

America's «Pacifism» in Europe and . . . Litvinov's

By MAX SHACHTMAN

The hubbub being created around the issue raised by the likelihood that Germany will be obliged to suspend reparations payments, a condition directly traceable to the Versailles treaty provisions and aggravated by the present world crisis, serves to give new point to America's imperialist role in Europe on the one hand, and on the other to the outstanding feature of the recent Geneva conference—the Litvinov proposals.

Germany's Plight

The plight of German capitalism is unmistakably a serious one. For the four years following the inauguration of the Dawes Plan, Germany was able to meet its involuntary obligations to its conquerors by borrowing extensively from them. The balance sheet remained virtually the same, while Germany's indebtedness was in reality not diminished and no sound basis actually laid for its economic recovery. With the decline of Germany's investment needs, indeed, its decreased ability to absorb these investments, plus the ensuing of capitalism's most violent crisis, Germany has been driven to the very brink of the abyss. The world crisis has created a situation where due to the fall of prices on the international market, the gold value provided for under the Young Plan for reparations has increased to an extent that makes them equal to the payments fixed under the Dawes Plan which the former was intended to modify.

Unable to pay from its dwindling gold reserves (Germany has less than 5 percent of the world's gold holdings, compared with more than 39 percent in the United States and almost 20 percent in France), it is more than ever compelled to pay in goods. But at the present time, this involves not only a decrease in German imports—which does not help to liquidate accumulated world stocks by one iota—but an increase of its exports. The Austro-German tariff union is but one step in this direction; the contracted world market and the growing customs walls throughout Europe—to say nothing of the United States—demonstrates the improbability of effecting a solution of Germany's ills in the direction of increased exports. The national deficit of the Reich is mounting steadily and is coupled with the failure of the new tax measures to bring in even as much as the previous taxes did. The rising unemployment does not help the situation. The growing division of the nation's forces into the Fascist and the Communist camp serve as the political reflection of the acuteness which the contradictions in Germany's position are assuming at home.

With this distracting picture looming before them, the German bourgeoisie marches hat in hand from Geneva to Chequers begging that the pressure be relaxed the noose loosened, and Germany be allowed once more to breathe lest the Eastern "rampart of European civilization be razed by the fury of Bolshevism". But in Geneva, in Paris, in Chequers, it is met with the same helpless shrugging of the shoulders. Briand and Henderson express their most heartfelt sympathies, but alas! they are themselves heavily indebted to the rich uncle across the sea, and if Germany is not to pay the Allied debts to the United States under the euphemistic title of war reparations who will? For out of Germany's annual "reparations" payments of approximately a quarter of a billion dollars to the European war victors, the latter are making annual "debt" payments of approximately a quarter of a billion dollars to the United States. And with Secretary Mellon's announcement of a treasury deficit of a billion dollars, it is hardly likely that the United States, which is itself the very soul of honor and punctiliousness in business matters, will consent to remit the debts honorably incurred and solemnly pledged for by the Allies.

But lest it be said that the United States is close-fisted, chauvinistic unrelenting it takes the opportunity offered by Germany's destitution to demonstrate to the entire world its entirely pacific nature and its magnanimity towards the oppressed German people. This far from means feat is now being accomplished by the Hoover administration, if not officially, then just as authoritatively through the mouth of Senator Borah, who is at least as much the Secretary of State as the formal occupant of that post, Stimson. How? Simply as follows:

The American Plan

1. We want not a cent from the German people. We never started the war; we were dragged into it. We wanted a peace without victory. We did not sign the humiliating Versailles treaty. We have received no reparations, and unlike other powers, we want no reparations. The others press the bled Germans for their re-

parations but we'll have nothing to do with the dirty business. It is true that arguments are being made by ignoble powers that unless they get reparations from Germany, they shall be unable to pay back what they owe the United States. But we have adopted a policy which says that these arguments are false and may not be advanced. Let the reparations business be settled between Germany and England, France and Belgium. We want none of it. Our sympathies are with the cruelly driven German people.

2. Germany's annual \$200,000,000 reparations payment to the Allies is one thing. But the shipment from the Allies to the United States, containing exactly the same sum, is another thing. It is an honorable debt consecrated on the battlefield. That we want. Welching on debts is not the American style. It is true that Europe's economic system makes debt payments difficult. Good. We are an understanding people. But the money is there from which payments can be made. So we propose says the ingenious Mr. Borah, alias Mr. Hoover, that you cut down on your armament expenditures! This will kill, in the best American style of mass output, four birds at once: (a) it will lighten your budgets and the burden upon your sorely taxed people; (b) it will enable you to maintain a good business name by paying your debts, which is good for the soul; (c) it will give further security to the maintenance of world peace by softening the belligerent mien of Europe; and (d)—which is not the least important bird—it will further insure the military predominance of American imperialism in the world political struggle!

