

How can Hitlerism be destroyed?

That the Nazi Government, or what has come to be known as Hitlerism, is a menace to the peace of the world, is a fact as much recognised by Socialists as by all those who support the war. No Socialist will deny that all the Hitler regime stands for is repugnant and revolting to every *ideal* which he strives to establish.

The suppression of free expression of opinion, the concentration camp, the *racial* persecution and exiling of all people arbitrarily deemed out of sympathy with Nazism, the public and private burning of a vast literature on Socialist and scientific subjects, the untold number of outrages committed by the Gestapo, are things indicative of a form of social life (pardon the phrase) which must befoul the finer feelings of all those worthy to be classed as really human.

Intellectual development cannot be where such conditions are prevalent. And where intellectual forces are stifled, real social material well-being is impossible of attainment. There must be no mistake that Socialists hate Hitlerism in a manner beyond question. It stands out to us calling aloud for destruction. But when we have said all this we have but touched the fringe of the problem presented by the existence of the present German Government. That Government, like that of any other throughout the world, owes its origin and maintenance to definite historical and social causes, in which we include such mass ideology as that upon which all governments largely depend for their existence.

Let us begin at the beginning.

The basic condition for the rivalry between modern states is the quest for profit on the part of those who own the means of living, the land, mines, railways and all such resources of the earth as the whole of mankind needs in order to live. The people who own these vital forces of human life are, in broad outline, represented by those who are in control of the machinery of government. Whether such government be *democratic* or dictatorship in form, the above statement applies with equal force. It cannot be too often stated that the method of government in all capitalist countries is a sort of by-product of the same general mode of wealth production and distribution. We leave aside for the moment whether the *democratic* or dictatorship form of the state in capitalist countries is more favourable for working-class expression and development. One point here is, that in democratic Britain, France and America, as in dictatorship Germany and Italy, wealth is produced primarily for profit. Therein is to be found the secret of the world situation in modern times. Profit represents--is in fact--the unpaid labour of the workers. Every worker must realise that after he has spent his energy in producing things for the capitalist, and after all materials and other items have been provided for, there is a surplus above the amount he gets in wages. When this surplus fails to materialise, capitalist production normally ceases. We describe the surplus wealth taken by the capitalist as surplus-value. The worker labours for the capitalist (when he is permitted to do so) for wages, and the capitalist puts him to work to realise the difference between the wages paid and the value of the worker's product of labour. "It is this sort of exchange", says Marx, "between capital and labour upon which capitalistic production, or the wages system, is founded, and which must constantly result in reproducing the working man as working man and the capitalist as capitalist."

The perpetuation and expansion of the capitalist's pursuit of surplus-value gave rise to the imperialism underlying modern war. For capital to grow to maturity it must break down national boundaries and seek the world for its sphere of activity and gratification. Hence the conflicts between national groups of capitalists represented by their respective governments backed by armed force.

The phrase, "the workshop of the world", at one time so aptly applied to this country, indicates an ideological landmark, not merely in the economic history and development of England, but also in that of the other leading capitalist powers. Those who were once the customers of "the world's workshop" became, in the very nature of the capitalist process, its competitors for markets, trade routes, spheres of influence, and the occupation of strategic positions, or the acquisition of raw materials.

Thus arose the intense rivalry of Britain and Germany, which culminated in the war of 1914-1918. The defeat of Germany in that conflict and the imposing of the Treaty of Versailles upon her paved the way for the war in which we are once more engaged.

One of the chief architects of the Versailles Treaty, Mr Lloyd George, has said of his own part-handiwork:-

I am one of the four upon whom devolved the onerous task of drafting the treaties of 1919 . . . The conditions that were imposed upon Germany were ruthlessly applied to the limit of her endurance. She paid £2,000,000,000 in reparations. We experienced insuperable difficulties in paying £1,000,000,000 to America--and we are a much richer country than Germany. We stripped her of all her colonies, confiscating her equipment in those vast territories. We deprived her of part of her home provinces, some of which she had possessed for over 200 years. We took her great fleet away from her. We reduced her army of millions to 100,000 men. We dismantled her fortresses and we deprived her of artillery, tanks, airplays, broke up all the machinery she possessed for re-equipping herself.

It is no part of our Socialist work to shed tears over the demilitarising of Germany or any other capitalist state. But as we look back from the time of the termination of the last war, up to date, we are forced to observe the economic and political consequences which called forth the author of *Mein Kampf* and his gang as the heads of a great state. Hardly had the Versailles Treaty been signed than the then German Government began to plot and scheme to defeat it. Hemmed in as Germany was by strong powers like England and France, there is little cause for surprise that, to quote Mr Lloyd George again:-

"When communities are deprived of the protection of law by selfish and unscrupulous interests they generally find refuge in taking the law into their own hands."

