

THE SOCIALISTS, THE WAR AND THE GENERAL ELECTION

By J. R. CAMPBELL

THE present war crisis has tested the whole Labour Movement. It has shown in the clearest possible light the ability of the various sections of the Labour Movement to analyse a war situation and to give concrete guidance to the workers as to how to struggle in the defence of peace. It has exposed those who are ready at the slightest pretext to line up with their own capitalist governments in any and every war, and also those who substitute revolutionary phrases for revolutionary action, and lifeless formulæ for the concrete analysis of a complex situation.

The Origin of the Present War Crisis

It must never be forgotten that the present war situation arises out of the capitalist crisis and of the fierce economic warfare waged by the capitalists of each country in an effort to escape from the crisis. The tariff wars, the currency wars, the subsidising of exports and the increase of dumping generally have created economic chaos throughout the world. And it must be noted that amongst those who have been foremost in the waging of this aggressive economic warfare have been the "democratic" capitalist States like Britain, France, and the U.S.A. Precisely because those countries possessed a considerable empire and wide-flung spheres of influence outside of their Empire proper, they were able not only to squeeze their own workers, but the millions in the colonies, and also the capitalist class in other countries which were trading with those colonies. The greatest successes in the economic warfare were obtained by those capitalist countries, which like Britain, had a large Empire at their disposal.

Although in theory (as distinct from practice) Fascist theorists have talked much about autarchy, national self-sufficiency, economic nationalism, the fact remains that the practice of economic warfare by all the leading capitalist countries has hit the Fascist States most of all, because they had not a large empire at their disposal as a market or a source of investment. Capitalist states like Germany and Italy, in spite of the aggressiveness of their economic policy, in spite of the low wages which Fascism has imposed on the workers got decidedly the worst of the struggle.

Note that this is a fact of monopoly capitalism and not of nature. It is not because Italy is "over populated" or that the Germans are "people without room" that their present situation arises. These peoples are being hemmed in not by their frontiers, but by the system of monopoly capitalism. Remove the shackles of that system and the peoples of Italy and Germany could immediately obtain a higher standard of life.

The position in Italy and Germany has undoubtedly been aggravated by the economic contortions of the Fascist Governments in their effort to escape from the crisis and particularly by the terrific cost of the re-armaments programme. The more the situation worsens, the more the Fascist governments seek to save the system of monopoly capitalism and to uphold the dictatorship by telling their peoples that not the capitalist system but the existing division of colonial territories is at fault, and that there is no tolerable future for the people unless a new share out of the territory of the world can be procured by war.

In pursuit of this policy, Nazi Germany becomes the leader of a group of European Fascist States intent on an early war. It builds an anti-Soviet alliance with Poland and Hungary and seeks to bring Bulgaria into this alliance. This Fascist coalition is primarily directed against the Soviet Union, but it also menaces the independence of a whole number of the smaller European states such as Czechoslovakia, Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, and Esthonia, and is a direct menace also to French imperialist interests.

It is essential in considering the present situation in Abyssinia not to lose sight for a single moment of this coalition of European Fascism (linked up with Japanese imperialism), the main objective of which is a war on the Soviet Union.

It is clear that this war situation, like the war in Abyssinia, is a product of the development of capitalist antagonisms. This has led some people to the conclusion that since war is inevitable under the capitalist system it is impossible for the workers to engage in any effective struggle for the preservation of peace. But the fact that war is inevitable under the capitalist system does not mean that any particular war situation need necessarily lead to war or that any small war once it breaks out cannot be brought to a speedy conclusion instead of being allowed to spread. Whether a war situation leads to an actual outbreak of war depends on struggle—on the struggle of the forces of peace against the forces of war.

Here the elementary fact must be noted that not all capitalist states desire an immediate outbreak of war. The small states which stand to lose their independence in the event of war are desperately anxious to hold off an outbreak of war as are certain imperialist countries like France. Nevertheless, the strength of those countries is not sufficient to have held off the outbreak of a war unless they are reinforced by the Soviet Union.

The entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations, and the conclusion of a series of non-aggression pacts has placed tremendous barriers in the way of the warmongers.

The Character of the League of Nations To-day

When certain I.L.P'ers quote with glee the Communist definition of the League of Nations as a "thieves' kitchen" they are deliberately ignoring this relation of forces. They forget that the description "thieves' kitchen" was part of a concrete analysis of the rôle that the League was playing at a given moment, and that this re-quotation cannot absolve Socialists from enquiring what rôle the League is playing in the present situation.

