

The Campus Debates War and Peace

By Joseph P. Lash

THE Vassar convention of the American Student Union is a matter of history, but the actions it took to make America a force for peace are now major issues on every campus. The attention paid by press and public to the Vassar convention indicated how largely the issues that agitated us were of concern to the whole nation. Moreover, the student peace movement has been the most articulate section of the peace movement as a whole, and in that student peace movement the A.S.U. has been the dynamo. The change in policy of the A.S.U. reconfirmed its leadership of the student peace movement, a leadership originally established by its sponsorship of the student peace strike and its work for the establishment of the United Student Peace Committee.

How much of a body blow the A.S.U. decisions were to "left" isolationism and "right" isolationism is now evident from the vicious attack upon the A.S.U. by the sectarians and by those who feel the best peace policy is one of inaction. Everything is being discussed but the issues. It is inconceivable to the Socialists, the pacifists, and the Trotskyites that when the issues are intelligently presented, individuals who want peace will choose the policy of an economic quarantine of the aggressor. Today they are comforting themselves with assertions that the only reason the A.S.U. adopted its new peace policy was that the Young Communist League had a mechanical majority. Instead of arguing the issues they take refuge in Red-baiting.

Because the issues discussed at the Vassar convention are those that concern the whole country, it is worth while recapitulating the positions as they developed at our student convention.

From the outset, the alternatives that confronted the delegates were a positive policy that would make the United States a force for peace in terms of the wars now raging in the world, or continuance of a policy embodied in the Oxford pledge, with its exclusive emphasis upon what we would do when war was declared. The former saw the fascist nations as the leading instigators of war; the latter considered the United States to be the chief war-maker. The former saw in Roosevelt's Chicago speech an utterance that strengthened the forces of peace; the latter considered it to enhance the chance of war. The former reiterated again and again that we must not despair of peace; the latter, defeatist in approach, spoke as if the only thing left for us to do was to avoid responsibility for the war.

The argument of the majority was a simple one. We stated that the inner logic of fascism had driven it to treaty-breaking, war provocation, and to war. Now the peace of the whole

world was imperiled by this drive of fascism. Retreat before aggression, whether under the guise of outright betrayal of democracy as done by the English Tories, or through pious talk of neutrality, entailed greater wars, more extended suffering, a wider loss of freedom. These things could be prevented only by rallying an international peace front. To accomplish this today, however, United States participation was decisive. Such an international peace front would act immediately to stop aggression by striking at the Achilles heel of fascism—its economic vulnerability. It was worth while to collect funds for children's homes in Spain and for ambulances in China, but these campaigns could not be considered substitutes for fighting for the right of the Spanish and Chinese governments to purchase supplies in the United States, and the denial of these rights to the aggressors. Deny Japan the oil, iron ores, and credits she now receives from the United States and England; undertake an economic quarantine of Japan, and a decisive blow will have been struck for world peace. The Soviet Union has long been anxious to collaborate in such a policy. With America equally prepared, England and France might quickly fall in line.

THE MINORITY, which opposed this policy, was composed of pacifists, Trotskyites, Lovestonites, Socialists, and a few liberals. This heterogeneous group achieved coherence only in its common opposition to any form of action for peace by the United States. It had no program for a popular struggle for peace and in fact deprecated any such program. For the actual struggle against war, it substituted pious phrases intended to disavow responsibility for any war in the future, a war which it considered inevitable and hence useless to oppose. It did not occur to them that the only genuine way of disavowing responsibility for war is activity in today's struggle for peace, not verbal pledges which the future alone can test. This shift of emphasis away from today's duty in the peace movement to paper promises of what we will do when war is already upon us is likewise the explicit assumption of the Oxford pledge. In this respect, the pledge is blood-brother to the Ludlow amendment and similar isolationist proposals.

The pseudo-left supporters of this minority position assumed that the fight against war in no way differs from the fight against capitalism, because "capitalism is the cause of war." It is only a short step from this to the assertion that only those convinced of the necessity for overthrowing capitalism should be mobilized for the struggle against war.

The assumption that one must be a revolutionist to participate in organized activity against war suffers from a pathetic fallacy,

which can be illustrated with reference to other fields as well. Capitalism is not only the cause of war; it is the cause of unemployment, low wages, company unions, child labor. Does this mean that one cannot undertake to secure a Wagner Labor Relations Act, unemployment insurance, increased relief, etc.? Does this mean that we should make no demands on the government simply because we cannot "depend" exclusively on the government? Should the actions and demands of the trade unions, unemployed, etc., be strictly limited to revolutionary demonstrations? Obviously, such a position is hopelessly sectarian and stupid.

