

War and Poverty

The Brood of Capitalism



2005

[NEW YORK LABOR NEWS](#)

P.O. Box 218, Mountain View, CA 94042-0218

WAR AND POVERTY

This manifesto was issued on the eve of the passage of peacetime conscription. Its purpose is twofold: It is an incisive indictment of the capitalist system as the breeder of war and militarism. It is a clarion to the American working class to unite and wipe this iniquitous system off the face of the globe.

But "War and Poverty" serves still a third purpose. It is a fresh testimonial to the internationalism and unflinching determination of the Socialist Labor Party. Securely anchored to the bedrock of Marxian science, the Socialist Labor Party staunchly upholds its principles, conscious that on its integrity will ultimately depend the fate of the working class.

Navies and armies are insurance for capital owned abroad by the leisure class of a nation. It is for them that empires and spheres of influence exist. The great war now waging is a culmination of efforts to maintain and extend these spheres.—*Rear Admiral French E. Chadwick, U.S.N.*

(N.Y. *Evening Post*, Dec. 17, 1915.)

PRINTING HISTORY

First printing	September 1940
Second printing	October 1940
Third printing	December 1941
Online Edition	December 2005

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Uploaded by Donna Bills

The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one uniting all working people, of all nations, and tongues and kindreds.

—*Abraham Lincoln.*

Fellow-Workers:

The world, the civilized world it is called, is locked in a death struggle. On a scale greater than ever in human history men are exterminating each other, destroying wealth and the precious heirlooms that have come down to us through the ages, with forces and means of destruction such as have never been witnessed before. During the year that has passed since the Second World War broke out, republics, ancient kingdoms and mighty empires have collapsed or yielded to conquest, while hundreds of thousands of innocent people—men, women and little children—have been, and are being, slaughtered with a brutality and a ruthlessness heretofore thought impossible. For, it is insisted, are we not, after all, human beings?

Yes, we are human beings, which is to say that, under the whip and spur of the overriding law of acquisitive societies—of societies based on private property, socially needed to sustain life—under such conditions, human beings become more ruthless, more destructive, more pitiless than the most savage beasts of the jungle. For of all animals, it has been well said, man is the only one who preys systematically on his own kind—of all animals he is the only one who is capable of rationalizing villainy, cruelty, murder and destruction into

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deeds claiming recognition as noble, kind and uplifting, and as being performed in the service of truth and idealism, and for the benefit of all mankind!

While the great powers on earth were locked in this death-struggle during the last twelve-month, the United States of America—greatest of all industrial powers—stood by, attempting, or pretending, to be neutral, disavowing intentions to enter the war, yet, through its ruling class spokesmen, all the time feeding the flames of war, and supplying the material things which made it possible to keep the war going, and to extend it over ever wider areas of the globe.

When the war commenced in September, 1939, the Socialist Labor Party said in an official declaration: “The role which the United States will be called upon to play in the war will be a most important one. In the capitalist premises it is almost inevitable that this country will be drawn into the war.” And we added: “This may result from deliberate plottings and propaganda, *but even without these it is difficult to see how in the capitalist premises the pressure of economic forces and events could be overcome.*”

The President of the United States at that time declared that so long as it remained within his power to prevent it, there would “be no black-out of peace in the United States.” The Socialist Labor Party, being guided by Marxian Science, and knowing that good intentions do not control events or rulers, but that these are inexorably controlled by economic forces, remained sceptical. And now the United States is on the verge of war, and before this declaration appears in print, peace-time conscription may be clamped upon a people unwilling to accept it, dreading its implica-

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tions, resenting its violation of time-honored traditions of the Republic, and recognizing in it the mortal foe of the liberty which, however diluted or restricted, still survives in the spirit and sense of our revolutionary founding fathers.¹ And this is coming to pass under the driving executive whip of the President who said that if he could help it there would “be no black-out of peace in the United States”!

II.

