

A Long-Term Policy

CONCERTED ACTION OR ISOLATION: WHICH IS THE PATH TO PEACE?

By Earl Browder

THE editors of the *New Republic*, together with some Socialist Party spokesmen, have recently defended their isolationist advocacy by speculating (in print) that the Communist Party will itself soon abandon its energetic support to a policy of concerted action. The utter unsoundness of that speculation is of a single piece with their whole isolationist position. The policy of concerted action for peace is not a short-time or emergency policy merely; it is valid for a whole period, and for all circumstances of that period, whether in the fight to prevent war or the fight to end a war already under way. The immediate practical aspects of such a policy may change from time to time, as some forces swing over from one side to the other, and as war is broadened or narrowed, but the essence of the policy is valid so long as war is the main danger to the world.

In saying this, of course, there is no intention to deny the *emergency* phase of the fight for peace today. These are truly critical days, when millions of lives hang in the balance, and when the balance may be turned one way or the other, accordingly as the United States turns decisively toward isolation or toward international coöperation for peace. The time is short for the masses of the United States to come to a conclusion—if they really desire to exercise their full potentialities for world peace. Time is the essence of the problem, and haste is needed as never before in history.

It is necessary, however, to dissolve once and for all the fatally mistaken notion that international coöperation for peace is a makeshift policy, hurriedly concocted for an emergency, which must at a moment's notice win full support of all its potential adherents or be dropped as a failure.

At this moment, the dangerous implications of such a short-sighted view are seen in the opinion, expressed by many shallow publicists, that the latest moves of the Chamberlain government at London, which take Britain another step away from concerted action for peace, and which strengthen the warmakers, become a signal of the bankruptcy of the policy of coöperation.

It is unfortunate that the short-sighted view seems to determine the practical course of the Washington Administration, however much President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull may reiterate their sound and correct ideas in general terms. The Administration had opened the door for the repeal or fundamental revision of the disastrous "Neutrality Act," when it consented to the House Foreign Relations Committee opening hearings on the various bills directed to that end. But it suddenly

caused the cancellation of the hearings, when it learned of Chamberlain's latest pronouncement. It is clear that for all practical purposes the Administration is conditioning all its moves upon the leadership of England. The theory of "parallel action," which is at variance with the theory of international coöperation, is the theory that the United States must under no circumstances take the lead. It is a cowardly and dangerous theory, which is paralyzing American action at the most crucial moment, and doing incalculable damage to the world.

American policy at this moment is thus subordinated, in the most humiliating form, to dictation from Downing Street, London. And one of the ironic jokes of history is this, that precisely those who are most pleased by this are the men who have been wailing loudest against the policy of concerted action, on the grounds that it would subordinate us to British interests! This paradox reveals that the isolationists do not fear taking policy from London so long as the reactionary Chamberlain determines the policy, but they refuse to have agreement with London only if the Labor Party determines the policy.

That may be completely consistent for Hearst and Coughlin, for whom the British Labor Party is only another web of Stalin's "red network." But Norman Thomas, Frederick Libby, and Oswald Garrison Villard swallow the identical conclusion with equal equanimity. They are no more disturbed by their alliance with Chamberlain abroad, than they are by their hook-up with the most reactionary circles at home.

NORMAN THOMAS, especially, stands in an ambiguous position, for which he has offered the public not a word of explanation. He is National Chairman of the Socialist Party, affiliated with the Labor and Socialist International; his brother Socialists all over the world are fully committed to the policy of concerted action for peace, both as national parties and collectively through the Executive Committee of their International. But Thomas and his party in America fight for Chamberlain's line and against the line of the Labor Party, co-members with Thomas of the International. Thomas fights against the line of Blum, Socialist Premier of France, and against the line of the French Confederation of Labor, and for the line of the right-wing radicals who keep Blum's government paralyzed in relation to Spain. Thomas fights against the line of Negrin, Socialist Premier of Spain, and supports those elements who are trying to overthrow Negrin and his government. Thomas fights

against the line of the Scandinavian Socialist Parties, whose leaders participate in their governments and demand collective security. Thomas is in full and complete contradiction to the policy of every European Socialist Party and of the whole organized labor movement of Europe. But he remains in the same International with them, and offers not a single word of explanation to America. He fights against their official position—but in America he attributes this position only to the Communists and says he is against it because it is a "Russian" policy. *He never explains that he is fighting against the position upon which the world Socialist and Communist movements are agreed.* He never explains that his policy is not only isolation for the United States government, but also isolation for United States Socialists from their brothers in other lands. If he would frankly withdraw from the Labor and Socialist International, this would at least remove some of the worst hypocrisy, even if it would leave him in error as deeply as before.

