

# THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF MODERN WAR

## CAPITALIST EXPANSION ENDS IN OPEN CONFLICT

By JOHN WEST

(Ed. Note: This is the first of a series of four articles by Comrade West on the problems of the revolutionary struggle against war. The remaining three will be entitled: "The Struggle Against War," "The League Against War and Fascism," and "The United Front and War." Do not miss them!)

An integral part of the great aim of the revolutionary movement is the elimination of war. It has become almost commonplace to realize that modern war threatens not merely suffering and death to vast millions, but the actual destruction of human civilization, the thrusting of mankind back into barbarism. No one who, with the lessons of the last war in mind, has followed the recent developments in military technique, can doubt this to be literally true.

In the face of this prospect, it is the revolutionary movement alone that has a solution to offer. From the open war-glorification by Fascism to the futile gesturing of pacifism, all other forces in modern society are not merely powerless to prevent war but in fact aid in preparing war. The responsibility for the struggle against war rests wholly on the revolutionary movement.

The first step in the struggle against war is a clear understanding of the nature and causes of war. A mere pious horror at the dreadfulness of war—which is shared by the great majority of men—is useless, and worse than useless.

### AT THE BOTTOM OF WAR

The driving force of the capitalist mode of production is the necessity for the continual accumulation and expansion of capital. This necessity is inescapable. Capitalists must constantly attempt to expand capital, in order to maintain profits. But this attempt comes up against (indeed it is merely the reverse side of) the equally inescapable tendency under capitalism for the general rate of profits to fall. The fall in the rate of profits demands capital expansion, in order to retain an equal or greater total amount of profit; the expansion, however, in its turn involves an increased tendency of the rate of profits to fall, and, consequently, the still further need for capital expansion.

The necessity for the expansion of capital leads to the mighty development of the means of production, to the huge new machines and great factories and mines and railroads, the enormous corporations, the ever-growing monopolies. The expansion is, however, by its nature unregulated and chaotic, for two chief reasons, the first of which is dependent on the second:

(1) It is carried out on a competitive basis, not in accord with

a rational and inclusive plan. (2) It is developed with no relation to the needs of a consumer market.

From the point of view of capitalism, the "market" is only the means for transforming commodity-values back into capital-values for further use in the accumulation of capital. The market is therefore necessarily limited not by the potential needs of consumers (which are nearly boundless), but by the conditions of capitalist production itself—by the possibility of using the surplus value realized from the sale of commodities to produce more surplus value.

The tendency to uncontrolled expansion exceeds the limits; the capitalist created market can no longer "absorb" the products of the expanded capital equipment; expansion becomes over-expansion. The over-expansion is temporarily "corrected" by the periodic crisis, during which capital (i.e. the value of the means of production) is destroyed through falling price levels, bankruptcies and material deterioration. The point is reached where capital accumulation can once more proceed "normally"; the tendencies re-assert themselves on a new and still more violent scale, and the next crisis is rapidly prepared for.

Capitalism thus faces: (1) A chronic necessity for the accumulation of capital, i.e. for the re-capitalizing of all present values and for new capital investments; (2) a periodic inability to find markets through which commodities turned out by the capital equipment can, by their sale to consumers, be re-converted into capital. During the decline of capitalism, this second periodic condition likewise tends more and more to become chronic, thus bringing about a lowering of the scale of capitalist operations. The necessity for capital expansion, however, continues in an even sharper form at the more restricted level.

These two conditions explain the fundamental basis of modern (imperialist) war.

### DRIVEN TO IMPERIALIST EXPANSION

Capitalists of every major capitalist nation are faced with the following situation: In order to sustain the system which sustains them, they must find continuous outlets for capital investment and re-investment; but the internal market, provided by the capitalist mode of production within any single nation, is not sufficient to re-convert into capital values the values of commodities turned out even by existing capital equipment, much less of new. Consequently, the capitalists of each nation are forced to seek outlets for capital investment (and likewise consumer markets) beyond the national borders.

If we glance even for a moment at the history of the United States since the War, we can see this tendency everywhere manifesting

itself.