It is a matter of experience and history that the campaigns for trade-union rights, unemployment insurance, a wages and hours bill, are the means by which the masses of people learn to distinguish their friends from their enemies. Concrete experience on a limited, but intimate, scale leads people to search for the causes of their misery; this, in turn, leads them to desire the abolition of those causes. But it would be fatal if we made organized effort for increased wages wait until the bulk of workers agreed upon the abolition of capitalism. Some of them may never agree to this, and yet we want them in unions. That is how people are mobilized for progress and democracy, and precisely by the same logic to the struggle for peace.

The pseudo-left position confuses the causes of war and the way to organize a mass movement against war. Capitalism may be the cause of low wages, but we do not postpone the organization of unions until we are in a position to overthrow capitalism. Indeed, the organization of workers in unions against the evils of capitalism as it affects their day-to-day existence is the royal road to achieving a mass struggle against capitalism as a whole. To make the abolition of capitalism the precondition for popular struggle against specific capitalist evils is putting the cart before the horse.

The same thing is true of the pseudo-left argument that we must not "depend" on capitalist governments. The truth is that nobody advocated "dependence" on capitalist governments. It is one thing to "depend"; it is quite another thing to exert all possible means to force the democratic governments, such as the United States, to adopt a positive program for concerted peace action. To "depend" on capitalist governments means to surrender independent activity by the people. Nobody advocated any such thing.

It is demobilizing the struggle for peace to say that one must be a "revolutionist" to carry on the struggle for peace. Indeed, a "revolutionist" who stands aloof from the strivings for peace by the people in general—

most of them, not revolutionists—torfeits all claim to the title.

IF ONE STUDIED the reactions of the press to Roosevelt's Chicago speech, it was abundantly clear that the reactionaries criticized the speech on the basis that any international policy of quarantining an aggressor would be anti-fascist and democratic in its consequences. The Tories in England and the two hundred families in France have fought collective action against aggression precisely because it inevitably meant the overthrow of fascism, which would be such a tremendous impetus to the forces of progress. In the Italo-Ethiopian war, for example, effective economic sanctions, which were never applied, would have meant the fall of Mussolini, whom the Tories consider a barrier to socialism; and the victory of a semi-colonial Negro power, with all its lessons to the Negro race everywhere.

Actually it was the program of the minority that would uphold the status quo; and that of the majority, calling as it did for collective action against aggression, was anti-imperialist. The minority tried to portray our demand for action against Japan as an effort to defend the interest of Standard Oil in China, and objectively one that would uphold United States imperialist exploitation of the Chinese masses. We pointed out, however, that a victorious China would be amply able to take care of Standard Oil. What is essential today for China's victory is that she be able to get oil and other supplies from abroad. Paradoxical as it seems, the defense of the Open Door in China at the present moment is a necessary condition for the complete abolition of the Open Door. To close the Open Door today means to open that door only for Japan.

When this pseudo-leftist attack of the Trotskyites and Y.P.S.L.'s was effectively answered, they then tried to create a panic. Instead of crying fire in order to clear the hall, they cried war. "Governmental action against Japan means war!" "Are you for the war or against it?" Having no program for peace themselves, they attempted to panic the liberals and pacifists with their alarms and innuendos. Resigned to inevitable war themselves, they tried to create the impression that the demand for an economic embargo was equivalent to war.

The position of the majority was that an international economic embargo upon Japan would quickly force her to sue for peace, because of her dependence upon the United States and Great Britain for oil and other war supplies, and because of the fragility of her whole economic structure. We supported this by facts and figures. We demonstrated how such a policy would strengthen the hand of the minority in Japan which is opposed to the war, but which has been silenced by Japan's easy victories to date. The minority made no effort to disprove that economic action could be effective. Instead they cried that economic action means war. But if economic action would be effective in halting Japan, why should American imperialism in-

