

War and the Working Class

The Socialist Party States the Case

Preface

The Socialist Party of Great Britain, like a voice crying in the wilderness, has always maintained that capitalism and war are inseparable.

There can be no capitalism without conflicts of economic interest. From these arise the national rivalries and hatreds, the fears and armaments which may at any time provoke war on a terrifying scale. Most people do not take the Socialist view. Even when faced with the Great World War of 1914-18 human hopefulness everywhere refused to accept what appeared to be a doctrine of despair. To say that capitalism must produce tense international situations from which war may burst at any crisis seemed like the passive acceptance of a series of wars, each more horrible than the last. So in the midst of the last Great War the peoples of all lands cherished a belief in a new world freed from fear and from war. It was left to the S.P.G.B., in its official organ, the *Socialist Standard*, in November, 1914, to insist on the bitter truth: "... the facts point irresistibly to further great wars. They indicate that no sooner will the present struggle have ceased than diplomats will be at work forming new alliances, and the Krupps and Armstrongs busy evolving fresh 'surprises' and mightier means of war. . ."

Nobody will now deny that the world is as ripe for war as in 1914. The diminishing number of those who can believe in the League of Nations since the Abyssinian fiasco carry on a disheartened struggle. The Conservatively-minded preach armaments and still more armaments, "to ensure peace and security", while those who claim to stand for progress can think of no solution more hopeful than to restore Colonies to German capitalism – in other words to return to the state of affairs out of which the last war arose!

Only the Socialist can look realities in the face and not give way to despair. Our message is one of hope—of coming triumph. You have the choice of roads, a choice which all humanity must make. The one road is the road of blood and tears, of capitalism and war. The other is the road to Socialism. Only by ending the exploitation of man by man can we strike at the roots of war.

Executive Committee, S.P.G.B. August. 1936.

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CHAPTER 1: What is War?

War is often thought of as something accidental, "a sudden storm in a clear sky", the outcome of diplomatists' stupidity or miscalculation, or of the arrogance and irritability of statesmen. It is none of these things. The contest by force of arms is an extension and consequence of an underlying contest going on at all times in other fields. Wars reflect the determination of Governments to defend or to conquer valuable possessions by armed might when other means have failed. The purpose of war – as will be shown in this pamphlet – is to gain or to maintain the mastery of territory where there are rich mineral deposits, vital trade routes such as the Suez and Panama canals, or areas such as Shanghai and India where vast sums of foreign money have been invested in railways, docks, factories and commercial buildings.

These are the objects of modern war. The method of war is to annihilate or disperse the armed forces of the "enemy" Government, destroy its armaments and means of supply, starve and terrify its

civilian population by blockade, aerial bombing and poison gas, and by propaganda to spread discouragement and defeatism.

The methods of war have changed and are still changing as a result of the progress of industry and communications. Wars in the medieval and ancient worlds sometimes had little direct effect on the civilian population; apart from the seizure and destruction of foodstuffs in the immediate neighbourhood of armies and battles the losses being mainly confined to the actual combatants. Modern wars are very different. The instruments of war, battleships and submarines, tanks, big guns, bombing-planes, and the means of supply and communication could not exist or be operated unless they had behind them highly-developed, large-scale industry. Consequently, while mechanical progress, especially in the air, has brought civilian populations within easy reach of attack, the dependence of war on industry has made it more and more important for Governments at war to strike at the fighting soldier at the front by attacking the toiling munition maker at home. Wars have become immeasurably more costly and more destructive. *It is on the civil population that the destruction will increasingly fall.*

These changes have had the result of making the idea of safeguarding the civil population an absurdity. Warmakers used to talk of war, with apparent justification, as a means of protecting mothers and children and the civil life in general. In truth no war in modern times has saved the women and children from attack and suffering, and in any future war tremendous losses of life in the great cities of the warring nations will have to be accepted as a matter of course. As the Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin has said, "The bomber will always get through" (House of Commons, 10 November, 1934), and the only "defence" will be to inflict the same destruction on the defenceless civil populations on the other side of the frontier.

Colonel Lindbergh has emphasised this feature of modern war. Speaking in Berlin on 23 July, 1936, he said that "the families the fighter leaves behind him are as much exposed as he is himself" (*Times*, 24 July, 1936). Colonel Lindbergh continued:-

"It is no longer possible to shield the heart of a country with its army ... Aviation has, I believe, created the most fundamental change ever made in warfare. It has abolished what we call defensive warfare. It has converted defence into attack." (*News-Chronicle*, 24 July, 1936.)

Those who accept capitalism must accept this. They believe that they must "defend the frontiers whatever the cost". The Socialist replies that no frontier is worth the life of a single worker.

To understand these opposed points of view we must look into the causes and consequences of modern war.

CHAPTER II: Some False Theories About the Cause of War

It is impossible within the limited space of a pamphlet to deal fully with the many explanations that have been put forward to account for war.

Some old-fashioned believers in the supernatural still regard war as a punishment visited by a god on a sinful world. In this they resemble the earlier generations which explained plague, pestilence and famine in the same way. Now the development of medical science and sanitation, and the growing powers of production of foodstuffs have, for the most part, driven out these superstitions. An understanding of capitalism will drive out fantastic beliefs about the cause of war.

Another theory, which has hardly more to recommend it than the one referred to above, is that modern war is caused by the pressure of population on food supplies, and that this pressure can be relieved only by the conquest of more territory. This theory is treated with a certain amount of respect because the rulers of Germany, Italy, Japan and other countries have thought fit to make use of it in their official propaganda.

As regards the European nations the argument, in its crude form, is easily disposed of. There were never more than a mere handful of white people in the pre-war German colonies, nor are there in the African colonies of Italy today. Practically all of the colonial lands are in tropical regions unfit for white settlement, and the part played by the few white men in them for the most part is to act as controllers of plantations worked by natives. The number of white men who can make a living as settlers in colonies of this kind is, and will remain, negligible. In the whole of the German colonies in 1913 the German population, including 3,105 soldiers and policemen, numbered only 19,696, these figures, according to the Right Hon. L. S. Amery, P.C., M.P., being official German ones (*Evening Standard*, 6 July, 1936).

Moreover, the very rulers who complain of overpopulation are foremost in using all the influence of Government money and Government propaganda to increase the population by raising the birth-rate. This is so in Italy, Germany, and Japan.

These rulers ask us to believe that poverty and unemployment in their countries are the result of overpopulation and the lack of colonies. Yet we find that poverty and unemployment are at least as prevalent in the countries with huge colonial possessions: Britain, France, Holland, Portugal and Belgium. By observing this we have taken the first step towards discovering the real cause both of war and of poverty.

The contrast of riches and poverty, of luxuriant idleness and the destitution of the unemployed, faces us in all parts of the capitalist world. The countries without colonies do not differ from the rest. It is obviously not true to say that in Germany all the population is poor, any more than to say that in Britain all the population is rich. In each country the desperate need for food, clothing and shelter within the ranks of the working-class is mocked by insolent waste within the ranks of the propertied class.

The next thing to notice is that poverty and unemployment are most acute in all countries during the times of crisis and trade depression, and it is just at those times that the cry of overpopulation and the demand for colonies are most insistent. Now crises and trade depressions are not caused by natural forces or by overpopulation but by the ordinary workings of the capitalist system of society. We, therefore, see that the poverty of the workers, whether the poverty of "normal" times or the worse poverty in times of trade depression, is a consequence of the way the capitalist system works; not a consequence of overpopulation in certain regions of the earth's surface.