These are the proposals of the United States which have caused such consternation in European capitals. In a word: The "European plan" is to link reparations and war debts and keep disarmament schemes separate; the "American plan" is to link war debts and disarmament schemes (for Europe to be sure) and keep reparations separate. What more profitable role than this could the United States wish for, a role which calls for its assumption of the peacemaker's garments? And what more classic instance could be given since the day when Wilson's fourteen peaceful points were given to Europe as the basis for America's issuing out of the war with the lion's share of the spoils, of the fact that America's pacifism is the handmaiden that best serves the interests of a rapacious, bandit imperialism, that most successfully invests its progress with the treacherous aura of benevolence?

America's pacifism in "solving" the European crisis or at least one highly important phase of it is its unique form of expanding its imperialistic power and crushing its rivals in the struggle for world power. It is a sham pacifism, a scoundrelly deception, a utopia as disastrous an illusion for those whom it fools as was Wilsonism for the war-weary masses of Europe in 1917-1918.

Although not produced by any imperialist ambitions or requirements, a pacifist cloudburst of another variety—equally nauseating, equally utopian, equally illusory—has just drenched Europe and sent its vapors around the world. Its artifice, Litvinov alias Stalin, represents the political antipode of the United States—the Soviet Union. Emanating from the spokesman for the Soviet Union, with its immense prestige and authority in the world's working class, this variety of pacifism, class-collaboration, can only have a more nefarious effect if anything. Our reference is to the disgraceful conduct of the Soviet delegation at the recently concluded Geneva sessions of M. Briand's European Commission, that is the anteroom of the black League of Nations.

That the workers' state is not only justified, but is under compulsion to take advantage of the world capitalist crisis in order to improve its own position—even, if necessary, at the cost of some assistance to the world bourgeoisie or sections of it—can be denied only by dunderheads who know nothing about the requirements of revolutionary policy. But when a concession is given, it must be called a concession. When a deal is made its nature must be established openly so that the workers the world over will have neither misgivings nor illusions. The vigilance of the workers, concerned over the unflagging hostility of the bourgeois world towards the workers' state, must not be slackened or lulled. In other words, the policy of the Soviet Union in "foreign affairs", which can only be a linear extension of its policy at home, must always have a clear class basis.

As at Brest-Litovsk, as at Genoa, so everywhere else the Soviets must show to the whole working class that it deals with the bourgeoisie not because it has an ounce of faith in its professed intentions, its good will, its "friendliness" or "peaceableness", but because the solitary existence of a capitalistically encircled proletarian state compels negotiations, trade agreements, commercial and diplomatic intercourse etc., etc. This at least, was the course in Lenin's time. The absolutely uncalled-for Soviet procedure at the Geneva Economic Conference in 1927, its equally baseless action in signing the imperialistic Kellogg "Peace Pact to Outlaw War", show how far the present regime in Russia has strayed from this course. Litvinov's conduct at Geneva last month has only meant that the rudder is being pressed harder in the wrong direction.

The European Commission has been established by French imperialism to pre-empt the birth of Briand's utopian "Pan-Europa"—the French plan for extending its "Little Entente" until it covers most, if not all of Europe. The official Comintern press has even characterized it as intended chiefly to organize the anti-Soviet interventionist bloc. Some months ago, this same press was filled with accounts according to which the Moscow trial of the sabotaging engineers has demonstrated that Poincaré, Briand, the French General Staff, the Polish government, the Rumanian puppets of France, etc., etc., were conspiring for active intervention against the Soviet republic. Here is a fact of no mean international political import. But at Geneva, the Soviet representative not only fails to put some pertinent questions, concerning the conspiracy to the representatives of France, but does not even refer to the matter at all. Worse than that, the speeches and the relations between the representatives of Communism and imperialism are marked by a politeness and mutual back-slapping which brings farce to the relief of its tragedy.

A Congenial Commissioner

"It was not," remarks the New York Times (5-19-1931), "the Litvinov one was used to hearing here in the Preparatory Disarmament Commission who spoke today. The Soviet Foreign Commissioner amazed all by his conciliatory tone and by foregoing the opportunity to exploit capitalist ills for the glory of Communism . . . If stripped of a few [few indeed! S.] typically Communist expressions (his speech) might have been spoken by some economist of one of a number of bourgeois schools." And, Litvinov adds: "I do think however, that something might be done for the removal of phenomena unnecessarily aggravating our relations and prolonging the world crisis. This requires the avoidance of everything tending to an atmosphere of distrust."

Distrust of whom and by whom? The bourgeoisie will "distrust" the Soviet Union so long as it exists, and for good cause. The bourgeoisie laughs up its sleeve when Litvinov or Stalin asks it to put "trust" in Russia's "readiness to adhere to the principle of the peaceful (!) co-existence of the two systems". Briand, Henderson, Curtius Zaleski and Co. are quite willing to sign any document or "peace pact". It costs nothing and—this time with Soviet aid—it helps them to poison the minds of the masses who are suspicious about the bourgeoisie's "pacifism". Or does Litvinov mean that the Soviet Union must stop "distrusting" the Briands and MacDonalds?

