1937 Is Not 1914

BY I. F. STONE

THE opposition to American participation in efforts for collective security is sustained emotionally by the parallel between 1914 and 1937. "These same men and women who took a militant pacifist position until within the last year or two," Alfred Bingham wrote in his pamphlet "Beware of Europe's Wars," "... are putting their very considerable brains and influence to work to spread the idea over America that we must soon fight 'for democracy' again and once more against the same enemy, though he is labeled 'Nazism' instead of 'Prussian militarism' and his mustache is one inch long instead of four." The assumption that to be anti-fascist is to be for war against the fascist powers is unwarranted; the assumption that to be for collective security is to be for a new world war begs the question. But are three inches of mustache the chief difference between 1914 and 1937? The case against isolation does not rest upon this difference. It is nevertheless worth examination; it may not determine national policies, but it explains and justifies the attitude of most workers, liberals, and radicals to events abroad.

Fascism is not the same as Kaiserism. The Germany of 1914 was a constitutional monarchy with the most advanced social and labor legislation on the Continent and the largest Socialist Party in Europe. Its workers occupied perhaps not a privileged but at least a protected position in the state. The gains they had achieved were so considerable as to make German Social Democracy, though still secretly revolutionary in its phraseology, reformist in its tactics and—as the outbreak of the war proved—nationalist in its outlook. The press was free, and the workers' press was powerful. It is hardly necessary to contrast these conditions with those existing in Germany today.

In the world of 1914 England and Germany strove for colonial expansion; Germany and France waited for another chance to settle their interminable and bloody accounts, the Austrian Empire watched the covert extension of Russian influence into the Balkans; England and Russia eyed each other over the borders of Persia and India; Japan and Russia felt that they would some day fight again in the Far East; Germany dreamed of Berlin to Baghdad; and all the great powers were anxious about the Bosphorus. There had just been a scramble in Africa and a crisis in Morocco. There were pan-Germans, pan-Slavs, pan-Moslems, and there was the British Empire. There was also dollar diplomacy. The time had come for the great imperialist war, although the peace movement was active and confident and, as the foundation of the Hague tribunal and the speeches of Theodore Roosevelt after Portsmouth and Algeciras showed, many saw clearly that in a world in which trade was international, law would have to be international too.

Much of 1914 is still with us in 1937; the similarities must be a warning and a guide to us in groping for the international order the world needs more than ever today. But the differences as well as the similarities must play a part in our diagnosis. In 1914 the status quo was menaced by imperialism—a world Samson, grooping blindly to obtain wider fields for productive forces choked by national boundaries. The disturbing force in the world of 1937 is fascism, capitalism's misbegotten offspring, crushing individual freedom, gagging the press, extending the methods of a Pennsylvania coal-company town to whole nations, treating whites in European nations as imperialists have been accustomed to treat black, brown, red, and yellow men in "backward countries," destroying the labor unions, bringing labor and capital both under the sway of a war machine run by demagogic adventurers who plunder the capitalism they protect as a gangster plunders the merchants he forces into a "protection" association. The effect on foreign policy hardly requires repetition. A movement that uses the slogans of autarchy, self-containment, isolation so reduces domestic purchasing power as to make foreign markets all the more necessary. The war machine consumes more and more steel; the people eat less and less bread. Tightened belts at home raise the pressure for war, the classic last resort of hard-pressed dictatorships.

Imperialism bred war in 1914; fascism breeds war in 1937. But fascism makes war at home as well as abroad, on its own people as well as on the foreigner. The Germany of 1914 sought, as does the Germany of 1937, to weld Germans abroad closer to the mother country; the Germany of 1914 dreamed, as does the Germany of 1937, of a greater Germany. But the Germany of 1937 and the Italy of 1937 have new weapons. There is first the virus of anti-Semitism, a powerful national disintegrant. Injected into the democratic powers, it sets Frenchman against Frenchman, Englishman against Englishman, American against American, weakens a nation by fomenting a miniature civil war. There is, second, the bogey of communism. Fascism frightens dominant classes in the democracies with the hobgoblin, then offers them protection—at a price. Germans abroad in 1914 were a potential nucleus of spies and saboteurs, though patriotism forbade citizens of foreign countries to help them, limited their usefulness. But Germans or Italians in other countries in 1937 form a nucleus of explosive possibilities. Such nuclei can train and direct native fascist parties, as they are doing today in many Latin American countries and beginning to do in this country. They have
something to sell big business: a way to destroy labor unions, the hope of ending the annoyances of democracy, a method for diverting attention from real problems to imaginary ones. That the business man thus exchanges the necessity of dealing with his employees as human beings for the yoke of a magnified gangsterism should be apparent to all, fascist propaganda, nevertheless, often succeeds in glossing it over, especially in times of social crisis.

