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## The Naval Bill and a Peace Program

LAST week Maury Maverick made a speech in the House, in which his main point was the declaration that the Communists are for the Naval Appropriations Bill. Later, to substantiate his point, he gave the *New York Times* some extracts from my speech in Chapel Hill to the Carolina Political Union.\*

Certainly we Communists have criticized, and continue to do so, Maverick's way of fighting the big naval appropriations. But we have never endorsed the enormous naval proposals, directly or indirectly. Our friend Maury was indulging in a little old-fashioned demagogy when he made that speech. Of course, something must be forgiven a man who is in a tough spot, who feels the ineffectiveness of his arguments, and who, therefore, is casting about desperately for new points which will appeal to the prejudices of his audience. In Congress, as in the New York Assembly at Albany, there seems to be a majority ready to outlaw the multiplication table if it can be proved that the Communists have endorsed it. Since the small Communist Party endorses the United States Constitution, these gentlemen have been deeply embarrassed; they have stopped talking about the Constitution for fear they might be suspected of having established secret connections with the Communists.

Maverick's pleasantries, however, cannot hide the deep seriousness of the problem that is posed, when he and other progressives abdicate the field of foreign policy in favor of the reactionaries. Maverick and Senator LaFollette, by their stand

\* See pp. 39-54.

on the question of peace and how to maintain it, are decisively strengthening the hands of the reactionary forces which they fight against so admirably on domestic questions.

Maverick and LaFollette are, to do them exact justice, not leaders of isolationism so much as its victims. Neither of them has contributed any independent thought to the question, but rather they reproduce and express the isolationist moods and prejudices of their particular social backgrounds. Neither is a "convinced" isolationist as yet, in the deeper sense of having thought the question through to its end, faced all the consequences, and finally adopted isolationism knowing what inevitably flows from it. This fact gives us a right to hope that neither of them are as yet lost to the camp of concerted action for peace. Both of them, surely, will review the whole question again when their constituents back home swing over to a positive peace policy. In this sense they are practical men.

Senator LaFollette, for example, certainly did not know when he spoke on March 6 in New York at an "isolationist" meeting, that the organizer of that meeting, Bertram D. Wolfe, is a member of the Lovestone group, which is connected with the Bukharin group that admitted its organic relations with the Japanese secret service. He surely did not notice that, from the same platform with him, Wolfe gave out the slogan calling for the defeat of America in any conflict with Japan. Norman Thomas was there with full knowledge, but LaFollette was in the fullest sense an "innocent" on all these things.

Congressman Maverick is reported to have passed the judgment on Norman Thomas, not long ago, that "he insists, on principle, upon always being in a minority." But the same criticism seems to have a special application to Maverick himself, when he throws his influence on the side of isolation, and thus builds up the very foundation of the big navy advocates, and then, to save his conscience, fights against the big navy

bill which his isolationism has helped make certain of adoption by an overwhelming majority.

No one doubts that the overwhelming majority of the American people are for peace, against war. But at the same time an equally large majority, if Congress is an even approximate measure, approves the big naval appropriations. The reason for this is the fact that the United States actually stands alone in the world, without as yet any practical program of collaboration with other peace forces in the world, and without any program for making its own influence felt in restraining the war-makers, but, on the contrary, a practical program which is encouraging and helping the war-makers. So long as the United States stands alone, and is itself contributing to the war danger in the world, the simple common sense of the masses will continue to align them behind the big navy advocates as the obvious answer to the war-making forces that threaten world peace.\*

Maverick is opposed to the proposed enormous increase of the navy. So are we of the Communist Party. Maverick has a splendid opportunity to reach the ear of the country with his position in Congress as Democratic leader of the progressives, in a Democratic Congress, while we of the Communist Party are a small and persecuted group, able to reach no ears except through our own limited channels. And yet I venture to say that, despite our handicaps, the Communists are convincing ten times as many people to oppose the big naval increase as Maverick can convince. That is because we, first of all, undermine and destroy the prejudices of isolationism which are at the foundation of the big navy idea, while Maverick supports isolation but stops short only of its logical consequence in the naval appropriations.