Two things must be noted. The most dangerous thieves have left the kitchen or are on the point of leaving it. Japan and Germany are outside, Italy is on the threshold. Evidently the kitchen is some kind of restraint on those countries who want an immediate war. And again, not all in the kitchen are thieves. The Soviet Union and the small states are interested in the preservation of peace.

This surely gives us the opportunity of mobilising a powerful peace movement in every capitalist country, to bring pressure to bear on the government of the day to support the peace forces of the League, while at the same time preparing the ground for the defeat of governments whose policy is notoriously anti-League.

This peace movement has not only a duty in relation to its own government, it has the duty of concentrating the forces of the working class and of all peace lovers on an international scale against those governments which at any given moment are the chief instigators of war.

Within this movement the revolutionaries must work for the winning of the pacifist masses for the full revolutionary line against war. We can give no blank cheques to the League of Nations. We can cherish no illusions regarding it. Our analysis of it must be a Marxist, and not a Liberal, analysis. The League of Nations is not "the nucleus of a world order"; it is not a body which can abolish war within capitalist society. When the Soviet Union entered the League of Nations, Comrade Litvinov said :

Far be it from me to overrate the opportunities and means of the League of Nations for the organisation of peace. I realise perhaps better than any of you how limited these means are. I am aware that the League does not possess the means for the complete abolition of war. I am, however, convinced that, with the firm will and close co-operation of all its members, a great deal could be done at any given moment for the utmost diminution of the danger of war, and this is a sufficiently honourable and lofty task, the fulfilment of which would be of incalculable advantage to humanity.

We must not forget these words to-day. When in the *New Statesman* pamphlet on Abyssinia it is asserted "It is nearer the truth to regard it as a League of Socialist and Democratic States bonded together against the menace of Fascism," that is an unwarranted idealisation of the League. The Labour Governments of Scandinavia are not socialist but left capitalist governments, and all of the small states in the League are not democratic even in the capitalist sense of the word. No, we have got to take the League just as it is "without one plea." It is composed *in the main* of capitalist states which do not want an immediate war plus the Soviet Union. It can on this basis be made a barrier against the most rapacious warmongers. A realistic Socialist appraisal of the League does not in any way diminish its usefulness at this stage.

It is in the light of this background that we must see the war in Abyssinia.

Away back in May, 1934, Karl Radek wrote an article entitled "The Dialectic of History and the League of Nations," in which he analysed the forces remaining in the League. He divided them as follows: (1) The small States seeking to avoid a new world cataclysm; (2) France which has everything to lose by war, and (3) Great Britain and Italy which are preparing to take part in a new struggle for the division of the world, but think (Great Britain) that the time has not come to come out openly on the side of the powers preparing for a new world war, or (like Italy) seek for what they can get by playing on the differences between the leading imperialist powers. This analysis has been strikingly confirmed.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that Italy embarked on the Abyssinian war thinking that she was so indispensable to Britain and France that she would encounter no opposition to this project. It seems tolerably clear now that Laval in January agreed to support Italy in this adventure, and when no British objection was raised during the Stresa conference in April (after Abyssinia had appealed to the League) it was only natural that Mussolini should give the signal of "full steam ahead."

The I.L.P. and the League

Now how did the Socialist Press estimate the effect of Mussolini's adventure on world peace. Here is the *New Leader* before it lost its head:

The campaign in Ethiopia cannot be localised. Its consequences will spread to Europe. Diplomacy is seeking favourable footholds. The voice of the working class has yet to be heard. (*New Leader*, July 5.)

The realists led by Mr. Garvin plead that he (Mussolini) be given his head so as not to jeopardise the integrity of Austria, the cornerstone of peace in Europe.

This is the most short-sighted of all policies. By a formal peace Mussolini will gain the fruits of war. What if Germany—rearmed by Britain—next threatens to annex Austria. Again in order to maintain “the indivisibility of peace,” peace will be maintained and another Fascist power strengthened.

In a way Abyssinia to-day is the testing centre of European civilisation. Either it will receive another blow or the common people of all countries will at last see that the Governments and the League will do nothing to stop the war and that it is on themselves that the onus will rest to prepare and organise immediately to hamper and obstruct all war preparations against Abyssinia. (*New Leader*, July 19.)

The Abyssinian conflict cannot be “localised,” the sufferers will be the workers of all countries. (*New Leader*, July 26.)

The system (the collective peace system) is founded on the idea that all nations should take common action against an aggressor with the League of Nations as the pivot of action.