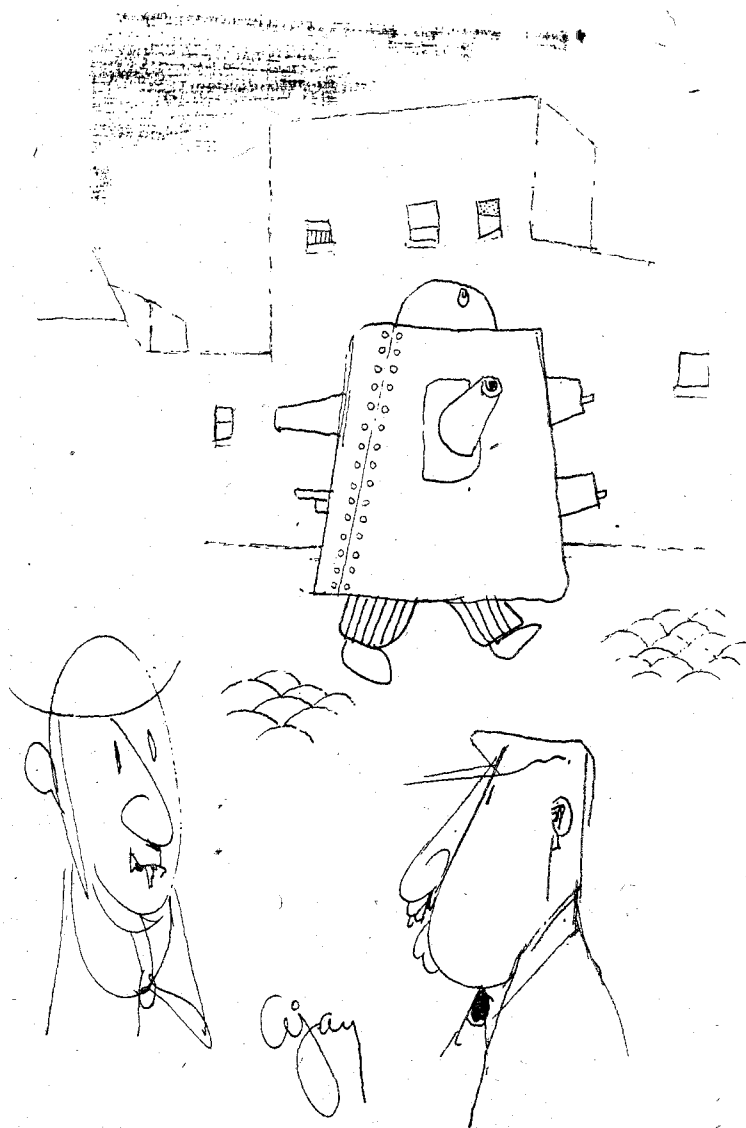
dulge in the venture of a war with Japan? If war is a continuation of politics by other means, why should American imperialists resort to war, if they can achieve their end of defeating Japan by economic action? It was mandatory upon the minority that they prove that economic action could not be effective. This they would not do—because it was impossible.

The easy assumption which the minority makes that a collective economic quarantine upon Japan will lead inevitably to war is also disproved by another statement that they themselves made. In discussing the question of increased military appropriations for the

pressed as in the discussion on armaments. They pointed to the sky-rocketing military budget and insinuated that this was a result of a policy of collective security. But who will say that the United States today supports a policy of collective security? The only alternative to the present drive toward armaments is a policy of collective economic action. Regardless of what the minority may believe, the ordinary person today is impressed with the aggressiveness of fascism, its treaty-breaking, its war provocation, and sees no alternative to a policy of armaments. That is why the only effective answer to the jingoists is a policy of international economic quarantine.

The inconsistency of the minority was also brought out in their position on the boycott of Japanese goods. One or two Pacifists were completely consistent. They opposed any kind of action against Japan, including the boycott. The others in the minority supported the boycott—we will not go into the motives—but stopped short when we proposed a national boycott.

We urged the boycott not only because it mobilized the people against aggression, but because in so doing, it educated the people to a need for international economic action against Japan and is the pressure weapon by which the government can be got to adopt a policy of international coöperation. American imperialism and the reactionaries in the State Department fear the boycott precisely because it mobilizes the people for collective action. They don't want such collective action because of its anti-fascist implications. These are the issues that were debated at the convention. These are the is-



"That's just Thornton carrying his isolationist policy to its logical conclusion."

United States, which the convention unanimously opposed, they, as well as the spokesman for the majority, pointed out that it was extremely difficult for Japan to carry out a military attack upon the United States, and vice versa. We agreed. But if war is such a difficult matter between Japan and the United States, then why the gratuitous assumption that economic action must lead to war?

The wishful thinking of the minority and its unrealism were nowhere so clearly ex-

pressed as in the discussion on armaments. They pointed to the sky-rocketing military budget and insinuated that this was a result of a policy of collective security. But who will say that the United States today supports a policy of collective security? The only alternative to the present drive toward armaments is a policy of collective economic action. Regardless of what the minority may believe, the ordinary person today is impressed with the aggressiveness of fascism, its treaty-breaking, its war provocation, and sees no alternative to a policy of armaments. That is why the only effective answer to the jingoists is a policy of international economic quarantine.