What is it that has happened, and why? The Socialist Labor Party has told the story in detail on previous occasions, when world events during the last five or six years threatened to plunge the entire civilized world into war. In the Party’s “Manifesto on War and Decay and Corruption of International Capitalism,” published 1937, we laid bare the basic cause of war, showing that war results from the clashing of economic interests in the world market, each capitalist nation seeking to dispose profitably of the surplus commodities produced by the respective working classes, who, though producing all social wealth, yet receive as their reward but mere fractions of that wealth, the remainder going to the capitalist owners of industry, their institutions and spokesmen and servitors generally, the unconsumed part, as stated, being placed in the world market for profitable disposal. In the desperate struggle to get there first, and to force competitors out, the interests, we repeat, of the capitalists of different

¹President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the “Selective Training and Service Act of 1940” into law on September 16 of that year, just two days after publication of this manifesto.—*R.B.*

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countries clash, and the result eventually is war.

Woodrow Wilson, the President who led the United States into the First World War, clearer than any other modern chief executive, has shown how interlocked, and interdependent, modern capitalist nations are, and why, accordingly, it is visionary to expect a great industrial and commercial nation to remain at peace when the rest of the powerful industrial nations are at war. In a speech delivered on September 5, 1919, in St. Louis, Mo., he said:

“Is there any merchant present here or any manufacturer or any banker who can say that our [i.e., capitalist] interests are separate from the interests of the rest of the world, commercially, industrially, financially? *There is not a man in any of those professions who does not admit that our industrial fortunes are tied up with the industrial fortunes of the rest of the world.*”

And in the evening of the same day, also in St. Louis, he declared:

“The real reason that the war . . . took place was that Germany was afraid her commercial rivals were going to get the better of her, and the reason why some nations went into war against Germany was that they thought Germany would get the commercial advantage of them. *The seed of the jealousy, the seed of the deep-seated hatred was hot, successful commercial and industrial rivalry. . . . This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war.*”

President Wilson spoke the truth, though he spoke this particular truth *after* the war; and none had a

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better opportunity to observe the forces at work which finally also forced him, in a capitalist world, to lead this country into war in 1917. And the identical forces are at work today, working inexorably toward the same ends, and through the same instrumentalities. "Hot. . . commercial and industrial rivalry" led to the war in Europe; the same considerations have brought the United States to the brink of war, all pious and hypocritical pleas to the contrary notwithstanding. Only a few years ago this now obvious cause of war was also recognized by another government official, Mr. Marriner Eccles, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, who frankly declared: "War is merely the openly armed continuation of our peace-time business." "Peace-time business" means capitalism, and if war is hell, then, truly, capitalism is scarcely less an inferno at peace than when at war!

Let it be emphasized, then, that if, or when, the United States enters the Second World War, it will be for none of the idealistic reasons or lofty purposes to be announced through Presidential proclamations, editorial gushings, or priestly incantations; it will be for one reason only, the desire and need of American capitalism to maintain itself, or to rule supremely, in the world market. In the words of Woodrow Wilson, the cause of war in the case of the United States, as in the case of every other capitalist nation, will be: **HOT COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL RIVALRY.**

III.

Since the collapse of French imperialism early this summer, with the consequent danger of British collapse, the capitalist class and its editorial and political

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spokesmen, the President leading among the latter, have carried on a feverish agitation in favor of peacetime conscription, which in fact would resolve itself into military and industrial conscription. For the first time in the history of the country conscription is adopted in time of peace, and without even submitting the question to the referendum vote of the people. Despite evidence of overwhelming opposition to conscription throughout the country, politicians and editors brazenly claim that the vast majority of the people of the United States clamor for conscription—that they beg to have the chains of military (and industrial) servitude placed upon them. The swindle is so palpable, so outrageous, that with all their propaganda machinery working overtime, the conscription advocates were forced to retreat, and to modify their brazen demands. If they really believed that the mass of the people wanted conscription, why did they not submit the question for a decision at the polls in the November election? The answer is, of course, that they know they are lying, they know they are perpetrating a huge fraud. And if editors were up for election, as politicians are, they, too, would “hear from home,” and heed the demand of their constituents! But editors, at least, are fairly safe—as yet. At any rate, they do not rush to the barracks. The swivel-chair and the cocktail hour offer too many temptations, apart from the fact that they are not going to risk their hides in defense of the “status quo”! Our great American poet, James Russell Lowell, had this gentry well catalogued. In his Bigelow papers he placed them on exhibition as, for instance, when he made Hosea Bigelow say:

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“Take them editors thet’s crowin’
Like a cockerel three months old,—
Don’t ketch any on ’em goin’,
Though they be so blasted bold.”

But the biggest fraud perpetrated is the contention made by the conscriptioners, politicians and editorial scribblers alike, that conscription is the very essence of democracy! The argument is that since the conscripted men are to be “selected” by the draft, it will hit poor and rich alike, and presto! there is your democracy! It is difficult to conceive of a more dishonest, and at the same time a more ridiculous, contention. It carries as much sense with it as if one were to say that capitalism is democratic because both rich and poor may starve, if they like, or that rich and poor enjoy the same opportunity to be idle, to steal a loaf of bread, sleep on park benches or underneath bridges! Moreover, it is not true that rich and poor alike are subject to the draft; already now it is pointed out that “experts” in industry will be exempted—or, as they put it, executives, specialists and experts will be “drafted” for home service. And even if the sons of the rich and influential are drafted, does anyone suppose that a James Roosevelt, for instance, would be exposed to the same dangers as John Smith?

There was a time when old-fashioned reactionaries argued against what is, in fact, a phony conception of Socialism, namely, the lie that everybody under Socialism would be reduced to the same gray level. They used to call that supposed state of affairs “The Coming Slavery,” and, as said, they falsely identified that sort of thing as Socialism. But if ever anything reduced

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everybody to the common gray level, it is the army and conscription. Yet, as applied to a supposed state of society, the reduction to a common level was called slavery. As applied to militarism it is called the very cream of democracy! Lottery is generally denounced as “sinful,” and is prohibited as a crime in most states. The drafting of conscripts is, of course, a lottery. Now, whereas in the case of money lottery is very bad, demoralizing and a crime, in the case of human beings it becomes a promoter of the nobler, the democratic, the better life! As a matter of fact, the different moral or ethical values placed upon the two forms of lottery beautifully illustrates the capitalist, the shopkeeper conception of morals. Certainly, gambling for money is bad! Certainly, gambling in human lives is good—human life being the cheap thing it is, especially the life of a wage worker, and above all if he happens to be unemployed! In designating a conscripted army as a sample of democracy, the capitalist apologists and the militarists unwittingly reveal their real conception of the thing they call democracy—capitalist democracy, or the “democracy” of the industrial treadmills as exemplified in the Ford plants and the steel mill infernos. The humbuggery of these contentions is so transparent that one wonders at the brazenness of those who offer them as serious, adult argumentation.

IV.

We have stated that peace-time conscription is in violation of the finest American democratic traditions, and carelessly the capitalist advocates of conscription have admitted the truth of that, though, of course, they did not mean to do so. Some of the most outspoken ad-

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vocates of conscription among the newspaper editors have admitted that peace-time conscription is a revolutionary step of a most thoroughgoing character, which is simply an acknowledgment that it is subversive of American democratic principles and traditions. Even at the height of the Civil War, the draft was condemned in the severest terms. The founder of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, in 1863, denounced the draft as “unconstitutional, needless, and an outrage on individual liberty and State rights.” And Greeley quoted the following from the *New York World* of the same year:

“The idea of a military conscription being itself profoundly repugnant to the American mind, it might have been supposed that unusual steps would have been taken by the friends of that resort [i.e., the friends of conscription] to present it with utter frankness, and in the light best adapted to dissipate the popular hostility. Nothing of the sort was done. . . . It was not only a conscription, but an act passed by conscription.”