There is no doubt that Italy is the aggressor in the war it is preparing against Abyssinia. Both Italy and Abyssinia are members of the League of Nations. It is the obligation of all members of the League of Nations to take common action against Italy. But it is clear that they will not do so. (*New Leader*, July 19.)

So up until the middle of July the I.L.P. saw the war danger as follows. The League would not restrain Mussolini from attacking Abyssinia. This would be a stimulus to Hitler. Unless the workers stopped Mussolini there would be danger for everyone in Europe because the war could not be localised.

No fear was expressed at this time as to the danger of League action against Italy. No, the I.L.P. saw the League paralysed and unable to act and Mussolini getting away with it.

The Left Socialist Parties associated with the I.L.P. shared this analysis. They did not see the League as fiercely aggressive and likely to plunge the world into war.

“The world,” said an appeal of the Left Parties, “is now facing a case of open imperialism in the piracy of Fascist Italy against Abyssinia. The collective system of peace could not have a better chance to vindicate its principles and promises.” (*New Leader*, August 16.) In short the Left Parties’ statement invited the League to wake up and do something about it. But a few weeks later when the League started moving with the rapidity of a South American sloth the I.L.P. takes fright, throws overboard its previous analysis, and sees the real war danger in a League of Nations war against Signor Mussolini.

The opposition of the workers to a war led by the National Government has unfortunately been weakened by the attitude of the Labour Party, the T.U.C. and even the Communist Party. They are all advocating support for sanctions by the League of Nations, despite the capitalist character of the governments, which dominate the League and would

conduct the war. It is important that all sections of the working class which are opposed to this policy should immediately get together and unitedly demonstrate their determination to resist an imperialist led war. (*New Leader*, September 6.)

We are compelled to express our deep horror and regret at the attitude of the Labour Party Executive and the Trades Union Congress in urging the Government to wage war on Italy in the name of collective security through the League of Nations.

The difference between the two rival dictators and the interests behind them are not worth a single British life. (*New Leader*, September 13.)

What caused this amazing change over? In the first place the realisation of the British imperialist conflict with Italy, and secondly, the cumulative effect of Fascist war propaganda on wavering Socialist elements.

The British imperialists were slow in realising the implications of Mussolini's war adventure, but when they realised the danger to their imperial communications, no less than their immediate interests in Egypt, they acted quickly. There can be no doubt that the attitude of British imperialism in the League of Nations has nothing to do with concern for the League as an institution or for the independence of Abyssinia.

Indeed it is impossible to deny that no body of people in the world has less right to adopt a moral pose about "aggressors" and "sanctity of covenants" than the National Government of Great Britain.

It was the leading party in this Government—the Conservative Party—that was in office in 1925 when the British and Italian Governments attempted to divide up Abyssinia into spheres of influence and infringe on its sovereignty. It was this party which has deliberately kept Egypt—a country on a much higher level of development than Abyssinia—out of the League of Nations. It was British imperialism that not once but on scores of occasions behaved in Africa in the manner that Mussolini is now seeking to emulate in Abyssinia.

What is the Workers' Case Against Mussolini's Attack?

But if the British Government has no case against Mussolini, that does not mean that the international working class has no case or that it must cease to obstruct Signor Mussolini's war plans because British imperialism for its own purposes is intent on obstructing him. The I.L.P. and the Socialist League refuse to see this and present the following simplified analysis:

The dispute has become a clash between sated and unsated imperialism over the disposal of an exploitable territory in possession of a "backward race." (Socialist League Statement to Branches, September 22.)

In this simplified analysis the following " trifles " are forgotten :

- (1) The struggle of the Abyssinian people.
- (2) The capitalist states in the League who want to uphold its prestige and power as a barrier against the war makers.
- (3) The Soviet Union and its determined peace policy.

Neither the I.L.P. nor the Socialist League saw these forces.

The I.L.P. would have it that the Soviet Union was prepared to sacrifice Abyssinia because of its non-aggression pact with France (which the I.L.P. regards as an old style alliance) and its friendship with Italy.

There is one government in the League which is not capitalist. Socialists are hoping Soviet Russia will speak out. Soviet Russia has the right to do so because Russia is not imperialist. Socialists are hoping that M. Litvinoff (who will preside at the Council meeting) will not allow himself to be silenced because of the Soviet-French alliance, the Soviet-French diplomatic friendship. (*New Leader*, July 26, 1935.)

When Litvinov did speak out in an unmistakable manner the *New Leader* refrained from giving his speech a reasonable amount of publicity.

The Socialist League is even nastier.