International Tel. & Tel. builds and operates telephone and telegraph systems in Spain, Latin America, South America, and the Near East. General Electric buys heavily into the electrical industries not only of "backward" countries but of Germany, France and England. New York banks and investment houses exploit the copper mines of Africa and the silver mines of Peru. The Standard Fruit Co. owns and operates the great orchards of Mexico; United Fruit, the orchards of Central America. The American Sugar Refining Co. expands its refineries in Cuba. Curtiss-Wright builds an airplane factory in China. Standard Oil and Texas Co. build oil refineries and operate filling stations all through the Far East, as well as in Bolivia, Venezuela and Mexico. The auto companies build plants in Canada and even (Ford) in England and Germany.

### CAPITALISTS VIE ON WORLD-WIDE SCALE

But the capitalists of England, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan are driven by the same scourge.

Since the world is limited in extent, since the areas available for new forms of capital expansion and exploitation are growingly restricted, conflict is not only likely but inevitable. The grandiose battle of the capitalists of the imperialist powers is fought on a world-wide scale. Into the colonies, mandates, "subject nations," "spheres of influence," flow the surplus capital funds, impetuously demanding to be set to work at making profits.

The political arms of the capitalists—the governments of their respective countries—are extended watchfully over the new investments.

They are ever ready to unseat a Central American government, threaten a native prince, wipe out "red handits," stop or start a revolution, send a flotilla of warships or a regiment of marines, resent an "insult to the flag," if necessary set two countries—Bolivia and Paraguay for example—flying at each other's throats to settle the dispute of Standard Oil and Shell over rights to an oil field.

To expose the foundation clearly, there must be added to this basic drive of capital for accumulation the closely related struggle for sources of raw materials, for control of shipping, for the ability to manufacture in countries where the standard of living is lower than in the home country, and the determination of the home capitalists to keep the home market for their own purposes by tariffs, quotas, and exchange restrictions.

### CAPITALIST SOCIETY CONTINUALLY AT WAR

The truth of the matter is this: In the stage of imperialism, capitalist society is continuously at war. This is the essence of imperialism. It is not a question of one war starting, then stopping, to be followed in a decade or two by a new war. It is war all the time, changing only in the form it takes, in the degree of violence.

The economic wars of capital expansion, of tariff and exchange and armament and competitive exploitation reach a point where the attempt is made to find a political solution of the economic and social contradictions through war open and undisguised; imperialist-inspired wars between subject nations; wars of subjugation by imperialist nations against subject peoples and the converse wars of these peoples against their imperialist oppressors; the world-wide war of the imperialist nations among themselves. But, though producing a "boom" by loosening the bonds on capital expansion, by destruction of existing values, and by credit expansion, the open wars, far from solving the contradictions, only express their depth, and prepare for still more bitter conflict to come.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR OF THE WORKERS

And throughout this bloody chaos is fought the war that gives historical meaning to the whole mad spectacle: the revolutionary war of the working class against its exploiters. This war, which, after generations of preparation, began on a world scale with the October revolution, continues within every country in a thousand varying

forms, from strikes to armed uprisings to preparations for intervention in the Soviet Union, and will continue until the final issue is decided.

The disguises that war wears—appearing as due to "national" or "cultural" differences, as following from an assassination or an insult to the flag—must not be allowed to hide the fundamental conflicts which are the true source of modern war. Though these other factors may provide the final push that sets open war going or may modify the character of a war, there is nothing in their own nature that must necessarily lead to war. They are the tools of the forces making for war, not the cause of these forces. Nor should we be misled by those who tell us that the present tendency toward "economic nation-

alism" means the end of imperialism and consequently of imperialist war. The loosening of foreign trade and foreign investment during the crisis, far from removing the imperialist contradictions, only exaggerates them, only increases the relative importance of whatever foreign capital expansion and trade remains and makes ever sharper the struggle to capture and control it.

The general conclusion is inescapable: Modern war is neither accidental nor due to the evil of human nature nor decreed by God. War is of the very essence of imperialist-capitalism, as much a part of capitalism as wage labor. To speak of capitalism without war is like speaking of a human being without lungs. The fate of the one is inextricably bound to the fate of the other.

## Will the Steel Workers Strike? Here's Record Under NRA to Date

By DENNIS BROWN

The record of the Roosevelt Administration comes up for inspection by the Insurgents of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, early in February. That record is here presented in a fourteen paragraph calendar statement of facts.

Two courses have presented themselves to steel workers during the past year and a half. One—recommended by William Green and Mike Tighe—has been a reliance upon the benevolence of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the NRA. Tacit admissions have given of an alliance between these labor leaders and the Federal Administration. Cooperation between labor and capital has been their stated policy.