Thomas may reply that his brothers abroad carry out their professed policy of international coöperation very poorly or even not at all. That is an entirely different issue. To the extent that they do execute their declared policy they are working for international unity and for peace, and the problem is to secure the execution of an established policy; but the more Thomas carries out his policy, the more is international unity disrupted and the cause of peace damaged, and the problem with Thomas is therefore to change his policy.

Roosevelt and Hull must be sharply criticized for allowing the reactionary maneuvers of Chamberlain to determine American policy. We must call upon them to have the courage of their own convictions. If Chamberlain, in control of British policy, does not agree with them, all the more reason for implementing their declared convictions together with those powers which do agree, without delay. The United States, which is in the most advantageous position of any nation, must assume the leadership, the responsibility which we inherit from our privileged position.

It is precisely against American leadership in the struggle for peace that the isolationists fight frenziedly, hysterically. Whenever this idea is broached, they immediately begin to tell us that the Americans are such nincompoops, so constitutionally inferior, such utter incompetents, that we cannot engage in a leading role in international affairs without being cheated out of our pants. They picture Uncle Sam as the country bumpkin who went to town once in 1917, bought a gold brick, and now must be kept strictly at home on the farm in

order to keep him from giving the old homestead away to the first sharper he meets.

Of course, this caricature of Uncle Sam is tempered by the assurance that if our brains are mush, at least our hearts are pure gold. If Europe has a monopoly upon intelligence, then America, they assure us, has a monopoly on virtue. But to keep our virtue, we must remain strictly at home behind our garden walls. We may continue to help the warmakers, but at all costs we must not help their victims or we are irretrievably lost. Such is the isolationist estimate of American character and intelligence.

If there was any truth in this gross caricature, then it might occur to even the most empty-headed of such a moron nation that perhaps we are predestined to fall victims to the devilish clever men of other lands, isolation or no. In such a case, the quicker we get some of those brains on our side the better, if we are really convinced we have no brains of our own.

As for me, speaking as an American whose line can be traced back to 1680 in Virginia, and speaking also for the latest naturalized citizen, I would like to denounce this whole picture as a vile slander upon our people. It may be accurate for some of the degenerate sons and daughters of our "sixty families," who furnish most of the money for isolationist propaganda, but it has not the remotest resemblance to the American workers and farmers, and those middle classes who have not been corrupted by monopoly capital. Americans do not claim any monopoly upon virtue, and we hotly resent any idea that we are excluded from our share of intelligence. We can take care of ourselves, and hold up our end, anywhere and everywhere—provided we learn how to take care of our own reactionaries—and muddleheads—right here in America itself.

AMERICA must step forward. Litvinov, for the Soviet Union, after waiting long for an initiative from elsewhere, called for an international conference. If Roosevelt and Hull, for reasons of "practical politics"—that reason which produces so many impractical results—or reasons of prestige, cannot directly respond to that initiative, then let them take the initiative themselves. And if we want something practical to result, let the United States clear its own record a bit to win more international respect, by canceling the infamous "Neutrality Act," and adopting the O'Connell Peace Act, on the basis of which real coöperation is possible.