The Socialist League must not flinch from declaring that the immediate needs of the Soviet Union, vis-a-vis France and Germany, do not constitute valid grounds for mobilising the workers of this country in support of the " sanctions " policy of the National Government or of the League of Nations. (Socialist League Statement, September 22.)

Here the Soviet Peace Policy is reduced to " the immediate needs of the Soviet Union, vis-a-vis France and Germany." And this at a time when France is opposing sanctions and the Soviet Union in spite of the cheap I.L.P. sneers at the " French Alliance " is supporting strong League action against the aggressor. The great Peace policy that is defending the lives of the workers of all lands is presented by the Socialist League as a cheap and nasty diplomatic bargain.

Given the fact that there were other forces in the League besides British imperialism, and that those forces were fighting for peace, what should be the attitude of the working class ?

The reply of the Communist Party was unequivocal. It was that the workers must do all in their power to strengthen those peace forces by exerting the utmost pressure on their own governments which were either opposing sanctions (France) or threatening them as a means to forcing an imperialist bargain (Britain).

In the early days of the conflict over Abyssinia the I.L.P. saw nothing wrong in a government embargo on goods going to Italy.

If the British Government will not place an embargo upon war materials to Italy, the organised workers should take the matter into their own hands. (*New Leader*, July 19.)

What Do the Socialists Say?

But immediately there arose the possibility of the workers by their pressure, by resorting to all forms of direct action, forcing a majority of the League governments to take much more drastic economic action against Italy than the mere imposition of an embargo on war materials, the I.L.P. proceeded to act as if all the peace forces in the League were the dupes of the National Government and that all collective action against Mussolini was action in favour of the British Government.

Here was a deliberate refusal to mobilise the workers to back up the peace forces of the League at the same time resolutely exposing and opposing the policy of the National Government.

When the real war danger remained unchanged the danger that Mussolini "would get away with it," the danger that (unless the workers developed their own independent action) the League would be faltering and ineffective, the I.L.P. and the Socialist League depicted the League as being a body which was plotting a war against Italy.

"War faces the British workers," shouted the *New Leader*. "Sanctions mean War." "The proof about the imperialist plot at Geneva."

All this was simply wavering before the Fascist war propaganda. For when Mussolini decided to attack Abyssinia he had to neutralise the strong anti-Fascist forces in Britain and France. His main line was "Sanctions mean War," *i.e.*, that any attempt to interfere with his robber war would only spread the war. Yet at the height of the most critical moment of the struggle to force the League to put barriers in the way of Mussolini, the I.L.P. and the Socialist League relays this propaganda.

The threatened war is not for the defence of Abyssinia against Italy. It is for the defence of British and French imperialist interests against Italian imperialist interests. (I.L.P. Appeal to the Working Class, September 27.)

Fundamentally this attitude amounts to an attempt to wage war on the international fight for peace. It is a refusal to recognise that the weight of the working class must be thrown not only against its own government, but also internationally against the Fascist aggressor states. An unreal war danger is set up to prevent the workers fighting against the real war danger.

The limit is reached in the issue of the *New Leader* on Friday, October 18, printed at a time when it is already clear that owing to the divergent interests of the imperialist powers in the League there will be the utmost difficulty in getting the League of Nations to agree to effective economic sanctions.

Yet the I.L.P. professes to see a danger that the League which is hesitating even on economic sanctions, will promptly proceed at the behest of the National Government to impose military sanctions which will lead to war.

At the beginning of the Abyssinian war the I.L.P. called for "workers' sanctions" against Italy. Now in the Manifesto of October 18 all question of action against Italy is dropped. Committees of Action are called for. But their object is not to stop supplies going to Italy, but to fight against sanctions. This policy at that moment meant a fight: (1) against the decision to impose an arms embargo on Italy; (2) against a decision to impose a financial embargo; (3) against a decision to impose a war materials embargo, and (4) against a proposal for an embargo on Italian exports. The last time Councils of Action functioned in Britain they were for an embargo on the warmaker. The I.L.P. proposes that they shall fight against a League embargo on the warmaker. Such are the fruits of topsy-turvy pacifism masquerading as a revolutionary policy against war.

The Socialist League also glories in its shame:

The Socialist League must not be disturbed by being accused by official Labour or by the Communists of "taking a negative line." There is nothing negative in standing for a policy which exposes the real causes of war, of winning support for that policy, and of waging battle with the forces of capitalism at home by exposing its real purposes and aims and by seeking to mobilise the workers in the fight for power. (Statement to Branches, September 22.)

So in a war situation the Socialist League sees it to be the sole duty of the Socialists to explain that wars are due to capitalism, and that our own Government is imperialist. That is a miserable negation of Internationalism.

