

# Spain and the Coming World War

## Civil War May Be Completely Transformed Into Imperialist Conflict

In an article published in last week's issue of the Appeal, I discussed the possibility that the new imperialist war might grow by a series of gradual stages out of present (Ethiopian, Spanish, Chinese....) and future armed conflicts on the world arena, without any sharp gulf between "peace" and war, and without formal "declaration of war" by the great powers.

It should be emphasized that it is only a possibility that I am dealing with. In the last analysis, only the very realistic criterion of a sufficiently large number of the armed forces of the great powers in the field fighting against each other, can test whether or not the war has begun. By this criterion the war has not begun. None of the great powers is yet at war, with the exception of Japan; and Japan is engaged not in an inter-imperialist war, but in a war against the semi-colonial country, China. The extent of Italian and German operations in Spain is not enough to constitute war in the full sense from the point of view of Italy or Germany; their troops in Spain are an "expeditionary force", not "national armies".

### England's Position

The great fact weighing against the possibility I have been discussing is, of course, the position of England—this along with the fear of revolution by all of the powers. England is not ready for war, and seeks consequently to delay its outbreak. England may succeed in keeping the Spanish and Chinese events sufficiently localized to prevent their spread into general war; and may even achieve temporary "solutions" for them. Even then, however, there are already France and the Near East approaching the boiling point. It is almost inconceivable that an analogue of the Spanish conflict, occurring in France—by no means unlikely, even in the comparatively near future—could remain within French national boundaries.

The key importance of understanding this possibility—and of preparing for it—is seen in this: that the attitude of Marxism toward inter-imperialist war is basically different from its attitude toward many other kinds of war. Marxism shows that the coming imperialist war, like the War of 1914-18, will be a struggle of two coalitions of the great powers over the "division of the spoils", over colonies, spheres of influence, means of exploitation. From the point of view of both sides, it will be a reactionary and decadent war, no matter how it may be dressed up under slogans of "resist the aggressor", "defend democracy against fascism", "defend the U. S. S. R.", or what not. Marxism therefore advocates in the coming war as in the last war, a position of defeatism with respect to both sides and all the respective governments, with the exception of the Soviet Union. The masses have nothing to gain from victory on either side.

But Marxism supports, in the present era, the armed struggles of colonies and backward nations against their imperialist oppressors. Politically, of course, in the case of colonies or backward nations as in the case of every nation, Marxism supports only the revolutionary program and its adherents. But materially it supports the struggle of the colony or backward nation as such, and rejects the conception of defeatism in these cases. It does so because these struggles

weaken imperialism and because the road to the proletarian revolution in the colonies and backward nations lies through resistance to the imperialist oppressors.

Marxists, consequently support Ethiopia against Italy, and support China against Japan.

### Fascism and Democracy

Even more obviously, in the case of a civil war which is not a mere palace intrigue or military-bureaucratic shift, do Marxists support the side of the workers and popular masses against the side of straightforward reaction. They do so not merely in the case of an outright civil war for proletarian power (tragically rare in history), but likewise when the class struggle assumes other forms: e.g., the form of an armed struggle between bourgeois democracy and fascism. Thus, Marxists support the struggle of the Loyalist army in Spain against Franco. They do make a distinction between the regime of Caballero or Negrin, on the one side, and of Franco on the other. Their tactics, with respect to Franco's government and armies, advocate defeatism, sabotage, boycott of supplies, etc.; the tactics with respect to Caballero-Negrin advocate none of these.

The tactics of the Marxists toward the Spanish events flow from their conclusion that the dominant character of the struggle is that of civil war, in form of a war between bourgeois democracy and fascism, in substance a defense by the Spanish workers and peasants of their rights and positions against the certain annihilation of these by the victory of Franco. Though this is the dominant aspect of the Spanish struggle, from the beginning it has also had as secondary aspects: (a) that of a war of aggression against a backward nation by Italy and Germany; (b) that of an episode in the world-wide inter-imperialist conflict, which conflict is destined to issue in world imperialist war. It is in spite of (b) and in spite of the bourgeois coalition government which heads Loyalist Spain politically that Marxists support the Loyalist struggle against Franco, that they fight to win in the Loyalist armies, that they send aid to the Loyalist workers and soldiers even at the risk that such aid, controlled by the government, will in part be used against the workers, that they attempt to boycott aid to Franco and to agitate for a defeatist position in his ranks.

### Two Kinds of Support

The Marxists give such support to the Loyalist struggle "for their own reasons"; they give it in absolute independence of the Loyalist government itself and of all bourgeois governments; they give no political support whatever to the People's Front government; they defend the rights and conquests of the workers against the government; and by their propaganda they prepare politically for the overthrow of the government and the victory of a workers' regime when a decisive section of the Spanish masses shall have been won to the program of workers' power. Such support and such support only is the road to the revolution in Spain.