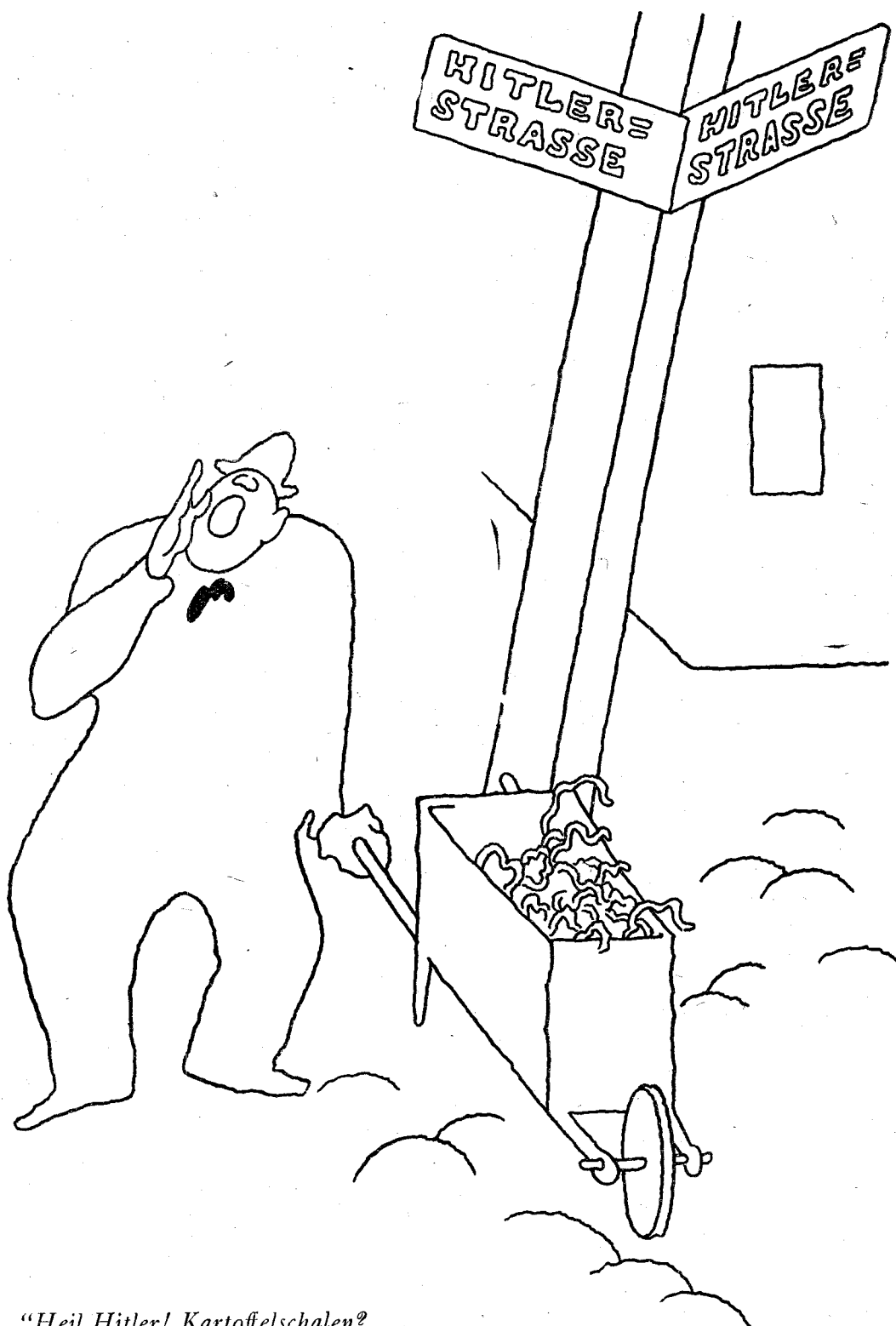
There are still some people who argue, concerted action was possible several years ago, as a practical measure, but now with so many great powers out of the League and others showing their contempt for it, this has become a Utopian project. That is the same thing as saying that concerted action for peace is practical, so long as there is no immediate danger of war. When war approaches as a serious prospect, they say, concerted action becomes impractical. That is of a piece with the logic

which assures us a certain remedy is very good so long as we are not sick, but as soon as we fall ill, it is dangerous to take it. It is precisely now, when every action or inaction is fraught with many dangers, that the peace-seeking peoples of the world must find the way to act together or face the consequence of going down together in a chaos of fascism and war.

To the degree that war spreads, to that degree does the policy of concerted action among the peace-seeking peoples become all the more important and necessary. This is a long-time policy, which must direct the fight for peace over a protracted period. It is the only road

for the prevention of war, and it is the only road for the ending of war already begun. Concerted action must begin at home, by the concerted voice and action of all our fighters for peace. President Roosevelt has indicated the correct policy in his speeches, but he still lacks the courage or the support necessary to put it into effect. Let us see that he does not fail for want of support.

This is the final article in Earl Browder's series on concerted action and isolation. The reader is referred to Mr. Browder's letter in Readers' Forum, page 21 of this issue.



"Heil Hitler! Kartoffelschalen?
Heil Hitler! Kartoffelschalen? . . ."

Gardner Rea

Who Is the Little Business Man?

By A. B. Magil

AN Associated Press dispatch from Washington in the March 17 issue of the *New York Times* states:

At least fifty organizations of small businessmen have sprung up since the February "little business" conference, officials of the Department of Commerce estimated today.

Literature received here indicated that the more active groups have platforms opposing chain stores and monopolies and seeking tax revision and more liberal credit.

Certain it is that the small businessmen, who are perhaps the least organized section of our population, are in need of some means of acting together for their common welfare. And the fact that opposition to monopoly abuses, tax relief, and the liberalization of credit are uppermost in the platforms of these organizations indicates that they are attempting to deal with the genuine problems of the small businessman. Yet it remains true that little businessmen, by their very position as small capitalists in a big capitalist economy, are particularly vulnerable to the pressure and seductions of the dominant finance-capitalist groups. And unless the labor and progressive movements establish contact with the organizations of small businessmen and assist them in the solution of their problems, they may become the dupes and catspaws of those very monopolies whose oppressive practices have brought them into existence.

The need for organizing the small businessmen along progressive lines has been emphasized by the developments at the little business conference in Washington. The implications of that conference were far-reaching. And it ineluctably posed the question: Can the small businessman be won to the struggle for the defense of democracy?—a question which Louis B. Boudin, in his review in the March 1 issue of the *NEW MASSES* of *The People's Front*, the new book by Earl Browder, has definitely answered in the negative.