A more common view about wars is that they are caused by the armament firms, "The merchants of death." It is said that these firms encourage competitive armaments and wars as a means of making profit. There is an element of truth in this. The evidence given at the recent official inquiries into armament manufacture in U.S.A, and Great Britain has proved beyond question that these interests resist disarmament schemes, divide up the world's armaments market among themselves, supply arms to all Governments without distinction, bribe newspapers and politicians to promote sales and in general apply to their trade the methods applied in every other. When all due allowance is made for this, however, we are still without an explanation for war. Let us grant that armament firms take advantage of the antagonisms that already exist between Governments. We still have to explain why those antagonisms exist. They may be embittered by armament propaganda, but they exist whether there is armament propaganda or not. Vickers-Armstrong, for example, make arms for the British Government, and were advertising their wares in the German Press while Germany was re-arming in defiance of Treaties (see *Forward*, 19 November, 1932), but that does not explain why the British and German Governments are antagonistic over European and Colonial territories, markets; and so on. Armament firms simply fish in troubled waters.

Modern wars are not caused by racial or religious hatred, bitter though racial and religious disputes may be. Black men and White men, Teutons and Latins, Aryans and non-Aryans, fought on both sides in the Great War. Christian Germany fought alongside Mohammedan Turkey, face to face with Christian Britain and Hindoo, Mohammedan and Parsee India.

In the fight at Wal-Wal, which was the excuse for the Italo-Abyssinian War of 1935-36, the soldiers in both armies – Italian and Abyssinian – were by race Somalis and by religion Mohammedan, yet they fought for Christian Ethiopia and Christian Italy (*The Times*, 9 October, 1935).

Again modern wars are not caused by rival conceptions of civilisation. The speeches in 1914 about Germany's mission to spread German "culture" over the world, like the British retort about "Huns" and "barbarism," were nothing more than war propaganda, designed to inflame the civil populations and military forces. The Allied armies included "the assassins of Sarajevo" – a monument now stands there in their honour, erected by the Yugo-Slavian Government – and one of Germany's Allies was Turkey, which only a short while before was denounced for Armenian massacres.

At the present time, should war occur between British and German capitalists the British Government would doubtless inflame the workers with stories true and false about Nazi concentration camps and brutalities towards Jews, Social-Democrats, etc., but if Italy were Britain's ally nothing would be whispered of the many brutalities of Italian Fascism. Hitler, on his side, would be reminding his audiences, as he has already, that concentration camps were used with appalling results by the British Government in its imperialist war against the Boer farmers in South Africa. In the Great War, 1914-1918, no mention was made on the Allied side of the atrocities in the Belgian Congo where defenceless natives were maimed and slaughtered in times of peace for profit. Nazi-Fascist brutalities are not unique, but no capitalist Government worries about brutalities until capitalist interests are at stake. The infamies of the

French Government towards unarmed French workers in 1871 drew no foreign capitalist sword from its sheath.

Lastly, it is hardly necessary to say that modern wars are not caused by “the old Adam in us,” by a lust for fighting. Even the most combative human being – as has been pointed out by the Minister for War, Mr. Duff-Cooper, M. P. – has no liking for “the prospect of being blown up by a gun fired miles away, and thinking that his home and family might be destroyed by bombs dropped from the sky.”

It is for this reason that the various pacifist movements are ineffective to stop war. They ask people to “think peace”, but overlook the great forces always at work under capitalism which cause economic conflict and thus give rise to military forces and all the ideas and preparations connected with war.

CHAPTER III: Capitalism the Real Source of War in the Modern World

When Socialists say that capitalism is the source of wars they do not mean that wars are deliberately and wantonly plotted by individual capitalists or groups for the purpose of making money. But that is the view sometimes attributed to Socialists. Professor A. E. Zimmern has made the mistake of assuming that that is the case made by Socialists against capitalism. Speaking in 1917 he said, “Capitalism did not cause the war ... it was the Kaiser, not Rothschild, who pulled the trigger” (see *Economic Aspects of International Relations* published by Ruskin College, 1917, p.64).

The matter is not disposed of by this simple statement. What we need to know is why the Kaiser “pulled the trigger.” What forces were at work which placed him and his Government in such a position that war could appear as a tolerable means of escape? Why, indeed, was there a trigger all ready to be pulled? In other words why do capitalist States build up powerful and costly armaments, little as the capitalists like having to pay for them? The answer is that the capitalist system of society is rooted in conflict; and war is one of the evil fruits of that conflict. To understand modern wars one must understand capitalism.

What is this system known as capitalism ? It was defined by the late Professor Cannan who, it may be observed, was not a Socialist. He wrote:

“The present organisation of industry is sometimes described as capitalistic, and the term is quite properly applied, if all that is meant by it is that in our part of the world the greater part of industry and property is immediately controlled by persons and institutions whose object is to make a profit on their capital. In Western Europe and America it is certain that the majority of workers work as they are directed to work by persons and bodies of persons who employ them in order to make a profit by getting more than they pay for all expenses, and who reckon the profit as a percentage on their capital. The greater part of the property is also in the hands of such persons and institutions” (*Wealth* by Edwin Cannan, published by P.S. King & Sons, Ltd., 1920).

This definition is good enough as far as it goes, but it does not bring out all the important features of capitalism. It does not remind us that the class ownership of accumulated property and of the wealth that is being produced day by day places the capitalists in the position of a privileged class, the position of being freed from the necessity of working; while the propertyless class – the workers – having to sell their mental and physical energies, their “labour power”, to the capitalists are a subject class. Nor does it remind us that the owning class must maintain armed forces in order to protect their privileged position; at home against the have-nots and abroad against the armed forces of foreign States. All that the workers receive is a wage or a salary which represents the price at which they sell their labour-power. This selling-price is based on the value of the labour-power, i.e., on the cost of maintaining the worker and his family at the standard of living usual in the particular industry and country at a given period. After the payment of wages and all the costs of production (raw materials, fuel, upkeep of machinery, etc.) there is a surplus left. It is out of this that the landlords, moneylending capitalists and shareholders derive their rents, interest and profits.

This surplus, which the capitalists obtain through their ownership of the means of production and distribution, is the purpose of capitalist enterprise. It enables those who own a sufficient amount of capital to live luxuriously, without working, and yet to add year by year to their investments at home and abroad.

In order to enjoy the proceeds of industry the capitalist has to have his products marketed in competition with the products of his rivals. The key to profitable marketing is cheapness, and cheapness is

sought by constantly trying to extract more work from the workers without increasing wages, by obtaining raw materials from the cheapest sources of supply, and by obtaining all the advantages of mass production. Mass production leads to encroaching on the markets of foreign rivals, which causes the Governments of the countries concerned to retaliate with tariffs, quotas, subsidies and other methods of excluding goods from the market. In the last resort the struggle leads to wars of conquest, the object of which is to acquire control over markets, or over territories rich in mineral and other resources and in exploitable population.