Membership Exerts Pressure

The second course toward which the body of the union has moved steadily is independent action. To bring their own coercive pressure upon the employers is what the union masses have been moving toward. That pressure can only express itself in the strike. This movement now finds its leadership in an organized struggle against Tighe and the union's bureaucracy.

It was the Rank and File group, whose criticism of Tighe and the NRA was formulated in the famous slogan "National Run Around", now the watchword of all progressive groups. It must however be pointed out that the Rank and File leadership showed serious weakness in its first struggle. Greater restlessness in the struggle will be necessary to unseat Tighe and Co.

Weighting of the Record

Many thousands of workers have believed in the policy of Roosevelt-Green Tighe. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating—and the pudding is on the table. Promises were made, and a promise must eventually be realized or withdrawn. Roosevelt, Green and Tighe must now stand on their record while the steel workers weigh against it the policy of independent militant action.

The following is the dated record of Roosevelt and the labor bureaucracy:

1. On October 16, 1933, the National Labor Board induced the Amalgamated to call off the Weirton strike. E. T. Weir signed an agreement providing for an election at which the workers would choose between the company union and the trade union.

2. Early in December 1933, the Weirton Co. refused to go through with its election arrangements. The wordy protests of the National Labor Board notwithstanding, Weirton proceeded to conduct an election of representatives under the company union scheme.

3. After two months of muddling and buckpassing, the National Labor Board finally referred the case to the Department of Justice (but never recommended to NRA Compliance that Weirton be deprived of the Blue Eagle). At length the Department began to prosecute the case, seeking an equity order which would compel Weirton to submit to an election.

4. But—conveniently for the Weirton company—the legal experts

of the Department of Justice did not trouble to familiarize themselves with the Anti-Injunction Act of 1932. Thus on May 29, 1934, Judge Nields threw out the case—on technical grounds—and the Department of Justice had to start all over again.

5. The case was resumed, and is still in the Federal courts. It is now January 1935, well over a year since the trouble began. Judge Nields cannot possibly decide on the case in time to get it before the current session of the U. S. Supreme Court. Thus the NRA will have expired before the election powers of the Labor Boards, specifically, and the meaning of Section 7a, in general, can be decided by the Supreme Court.

### Roosevelt's Pledge

6. On May 30, 1934 (one day after Judge Nield's first decision on the Weirton suit) President Roosevelt, in his executive order approving the extension of the iron and steel code, made the following specific pledge:

"In order to assure the free exercise of the rights of employees under the provisions of Section 7 of this Act and Article 4 of this code, I will undertake promptly to provide, as the occasion may demand, for the election by employees in each industrial unit of representatives of their own choosing for the purpose of collective bargaining and for mutual aid and protection, under the supervision of an appropriate governmental agency and in accordance with suitable rules and regulations."

7. On June 15, 1934, Amalgamated convention and induced the workers to call off the strike scheduled to begin the next day. He appeared as a quasi-official spokesman of the Federal Administration; and he let it be understood, by tacit assurances, that if the strike were called off the workers would have their elections, majority rule, recognition, collective agreements: all they were asking for.

### Set Up Steel Board

8. On the same day Congress passed Public Resolution No. 44 (approved by the President a few days later), authorizing the President to set up boards empowered to call for employee elections to determine collective bargaining representation. Section 2 reads:

"Any board so established is hereby empowered, when it shall appear in the public interest, to order and conduct an election by a secret ballot of any employees of any employer, to determine by what person or persons or organization they desire to be represented in order to assure the right of employees to organize and to select their representatives for the purpose of collective bargaining as defined in Section 7a."

9. On June 28, 1934, the President, relying on Public Resolution No. 44, did in fact create the National Steel Labor Relations Board, Section 3 of the Executive Order reads as follows:

"Whenever, after its services are invoked by employers or employees, the Board upon investigation, shall find that an election is necessary to determine by what person, persons or organizations employees desire to be represented, the Board is authorized to order and conduct an election by a secret ballot. . . . After each such election the Board shall certify the results to all concerned, and the person, persons or organization certified as the choice of the majority of those voting shall be accepted as the representative or representatives of said employees for the purpose of collective bargaining, without thereby denying to any individual employee or group of employees the right to present grievances, to confer with their employers, or otherwise to associate themselves and act for mutual aid or protection."

We may say then that the creation of the NSLRB signified a truce: the workers agreed not to strike; the government agreed to call for elections, majority rule governing.

