

# Whose War?

John Reed asked that question in the April 1917 issue of the old "Masses." We reprint his remarkable article to throw light on today's war.

JOHN REED'S "Whose War?" appeared in the April 1917 issue of the *Masses*. By the time this issue went out, America was in the World War. On April 2, Reed attended a large meeting of the People's Council, a peace organization. The audience clamored for Jack Reed, but David Starr Jordan, the chairman, decided that there was no time to hear Reed. Then came the momentous announcement that President Wilson had that evening called for war in his address to the joint session of Congress. Jordan arose to say that the People's Council would follow the President, even though it had been for peace. The cries for Jack Reed were repeated by the audience. He stepped forward and declared: "This is not my war, and I will not support it. This is not my war, and I will have nothing to do with it." Reed did not swerve from this forthright anti-war position. The *Masses*, for which he continued to write, remained an anti-war organ.

Twenty-three years later, Reed's statement has lost nothing of its force, its clarity, its sense of

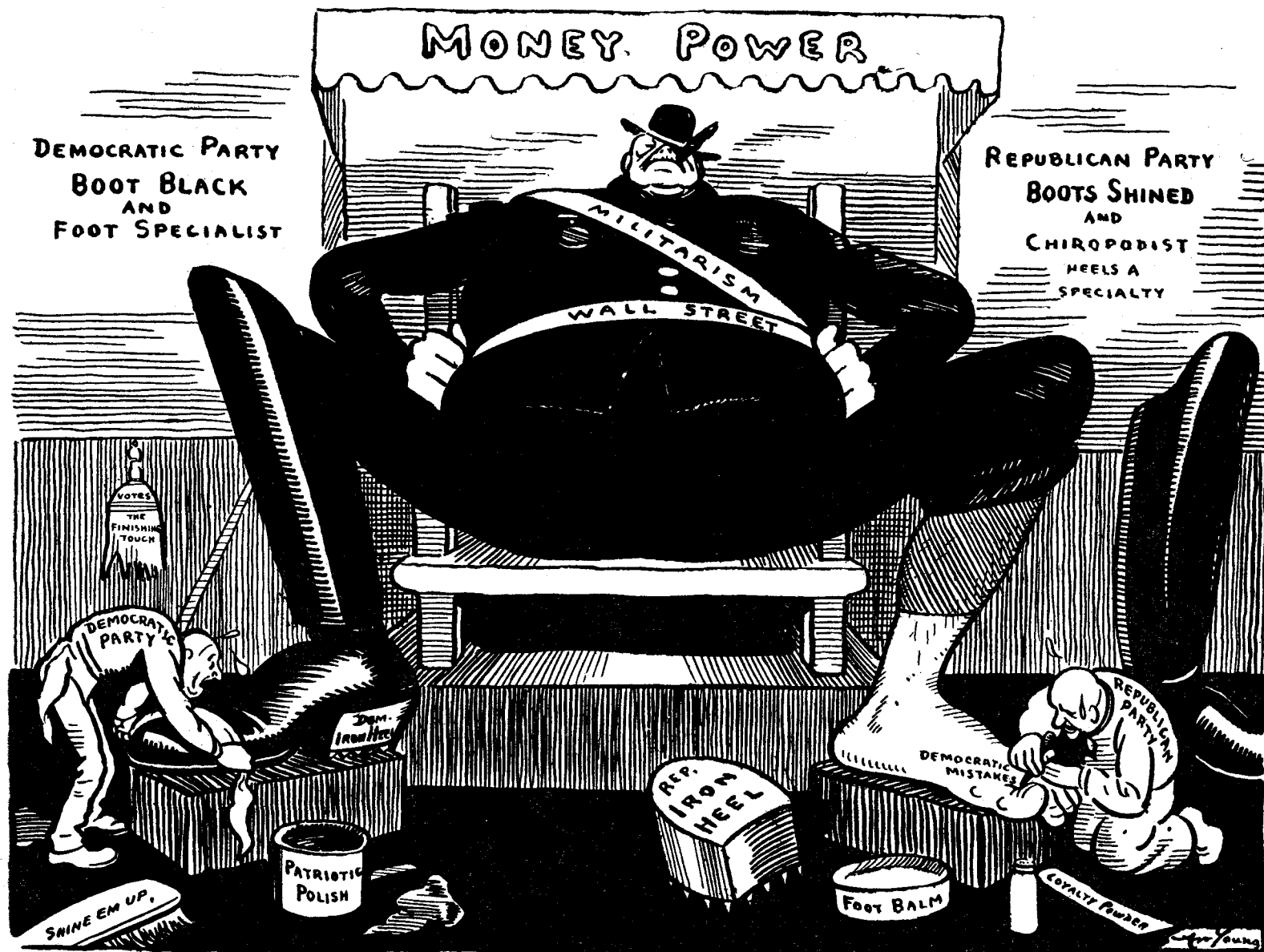
immediacy. We are proud to reprint the substance of it. The message of John Reed will be heard above the war drums in Washington. The people will not boil *twice* in the same caldron.—THE EDITORS.

*"The current ebullition of patriotism is wonderful."*  
—Rev. Dr. Parkhurst.

**B**Y THE time this goes to press the United States may be at war. The day the German note arrived, Wall Street flung the American flag to the breeze, the brokers on the floor of the Stock Exchange sang "The Star-spangled Banner" with tears rolling down their cheeks, and the stock market went up. In the theaters they are singing "patriotic" ballads of the George M. Cohan-Irving Berlin variety, playing the national anthem, and flashing the flag and the portrait of long-suffering Lincoln—while the tired

suburbanite who has just been scalped by a ticket speculator goes into hysterics. Exclusive ladies whose husbands own banks are rolling bandages for the wounded, just like they do in Europe; a million-dollar fund for Ice in Field-hospitals has been started; and the Boston Budget for Conveying Virgins Inland has grown enormously. The directors of the British, French, and Belgian Permanent Blind Relief Fund have added "American" to the name of the organization, in gruesome anticipation. Our soldier boys guarding the aqueducts and bridges are shooting each other by mistake for Teutonic spies. There is talk of "conscription," "war-brides," and "On to Berlin." . . .