As examples, we have the actions of the Japanese Government in Manchuria and Northern China, of France in Morocco, of Italy in Abyssinia, and of the British Government in its constant acquisition of new territories in the 19th century. Alongside the gaining or retaining of territories from which raw materials are obtained, or in which goods are sold, there is the connected problem of protecting trade routes by land, sea or air, and the railways, ships and aircraft on those routes. The Suez Canal and Panama Canal are vital links of this kind, and the pre-1914 threat to the British Empire arising out of the German scheme of a railway through route to Baghdad, and to British shipping supremacy through the development of the German fleet, has its present counterpart in the increased strength of the Italian Air Force and Navy, which threaten the British hold on the Mediterranean. The development of the aeroplane has not altered the problem in its essentials. The little port of Koweit on the Persian Gulf, which would have been the sea terminus of the Berlin-Baghdad railway, is now on the British air-route to India, and British capitalist interests would at once be endangered if that area fell into the hands of another great power.

Lord Bledisloe, former Governor-General of New Zealand, addressing the Liverpool Branch of the British Empire Society on 20 March, 1936, disclosed rivalry between the British and Japanese and American capitalists in the Pacific which strongly recalls the Anglo-German rivalry in the Atlantic which preceded the War in 1914:

“For five years I lived in two islands in the Pacific Ocean, where I was not only Governor-General but Commander-in-Chief. The most profound sources of anxiety there in the matter of security from outside interference are the craving for territorial expansion by nations whose shores are washed by the Pacific, and the gradual crushing out by subsidised foreign competition of the mercantile shipping of the British Empire.

“The gravity of the shipping position lies in increased helplessness in time of war. It is no good looking to resources of comparatively poorer countries like Australia and New Zealand to find means to fight this unfair competition.

“It must be done by the British people and the British Government, or, I warn you, British shipping will be eliminated from the Pacific Ocean” (*Daily Telegraph*, 21 March, 1936).

Although the capitalist interest in territorial expansion and war is rarely admitted, quite a number of frank and revealing statements have been made. The late Lord Brentford (formerly Sir William Joynson-Hicks), Conservative Home Secretary 1924-28, once declared in a speech (reproduced in the *Daily News*, 17 October, 1925):-

“We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know it is said at Missionary meetings that we conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword, and by the sword we should hold it”.

The late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, in a speech to the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in 1890, said that

“All the great Offices of State are occupied with commercial affairs. The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office are chiefly engaged in finding new markets and in defending old ones. The War Office and the Admiralty are mostly occupied in preparations for the defence of these markets and for the protection of our commerce.”

Marshal Lyautey, who was in command of the French Army fighting in Morocco in 1922 was even more explicit:-

“French soldiers are fighting in Morocco to acquire territory in which rise rivers capable of supplying power for electrification schemes which will prove of great advantage to French trade.

When we have acquired the last zone of cultivable territory, when we have nothing but mountains in front of us, we shall stop.

“Our object is commercial and economic. The military expedition in Morocco is a means, not an end. Our object is the extension of foreign trade” (*Star*, 31 October, 1922).

Marshal Foch, in the last war, admitted the commercial nature of the forces leading to war:-

“What do we all seek? New outlets for an ever-increasing commerce and for industries which, producing far more than they can consume or sell, are constantly hampered by an increasing competition. And then? Why! New areas for trade are cleared by cannon shot. Even the Bourse (the Stock Exchange), for reasons of interest, can cause armies to enter into campaign” (*United Service Magazine*, December, 1918).

Dr. Heinrich Schnee, formerly Governor of German East Africa has stated the case for the German capitalists :-

“The German problem of colonial raw materials can only be solved by handing back to her the German colonies ... The colonies offer an assured market for our own industrial produce; they afford a field of investment for the savings and capital of the Mother country ...” (*Peace*, London, Feb., 1936).

Mr. Hirota, then Foreign Minister of Japan, speaking in the Japanese Parliament on 21 January, 1936, put the same claim forward for Japan, as reported in *The Times*, (22 January):-

“After referring to restrictive measures of various kinds on world trade, Mr. Hirota continued: ‘To a modern nation, particularly such as our own, with a vast population but meagre natural resources, the assurance of a source of raw materials and of a market for finished products is a condition of prime necessity to its economic existence.’”

Mr. Hirota was, of course, seeking to justify Japan’s wars to conquer territory formerly belonging to China, and, like other politicians justifying expansion, he argued that the expansion of Japan’s trade would “contribute towards international good understanding and to the enrichment of world civilisation and the promotion of peace and happiness of mankind.” That argument, however, assumes that the object of the efforts of capitalists is to supply a real need, whereas in fact their object is to make profit by destroying a competitor already in the field, or by excluding his entry. Thus it was reported by the *Daily Telegraph* Correspondent in Peking (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 February, 1936) that the Japanese had “cut the famous caravan trade highway across the Gobi Desert between Urga, the capital of Outer Mongolia and Kalgan, 100 miles north-west of Peking, thus completely stopping international trade between the two centres. The Urga-Kalgan trade was the monopoly of the Wortvog Corporation with headquarters in Berlin.”

Mr. W.M. Hughes, Australia’s wartime Prime Minister and present Minister for Health, speaking at Brisbane, 24 July, 1936, has given his testimony also:-

“The increasing intensity of competition for economic markets must lead to armed conflict unless an economic settlement is found. This, however, is hardly to be hoped for. Talk about peace in a world armed to the teeth is utterly futile” (*News-Chronicle*, London, 25 July, 1936).

Inseparable from the question of markets and raw materials is that of investments abroad. The capitalist who has money invested in some foreign or Empire territory will do his utmost to secure protection for his property through the activities – including in the last resort war – of his Government. The vast foreign investments of British capitalists would alone be sufficient to explain the readiness to use armed force against the threatened encroachments of other Powers. British interests in Venezuela for instance stand at £200 millions (*Star*, 18 December, 1935). The *Manchester Guardian*, explaining why Great Britain “may hesitate to relax her control over India,” stated (30 December, 1929) that “Great Britain finds in India her best market, and ... has a thousand million of capital invested there.” Japanese investors are said to have £200 millions in Manchuria, and Great Britain upwards of £60 millions in Shanghai alone. Regarding the latter, the Shanghai Correspondent of the Conservative newspaper, *The Observer* (London)

recently declared, with remarkable candour, that “Shanghai is essentially a capitalistic structure designed to protect vested interests” (*Observer*, 1 March, 1936). That is the Socialist view in a nutshell.

Then British capitalists have £450 millions in the Argentine, and £250 millions in China (including Shanghai). The total amount invested abroad was estimated by Sir Robert Kindersley, Director of the Bank of England, at £3,438,000,000 in 1930 (*Economic Journal*, June, 1932).

It was estimated that American capitalists in 1926 had 13,000 million dollars invested abroad (see *America, The World's Banker*, by Dr. Max Winkler. Published by the Foreign Policy Association, New York, 1927).

We have seen, therefore, how the private ownership of the means of production and distribution, and the resulting competitive struggle, gives sections of the capitalist class a motive for using armed forces in wars to protect their vested interests. It is true that all the capitalists do not have identical interests in foreign trade and investment, so that they are always divided in their views on free trade and tariffs, and on wars. It may even be true to say that, owing to the high cost of modern armaments and war, the capitalists as a whole spend more on wars than anything they gain by victory or risk losing by defeat. Nevertheless, at any given moment the policy of the Government is dictated by the group which is predominant, and that group will press the issue to the extent of war without considering the special interests of other sections of the capitalist class. All sections of that class, however, have an interest in defending against the working class their privileged position based on their private ownership of the means of production and distribution. They are all prepared to use armed force to maintain that position against the propertyless class.

