

The Second World War and the Darker Races

By George Padmore

THE second World War has begun. Already Africans, Indians, West Indians, and other colored races are being appealed to, and in the French colonies conscripted, as cannon fodder for the bloody holocaust which threatens to drown the world in blood and bring misery, ruin and devastation on a scale before undreamt of.

The maharajahs, sultans, emirs, sheiks, paramount chiefs and other native potentates are vying with one another in offering up the lives of their peoples as human sacrifice to Mars. However, we need not be deceived by these manifestations of "loyalty." These minions are merely doing what they have been ordered to do by their white masters. They are the stooges of imperialism.

What is the War About?

But what is this war about? This question is on the lips of every colonial one encounters in London today. While most Negroes, like the common people of England, are bewildered over the issues involved, about one thing they seem clear. And that is, the war, notwithstanding the professions of statesmen, is certainly not one for Democracy.

When we consider the autocratic manner in which colonies are administered, be they under so-called democratic or totalitarian regimes, it should cause no surprise that the colonial peoples have not been consulted as to whether they want to fight or not. All that they have been told is that this war is the noblest that has ever been embarked upon, for it is to save Poland, a Fascist state, from the big, bad Fascist wolf, Adolf Hitler. But this is sheer humbug.

The British and French imperialists are no more concerned about the Poles than they were about the Czechs. What they are concerned about is the preservation of their colonial empires and the monopoly which they enjoy in the exploitation of cheap colored labor. They most certainly have not gone to war to defend Democracy, which they themselves deny to hundreds of millions of colored peoples in Africa, India, the West Indies, Indo-China, Morocco, Tunis, Algeria, and other territories too numerous to mention. Nor are they at war to uphold international law and order, or even to rid the world of those "evil things—brute force, bad faith, in-

This new war is a fight not to preserve democracy or to blot out "evil things," but to guard the empires of England and France from Hitler, the author declares. Since this was written, Hitler has demanded colonies in his speech to the Reichstag following the Polish conquest



GEORGE PADMORE

justice and persecution," which Mr. Chamberlain, in his speech of self-righteous indignation denounced over the radio as war was declared.

What Britain in particular is worried about is the menace which German imperialism represents to her commercial interests. The politicians at Downing street, who represent the Federation of British Industries and the financiers of the city—the real rulers of the Empire—are afraid that if Hitler is not checked now, he might, after consolidating his position on the Continent, demand the return of the former German colonies, and call for a redivision of the colonial territories, which can be achieved only at the expense of Britain and France. This, then, is the essence of the quarrel

between Nazi Germany and the so-called Democracies.

Behind all the shibboleths of "brute force and oppression," which the British and other imperialist Powers have been practicing upon the colored races for centuries, is the long standing conflict between bandit nations for colonies as markets, sources of raw material and cheap labor, spheres for the investment of finance capital, and naval, military and air bases. It is for the possession of these things that the war is being fought.

Poland the Pawn

Poland in 1939 is merely being used as a pawn in the game of power politics, in just the same way Belgium was used in 1914. The cry of "poor little Poland" is being exploited by the financiers and warmongers to win the sympathy of the common peoples of all lands. While the Polish workers and peasants are entitled to our sympathy in their tragic hour of national disaster, we can have nothing but contempt for the gang of feudal landlords and the corrupt generals who lost no time in bolting into safety, leaving the toiling masses to the mercy of Hitler and Stalin.

But let us take the words of the British Prime Minister at their face value. Is it not strange that he should be so passionately concerned about Poland (whose Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck, was one of those who helped tie the noose around the neck of Hailé Selassie at Geneva) while at the same time he condones the rape of Ethiopia? Let us not forget that it was Mr. Chamberlain who declared that sanctions were a midsummer night's dream, and who recognized the Italian "conquest" of Abyssinia by his Gentleman's Agreement with Mussolini. Mr. Chamberlain might forget these little "indiscretions," but Africans have long memories.