The Stalinists, social-democrats, and other types of reformists and social-patriots also support the Loyalist struggle, but their support is at the opposite pole from that of the Marxists. Their ma-

terial support is subordinate to political support of the People's Front government. Since the People's Front government is a bourgeois government and thus ultimately counter-revolutionary in nature, political support of such a government is political treachery; it is, as the Barcelona events proved, not support of the Spanish workers but defense of a capitalist government, against the workers and the revolution.

Marxists support the Loyalist struggle, entailing for a period "defense of the government" against Franco, in order to aid the Spanish workers and to prepare the ground for the definitive victory of workers' power, thus for the overthrow of that same government. The reformists support the government precisely in order to defend capitalism against socialism as well as against fascism, to betray the workers and to prepare the ground for the complete liquidation of the revolution. This is the harsh reality.

In order to bolster up their case not merely Franco but also Hitler and Mussolini are making war against "the legitimate democratic government" of Spain; and that therefore all "peace-loving democratic people" should unite to resist the mad dogs of Nazism and Fascism, the "aggressor nations" Germany and Italy. It happens to be false that Germany and Italy are making war against Valencia (though if true it would not at all alter the Marxist attitude toward the Spanish events), but the falsity of this contention is its least sinister aspect. Let us examine further.

### The Call for Government Action

The conclusion that the Stalinists and reformists draw from their argument that Germany and Italy are at war with Valencia is not, primarily, that independent working class action should be taken against them, but that governmental action by the "democratic" powers should be taken against the "aggressor nations". "Collective action" of the democratic nations is the password; action by the governments assembled in the League of Nations or on the basis of the Kellogg Pact, or through the Non-Intervention Committee, or the Nyon Conference—the mechanism chosen is incidental. In this country precisely the same conception leads to a demand essentially the same; invocation of the Neutrality Act against Germany and Italy, advocated alike by Browder, Thomas, Waldman, and the Socialist Call.

What is the meaning of this? Put simply and bluntly, the Stalinists and reformists are demanding war, imperialist war, and agreeing in advance to support it. Their entire international propaganda in connection with the Spanish events has, in fact, been consistently social-patriotic, and is merely a rehearsal for the betrayal to the new war. And their position could result in nothing else: they support, politically and materially, the Valencia government, and defend politically and materially democratic capitalism against fascist aggression, whether by Franco, Hitler or Mussolini. If allies come in—England, say, or France—to aid in defending Valencia and in attacking Hitler and Mussolini, they can only welcome this with open arms, and support these allies just as they support

Negrin. And they will do so.

Marxists, on the direct contrary, are against all intervention by capitalist governments in the Spanish struggle, and for working class aid only. If England and France should intervene on a large scale, if the Spanish struggle should thus be transformed into an inter-imperialist war, Marxists explain that under such circumstances, the dominant character of the Spanish struggle would be entirely changed; its aspect as a civil war would be subordinated to its aspect as one episode or phase in the inter-imperialist conflict. The imperialist "allies" of the Valencia government would be entering armed conflict only for their own imperialist interests, and the Valencia government would be in every respect subordinated to those interests. At that time, to fight loyally, to fight to win, in the Valencian armies, would in actuality be to fight to defend one set of imperialist interests as against another. The workers, then, could defend their own interests only by struggling, in every possible way, against the war, in Spain and in all countries. Marxists would go over to a position of defeatism with respect to the Loyalist armies, since only such a position would correspond with the changed character of the struggle itself.

### Dangers of Spain

This change in the struggle, its complete subordination to the inter-imperialist conflicts, is possible even short of its transformation into imperialist war on a grand scale. In fact, the growing subordination of the progressive aspects of the Spanish struggle as a civil war, to its reactionary aspects as an episode in the

inter-imperialist conflicts, is apparent during these last months, and corresponds closely to the growingly reactionary character of the Valencia regime internally. The inter-imperialist conflicts could become dominant not merely through war, but, for example, through large scale intervention by England and France either independently or through the League; or by a sell-out deal by Valencia with Franco engineered along the lines long ago suggested by England. Under any of these circumstances, the same conclusion would have to be drawn by Marxists: the continuation of struggle of the workers for their own interests and for the socialist revolution would become incompatible with any attitude even of temporary "toleration" or "defense" of the People's Front regime; that regime would have become indistinguishable, for practical purposes, from the regime of Franco and from the imperialist regime which controlled it. This situation has not yet been reached, and it would be altogether false to anticipate it in action. The way for the Spanish workers is still to beat Franco, which now means fighting loyally in the Valencia armies, without any confidence at all in the People's Front and its governments, and preparing politically for the establishment of workers' power which alone will carry the war to a successful conclusion in the interests of the masses. But if the workers not merely in Spain but on a world scale, are not to be caught in the web of social-patriotism later on, the political preparation must also look forward to these possible outcomes, which, from all indications, are neither far off nor unlikely.

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