We have looked at war from the capitalist viewpoint. Let us now consider the worker's.

CHAPTER IV: The Workers and War

The workers' interest is to get rid of capitalism. That is the starting point of the Socialist case. The workers who make up the overwhelming majority of the population are the wealth producers, but they produce wealth for others to own and enjoy. The workers produced the wealth now invested abroad in countries such as China, India and the South American Republics, but those investments do not belong to the workers. They are the private property of British capitalists. This fund of wealth for investment abroad only exists because of the poverty of the working class. Both at home and abroad the interests of capitalist and worker are opposed. Increased wages mean lower profits and the capitalist, after satisfying the personal needs of himself and his family, strives to accumulate additional capital rather than raise the workers' standard of living. This means that, instead of the nation's resources of labour and materials being used mainly for the production of useful articles for all to enjoy, and beyond that only for repairs to existing factories, machinery, etc., and for the necessary extensions of productive capacity, the capitalists – being interested in increasing their profit and ownership – see to it that vast resources are directed to the production of luxuries for themselves and of more and more machines and factories, etc., out of which they hope to make additional profit. Finding that the rate of profit is often greater abroad than at home, they ship off goods, machinery, railway material, etc., for investment purposes overseas, where it becomes a fruitful source of international rivalries through conflict with the interests of other capitalist groups.

As the workers do not own these foreign investments they have no interest in supporting war to protect them.

What of the other arguments used in favour of war? Have the workers an interest in waging war to resist foreign rule, or to protect overseas territories rich in raw materials, or to protect distant trade routes? The answer is no. Those raw materials, and the goods moving along those trade routes, belong to the capitalists, not to the workers. It is true that, for sentimental reasons and from the point of view of convenience, most people dislike the idea of being ruled politically by foreigners, i.e., by people of different language, customs and habit, but there is a great difference between disliking a thing and deciding that it is worth a war. The protection of British capitalism is not worth a million workers' lives, or indeed one worker's life.

What do the working class get out of life in any of the advanced capitalist countries? They are, strictly speaking, “wage-slaves,” toiling to enrich a privileged class. They suffer everywhere from being subject to the arbitrary orders of the employer and his agents. They have to endure poverty and unemployment, and a pauperised old age when they are no longer fit to work. Life for the workers becomes somewhat harder in times of trade depression and less hard in times of expansion, but this is so in all capitalist countries. The life of the worker does not differ essentially from one capitalist country to another, nor is it much influenced by victory and defeat in war, or by the acquisition of a Colonial Empire. Victory

in the Great War left the workers of Britain and the Dominions in a position rather worse than before 1914, owing to greater unemployment. Defeat left the workers of Germany in a similar position. The people who lost in Germany were German capitalists. The people who gained in the victorious countries were likewise capitalists. As regards "Empire," the Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, actually have a standard of living for the workers slightly higher than in Britain, yet these countries have no great Empire, no colonies or dominions, no great foreign investments, and have not taken part in wars recently.

What the workers suffer from everywhere is capitalism. Their interest requires that they should concentrate on achieving Socialism. War is not a means to that end. It solves no problem of the working class. Victory and defeat alike leave them in the same position. They suffer all the horrors that go with war but they gain nothing from victory and lose nothing in defeat. They have no concern with capitalist trade and foreign investment.

They have no interest at stake which justifies giving support to war.

CHAPTER V: The Appeal of the War-Makers.

The greater part of the propaganda put out by governments to induce the workers to support wars hides the underlying capitalist interests and motives. Instead, use is made of appeals to patriotism, national independence, democracy and religion. The appeal to patriotism succeeds because the majority of workers have not yet understood the nature of capitalism. Patriotism is an appeal to the alleged mutual interests of all the citizens of one country as against all the citizens of "enemy" countries. It has lost its justification in the world of today. The workers of all lands, by similarity of their class position, by poverty and their common suffering from the evils of capitalism, should be bound together in furtherance of their mutual interest in resisting the encroachments of the capitalists and in replacing capitalism by Socialism.

Each nation consists not of a "community" but of two classes with antagonistic interests, the propertied class and the working class.

For the same reason, the cry of national defence is one to which the worker should turn a deaf ear. Even if we grant that foreign occupation and foreign rule may be inconvenient and irritating, a war to defend frontiers, or to set up independent nations, is an absurdity from a working class point of view. The workers have in reality nothing to defend but their poverty, insecurity and subjection to their own particular national group of capitalists.

The transfer of population in Alsace and Lorraine from France to Germany in 1871, and back again to France in 1919, made no material change in the status or condition of the workers. All it meant was the transfer first to German groups, then back again to French groups, of rich iron deposits in Lorraine and thriving textile factories in Alsace – owned all the time, not by German and French workers, but by the capitalist minority in each country.

Although workers in India, Ireland and elsewhere, misled by capitalist propaganda, believe that complete independence would free them from poverty, the notion is shown up in all its falsity in the pitiful poverty of the workers in countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, which achieved national independence in the World War, 1914-1918, and the Irish Free State, which a few years later achieved partial independence.

In 1914 the British Government and the political parties which supported it (including the Labour Party) urged the workers to support what they said was a war in defence of democratic institutions, Parliamentary Government and trade union rights against the dangers of Prussian militarism and autocracy. German workers, on their side, were implored to defend their liberties against barbarous autocratic Russia. The stronger side in the war held out the bait that it was a war to end war, to "make the world safe for democracy", and to enforce the principle of self-determination for small nationalities. With these words on their lips the politicians were making the secret treaties for dividing up the spoils of conquest, the last chapter being the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. Even the formation of new states (Poland and Czechoslovakia) only raised as many problems of national minorities as it removed. The annexation of German and colonial territory, and the breaking up of Austro-Hungary, were in line with all the old practices of conquering powers. The world, far from being made safe for democracy by the Great War, has entered on a period of widespread reaction and Fascism, and of Terrorism directed against workers' organisations.

A British Tory Government, composed of the men who before and since have preached to the British workers of their "trade union liberties," were responsible for the 1927 Trades Disputes and Trade

Union Act, which severely restricted the unions in many directions, cut off Post Office workers and other Civil Servants from all outside affiliations, even forbidding them to associate with similar unions in other "Empire" countries! The Tories forced this Act through in total disregard of the pleas and protests of the Labour Opposition in the House of Commons, that is, of the Party which had backed the "war for democracy"!

Now, with the rearmament of Germany, the same argument is being revived in the form that British liberties must be protected against Fascism and Nazism. Nothing is more certain than that governments take advantage of war to introduce emergency measures destroying those alleged liberties. With the experience of the last War fresh in our minds, how can anyone doubt that war is a great breeding ground of Governmental reaction, suppression and brutality?

There is only one safe rule for the working class to follow when urged by the capitalists to support capitalist wars. No matter what form the appeal may take, they should examine the question in the light of working class interests. Ask yourself the question: "Have the working class of one nation any interest in slaughtering (and being slaughtered by) the workers of another?" "Have they any material interest in gaining victory or avoiding defeat, in defending frontiers or fighting for national independence?" "Have they any interest in supporting one national section of the capitalist world against another?"