But the American Student Union has received a new strength from its new policy, and thousands of students today are coming for the first time into our organization. The decisions of the Vassar convention have strengthened the unity of the American Student Union and extended it over a wide front.



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Crisis in France

THE search for a new cabinet in France justifies no alarmist pronouncements on the collapse of the People's Front. Here was a first-rate cabinet crisis provoked by the right wing of the Radical Socialist Party. The conduct of this faction was itself but a reflection of pressure exerted upon it by the two hundred families and their political henchmen who are in close alliance with the British bankers.

On the surface, at least so far as the explanations issued by M. Chautemps go, the crisis appeared to be only a squabble between parties, between the Radical Socialist and Communist Parties primarily. Actually profound political issues were at stake. For several months the Chautemps government drifted farther and farther away from the program of the People's Front in financial and labor policies as well as diplomatic matters.

Every such political concession to the right met the merited opposition of the French workers. The whittling away of the forty-hour week was sternly criticized and opposed by the great trade-union federation. Apparently MM. Chautemps and Bonnet decided that it was dangerous to make further concessions to the right while the existing commitments of the Radical Socialist Party to the People's Front program remained unchanged. Under the familiar camouflage of anti-Communism, the Chautemps-Bonnet team sought to impose its views and held the cabinet crisis as a club over the people.

It needs to be emphasized that the occasion of this cabinet crisis was not the program of the People's Front, *but the departure from that program by the Chautemps-Bonnet government.* Herein lies the explanation for the remarkable resilience exhibited by the People's Front throughout this crisis. The Socialist Party voted down a resolution introduced by Leon Blum, which would have committed it to participation in a second Chautemps cabinet without Communist representation. Indeed, it was the Socialists who forced the fall of Chautemps by their collective resignation

when the premier repudiated Communist support. The Radical Socialist Party is itself no unit on this issue and fully half the party would bolt an alliance with the right. Indeed, M. Chautemps has been careful to reaffirm his support of the People's-Front program, and this is good testimony of that program's hold upon the French people.

It appears that the cabinet crisis will be weathered by an interim ministry which will carry on until harmony is reached or a new election is ordered. In any event, it would be most difficult, if not impossible, for a cabinet without both Socialist and Communist support to survive on the basis of the last general election. The gloomy prophets ought to remember that the French People's Front has weathered other storms.

The Shameful Filibuster

THE filibuster against the anti-lynching bill in the Senate has been going on thirteen days at this writing. A handful of senators are blocking the known desire of no less than seventy-three senators to pass the bill. In the special session the filibustering tactics succeeded, partly because of the pressure of time, but now the reactionaries appear to be running into stiffer opposition. There is talk both of invoking the cloture rule to shut off debate, and of tiring the filibusterers out by holding night sessions.

And what, after all, is the bill which has halted all business in the Senate for two weeks, which the reactionaries talk of as certain to bring about the ruination of the country? It is a bill to implement the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment says:

Nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

And Section 5 provides:

The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

With this clear constitutional basis the anti-lynching bill provides that when state or other government officials fail to protect a prisoner from a lynch mob, or conspire with a lynch mob, or fail to prosecute the members of the lynch mob, the federal courts shall take jurisdiction. There are provisions for the payment of money damages to the victim of a lynch mob. Failure to arrest or indict the lynchers for more than thirty days after a lynching will be *prima facie* evidence of neglect and bring the anti-lynching law into operation.

The bill is therefore an exceedingly simple



HUGO
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one. It says that the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution is no longer to be a dead letter in its application to victims of lynch law, who are almost invariably Negroes. It is a shamefully belated attempt to wipe out one of the foulest blots on the history of this nation.

A Shift in Tactics?

THE word coöperation—coöperation between government and "business"—is increasingly heard from the biggest representatives of monopoly capitalism, and one of the reasons for this apparent shift in tactics probably is the situation in the Supreme Court. The appointment of Solicitor-General Stanley Reed to Justice Sutherland's seat gives the liberals a clear majority, and now there are revived rumors of the impending retirement of Justice McReynolds, another reactionary, who will be seventy-six on February 3.

As the court will be composed with Reed, New Deal legislation would not meet a hostile majority, and Wall Street must feel it is losing its ultimate barrier against a program of social security. In this situation it would appeal to the strategists of the big monopolies to walk a little more softly, talk a little more sparingly about every bill for the relief of human needs being an assault on the Constitution—and redouble their efforts to smash the organized labor movement, which with the farmers forms the backbone of the overwhelming national support for the New Deal. If the interpreter of the Constitution, the Supreme Court, is likely to uphold a bill which Wall Street attacks as unconstitutional, there is much use in raising the issue of the Constitu-