10. From the beginning of a July 1934 to late in December—a period of six months—the Amalgamated

### SITUATION IN CUBA

#### AFTERMATH IN SPAIN

The terror regime continues in the island of Cuba.

As the conflict between the Mendieta-Wall Street regime and its opponents (on both the left and right) increases in sharpness, with bombings and street murders again daily occurrences, the government has placed the country under virtual martial law.

All constitutional guarantees have been suspended throughout Cuba for a period of 30 days. This decision was accompanied by a Cabinet decree calling for the death penalty for all persons convicted of setting fire to cane fields or "sabotaging in any form or otherwise interrupting the sugar harvest". Freely interpreted, this decree can

be made to apply to strikers on the sugar plantations.

#### Tollers Under Imperialism

Imperialism and its puppets are unable to solve the crisis that has held the island republic in its clutches, with ever-increasing privations for the masses, for nearly a decade. The great mass of toilers of city and plantation remember how they were able, during the days of revolutionary upsurge following the overthrow of Machado, to win increased living standards through militant struggle, and are now preparing to press forward once more in order to regain the positions that the Mendieta "counter-revolution" has wrested from them.

The period of the sugar harvest is always the period of most intensive struggles by the Cuban working class, and in this case it coincides with the political crisis brought about by the partial breakdown of the ruling clique.

#### Mendieta Seeks Allies

The beleaguered Mendieta regime is casting about on all sides for allies. Elements such as the "Auténticos" of Gran San Martin and the semi-Fascist ABC, who under more favorable circumstances would ally themselves with the puppet of imperialism, realizing that a greater future is offered them if they remain in opposition, have spurned every attempt to negotiate. Gran, from his exile in Miami, Florida, has announced that his party "will not accept any formula tending to perpetuate the present regime in Cuba".

While the government casts about in search of a life-line, it is bringing pressure about the left forces on the political field. It is these leftist forces which today represent the main danger for the Mendieta government.

A number of strikes have occurred recently, contributing considerably to the further weakening of the government. If the threatened general strike should materialize, however, it may well become, as in the case of Machado, the lever by which the whole regime can be dumped into the sea.

#### The Aftermath in Asturias

According to an official statement made public on Jan. 15 by the governor general of the province of Asturias, eleven thousand miners of the region have either been killed in the recent revolt or are otherwise unaccounted for. The government decreed some time ago, that all miners returning to work, in order to be permitted to do so, would first be required to turn over one rifle to the authorities. A few days ago the Miner's Union of Asturias was declared illegal. It appears that the valiant miners of Asturias who bore the brunt of the armed struggle, are also destined to bear the brunt of the present relatively "peaceful" interlude.

The whereabouts of some of the missing miners is indicated in the same official statement referring to a whole series of rebel groups who are still holding out in the mountainous recesses, and against whom, according to the announcement, a special military expedition is now being sent.

Spanish government officials announce that they have confiscated 89,354 rifles, 35,211 revolvers and 1,026 machine guns, from the workers recently in rebellion.

As the Lerroux regime draws the balance of the Spanish October, its own foundations are being corroded by the internecine struggles now developing within the rightist camp itself. One of the main points of friction from the beginning has been the disagreements arising as to the punishment that should be meted out to the ex-rebels. Some of the rightist forces, especially the Fascists, have been insisting on large scale executions of the leaders of the uprising. The Lerroux government on the other hand has allowed the Left Republican leader, Azana, and others, to go free, while commuting practically all of the death sentences imposed by military court, to sentences of life imprisonment.

It is now quite evident that the struggle of the Spanish working class was at least successful in that it has prevented the Fascists from consolidating themselves in the government. Meanwhile a deep ferment is in process within the ranks of Spanish labor; policies are being reviewed, lessons being drawn; and all indications point towards a renewal of the struggle on a still higher plane in the not very distant future.

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New York University

**JAMES BURNHAM**  
Professor of Philosophy,  
New York University

**GEORGE S. COUNTS**  
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**MORRIS MILGRAM**  
Student League for Industrial  
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**ROGER BALDWIN**  
Chairman, American Civil  
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**LUIGI ANTONINI**  
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Editor, Il Martello

**FELIX MORROW**  
Sec'y, Provisional Committee for  
Non-Partisan Labor Defense

HEYWOOD BROWN, Celebrated Columnist

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