To all these questions the answer is NO!

CHAPTER VI: The Socialist Party and the Great War, 1914-1918

The situation prior to 1914 was that the German capitalists were rapidly encroaching on markets which had once been monopolised to a large extent by British capitalists. German foreign trade, while still below that of England, was growing more rapidly, often with the aid of Government subsidies, The German Merchant Service was challenging the British. A fierce struggle was in progress for Emigrant traffic across the Atlantic. In the trade depression of 1913 German industrialists and politicians complained that they were penalised by having so small a colonial empire compared with the British Empire, and that they were barred from overseas markets, such as the French colonies in Africa and Indo-China. A "tariff war" was in progress between France and Germany. German capitalists promoted the scheme for the Berlin-Baghdad railway as an outlet for exports and an area for profitable investments.

English interests feared this threat to imperial communications with India, especially as the rapid enlargement of the German Navy threatened British Naval supremacy.

The alliances between France and Russia, and between Germany and Austro-Hungary, involved all these countries in the tension created by the Serbian assassination of an Austrian Archduke at Sarajevo. Then when Germany decided to support Austria against Russia and her ally France, and invaded Belgium as a means of attacking France, the British Government declared war on Germany. The excuse was that Germany had broken treaties by the invasion of Belgium, but the real reason was that British capitalist interests were endangered directly by the likelihood of Germany becoming master of ports on the English Channel, and indirectly by the great increase in Germany's commercial and fighting strength that would result from victory over France and Russia. The British Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith (later Lord Oxford), wrote on 2 August, 1914: "It is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power. We cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base. We have obligations to Belgium to prevent it being utilised and absorbed by Germany." (*Memoirs and Reflections*, Lord Oxford.)

It is true that he also mentioned "intimate relationship" with France, and that his last sentence (quoted above) mentions "obligations to Belgium," but history has many instances showing that Governments do not act on their obligations unless they believe that interests are also involved. In 1932 the Governments in the League of Nations were solemnly pledged to protect China; and in 1935 to protect Abyssinia, but both pledges were in effect dishonoured.

In 1914, with the outbreak of war, various organisations which had claimed to be "Socialist", rushed in to offer support to their capitalist governments in defiance of all their pledges not to do so, made at successive international Labour Conferences.

Nothing was heard in 1914 of the "general strike" which, it had been said, would make war impossible. Now, in 1936, this remedy is again being proposed. It would fail for two reasons. Firstly, the workers who in times of peace so far accept capitalism as to vote its representatives into political power, would, in a time of international crisis, be quite unable to resist the full volume of the patriotic propaganda poured out by the Government. Secondly, the capitalists who control the machinery of Government, including the armed forces, are able, even during a time of peace, to smash all opposition, as was

demonstrated in Great Britain; where a general strike occurred in 1926. How much more so would this be true under the special conditions which accompany a threatened outbreak of war when it is easy for the Government to invoke martial law, Emergency Powers Act, etc.

However, in 1914 a general strike was not even attempted. Instead, trade unions, syndicalist organisations and Labour parties all over the world lined up with their Governments.

In the opening month of the War the Labour Party placed its Head Office, its entire machinery, "at the disposal of the Government in their recruiting campaign" (*Labour Leader*, 3 September, 1914). The Labour Party decided to give its full support to the prosecution of the War. It entered the wartime coalition Governments and was a consenting party to all the actions of those Governments. A typical pronouncement by a leader of the Labour Party was that made by Mr. Arthur Henderson, who represented the Labour Party in the wartime Coalition Governments. At the time he made the pronouncement below he was President of the Board of Education. He contributed it to the *Times' Recruiting Supplement* (3 November, 1915):-

"The British people are more than ever determined to free themselves from the blighting, ruthless spirit of militarism. A clarion call has been sounded, the nation's imperative and essential need has been proclaimed, and under the leadership of the Sovereign the young manhood of our country is generously responding and volunteering for national service ..."

Within a few months the shackles of conscription had been fastened on the misguided followers of Mr. Henderson, who himself took an active part in recruiting and was given a post in the Cabinet. It was Mr. Henderson who urged that the strike leaders in the Clyde area be deported; as they were.

Three years after the outbreak of war the attitude of the Labour Party was unchanged. Mr. W.F. Purdy, Chairman of the Labour Party Executive, in an interview with a correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* (7 June, 1917), said:-

"As Chairman of the E.C. of the Labour Party I am not going to meet or sit in conference with the representatives of the enemy countries while we are at war. I mean to carry out the policy of British Labour as laid down by our representative gathering. That policy is to pursue the war to a successful termination, which means to a complete victory over the enemy."

The Independent Labour Party was another Party claiming to be Socialist. In 1914 it allowed its members to support the War and to engage in recruiting. Mr. J. R. McDonald and the late J. Keir Hardie both took a part in although at the same time they criticised the past conduct and policy of the Liberal Government, which they alleged was responsible for the entry of the country into the War. I.L.P. members in Parliament were permitted to vote War credits, and throughout the War the I.L.P. remained a constituent part of the war-supporting Labour Party.

Mr. Keir Hardie, writing in the *Merthyr Pioneer*, on 27 November, 1914, expressed his pleasure that a recruiting meeting addressed by him had been more successful than those of the Liberals.

"If I can get the recruiting figures for Merthyr week by week, which I find is a very difficult job, I hope by another week to *prove* (Keir Hardie's italics) that whereas our Rink meeting gave a stimulus to recruiting, those meetings at the Drill Hall at which the Liberal member or Liberal candidate spoke had exactly the opposite effect." (*Daily Herald*, 10 January, 1929)

The Labour Party never repudiated its war-time attitude, nor did its prominent leaders. One of them, Mr. Arthur Henderson, replying to the charge that he had supported the War, said that he was not in the least ashamed of his War record. (*Daily Herald*, 10 January, 1929.)

Compare the attitude of the Labour Party with the attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. Our manifesto, issued at the outbreak of the War, sets out the Socialist position in words that are clear and uncompromising. They embody the only attitude for Socialists to adopt to capitalist wars:-

"WHEREAS the capitalists of Europe have quarrelled over the question of the control of trade routes and the world's markets, and are endeavouring to exploit the political ignorance and blind passions of the working class of their respective countries in order to induce the said workers to take up arms in what is solely their masters' quarrel, and
"WHEREAS further, the pseudo-Socialists and labour 'leaders' of this country, in common with their fellows on the Continent, have again betrayed the working class position, either through their

ignorance of it, their cowardice, or worse, and are assisting the master class in utilising this thieves' quarrel to confuse the minds of the workers and turn their attention from the Class Struggle

"THE SOCIALIST PARTY of Great Britain seizes the opportunity of re-affirming the Socialist position, which is as follows:-

"That Society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

"That in Society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a CLASS WAR, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

"That the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers.

"These armed forces, therefore, will only be set in motion to further the interests of the class who control them – the master class – and as the workers' interests are not bound up in the struggle for markets wherein their masters may dispose of the wealth they have stolen from them (the workers), but in the struggle to end the system under which they are robbed, they are not concerned with the present European struggle, which is already known as the 'BUSINESS' war, for it is their masters' interests which are involved, and not their own.

