

THE OVERESTIMATION OF THE WAR DANGER

Most leaders of the U. S. Communist Party are in agreement that the party overestimated the danger of war in the last decade and that this constituted a grave, left-sectarian error. "While we asserted that World War III was not inevitable," declared Eugene Dennis, general

secretary of the party, "we evaluated certain war preparations as if a new war was imminent." Norman Schrank, another party official, added: "This is true; how can we on the one hand say 'war is not inevitable' and on the other act as if it is imminent without seeing a growing conflict between the two? War's imminence is clearly a negation of its non-inevitability." (*Party Voice*, September 1956.)

But is this "true" and self-evident? Did not the conflict between the views that war was imminent and that it was not inevitable reflect the actual struggle between two divergent historical forces? Specifically, war's imminence is not clearly a negation of its non-inevitability. Actually, it was the fear of the very *imminence* and *magnitude* of a possible nuclear world war that brought about the negation (the qualitative change) of the immediate war danger.

"That the war danger was real should not, and cannot, be denied," Schrank continued. "But how we viewed it, raised it, fought it, is an entirely different matter."

But how did most American Communists view or fight the war danger? They proclaimed that American imperialism was seeking world domination and that a third world war was likely if the American people did not act to prevent it. The world peace movement conceded that war was not inevitable but warned that the actions of the imperialists might bring it on. Obviously, wherever the outcome of a given event depends on mass popular intervention, the term "inevitable" can only have a conditional, contingent meaning.

These warnings brought about an historically unprecedented mobilization of peace forces, awakening millions both to the imminence of the threat and the possibility of preventing it.

"We said war was not inevitable," Schrank writes, "but

we frequently described (the imperialists') aims as fully possible of being realized. If their aims were fully possible, how could we convince people of the non-inevitability of war?"

However, people do not engage in bitter struggles or make heroic sacrifices for the sake of conjectures or vague theories. The urgent need was to arouse people to the danger and to prevent something that was fully possible of being realized.

Martha Stone, another national committee member, flatly declares in the September issue of the party theoretical magazine, *Political Affairs*: "I do not believe that we were at any time during this whole ten year period on the brink of war. The capitalist class while planning for war was increasingly running into obstacles to the realization of its plans."

Did not these obstacles arise because, for once, millions recognized the existence of the "brink of war" danger?

In the comparative "security" of the post-Geneva period, it is easy to forget or distort the events of the pre-Geneva period: the Berlin blockade, the MacArthur group's demand for bombing Manchuria, the Nixon call for intervention in Indo-China and at the side of Chiang Kai-Shek and the constant threats by the Pentagon to flatten the Soviet Union with A-bombs. Clearly, the world was at the brink of war at several junctures between 1946 and 1955.

Three attitudes were possible in an evaluation of the war danger during the last decade: the non-partisan estimate that either war or peace would come regardless of the people's actions; the flippant estimate that war "was not in the cards" (like the widely-current journalistic guesses on the eve of both world wars which disarmed

millions from opposing the danger); and the partisan and scientifically correct estimate that both possibilities were present (that war was both inevitable and preventable) and that the people's action or inaction would make for the one or the other.

Hence the stupendous efforts of the world peace camp during the Korean war to mobilize world opinion against the threat of a nuclear war. It was such an "overestimation" of the war danger that led to the sustained efforts of many Americans who warned their representatives in Washington against further United States involvement in Korea, Indo-China and other areas. And world peace was saved.

The Draft Resolution, a summary statement drawn up by the leadership for discussion preparatory to a party national convention in 1957, criticizes the attitude of the past that "the more the camp of socialism and peace grows, the greater the danger of adventurism and desperation of imperialism, the greater the sharpening of the war danger." It declares that the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party took the opposite view that the stronger the camp of socialism, the greater the chances that the world peace movement will achieve peace and that the aggressors will not dare unleash war.

But did the 20th Congress take an opposite view? Is there a contradiction between "greater desperation" and possible "sharpening of war danger" and the greater chances of victory by the world peace movement? Do not both reflect the contradictory aspects of the present transition period? And who in this period of flux and transition can fix the precise point at which "the greater" becomes "the lesser" and where a mere chance turns into certainty?

The 1949 victory of the Chinese revolution immeasurably strengthened the camp of peace and socialism, but it also intensified imperialist desperation and adventurism and for a time sharpened the danger of a third world war and did actually precipitate the Korean war.

The Draft Resolution equivocates on the "left sectarian war danger." It states that the war danger was overestimated but maintains that "the war danger still exists" and that "imperialism breeds this war danger as shown again in the Suez crisis." If the war danger still exists and imperialism still breeds actual wars and war dangers, how was it possible to "overestimate the war danger" at the time when millions of Koreans were being slaughtered in American air raids?

The failure to build an American peace movement, too, is now attributed to the overestimation of the war danger, which, presumably, made the formation of a mass peace movement seem hopeless. But according to William Z. Foster, the party chairman, in his article *On the Party Situation* in the October 1956 issue of *Political Affairs*, "an American peace movement was not built" because of "disruption," "disintegrative agitation by factions in the party" and by "those who ignored the existence of a war danger" and "shielded American imperialism by denying that it is driving for world domination."

The acute war threat has receded. Although no longer imminent, however, the war danger still exists. It will remain, so long as the gigantic arms race and H-bomb stockpiling continues. It is one thing to say that the might of the world socialist sector has developed to a point where it would be suicidal to attack it; it is another to say that imperialism has turned peaceful or is capable of stabilizing itself.

30 In the new relationship of forces, socialism is able to pressure and drag world imperialism toward peaceful co-existence and toward the resolution of the struggle between the two systems and of international conflicts in general, by means short of war. On the other hand, the main feature of the old period, the capacity of imperialism to suppress social change by means of bullets has not been entirely eliminated.