Matters stand no better with regard to the famous Litvinov "protocol" itself. "M. Litvinov proceeded to explain that his protocol meant to do for economic warfare what the Briand-Kellogg peace pact did to war—to outlaw it," the Times (5-22-1931) informs us. "It would . . . prevent discrimination against any one country or group of countries saying in other words that the main idea [so!] was to assure the peaceful co-existence of the Communist and capitalist systems." That these two systems cannot exist peacefully side by side is an A B C truth for any Marxist, not to speak of any class-conscious bourgeois; the contrary idea is a stupid, reactionary invention of Stalinism upon which the equally reactionary theory of "socialism in one country" is founded. As to what "his protocol meant", let us withhold comment for a moment until we read the miserable manner in which the central organ of the American Communist Party tries to palm off this cheap pacifist counterfeit as good Bolshevik coin:

"The meaning of the Soviet proposals is the revelation that only the Soviet system can guarantee peace to the world's peoples [A revelation indeed, for the pro-

posals say nothing of the sort! S.] . . . What a crushing refutation of the 'inconceivably silly' charge of 'Soviet dumping'! Do you want to stop dumping? Then let all nations pledge themselves to sell no goods in the world market cheaper than they sell these goods in their own country! (What could be more simple? [We can really think of nothing more simple or more fantastic! S.] What argument more convincing? [To whom? Pioneers, perhaps? S.] Although the Soviet proposal is the very soul of logic [Ahem!], the imperialist robbers and war-makers will undoubtedly seek for some hole to crawl through in an effort to explain to their peoples that the Soviet proposal is 'utopian': The Soviet in one blow has shattered the charge of 'dumping', proposed that the standard of living of the toiling masses be raised, trade rivalries abolished and the danger of war dispelled!" (Daily Worker, 5-20-1931.)

At One Single Blow!

At one blow, neither more nor less! According, then, to the new "revelation" from Mount Litvinov, if imperialism would only consent to function without dumping on the world market—a proposal which we are assured is not utopian—trade rivalries would be wiped out and the danger of war dispelled. This gospel—we want to call it reactionary poison but it is simply crass, abysmal ignorance—is taught to the working class not only by the "diplomatic representative of the Soviet Union" who "speaks to the world's masses over the heads of the bourgeois robbers", but by the central organ of official American Communism. But things cannot rest there. The Soviet proposal, made, in the words of Briand, with that "moderation of M. Litvinov to which we all pay homage", is meant to "outlaw" economic warfare just as the Kellogg Pact "outlawed" war. Why doesn't the Daily Worker, which endorses the one, also endorse the other? Is there a fundamental distinction? We see none. When Stalin signed the Kellogg Pact, the Daily Worker at least had the . . . decency to keep quiet and to cover up the scandal by heaping denunciation upon the Pact "in general". It is clear that the policies of Stalinism are causing the Daily Worker to surrender even the last few tatters of decency it had left.

One might continue with even more detailed comment upon the Litvinov proposal. There is, for instance, the illiterate apology for Litvinov by Harrison George (5-22-1931) who was transferred from his cage on column seven to Amer's place on column one to explain—we quote literally—that Litvinov "is only asking that the United States obey its own law." But there has already been enough to show that the socialist New Leader, usually rabidly anti-Soviet, was eminently correct when it wrote eulogistically (5-23-1931) that "Litvinov spoke like a socialist who has belief in democracy. And the world listened seriously". Litvinov may consider this a complement from a foe. We regard it as an epitaph for the degenerated Centrist bureaucracy.

THE UNIFICATION OF THE CHINESE OPPOSITION

"Dear Comrades of the Secretariat and Trotsky:

"The Unification Conference of the Chinese Opposition took place on the historical day of May First in Shanghai. Seventeen representatives were present, and in addition from delegates with advisory rights. They represented a total of 483 members (all of four groups). The Conference adopted our common platform and other resolutions which were worked out by the unification commission. A National Executive Committee (consisting of nine members and four candidates) was elected, from which a Secretariat of five was chosen. The name of our organization was made 'The Left Opposition of the Chinese Communist Party'. Its organ is to be called 'Spark'. Our platform and resolutions will be translated into European languages in the nearest future.

"The Chinese Opposition has been united. This has provoked a great deal of attention both from the reaction and from the working masses. We believe that under the leadership of the International Left Opposition, it can and will carry on its great historical task. We hope that between the Secretariat and the Chinese section there will be a constant and close relation.

"The news about the burning of comrade Trotsky's library was brought us by the bourgeois press and confirmed by your circular. We have appointed a special committee for contributions.

"With Opposition greetings,
Secretariat of the Left Opposition of the Chinese Communist Party.
"Secretary, Tchen Du-Siu."