"THE SOCIALIST PARTY of Great Britain pledges itself to keep the issue clear by expounding the CLASS STRUGGLE, and whilst placing on record its abhorrence of this latest manifestation of the callous, sordid, and mercenary nature of the international capitalist class, and declaring that no interests are at stake justifying the shedding of a single drop of working class blood, enters its emphatic protest against the brutal and bloody butchery of our brothers of this and other lands who are being used as food for cannon abroad while suffering and starvation are the lot of their fellows at home.

"Having no quarrel with the working class of any country, we extend to our fellow workers of all lands the expression of our good will and Socialist fraternity, and pledge ourselves to work for the overthrow of capitalism and the triumph of Socialism.

"THE WORLD FOR THE WORKERS!

"August 25th, 1914,

"THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

"WAGE WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE! YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS, YOU HAVE A WORLD TO WIN! – *Marx.*"

The outcome of the War, the condition of the working class in the years after the War, and the bitter struggles the workers have had to maintain or even to defend their miserable standard of living, have proved our case up to the hilt.

CHAPTER VII: The League of Nations

Superficially the present situation differs from the pre-1914 situation owing to the formation of the League of Nations. The idea proclaimed was that all the nations should come together in an international body and use their collective strength to maintain universal peace.

From the outset the League was weakened by the abstention of America, but that circumstance is not the real reason for the League's failure to justify the hopes of some of its founders. If international conflicts and wars arose only out of misunderstanding the League would doubtless function very satisfactorily. But that idea ignores the real basis of war, which lies in the nature of capitalism.

Capitalism is competitive and monopolistic. It rests on the forcible exclusion of the working class from participation in the ownership of the means of production and distribution. Capitalists maintain their profits by resisting efforts to raise wages, by monopolising markets and raw materials, by using

Governmental power to protect their own interests and to damage those of their rivals at home or abroad. War is but an extension in its more extreme form of the never-ending conflicts of capitalism. Because of its competitive character capitalism cannot in any circumstances give prosperity to all the population, or even to all of the members of the capitalist class. Even the measure of prosperity it can give in periods of trade expansion is followed inevitably by the prolonged depressions such as the one which began about 1930.

In each country there are dissatisfied capitalist groups striving through the respective Governments to solve their trading problems by policies which conflict with trading interests in other nations. In the resulting international tension, what can the League of Nations do? At most it may serve to some extent as an organisation through which wars over minor differences may be avoided, the rival powers bargaining with each other with the threat of war in the background but without going to war. Beyond this point the League cannot go. It cannot escape from the limitations imposed by capitalism. When major capitalist interests are involved the Powers cannot be prevented from using their armed forces to decide the vital issue of capitalist supremacy. Thus Japan and then Germany defied and renounced the League. Thus Italy waged war on Abyssinia, "with the League, without the League, or against the League," as Mussolini phrased it. Thus Britain and any other Power will use the League, ignore it or defy it, as interests and comparative military strength dictate. As regards Great Britain the League has already been used by the ruling class. Conscious of the need to have working class support for rearmament and any possible war, and aware of the widespread sympathy with the League idea, the Government has made it clear that in any future war concerning British capitalist interests care will be taken to present the war as a "League of Nations" war. In the task of deluding the working class into supporting the war by raising false issues, the League will be an even bigger and better bluff than was "Poor little Belgium." The Labour Party has declared its attachment to the League doctrine of so-called collective security, and the Minister of War, Mr. Duff-Cooper, has met their point of view by saying in the House of Commons on 12 March, 1936, that "if ever we are involved in a war again on the Continent ... it will be a war ... on behalf of and in support of the principles of collective security ..." (Hansard, 12 March, 1936, col. 2356). The Labour Party is thus already trapped in the capitalist net of war.

One of the factors which confuse the issue and prevent many workers from seeing that the League of Nations is being used by the big powers for their own, capitalistic, purposes, is that Russia, after years of denunciation, recently joined the League. In self-justification the Russian leaders say that it is necessary in the interests of the whole world that Russia shall be saved from attack by Germany and Japan. Entry into the League in the view of the Russian Government gives Russia added security. So, having decided on that course they had no hesitation in renouncing their former propaganda against the League. The next step was the pact between the French and Russian Governments pledging mutual assistance against German aggression – a return to the pre-war treaty system, which divided Europe into two hostile camps.

The Socialist has no hesitation in rejecting the argument that because Russia is in the League the workers should be prepared to support a war involving Russia, waged in accordance with the League doctrine of collective security. In the first place, the Socialist Party of Great Britain does not accept the claim that Russia, under Bolshevik rule, is Socialist, or is moving on to Socialism. The State-controlled capitalism which exists in Russia possesses all the main features of capitalism elsewhere, although in a less developed form (the wage system, production for sale at a profit, bondholding, unequal standards of living for the privileged and the ordinary worker, etc.). It is not possible for such a system to be developed directly into Socialism, even if those in power single-mindedly desired that development. Russia has to go through the normal stages of economic progress, and only an independent Socialist movement from below, acting in association with the Socialist movement outside Russia, can achieve Socialism. The working class should apply to Russia the same test that should be applied to capitalism elsewhere when administered by so-called Labour or progressive Governments. The workers have no interest in engaging in wars between capitalist groups because such administrations are involved.

Regarding Russia's need for the support of Imperialist France and Imperialist Britain, that need itself reflects the gulf that has appeared between the Bolsheviks and the world working class. In 1918 Russia was defenceless from a military point of view, and had to yield to peace terms dictated by the German Generals. Yet the Bolsheviks of that time behaved with dignity and courage, strong in their faith in the working class in the warring countries. Although Lenin and his associates were wrong in assuming that Socialist revolution would take place throughout the world, their proclamations addressed to working class solidarity had effect in undermining the allegiance of the German and other workers to their capitalist-militarist Governments. How different is the attitude of the Bolshevik Government now.

Russia now is a great power, has the biggest army and air force in Europe, and is moving – or so we are told – in a great triumphal progress of industrial development and political and economic

consolidation. That is what gives the gesture of seeking the aid of foreign capitalist Governments its significance.

What we are witnessing in fact is the disintegration of Bolshevism as an idea. The Russian Government, though outwardly all-powerful, is inwardly hesitant and uncertain. Instead of facing the world sure of their power and ultimate victory, the Bolsheviks have lost their faith. They have come to terms with capitalism as an economic system. They are adjusting themselves to the world of capitalist diplomacy, military alliances, pacts of defence and offence, and theories of the balance of power.

In the Statutes and Conditions of Affiliation to the Communist International (the so-called Twenty-one Points), adopted at the Second Congress, Moscow, 1920, we find set out in harsh unmistakable terms the original Bolshevik creed. In 1920 "heavy civil war" was the Communist road to power in all countries; the Communist International proclaimed "its duty to support, by all the power at its disposal, every Soviet Republic, wherever it may be formed". It is a far cry from that belligerent utterance to the passivity of the Russian Government in recent years in face of the plight of German and Austrian workers' organisations.

Now Russia pledges her military aid to French capitalism, and is plainly desirous of a similar pact with British capitalism.