It is the top and not the bottom of democratic society which now begins to show lack of patriotism. When the German government permitted Lenin and Trotsky to go in a sealed train across Germany into Russia, it hoped to use workers and peasants tired of patriotism, czarist style, to end the war on the eastern front. But the German government of 1937 is using the "unpatriotic" potentialities not of the working class but of sections of big banking and big business against the national and imperial interests of their own countries. The cash register never did march to the front trenches, and fascism cultivates for all it is worth the innate imperviousness of money to sentiment. Is it thinkable that the Britain of 1914 would have permitted the Germany and the Italy of 1914 to do what they are doing today in Spain, or what they will do tomorrow in Czechoslovakia? A Tory government, representing Britain's ruling class of bankers, merchants, and industrialists, is betraying imperialist interests. The fear of Rio Tinto mine owners that a Spanish republic may force them to pay higher wages while a fascist-dominated Spain will conveniently rid them of labor unions proves stronger than the fear that German and Italian rather than British capital may dominate the peninsula, that imperial lines of communication in the Mediterranean may be rendered unsafe, that Great Britain's hold on the Near, Middle, and Far East may be weakened.

The menace of fascism does not represent a mere change in label or in length of mustache. The progress of technology is its ally. John Dos Passos in his introduction to Mr. Bingham's pamphlet comforts himself with the thought that the Atlantic is a "good wide ocean," but the Italian squadron that set out recently to bomb Valencia was the same squadron that flew to Chicago; what geography put asunder the Wright brothers have joined together.

The rise of fascism marks 1937 off from 1914; so does the rise of the Soviet Union. The Russia of 1914 was a decayed, semi-feudal, absolutist monarchy with faded constitutional trimmings, corrupt to its core. From this gangrenous organism exuded the characteristic odor of all dying Western civilizations—anti-Semitism. The Russia of 1937, though still in many respects absolutist, as all Russian government has been for centuries, is nevertheless the scene of the greatest social experiment of our time. Under the most difficult circumstances—lack of capital, lack of literacy, lack of international security—its ruling party is seeking to transform the most backward of the great European nations into the most advanced. The working and peasant classes of the U. S. S. R. are still poverty-stricken as compared with American, but not with czarist or Balkan, workers. There is only one party, but the introduction of the secret ballot offers workers and peasants a weapon against bureaucratic and inefficient officials and their policies. The establishment of a constitution which moves, at least formally, toward the adoption of democratic practices has been followed—after the assassination of an outstanding government official—by a hunt for and extermination of suspected dissident elements that has left the outside world bewildered. But the forces set in motion in Russia cannot permanently be halted. We all have an interest in that experiment, in its failures as well as in its achievements, for we can learn lessons from it that may save many lives and much anguish in the West. There we can see the defects of socialism as here we can see the defects of capitalism. The rise of fascism is the one stumbling-block to a policy that would seek carefully and gradually to avoid both.

The Russian Revolution likewise had its reflection in the sphere of international relations. A feudal-capitalist Russia was forced to look abroad for new fields of exploitation, its millions of ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed peasants and workers a tremendous potential market, but a market it could not tap without the overthrow of czarism. Socialist Russia, whatever its shortcomings, is too busily engaged in striving to develop its resources and industries and in raising its standards of living to need foreign adventures. Its army is defensive. Its agencies of propaganda have been muffled, as the ardor of revolution has been replaced by the desire for peace and reconstruction. The rise of fascism in Germany has led the Communist doctrinaires to abandon their intransigent position of the past—a position that helped Hitler to power in Germany—and to seek the help of democratic countries in maintaining international peace and of liberal and Socialist parties in preventing the destruction of democracy in the West under the impact of fascism.

It is true that the slogans and battle cries of this period echo those of 1914, but this does not mean that the situation is the same. The cry is again "make the world safe for democracy," but the cry has more substance behind it. No Social Democrats rise in the Reichstag to vote war credits; liberals and radicals of all nations have joined forces to aid Madrid, knowing that the barricades in Madrid also protect Prague and Paris, and even London and New York. The fascist powers have launched an international class war which they hope to make an instrument of conquest. They are a menace not only to imperial interests but to democracy itself, a possession that the rise of fascism has taught our sectarian radicals not to treat lightly. Fascism opens the way to social disorders far graver than those threatened by old-fashioned imperialism. The fascist preaches—and practices—the abandonment of the rationalism, the individual freedom, the free institutions that were capitalism's accompaniment and, with increased productive capacity, its historic justification. Fascism threatens democracy as it threatens the world's first experiment in socialism.