But the attitude of both those parties to an attack not on Abyssinia but on the Soviet Union—the Fatherland of the workers—is one which every British worker must note.

We have already quoted the remarks of the Socialist League concerning the Soviet Union. Here is what the "Left" Parties, with which the I.L.P. is associated, are saying:

The Communist International is also urging national unity with the ruling class in capitalist countries, allied to the U.S.S.R., and encourages reliance upon the League of Nations and a collective system of peace within capitalism. The International Bureau calls on the workers to resist every appeal for national unity with the capitalist class or capitalist governments, and to prepare for mass revolutionary action against war. (*New Leader*, August 16.)

The line of the I.L.P. and the Socialist League is perfectly clear. Suppose the Fascist coalition now being formed in Europe decides to attack the Soviet Union. A state of war tension exists. A number of capitalist states in the League have signed mutual assistance pacts with the Soviet Union. A number of other League countries are in their own interests in favour of restraining the Fascist bloc. The question of whether the mutual assistance pacts will hold, or the other League Powers

will act will be a determining factor in whether the Fascist bloc will lead a war against the Soviet Union at a given moment.

The position of the I.L.P. and the Socialist League in this situation is as follows. They will advocate that the Socialists in the countries having a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union should demand that their governments tear up the pact and leave the Soviet Government in the lurch. They will demand in Britain "no economic sanctions" against the Fascist bloc (*i.e.*, no embargo on arms for the Fascists, no embargo on loans, full freedom for British capitalism to supply the Fascist states with food and raw materials), and, of course, no military sanctions. And this lining up with Fascism is called a revolutionary Socialist policy.

Note that support of the pact, support of sanctions does not mean support of the existing capitalist government in any country. It will mean a resolute fight against such governments in favour of their replacement by governments really supporting the energetic carrying through of the pacts and the Covenant of the League.

It is quite clear that the I.L.P. and the Socialist League, by deserting the immediate fight for peace in connection with Abyssinia, are preparing for a still bigger desertion—the desertion of the defence of the Soviet Union.

To Stop the War—Defeat the Government

Those parties in their effort to confuse the working class have undoubtedly been aided by the Labour Party and T.U.C.

Right from the start the Labour Party and the T.U.C. treated the National Government's action in calling for League action against Mussolini as a "death-bed repentance"—*i.e.*, a belated but genuine adherence to the principles of collective security.

That the National Government was pursuing imperialist aims through the League they refused to recognise.

At the Trades Union Congress Citrine said :

The National Government can be abused and is abused every day in the week by individual delegates, but we do not propose to bring forward to you in every one of our resolutions we submit some new expletive, some new opprobrium of the latest misdeed of the capitalist government of this country or any other country.

As for Mr. Rowlands, he said in his well meditated speech that what we have to do is to expose the war policy of our own government. He failed to give any evidence of that policy in respect to Abyssinia.

This was said after the newspapers had been full of details : (1) regarding the attempt of Eden to fix up an imperialist bargain with Signor Mussolini at Rome, and (2) the efforts of the same gentleman to conclude a deal with Baron Aloisi at Paris.

For weeks before Citrine spoke there were on sale pamphlets on Abyssinia describing the secret treaties between the imperialists of Britain, France and Italy in respect to that country.

The black record of the National Government in respect to disarmament, in respect to the collective system, needed to be emphasised more than ever (in a situation when the Labour Movement was supporting sanctions), in order to show that real support of the collective peace system meant an energetic drive for the early defeat of the National Government.

Not only did the refusal to do this at the T.U.C. confuse the movement, but it has left it in a measure unprepared to meet the electoral onslaught of the National Government.

First and foremost in our fight to defeat this Government and replace it by a Labour Government must come a root and branch exposure of the policy of the National Government—the most warlike government in the world outside the open Fascist powers.

It was the protector of rapacious Japanese imperialism in its attack on China. It is the supporter of rearming German Fascism. The consequences of its signing the Naval Treaty with Germany are seen in the split between French and British imperialism in the League to-day, and all the consequent paralysis.

Now this Government is coming out for a rearmament programme—a programme for enriching the private arms trusts in this country.

It is coming out with the proposition for a *defence loan* so that the rich can avoid paying for the defence of their empire and can enrich themselves not only as armament shareholders, but also as subscribers to the defence loan.

We must see in this Government not the defender of the League, but its enemy. Not the enemy of the main Fascist powers, but their supporter. For that reason all who wish to fight Fascism and War must level the barriers and unite the forces of the working class and of all friends of peace for the complete destruction of this Government.

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