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The Isolationist United Front

IT WILL help throw light into the confused discussion on concerted action versus isolation, to examine the unprincipled and undeclared "united front" among the isolationists, which they put forward as a camp of "peace advocates."

First of all, their "Left wing": This found its classic expression in the "round robin" to the *Nation*, rebuking that journal for rejecting isolationism (*Nation*, January 22, p. 111). In the list of forty-five signers, we discern the following groupings: open Trotskyites, who for several years have worked in alliance with the fascist powers on the principle of serving their aims by "ultra-revolutionary" catch-words; Lovestoneites, who since 1935 passed to the Trotskyite position on all world issues; the Socialist Party leaders, since 1936 pitifully dependent upon Trotsky for all their central thoughts; the extremist-pacifists, for whom all struggle is anathema and destructive of social ends, and who, therefore, openly advocate capitulation before aggression at home and abroad; the primitive-Christians, who reach the same goal through ethical, "turn-the-other-cheek," considerations; the practical politicians, who see some future left in exploiting the naïve isolationism of the middle-western farmers and small-townsmen; and officials of the Auto Workers' Union who adopted a pro-Japanese resolution, under the influence of Trotskyite-Lovestoneite intriguers.

The claim of this group to be a "Left wing" is based upon its open or implied adherence to the Trotskyite thesis that democracy is not worth defending, that its defense will only

hasten its own destruction, that there is no essential difference between democracy and fascism, that the victory of fascism is inevitable, that fascism and war may even prove to be a good thing because they will hasten the downfall of capitalism and the consequent rise of a new society. The "Left wing" coloration is thus made an incentive to take up more boldly the slogans of the fascists themselves, and thus transform anti-fascist and peace sentiment into helpers of the fascist world-plan.

Typical of the "center" of the isolationist united front is David Stern and his newspaper chain, headed by the *New York Post*. Ostensibly "open-minded" and moved by immediately practical considerations to the exclusion of dogma, Stern and his associates drive consistently to the same end of extreme isolationism.

The "Right wing" of the isolationist agitators and propagandists among the masses is typically represented by Father Coughlin, by the *American Mercury* and the Hearst press. In them we have the case of isolationism presented in its most openly fascist form, with fully developed nationalism, chauvinism and frank admiration for the fascist dictators, as chief characteristics.

There is no hard-and-fast division between these various groups. On the contrary, there is quite a free collaboration between them. Thus O. G. Villard, "liberal," extends his public congratulations to Father Coughlin for returning to the air to uphold the isolationist cause, without even a blush for his new ally. Thus Norman Thomas and Hearst collaborated last November to blanket the news of the historic Congress for Peace and Democracy, with four and a half million members represented, by an isolationist blast against the congress written by Thomas, which was combined with a "Catholic" picket line to identify the congress with "Communism." Thus

Trotskyites boldly collaborate in the fascist *American Mercury*, and Bruce Bliven writes them "explanatory" letters.*

The main body of the isolationist propaganda machinery consists of the majority of the big newspapers of the country. They plug along, most of them, without any special ideological slant, broadcasting any and every variety of isolationism with magnificent impartiality. Equally impartial is the support given to all by the Nazi and fascist organizations in the United States, and by the open apologists for Japan.

This broad united front of the isolationists of all stripes is particularly in evidence in the past six months, since the great stream of public sentiment began to run in the direction of concerted action for peace, and especially since President Roosevelt's famous speech of October 5 in Chicago. All the isolationists are especially vindictive against the President because of that speech. But, being good practical politicians, they would like to avoid a head-on collision with the broad personal popularity of the President. Therefore, their arguments are seldom directed openly against the President; since the Communists support the President on this issue, and since the Communist Party is a small and weak group as yet, they find it convenient to direct their main polemic against the Communists. That may not be particularly honest and frank, but at least it is "smart" political tactics.

Our isolationists are, as a rule, desirous of keeping all discussions of war and peace quite separated from issues of domestic policy, and as far as possible on the plane of abstractions. But foreign policy is inevitably tied up very concretely with all issues of domestic life. Therefore, we will expect to find these groups and individuals prominent in the agitation of isolationism also tending to take up a common view on the chief domestic problems of the day.

In this expectation we will not be disappointed. Take the

* See p. 80 of this book.

issue of Roosevelt's proposals for curbing the Supreme Court. That was the question which most stirred our political life in 1937, which most hastened the growing political realignment of the country. And on this question, we will find that at least 95 per cent of the individuals and groups most vocal in fighting against the President's indication of a positive peace policy were equally vocal (and equally vicious) in opposing his proposal to deflate the Supreme Court. The same instincts, or the same logic, or the same class interests, which bring them to a common position on the one question, seem to work with equal precision to bring them to a common front on the other question. That is, of course, only natural and to be expected.