In 1920 the "Twenty-one Points" of the Communist International imposed on affiliated parties the following rigid course of conduct. They had to

"renounce not only avowed social-patriotism, but the false and hypocritical social-pacifism as well. They must systematically demonstrate to the workers that without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism neither international arbitration nor conferences regarding the limitation of armaments, nor the 'democratic' reorganisation of the League of Nations will be capable of saving mankind from new imperialist wars."

More recently, in 1929, the British Communists were demanding "repudiation of the League of Nations as a capitalist and imperialist institution." (See *Class against Class*, published by the Communist Party of Great Britain.) Now Russia is encouraging all the illusions it formerly rejected. Although the whole Bolshevik conception of a Communist revolution in Russia was founded on a misreading of the condition of the world working class movement their former attitude of hostility to the capitalist League of Nations was in line with the Socialist position, and their present attitude of support for the League does not constitute a reason why the workers should abandon working-class interests and Socialist principles in order to support capitalist war waged under the false banner of the League. False and dangerous though it was on other grounds, Lenin's slogan that imperialist war should be turned into civil war, had behind it an idea in keeping with the Socialist attitude, and in direct conflict with the new Bolshevik doctrine which requires Communists outside Russia to advocate the League of Nations and to support the military actions of their Governments against the countries with which Russia may find herself at war.

CHAPTER VIII: The Italo-Abyssinian War

Although outwardly the attack of powerful Italy on weak and backward Abyssinia differs from the clash of interests between great powers, it calls for no departure from the Socialist attitude outlined in the preceding sections of this pamphlet. Here, as elsewhere, the quarrel was between the ruling class of one country and the ruling class of another over the right to exploit the population.

Why Mussolini's Government sought the war is to be explained on the usual grounds.

Notwithstanding Fascist promises of a new economic system, industry in Italy is conducted on the usual capitalist lines of capitalist concerns seeking profit in competition with the rest of the capitalist world. Italy lacks home supplies of essential raw materials, including coal and cotton, and must therefore buy them abroad. In times of active trade this presents no special difficulty, the money coming from exports and from the tourist traffic and remittances sent home by Italian emigrants in U.S.A., South America, etc. In times of world trade depression, however, these two activities (tourist traffic and remittances) are sharply curtailed. Italian industry and Government finances are consequently badly hit during every world trade depression. In the depression of 1896 Italy sought markets and raw materials by waging war on Abyssinia, but was defeated. In 1935 history repeated itself, but with a difference. Mussolini sought an outlet by a further war, which would, he hoped, provide cotton and other raw materials, markets for Italian goods, and land for a certain number of settlers. This time Italy won. (It may be noticed in passing that the development of cotton

growing in Abyssinia will aggravate the existing over-production of cotton in relation to the effective demand for it under capitalism; it can be seen, therefore, that the war waged by the Italian Government was not due to simple economic causes, i.e., supplying a need of the human race, but was solely an outcome of capitalism, of the lust for profit in a world divided into rival capitalist groups.)

Abyssinia is reputed also to contain undeveloped mineral resources – oil, gold, copper, potash and platinum, which are additional attractions for the Italian capitalists.

There were doubtless still other reasons for the Italian aggression. The workers' early enthusiasm for Fascism began to wear off long ago, and this was hastened when it was seen that Mussolini had no cure for the evils of the most recent trade depression. Strikes and demonstrations occurred, some directed against the war, and Mussolini, like Crispi before him in 1896, thought of victory in war as a means of regaining popular support. While claiming that the country was united solidly behind him his Government took the precaution of imposing drastic control of the frontier passes into Switzerland with the twofold object of preventing the escape of deserters from the army and of preventing the importation of anti-war and anti-Fascist propaganda, journals and leaflets.

Yet Mussolini's appeals to the Italian workers to sacrifice their lives in a ruling-class quarrel were paralleled by those of the Emperor Haile Selassie. Although Abyssinia had made only small advances towards capitalist industrialism, and that only in limited areas, it had its evils no less than those of the capitalist powers. Chattel slavery still existed, and was only slowly giving place to wage-slavery. There was desperate poverty on the one hand, face to face with the wealth and power of the ruling class on the other. It is true, as the Emperor said, "that throughout their history they have seldom met with foreigners who did not desire to possess themselves of Abyssinian territory, and to destroy their independence," but independence meant no more to the subject class in Abyssinia than it does elsewhere. Moreover, much of the tribal territory held by Abyssinia was itself seized by the Emperor and his predecessors by force of arms, and was being held by force against the wishes of the local population: It is one of the ironies of the situation that just as Mussolini was afraid of discontented workers at his back, so the Emperor had to take extreme precautions that the arms he imported did not fall into the hands of his own unwilling subjects who would use them to revolt against him.

Although it is claimed by his admirers that the courage and dignity of the Emperor marked him out sharply, not only from the Fascist braggart, but also from many of the European statesmen who pretended to condemn the latter, the Emperor's cause was not that of the exploited resisting the exploiter. That idea was as baseless as Mussolini's claim that it was a "poor man's war," a war for the Italian workers. The war concerned the interests of two ruling class groups, and was therefore not a quarrel calling for working-class intervention.

Haile Selassie's command over the kind of phrases to delude his subjects into lighting their master's wars was hardly less than that of Mussolini himself: "He who dies for his country is a happy man" – "It is better to die free than live as slaves" (decidedly inappropriate in a country where there were many chattel slaves) – "God will be our shield. United with God, our ramparts and our shields will face tomorrow's invader with confidence ... Your sovereign will be in your midst and will not hesitate to shed his blood for Ethiopia. If no peaceful solution is found Ethiopia will struggle to the last man for existence."

The religious note will be better understood when it is remembered that the Abyssinian priesthood owned one-third of the total land and were immensely influential.

Many of the other Governments had direct or indirect interest in the situation. The Abyssinian Government had for many years tried to insure itself against occupation by one Power by giving contracts and concessions to several different countries. America, France, Japan, England, Belgium, Germany and Egypt were among the countries with trading or other important interests. Owing, however, to the complications of the European situation – in particular, the aim of keeping Austria apart from Germany, for which Italy's aid was considered at that time to be essential – and of overawing Germany, England and France were not overmuch disturbed at the idea of an Italian conquest of part of Abyssinia, provided, however, that their own interests were safeguarded, along with Egypt's interest in Lake Tana, from which the Nile flows. The Japanese also had interests at stake, and their Government accordingly allowed influential Japanese organisations to work up an agitation against Italy on account of the proposed "violation of international law and justice." The Japanese Government, which used the same methods in Manchuria and is now using them in China proper, affected to be horrified that Italy should do the same in Abyssinia!

A factor which caused misgivings in many capitals was that any Abyssinian success would cause increased unrest among native populations throughout all the colonies in Africa.

The speedy and sweeping Italian victory undoubtedly alarmed the British Government and led to much friction, but it is noteworthy that Sir S. Hoare, then Foreign Secretary, right at the outset laid it down that Italy has a right to “expand,” i.e., to conquer the territory of other nations (Hansard, 11 July, 1935), thus paving the way for the ensuing shameless betrayal of the Abyssinian ruler by Britain and the League.

It is also worth remembering that, in order to buy Italy off, the British Government offered to give away some British territory in Somaliland without asking the local inhabitants or the population at home, and that Italian statesmen contend that Abyssinia was included in the “blood money” promised to Italy by Britain and her Allies during the Great War as the price for deserting Germany.