Let this much be clear. The naval bill is the inevitable con-

\* Compare p. 206 ff. for the development of this question following the Munich betrayal of September-October, 1938.

clusion to the policy of "neutrality" and isolation, that still remains the practical foreign policy of the United States. No matter how much we Communists vote together with the Mavericks against a big navy, so long as isolation remains our practical foreign policy the vast expansion of the navy will be carried over our dwindling votes. But to the degree that all progressives, including the Communists, can swing the country to a practical policy of concerted action for peace, to that extent we also organize the masses to cut naval and military expenditures by making them obviously unnecessary.

There is still much confused thinking, caused by confusion as to what is really the policy of the United States government. Some people think that because President Roosevelt made a strong speech for concerted action to restrain the war-makers on October 5, 1937, at Chicago, therefore the policy of the United States government is no longer an isolationist policy. And because last Thursday, Secretary of State Hull made an international radio broadcast along these same lines, they become confirmed in their impression. But, unfortunately, it is not true.

Roosevelt's speech was a splendid contribution toward a change in policy—but it did not yet bring about the change. Hull's speech registered a continuing and growing determination to change—but the change is still not made. These speeches are, of course, also political acts in some degree, and influence the world, because they *promise* (or threaten!) to change American practical policy. But meanwhile—and this is the rub—practical policy remains isolationist.

And that is the central contradiction in the Roosevelt administration, from which spring a hundred paradoxes. The gap between word and deed becomes the more glaring, the more international relations sharpen, the more imminent becomes the war danger.



Litvinov spoke to the world also on Thursday, on behalf of the Soviet Union. He suggested an international conference to organize restraint of the war-makers. The spirit and direction of his declaration were in close harmony with the speech of Hull. No one can doubt that the entire Soviet Union is behind Litvinov's initiative with full strength. But Washington has not responded as yet to Moscow's proposal. The reason is this, that while Litvinov's speech represented the considered policy of the whole Soviet government and people, Hull's speech represented an *aspiration* toward a policy, while the practical policy being carried out is still the opposite.

This fact was dramatically emphasized by the simultaneous bombardment of Barcelona, with the killing and wounding of over four thousand people, mostly women and children, by German and Italian airplanes *carrying ammunition made in the United States*. In the same week boats sailed from Baltimore for Germany carrying two thousand additional aerial bombs, to replace those just dropped on Barcelona. Japanese and German boats continued to load and ship American scrap iron, for the making of shrapnel to kill Chinese and Spanish women and children. And at the same time President Roosevelt declared no move will be made to lift the embargo against the Spanish republic, even though it is in violation of our solemn treaty obligations to that nation.

The United States is every day helping the fascist war-makers in a practical way, while reading them moral lessons in speeches. The United States is denouncing the treaty breakers, but at the same moment is breaking its own treaty with the Spanish nation. The United States places an embargo against the weak and helpless victims of aggression, who could not threaten us if they would and who would not if they could, but it carefully refrains from an embargo against the strong aggressors, who threaten the peace of the whole world.

*What a picture of blatant hypocrisy all this must appear to the rest of the world! How the fascist war-makers must laugh at our moral lectures directed against them! And how low must our moral authority be falling among the peace-seeking peoples of the world, who know that America, among all nations, is the only one with the power to throw the scale one way or the other without having to resort to any warlike measures.*

With such contradiction between our expressed ideals of concerted action for peace, and our practical isolationism which is service to the fascist war-makers, the colossal naval expenditures proposed only create further confusion. Still worse, the fight for and against the naval bill is such as to perpetuate that confusion, taking attention away from the fundamental questions of foreign policy making for peace or war.

Reflecting and perpetuating this contradiction is the spectacle of many Congressional progressives, who are the best fighters for Roosevelt's domestic program, deserting the President on his proposals for a positive peace policy, thus throwing the decisive influence in foreign policy over to the reactionary side.

The only way out of this swamp is to organize the masses who favor concerted action for peace, arm them with a sharp and clear understanding of the issue, bring them to expression as aggressively and as clearly as the minority of convinced isolationists whose influence they must overcome, and show the Congressmen that it is just as practical politics, and maybe more so, to demand the execution of the President's Chicago speech as to oppose it. Wipe out the contradictions in American foreign policy, wipe out the contradictions between the line-up on foreign and domestic policy, implement the Kellogg Pact and the high ideals expressed by Roosevelt and Hull, accept the latest proposal of Litvinov—this is the road toward keeping

America out of war by keeping war out of the world. And this is the way, therefore, to render obviously unnecessary any enormous expansion of the war expenditures that burden the people.

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