It is to the credit of the Roosevelt Administration that by means of this conference it sought to give articulation to a section of the population that has hitherto had little voice in the nation's affairs. And it is no reflection on those who attended the conference that, brought together from various parts of the country, strangers to each other, without previous experience in organization and without sure guidance, their speech was at times muddled, their ideas contradictory, and their proposals too often an echo of those big business groups which have for so long dominated them.

Much that happened at the Washington conference still remains to be cleared up. The very concept, "small businessman," seems to have been expansively defined. An Associated Press dispatch in the *New York Times* of

February 3 quoted Administration spokesmen as unofficially defining a small businessman as anyone doing a gross business of less than \$1,000,000 a year and having fewer than 500 employees. This is generous indeed; and it would not be surprising if the corner grocer found it difficult to see eye to eye with anyone whose business approached this maximum limit. Jesse Jones, chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, went even further. He happens to be a wealthy Texas banker, but in addressing the conference he spoke "as a little businessman myself." And he defined little business as follows:

"Organizations like General Motors, Big Steel, and so forth are big business—the rest of us are little business." That would include corporations doing many millions of dollars' business a year.

The composition of the conference and of the committee that presented its program to President Roosevelt would seem to indicate, too, that the poorest sections of little business—small grocers, butchers, merchants, etc.—were very inadequately represented, the majority of the delegates being independent capitalists in industries that are not highly trustified, but which feel, nevertheless, the pressure of the monopolies. And the conferees came for the most part from the East, New York furnishing the largest delegation, with the South, where Roosevelt sentiment is strong, and the Far West very meagerly represented. (The committee of twelve that saw Roosevelt did not include a single delegate from the area west of Chicago.)

Nor did big business itself keep hands off the conference. The large employers evidently found it not too difficult to smuggle in their emissaries, particularly since the conference was held under the auspices of that sensitive refractor of the big business viewpoint, Secretary of Commerce Roper. Not all the confusion—which the press greatly exaggerated—could be attributed to deliberate disruption, but Fred Roth, chairman of the conference, was undoubtedly talking to the point when he charged that trouble-makers had been planted and their expenses paid.

The *Sunday Worker* of February 27 offered documentary proof that these trouble-makers were no imaginary bogies, and that their activities were not confined to creating disorder. It published a photostatic copy of a letter from E. T. Lay, executive secretary of the Associated Industries of Florida, Inc., affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers, boasting that he and J. C. McCorkhill, first vice-president of the Associated Industries, had attended the conference and "practically dictated and secured the adoption of the entire report opposing wages and hours legislation, and for the investigation

and amendment of the 'Wagner Labor Relations Act.'"

In view of these handicaps and the fact that the labor and progressive movements have as yet made few serious efforts to counteract the big business influences that surround the small businessmen, the surprising thing is not that the conference adopted a number of reactionary resolutions, but that it sounded so strong an anti-monopoly note. Yet Boudin, in his review of Browder's important book, cites the Washington conference in support of his thesis that little business is completely and irrevocably in the tow of big business, and, "if anything, may be expected to be more reactionary than big business—at least in intention."

Louis Boudin was one of the leading figures in the left wing of the pre-War Socialist Party. That wing had important shortcomings, due to its inadequate understanding of Marxism and its lack of knowledge of Lenin's further development of the teachings of Marx and Engels, to meet the problems of the present epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolution. But the left wing represented on the whole a healthy revolt against the dominant opportunist Hillquit-Berger right wing, and in 1919 it became the foundation on which the Communist Party was built. In reviewing Browder's book, Boudin, who is not a Communist, has dealt with some of the most important official pronouncements of the Communist Party in the recent period. And the fact that his review is by and large sympathetic is further testimony that the Communist Party is today the link with all that was best and strongest in the pre-War labor movement.

There is one point, however, on which Communists differ most emphatically with Boudin. In his review he expresses the conviction that in the central conflict of our time, that between the forces of democracy and fascism, the small businessman is foredoomed to take the side of reaction and fascism. Moreover, he seems to imply that the Communist Party is in agreement with him, but that Browder has neglected to make this clear in his book, indulging in such "ambiguous" statements as: "Let the farmers and *middle classes* take a leaf from the book of the C.I.O.," etc. (Boudin's emphasis.) There is a real contradiction here; it is not, however, in the position of the Communist Party or its outstanding leader, but in that of Boudin. To reject the small businessman as a potential ally in the struggle against fascism is actually to reject the whole policy of the people's front, which is based on a class alliance of the workers, farmers, and urban middle classes. Fortunately, Boudin does not draw the logical practical conclusions from his theoretical posi-