It may be true, as Mr. Bingham says, that "anti-Nazi sentiment in America today has become a weapon in the
hands of the Soviet Foreign Office." It is equally true that anti-Communist sentiment, much of it directed against people who are not Communists, has become a weapon in the hands of the German Foreign Office. But the Soviets hope that anti-fascist feeling in the democratic countries will help to hold the fascist powers in check and preserve peace; the Nazis mobilize anti-Communist opinion to make war. Progressives and radicals of all shades and varieties have learned not to allow the red-baiters to split their forces at home. They must learn the same lesson abroad. Berlin does not hide its contempt for the democracies: "stupid cows" Goebbels calls them. The European democracies themselves, caught between their national interests and the pro-fascist feeling all too common among their upper classes, fumble and falter as fascism advances. Today it is Madrid. Tomorrow it will be Prague. How long before it knocks at our own doors? The experience of the Spanish republic shows that when that time comes there will be only one place to which anti-fascists can look for aid in the event that they must fight for their liberties and their lives. I shall not mention the bogeyman by name.

Right Turn in Canada

BY JAMES McNEIL

Ottawa, October 15

I T WILL probably be startling news to John L. Lewis to learn that he was given a vigorous rebuff by the loyal British voters of Ontario, and that Premier Mitchell F. Hepburn, by his victory in the Ontario provincial elections on October 6, saved Canada from a surge of "American lawlessness," from a Lewis-led invasion of "foreign agitators," and even from an armed rebellion of 15,000 Communists inspired not only by Comrade Stalin but also, according to Mr. Hepburn's press, by President Roosevelt. But however spurious the issues of the campaign, the results are unmistakable. Mr. Hepburn, who has been in office as provincial Premier since 1934, was returned to power with 67 seats out of 90. His Conservative opponents carried 23 seats, an increase of only 5. The 65 labor, farmer-labor, Canadian Commonwealth Federation, and Communist candidates, running under various labels and often against one another, won not a single seat. The C. C. F., Canada's socialist party, lost its one sitting member, and but a single labor candidate, a Communist, came within sight of election.

As Ontario elects 82 of the 245 members in the federal House of Commons, the results of this swing to the right will be felt not in one province only but in the whole of Canada. Mr. Hepburn has been given a powerful claim to a decisive voice in the councils of the national Liberal Party and no mean leverage with which to lift himself into the seats of the mighty at Ottawa. His strengthened position is not welcome to the national Liberal leaders, who have several times rebuffed the provincial Liberal Party, and until the final stages of the campaign no federal Liberal minister lent his aid in Ontario. Mr. Mackenzie King, the national Prime Minister and Liberal leader, must now either conciliate his rising subordinate in the party or anticipate a challenge at the next national elections some two years hence. Mr. King for the time is safely in power, but he has been leader since 1919 and Prime Minister three times. Under such circumstances Mr. Hepburn may well be ambitious to succeed him either within or without the fold of the present Liberal Party.

Mr. Hepburn's victory was due not only to improved business conditions and his ruthless use of the C. I. O. as a bogey, but to the alliance he effected between the mining-capitalist groups exploiting the north country and the farmers who control the vote in some sixty of the ninety Ontario constituencies. Improved business conditions enabled him to show buoyant revenues, a budget surplus, and lower taxation; the C. I. O. bogey served a useful tactical purpose; but Mr. Hepburn's real power came from this alliance of the mining interests and the rural vote. The farmers, who have no political organization or press of their own, were the unwitting and sleeping partners of the union, but their votes were decisive. The mining interests, with some support from the timber, pulp, and paper groups, which are owned in part by American capital, provided the necessary sinews of war for campaign expenses and newspaper propaganda.

While this alliance was the key to the victory, the campaign was based on monumental misrepresentation of Lewis and the C. I. O., beginning with Mr. Hepburn's theatrical intervention in the strike of the General Motors workers at Oshawa in the spring. The C. I. O. was presented to the public as a new "American invasion," and one newspaper solemnly compared the legal entry of international union organizers into Canada with the Fenian raids of the last century, in which a few Irish-Americans started a little war of their own on Canadian soil. John L. Lewis was portrayed as a lawless political gangster raiding the pay envelopes of the innocent Canadian workers and threatening the peace, order, and good government of Ontario and of all Canada. Everywhere the red hand of Moscow was seen, and the Premier himself stooped several times to repeat that Oshawa was to be the signal for the revolt of 15,000 Communists.

Such a campaign of conscious fabrication could not delude all the electors, and the facts slowly worked some change in Mr. Hepburn's alarmist approach. There had been no lawlessness at Oshawa or in any other industrial
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