined for us.

Whatever the avowed object of the war, or the real aim on either side, the Central Empires had made themselves the particular enemies of democratic Socialism. From that point onward, it was quite evident that the defeat of the Central Empires would be conducive to civilization in general and international Socialism in particular.

Throughout the war Germany has acted with brutal lawlessness and inhumanity, not only against her enemies but also against peaceful and law-abiding neutral nations, including our own.

All sane people, even Germans themselves, must acknowledge that the ruthless methods of warfare adopted by the German government are indefensible and intolerable. With wanton disregard of all human rights in the way of its military plans, Germany has tried to enthrone barbarism over civilization.

The provocation to war, which this nation has borne with a patience and forbearance which will glow brightly in our history, has been great indeed. No nation with power to defend itself has, in modern times, endured so much.

Recognizing this most clearly, we Socialists have, nevertheless, hoped that the nation might find it possible to stay out of war. We recognize the great peril of active participation in the war to our national life. To the last moment we opposed war against Germany by this nation. More than that, even now we urge that instead of raising a large army to be sent to Europe, the government should mobilize the economic resources of the nation, and place the greatest possible amount of munitions and food supplies at the disposal of France and Belgium.

In this manner, we believe, the largest possible contribution to the defeat of Germany would be made, while, at the same time, our own nation would be saved from much bitter suffering, from reaction and military rule over our civil life during the war, and from the heavy burden of a great military system.

No Fight For Democracy.

We do not believe that the entrance of the United States into the war at this late hour is due to a determination to fight for democracy, or for the independence of peoples from autocratic rule. Our capitalist class has shown too great an interest in the war to make

such a belief tenable.

But even if it is conceded that the war of the United States against Germany has been brought on by the capitalists of this nation in their own interests, we must still desire that in the struggle this nation shall be victorious. Regardless of the capitalist motives involved, it is a fact that on one side are ranged the greatest autocracies in the world, the most powerful reactionary nations, while on the other side are ranged the most progressive and democratic nations in the world. To this fact we can not be indifferent.

We do not, as Socialists, subscribe to the doctrine that once war has been declared in spite of our opposition, we must cease all opposition to it. WE do say, however, that when, as in the present case, it is clear that the victory of one side as against the other would promote freedom and democracy, an intelligent application of Socialist principles to the existing situation leads inevitably to the conclusion that the interest of our movement requires the victory of that side.

Indifference As Treachery.

To profess indifference to the *result* of the war now being waged, to desire either that the war end in a draw or in the defeat of the Entente powers with which this nation is allied, is treachery to the principles of international Socialism.

Furthermore, it is treachery to the democratic principles and institutions of America. The identification of Socialism with this disloyalty to the essential principles of Americanism would destroy every hope of ever winning the great masses of the American people to our cause. We assert that Socialism is not disloyal to the interests of this nation.

Now that the war is an accomplished fact, for the reasons stated we hold that it is our Socialist duty to make whatever sacrifices may be necessary to enable our national and its allies to win the war as speedily as possible.

In accordance with this statement of the principles which we believe must guide the action of Socialists at this time, we recommend to our members

and sympathizers the following program of action:

Active agitation against the suppression of free speech and other popular rights, and to all the reactionary movements which arise in wartime.

Agitation in favor of submitting the question of universal compulsory military service to a popular referendum vote of all citizens.

The creation of public opinion to enforce the demand that conscription of wealth accompany any conscription of man for military service.

Demand that for the purpose of paying for the war the United States government shall sequester all incomes in excess of \$5,000 a year.

Cooperation with the labor unions and other working class organizations in an effort to secure the popular democratic control of all governing bodies instituted for the war, and the representation of the labor unions in the direction of all industries which are or may be placed under government control.

Limitation of profits in all private industrial and commercial enterprise.

Government ownership of railroads, mines, industries upon which the efficient prosecution of the war, and the well-being of the civil population, depend.

Active efforts to promote the restoration of the Socialist International, especially to establish friendly intercourse with our comrades in enemy countries, with a view to cooperation in efforts to bring about a peace which will be in the interest of the international Socialist movement.

Special activity to promote humane treatment of prisoners of war and interned aliens, to oppose all violations of international law by this nation, and to limit the area and the terrors of war in all possible ways.

Energetic action, through political and economic organization, to raise the income of the working class to meet the almost inevitable increase in the cost of the necessities of life.

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