Behind all the difference between the various groups of isolationists, certain revealing uniformities can be traced in the structure of their arguments. Since it is these uniformities which constitute the basis for their united front, it is worth while tracing a few of the chief ones.

For example, examine the isolationist logic in evaluating the recent resignation of Eden from the British government, and Chamberlain's open conciliation with fascist aggression. One and all, the isolationists denounce the British course as a crime against humanity, and a proof that they were always right when they said it was impossible to establish a "united front of the democratic nations" that would include Britain; and then, in the same breath, they proceed to "prove" by the British example, that the only correct course for the United States is one closely copied after that of Chamberlain—that is, to hell with the rest of the world, make our own arrangements, and, above all, keep out of the way of the bandit nations, the fascist aggressors, and speak softly to them.

All groups of isolationists are agreed that the United States is, under all circumstances, incapable of pursuing an effective peace policy in collaboration with other nations. They dis-

agree only in their explanations why this is so. Some of them, like Norman Thomas, look upon the United States as equally a bandit with the fascist governments; the only way to keep the United States from doing mischief is to keep it from doing anything at all. Others, like many of the pacifists, think that on the contrary, the United States is of a Christlike purity of morals, which can only be preserved by cutting off all contacts with other nations. Still a third, and the largest, group is convinced that even with the best intentions in the world the United States goes into world affairs mortally handicapped by the superior abilities of other nations, especially Great Britain, to trick the United States out of our very shirt and pants; we are like the country boy going to the city, sure to be sold a gold brick by the city slickers. But, however much they differ as to the reasons, all isolationists are agreed upon the conclusion that the United States must at all costs keep out of world affairs and make no difficulties for the bandit nations.

Another item of common agreement among isolationists is their agreement that the Communists are a dangerous and pernicious influence, and especially so because of our advocacy of concerted action as the path to peace. The various groups place varied emphasis upon this idea, but all are agreed that the danger from this Communist influence is much more serious than the danger from fascist trends. For the Trotskyites, whose one function in life is to destroy the Communist movement by all means, the Communists are not only the chief but practically the only danger to world peace. Norman Thomas and his Socialist friends strongly incline to the Trotskyist view. The other groups adopt the idea to the varied degrees they are able to exploit it.

Most important of all their common ideas is the isolationist conception of the Soviet Union as the chief menace to the peace of the United States. It is of no consequence to demon-

strate to them that the Soviet Union is consistently, and from its very nature, an advocate of peace and prepared to co-operate with all peace-loving peoples to preserve peace. All evidence to prove that only convinces the isolationists all the more of the insidious role of the Soviet Union which would inveigle the United States into war precisely through the common interests of the Soviet Union and the United States in maintaining peace. They have a very strict logic in their inveterate hatred of the Soviet Union. It consists of the main proposition that the only way the bandit nations can be prevented from making war is to give them whatever they demand; the secondary proposition, that the Soviet Union, no matter how much it wants peace, will never agree to surrender to the fascists as the path to peace; and, conclusion, that therefore the Soviet Union is the enemy of peace, and everyone who wants peace by surrender to fascism should dissociate himself from the Soviet Union.

When one goes over all the ideas generally agreed upon among all the isolationist groups, ideas which form the basis for their united front among themselves, then one cannot but be struck by another feature of these ideas. They are not only held in common by the isolationist groups, but they form the basis of possible agreement with Hitler, Mussolini and the Mikado; the ideologists of the bandit nations are closely in sympathy, if not in agreement, with all these ideas. In fact, they consider the victory of these ideas in the United States as an essential step toward the general victory of fascism throughout the world. The ideas of isolationism are a necessary part of the fascist system in its march toward world conquest.

Thus it comes about that the sharper grows the world situation, the more are peace and democracy endangered by the advance of aggression by the bandit nations, then all the more do the isolationists, fighting desperately for withdrawal from world affairs by the United States, proceed step by step to

prove as a desperate last resort that democracy is an illusion which it is not worth risking anything to preserve; that peace itself is a questionable goal, not worthy of serious effort to maintain; that the natural, inevitable and perhaps desirable condition of the world is a wild and bloody scramble for its redivision; that in such a condition, the rule is each nation for itself, and the United States has nothing to do but keep its eyes open, preparing to join in the general blood-bath only after all others have seriously weakened themselves by fratricidal struggles which will open the way for America to grab the lion's share at a minimum risk for itself.

These logical conclusions of isolationism are, of course, not yet drawn consciously by all or even by a majority of those advocating isolation. But the more logical and consequential minds among them are visibly moving in that direction. They will all soon come to the point where they might either accept this as the main current of their thought, or else make a clean break with isolationism and take the only effective path to peace—the path of concerted and organized action by the peace-loving majority of the peoples of the world and their governments.

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