That the thrusting of the Versailles Treaty upon Germany was in principle no worse than the German or Prussian Treaty imposed upon France in 1871, than that imposed

upon Roumania at Bucharest, or that on Russia at Brest-Litovsk, is but begging the question. The real point is that capitalist treaty-making is not only no safeguard against wars, but as a sort of storehouse for their recurrence. And so is Europe, perhaps the whole world, once more on the verge of a gigantic slaughter, blinding and maiming; the approximate end to the whole butchery and destruction being beyond reasonable forecast.

The British Government again drags the workers of this country and its colonies into the battlefields on the plea of resisting aggression, as it did in the last "war to end war". This time we are to smash Hitlerism, as we were in 1914 incited to destroy the Kaiser and his military caste.

But it is not the Nazi form of government as such that the British ruling class seeks to end, but the policy of Hitler's regime in aiming at the interests of those who own and control the British Empire. Hitler and his murderous thugs might have raped and persecuted, imprisoned and tortured indefinitely, without as much as a stir from the "Mother of Parliaments". The sacking and slaughter of Abyssinia, the overrunning of Austria and Czechoslovakia, were as much undisputed acts of aggression as that of Poland, but they evoked the British Government to acts of *accommodation* rather than conflict. Not until it was certain that Hitler had designs on the dismemberment of the British Empire were the forces of slaughter released by Great Britain and her ally, France.

If the present war is allowed to run its course until one or other of the combatants is crushed, are we likely to witness, if we are still alive, the downfall of the Nazi form of government in Germany, the restoration of some form of democratic social life in Germany, and the maintenance of what *democratic* means of expression remain in Europe today? If Chamberlain, Daladier and Company are the spokesmen in setting the seal of defeat on Germany, will they invite the "leaders" of the working-class movement to secure that the German workers be permitted to voice their political and social views, whatever they may be? We know from experience they will do nothing of the kind; it is not a matter in which they are the least bit interested. Therefore, the backing of the "Labour Movement" given to the British and French governments is preposterous.

The working-class movement of Europe, even that part of it which claims the war to be one of Democracy *versus* Nazi Dictatorship, is no more likely to be consulted at the "funeral" of Hitler than they will be granted their emancipation from wage-slavery by the international capitalist class. The real issue before the working class of the world is one of ending its exploitation and all that such entails.

The present war is most likely to bring in its trail, unless it is stopped by working-class action meanwhile, greater misery than the last war, greater and more intensified exploitation, less *freedom* to achieve our purpose than we now possess, whichever side is triumphant in the struggle.

The German workers must, it seems, be the means of effecting the downfall of the Nazi system of government.

For ourselves we, as Socialists, would render them any service which would assist in their accomplishing the overthrow of their despotic ruling gang, if only to gain for them the immediate means of being able to give expression to their social and political aspirations without fear of being murdered or placed in a concentration camp.

Until the working-class movement in Germany or anywhere else can gain the means of emerging from underground into the daylight, their chances of finally freeing themselves from capitalism through Socialism are well-nigh hopeless. To assist in the war against Germany is not the way by which this can be accomplished, we should be slaughtering the very people we desire to *liberate* from the Nazi yoke. Moreover, our action then would assist Hitler and Co. to bury still deeper the opposition to his rule. He would point to the unanimity of feeling here to secure it in Germany. We find no valid reason for the support of this war, as we found none for the last war, which left us, of the Socialist Party, more isolated in our opposition than we are today.

When the war of 1914-1918 was at its worst, when the blood-bath was full to overflowing, we said then:

"Every Socialist must, therefore, wish to see peace established at once to save further maiming and slaughter of our fellow-workers. All those who, on any pretext, or for any supposed reason, wish the war to continue, at once stamp themselves as anti-Socialist, anti-working class, and pro-capitalist." (*Socialist Standard*, July 1917.)

Quite frankly, facing the matter realistically, we see no immediate prospect of the workers becoming Socialists in sufficient numbers to come to real grips with the capitalist class in a challenge to the latter's political power. The talk of a Socialist peace, although supremely desirable and necessary, would therefore seem to be Utopian at the moment. If the working class becomes alive to the realities of the war issue they will see that their first task is to stop the blood-letting, and finally to gain political power for themselves and establish Socialism throughout the world and thus end all wars.

(February 1940)