This description fits the present proposed conscription act—this anti-democratic, Hitleristic measure that is being crammed down the throat of the American people. And they refer to this involuntary servitude as the very jewel of democracy!

But we need not go back eighty or one hundred years in search of condemnations of peace-time conscription by outstanding Americans. None has denounced conscription as the very enemy of American democratic principles and liberty in harsher terms than the War President of twenty-five years ago,

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Woodrow Wilson. In his second annual message delivered before Congress in joint session, December 8, 1914, President Wilson, discussing the subject of national defense, said:

“It [national defense] cannot be discussed without first answering some very searching questions. It is said in some quarters that we are not prepared for war. What is meant by being prepared? Is it meant that we are not ready upon brief notice to put a nation in the field, a nation of men trained to arms? Of course we are not ready to do that; **AND WE SHALL NEVER BE IN TIME OF PEACE SO LONG AS WE RETAIN OUR PRESENT POLITICAL PRINCIPLES AND INSTITUTIONS.** And what is it that it is suggested we should be prepared for? To defend ourselves against attack? We have always found means to do that, *and shall find them whenever it is necessary without calling our people away from their necessary tasks to render compulsory military service in time of peace.*”

And identifying his opposition to conscription in peace-time with the “finer passions” of the American people, he went on:

“We never have had, and while we retain our present principles and ideals we never shall have, a large standing army. . . . we shall not turn America into a military camp. We will not ask our young men to spend the best years of their lives making soldiers of themselves. . . . And especially when half the world is on fire we shall be careful to make our moral insurance against the spread of the conflagration very definite and certain and adequate indeed.”

Surely, nothing could be stronger than this so far as

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condemning peace-time conscription goes. With conscription in force, according to the Wilsonian dictum, “our present principles and ideals” will have been destroyed—ceased to exist—and America will have been turned “into a military camp.” It is a safe bet that this is one passage from the utterances of his illustrious predecessor which Mr. Roosevelt will not cite in support of his strenuous efforts to dragoon the American people into conscription!

But perhaps the conscriptioners will speedily attempt to reconcile their advocacy of conscription with Wilson’s condemnation of peace-time conscription. They can do so by plunging the country into war as soon as conscription becomes law! For even Wilson believed in conscription in war-time. And perhaps that is precisely what they will do, though once conscription is a fact, they will care little about seeking justification, and still less about reconciling Prussianism with democratic Americanism. They will not need to. American labor will have become completely enslaved—completely gagged and bound.

And what is it we are asked to defend? Some call it “our democracy”; others “our way of life”; others our “economic system of free enterprise,” etc. Present-day democracy is not the democracy of our revolutionary fathers. In 1776 the people generally had a stake in the economic system—most of them owned property which they naturally were eager to defend. Today the majority owns no property. According to the Report of the Federal Trade Commission (1926), 59 per cent of the country’s wealth is owned by one per cent of the population, while 87 per cent now own only 8 per cent. Accordingly, the mass of the people in the United

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States are propertiless, and, therefore, they have no stake in the present economic system. And what is “our way of life”? There are two ways of life in America—the way of life of the capitalists, the Fords, the du Ponts, the Roosevelts, and the way of life of the wage slave in the Ford plant, in the steel mills, in the coal-mines. The former is a way of life in comfort, well-being and security. The latter is a way of life in distress and poverty and insecurity, or in total misery if the worker is unemployed. Which way of life is it they want us to defend?

What the workers really are expected to defend is the system of capitalism, the very system that enslaves them, the very cause of wars! To maintain the *status quo*, to uphold the system of wage slavery, to help the capitalists to hold or to conquer foreign markets, is to defend the chains that are fettering them—for these the workers are asked to lay down their lives!

V.