What attitude did the Labour Party and other organisations adopt to the Abyssinian War? With their incurable weakness for sentimental phrases they discovered here another “Poor little Belgium” being attacked by a wicked aggressor. They entirely failed to understand the Socialist case that no working-class interest was involved justifying war. Accordingly they wanted to take sides with the Abyssinian ruling class against the Italians. The I.L.P., while denouncing the Communists for their support of the League of Nations and of “Sanctions,” were equally confused concerning the purely ruling-class character of the struggle. They wanted working-class “Sanctions,” i.e., a boycott of the manufacture and transport of arms and munitions of war, directed however only against the Italian ruling class (*New Leader*, 19 July, 1935). The I.L.P. had no objection to helping the Abyssinian ruling class to drive its conscript soldiers to death and mutilation. The Labour Party backed the Abyssinian Emperor, just as in 1914 it backed the Belgian ruling class. The Labour Party organ the “Daily Herald” actually published the following from their correspondent in Abyssinia (24 July, 1935):-

“It seems as if all that remains for the Abyssinians to do now is to sharpen their spears, clean their rifles and hope that Europe will let them buy ammunition, *So that it may be a fair fight.*” (Italics ours.)

Could anything better illustrate the hopelessly non-Socialist attitude of the *Daily Herald*? Here was a war about to take place between the exploiting class of two countries, the only difference being that one of them was more developed industrially than the other. The organ of the Labour Party hoped that the slaughter of workers about a question which was not worth the life of a single one of them would be conducted on a “fair” basis, the only possible result of which would be that the killing would be prolonged! That indeed is what occurred. The lives lost on both sides achieved nothing for the exploited in either country.

The Labour Party and Communists supported League action and the imposition of Sanctions. The Communists put up thousands of posters throughout the country demanding, among other things, the closing of the Suez Canal, although they knew quite well that this might mean war. They denounced the British and other Governments for not imposing more drastic Sanctions against Italy. Their new doctrine led them to accept without a qualm that workers should engage in war under League of Nations auspices; and it may be remarked that the Russian Government, in spite of its claim that it is guided by different principles from those of other Governments, did not behave essentially differently in the Abyssinian dispute. Shipments of Russian oil to Italy were continued, on the familiar capitalist plea that unless oil sanctions were imposed some other country would supply oil if Russia withdrew from her contracts. Also M. Litvinov, Russian representative at Geneva, followed the lead of Britain and France on the question of raising Sanctions after the defeat of the Abyssinian forces. The following is an extract from M. Litvinov’s speech at the League assembly on 1 July, 1936. (See *Manchester Guardian*, 2 July, 1936.)

“It appears indubitable that by economic sanctions alone it is impossible to drive the Italian army out of Abyssinia and restore the independence of the latter, and that such an objective can only be attained by more serious sanctions, including those of a military nature.

“Such measures could only be considered if one or several States could be found which in virtue of their geographical position and special interests would agree to bear the main brunt of a military encounter.

“Such States were not to be found among us, and, even if they had been found, the other States before deciding on any particular degree of co-operation in serious measures would require guarantees that similar co-operation could also be counted upon in other cases of suppressing the aggressor.

“Such guarantees are all the more necessary because some actions and statements of one European State whose aggressive intentions leave no room for doubt – indeed, are openly proclaimed by that State itself – indicate an accelerated rate of preparation for aggression in more than one direction.”

The attitude of some countries to these actions and the lenient treatment accorded to their authors shook the belief that these guarantees could be immediately secured.

“In these circumstances I came to the conclusion, even during the May session of the Council, that further application of economic sanctions was useless and that it was impossible to afford any practical aid to Abyssinia in this way. It seems that these conclusions have been reached by nearly all the members of the League.”

The Socialist Party of Great Britain's attitude was quite unlike that taken up by the Labour Party, Communists and I.L.P. Socialists do not take sides in ruling-class quarrels. A story told of the Viennese during the battle of Sadowa is more in line with what should be the working-class attitude. At that battle, which occurred in 1866, the Prussians and the Austrians were fighting out the issue as to which of the two groups should dominate the German States and Central Europe. It is said of the Viennese that, while the battle was in progress, they went on dancing, “as if it did not matter which side won.” They were right, it did not matter. Not all the apologists for capitalism and war could point to any tangible loss suffered by the mass of the Austrian population because Austria lost the battle and the war. Nor could they show any tangible gain to the Prussian workers through the victory.

The overpowering of the Abyssinians by the greater armed might of Italy, the slaughter of tens of thousands of almost unarmed tribesmen – both soldiers and civilians – the destruction of defenceless towns by thousands of bombs rained down by Italian airmen, the onslaughts with gas and liquid fire showed up in strong relief the futility of the attitude of those who trust in the League of Nations. While making a gesture of opposition to Italy by imposing the less effective Sanctions the League remained in fact under the control of the great Powers, England and France, both of which were thinking of their own capitalist interests in Abyssinia, the Mediterranean and elsewhere, and of the problems caused by a re-armed Germany refortifying the Rhineland. As the Emperor afterwards said the French Government was secretly committed to helping Italy (*The Times*, 1 July, 1936).

Overshadowing the whole issue was the fact that no workers, whether in Abyssinia, Italy or the other League countries, had any interest in the purposes for which the Abyssinian-Italian war was fought. It is a question of minor importance to the exploited in Abyssinia or any other country whether they are exploited by Italian, Abyssinian or other seekers for profit. Even in secondary matters there was nothing to choose between the two groups. Abyssinian official life was as corrupt as that of any of the more advanced countries. It was revealed that one of the Abyssinian War Lords, Ras Desta, son-in-law of the Emperor and Commander-in-Chief of one of the armies, “was more interested in money-making than in fighting the Italians.” For months after the outbreak of the war he had been making handsome profits from the sale of arms and ammunition to his own troops” (*News Chronicle*, 11 February, 1936).

CHAPTER IX: The Fight for Socialism

It will be seen from the foregoing chapters of this pamphlet that the attitude of the Socialist Party is fundamentally different from that of other parties, whether Liberal or Tory, Labour or Communist. The working class have nothing to gain by victory and nothing to lose by defeat of sufficient importance to call for the shedding of working-class blood. All the pleas for supporting capitalist wars, however seductively phrased, are based on falsehood as far as the working class is concerned. For us the cry must not be national defence but INTERNATIONAL WORKING-CLASS SOLIDARITY.

For Socialists the urgent necessity of our era is the solution of the poverty problem. It can be solved only by the establishment of Socialism as the international social system. Beside that all else pales into insignificance, for the problem of security against War is part of the same social problem. Without the abolition of capitalism there can be no economic security for the working class and there can be no guarantee against the outbreak of devastating wars through the rivalries of national groups of profit seekers.

Wars have the baneful effect of veiling the class struggle by developing a false sense of identity between exploiters and exploited in each country. There is no danger or evil common to capitalist and

worker that war can banish. The interests of the two classes are always antagonistic and remain so in war and peace.

SOCIALISM MUST BECOME THE SINGLE AIM OF A POLITICALLY-ORGANISED WORKING CLASS. THEN CAPITALISM AND WAR WILL BE NO MORE.