Furthermore, is it not strange that Mr. Chamberlain denounces the wrongdoings of Hitler but remains silent about Mussolini's "brute force, bad faith, injustice and oppression" toward Abyssinians and Albanians? Surely justice, like freedom, is indivisible. If Britain wants to win the respect of her subject peoples then her statesmen must be consistent in their advocacy of justice and fair play, even at the risk of offending Mussolini. This kind of duplicity only

serves to emphasize the moral bankruptcy of those who talk about ridding the world of "evil things." We, too, want to rid the world of evil things, but this will never be until we have got rid of the system of imperialism, the most evil thing of all.

Democracy for Colonials?

Today, as twenty-five years ago, we are hearing a lot about Democracy. Poor Democracy! What crimes are committed in her name!

What do black folks know about democracy? There is as much democracy for Negroes in Mississippi as in Africa, especially in such places as Kenya, the Congo, Rhodesia and South Africa. The natives have as much liberty and freedom in their own countries as the Jews enjoy in Hitler's Germany. Nevertheless, there are some white folk who have the impudence to ask Africans to forget all about their misery and their sufferings and to line up with their slave masters as they did in 1914-18. Then it was "defense of democracy against the Kaiser and Prussian militarism." Now it is "defense of democracy against Hitler and Prussian Naziism." Only the villain has changed!

Sometimes one despairs of the stupidity of the common people. When will they learn? But if the future is to be judged from the past, those Negroes who allow themselves to be taken in by the kind of demagoguery which is being peddled around today may expect as little reward for their services as they received after the last slaughter.

And what did the Negroes get out of the last war which should make them enthusiastic about the present? Nothing. Today they enjoy less democracy in their own countries than they did in 1914. And as for self-determination?

Abyssinia, the last of free Africa, is sufficient answer.

One would think that the least the Allies could have done to show their appreciation to the blacks was to set aside one of the African colonies annexed from Germany as a national home for black folk. But nothing of the sort happened. Even this small act of mercy was considered too much for Negroes. Instead, Britain and France, who were supposed to have been fighting for Democracy and to free the world from the menace of Prussian barbarism, grabbed all the colonies of the defeated Powers (Germany and Turkey), and shared them among themselves. Then, to add insult to injury, they defended their action on the grounds that the natives who inhabited these territories were unfit to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world. Those who have any doubt about this, may read Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Is it not strange that the Africans were fit enough to help the Allies pull their chestnuts out of the fire, but not fit to share in the victory? In the quarter of a century which has elapsed, Britain has had every opportunity to express her appreciation for the supreme sacrifice paid by hundreds of thousands of Africans and peoples of African descent on the battlefields of Flanders, Egypt, Palestine and Africa. Yet having failed to do so, Mr. Chamberlain today has the effrontery to talk about "bad faith" on the part of others.

They have broken faith not only with the living but with the dead. But let us not say any more about the past.

What of the present? It is not too late for our British masters to make good their lofty pretensions.

If the British and the French im-

perialists, and all those who are taken in by their diplomacy, really want to convince the colored races—and for that matter, the white working classes—that they are really concerned about ridding the world of "evil things," now is an excellent opportunity for them to start by putting their own empires in order. Let them extend *Democracy* to their colonies. Let Mr. Chamberlain get up at Westminster, and Mr. Daladier in the French Chamber of Deputies, and issue a declaration to the world granting their colonies *self-government*. Such a revolution in international relations would not only be a moral victory for the democracies, but a bloodless one. Such a gesture, coming at this time, would rally reinforcement to the democratic front by giving hundreds of millions of subject peoples something tangible to defend. It would cut the ground from under Hitler's feet and inspire the workers of Germany to strike a blow for freedom against their Nazi oppressors.

But will Messrs. Chamberlain and Daladier accept our challenge? Or shall our suspicions be confirmed—that their democratic statements are just a facade for their real imperialist aims?

I hate Nazism as much as anyone. I was fighting the Brown menace at a time when many who are today denouncing Hitler were singing his praises.

The fact that I spent three months in a Nazi prison does not blind me to the fact that in a capitalist world, as long as Britain and France reserve the right to rule over 500 million colored peoples and exploit their labor in the interests of plutocracy, they cannot expect Germany to be satisfied. Empire and Peace are incompatible. And it is precisely for this reason we say that if peace is to be achieved, imperialism must be abolished.