The Socialist Labor Party has watched closely the progressive steps taken which have led us to the brink of war. In 1937, at Chicago, Mr. Roosevelt took what may be regarded as the first step toward war. A subsequent step was taken by Mr. Roosevelt at Kingston, Ont., Canada, on August 2, 1938, where in a speech he personally pledged the United States to the defense of an outpost of the British Empire. And other steps have followed in logical order. Whether the President was conscious of taking these steps is of no importance here. They serve to illustrate, however, the manner in which a country gradually, and, to the uninitiated, im-

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perceptibly, is being pushed or maneuvered into war. That sinister influences have also been at work we know—munitions-dealers, manufacturers of war supplies generally, being among the outstanding. At present we witness, on another front, the result of propaganda by capitalist interests, namely, in the case of Mexico where aggrieved American oil interests are pulling wires to embroil the United States in war with Mexico in the interest of the said American oil interests. A classic example of clear recognition of such sinister influences at work we find in a statement issued by Woodrow Wilson on March 25, 1916, in which he denounced certain American “unscrupulous influences” for their efforts to bring about an invasion of Mexico by United States military forces. Said Mr. Wilson:

“The object of this traffic in falsehood is obvious. It is to create intolerable friction between the Government of the United States and the de facto Government in Mexico *for the purpose of bringing about intervention in the interest of certain American owners of Mexican properties. . . . The people of the United States should know the sinister and unscrupulous influences that are afoot. . . .*”

As in 1916, so now, there are “certain American owners” of properties abroad, investors and financial interests, that is, all those who have a financial, an economic, stake in the British Empire, who are working ceaselessly to bring the United States into the war on the side of British capitalism. American workers—beware of “these sinister and unscrupulous influences that are afoot,” and which may prove determining in pushing the country over the war-brink!

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As in the past, on numerous occasions, so now the Socialist Labor Party warns the American workers against permitting themselves to be regimented and dragooned into war in defense of one set of capitalist interests against assaults by other capitalist interests. We repeat what we have stated again and again:

We declare that we detest Hitlerism and all other forms of dictatorship, and all that they stand for, which most of the conscriptioners do not, and that we will fight the evil thing to the end, but we declare also that the place to start that fight is here, in the United States of America. There are hundreds of thousands of Hitlers right in our midst, and it will occupy all our time and efforts to finish that fight. When once we have finished it, we shall have in this beautiful, beloved land a true democracy, and an economic system wherein as freemen we have a stake, a democracy and a society which we shall defend passionately against any domestic or alien Hitler, should such arise or knock upon our gates. To defend, as wage slaves, our economic despotism in any manner whatsoever would be to defend the very thing that is enslaving us, the very thing which is plunging the world's workers into bloody, fratricidal warfare. It would be to defend, and to fasten upon us still more firmly, the very chains that bind us. As the platform of the Liberty Party in 1843 declared: "When freemen unsheath the sword, it should be to strike for Liberty, not for despotism!" And it matters not whether it be political or economic (industrial) despotism.

Workers of America, unite! Unite under the banner of the Socialist Labor Party! Organize, now, in Social-

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ist Industrial Unions, to give effect to your Socialist Labor Party ballot cast for the abolition of capitalism, and to serve as the government of the future—as the Administration of Industry, the Industrial Union Government! Then, and not until then, will freedom and peace return to a disrupted and enslaved world; then and not until then, will abundance of the good things in life be assured to all; then, and not until then, will the promise of our glorious Declaration of Independence be fulfilled: Self-government for the useful people in their everyday but vital concern, that is to say, in industry, with reenforcement of their guaranteed right to life, liberty and the untrammelled pursuit of happiness. Demand, and organize to enforce your demand:

PEACE, LIBERTY, ABUNDANCE.

And never forget that—

There can be no peace without Socialism.

SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY
OF AMERICA.

Issued September 12, 1940—in the
Golden Jubilee year of the Socialist Labor Party,
and the Second Year of the Second World War.