I know what war means. I have been with the armies of all the belligerents except one, and I have seen men die, and go mad, and lie in hospitals suffering hell; but there is a



"RIVALS FOR THE MONARCH'S FAVOR." An old drawing by Art Young which like most of the great cartoonist's things is very pertinent now, especially in this election year.

worse thing than that. War means an ugly mob-madness, crucifying the truth-tellers, choking the artists, sidetracking reforms, revolutions, and the working of social forces. Already in America those citizens who oppose the entrance of their country into the European melee are called "traitors," and those who protest against the curtailing of our meager rights of free speech are spoken of as "dangerous lunatics." . . . The press is howling for war. . . . Lawyers, politicians, stockbrokers, social leaders are all howling for war. Roosevelt is again recruiting his thrice-thwarted family regiment. . . .

Whose war is this? Not mine. I know that hundreds of thousands of American working-men employed by our great financial "patriots" are not paid a living wage. I have seen poor men sent to jail for long terms without trial, and even without any charge. Peaceful strikers, and their wives and children, have been shot to death, burned to death, by private detectives and militiamen. The rich have steadily become richer, and the cost of living higher, and the workers proportionally poorer. These toilers don't want war—not even civil war. But the speculators, the employers, the plutocracy—they want it, just as they did in Germany and in England; and with lies and sophistries they will whip up our blood until we are savage—and then we'll fight and die for them. . . .

We are simple folk. Prussian militarism seemed to us insufferable; we thought the invasion of Belgium a crime; German atrocities horrified us, and also the idea of German submarines exploding ships full of peaceful people without warning. But then we began to hear about England and France jailing, fining, exiling, and even shooting men who refused to go out and kill; the Allied armies invaded and seized a part of neutral Greece, and a French admiral forced upon her an ultimatum as shameful as Austria's to Serbia; Russian atrocities were shown to be more dreadful than German; and hidden mines sown by England in the open sea exploded ships full of peaceful people without warning.

Other things disturbed us. For instance, why was it a violation of international law for the Germans to establish a "war zone" around the British Isles, and perfectly legal for England to close the North Sea? Why is it we submitted to the British order forbidding the shipment of non-contraband to Germany and insisted upon our right to ship contraband to the Allies? If our "national honor" was smirched by Germany's refusal to allow war materials to be shipped to the Allies, what happened to our national honor when England refused to let us ship non-contraband food and even *Red Cross hospital supplies* to Germany? Why is England allowed to attempt the avowed starvation of German civilians, in violation of international law, when the Germans cannot attempt the same thing without our horrified protest? How is it that the British can arbitrarily regulate our commerce with neutral nations, while we raise a howl whenever the Germans

"threaten to restrict our merchant ships going about their business"? . . .

We have shipped and are shipping vast quantities of war materials to the Allies, we have floated the Allied loans. We have been strictly neutral toward the Teutonic powers only. Hence the inevitable desperation of the last German note. Hence this war we are on the brink of.

Those of us who voted for Woodrow Wilson did so because we felt his mind and his eyes were open, because he had kept us out

of the mad-dog fight of Europe, and because the plutocracy opposed him. We had learned enough about the war to lose some of our illusions, and we wanted to be neutral. We grant that the President, considering the position he'd got himself into, couldn't do anything else but answer the German note as he did—but if we had been neutral, that note wouldn't have been sent. The President didn't ask us; he won't ask us if we want war or not. The fault is not ours. It is not our war.

JOHN REED.

## Let's Stop It Now

*London (by cable).*

**A**S A Christian minister I desire peace. As a humanitarian I shrink from slaughter which may cost millions of lives and gravely endanger Western civilization which despite its defects has inestimable qualities.

The results of the last great war yield no encouragement to a belief that a similar bloodbath will bring better results. (Nor do I anticipate an easy or speedy overthrow of Hitler and the Nazi regime by war.)

The only alternative is a negotiated peace. I desire therefore a real peace conference attended not only by belligerents but by all great neutral powers and in particular by the United States and the Soviet Union.

This conference should redraw the frontiers of Europe more justly than Versailles. It should also lay down principles of religious, racial, and social freedom and provide guarantees for their enforcement.

Such a conference seems better calculated to achieve a just peace than one at the end of an exhausting and prolonged war with all the hatred and bitterness it must result in and where vengeance would supplant justice as the dominating motive.

A peace conference may not be immediately possible. It may not be possible at all if any of the combatants start a serious offensive by land or air of which at the moment there seems small likelihood though unfortunately any madness or stupidity is possible.

The highly fortified lines where the antagonists face one another in the West discourage an attack which must inevitably cost the assailant so dearly in men and munitions as to court almost certain disaster. Germany has scant encouragement and indeed no sufficient need to do so. For the Allies it would be a gambler's throw.

A small but powerful group in England are still anxious, consistent with their usual attitude, to start a holy war against Bolshevism by launching the large army of white, black, brown, and yellow races accumulated in the Near East against the Armenian and Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic. The present situation, however, has lessened the danger of an eastern extension of the war which, as matters stand today, would almost certainly mean the end of the British empire.

Wiser counsels are likely to prevail. The alternatives then are to continue as at present with social discontent and financial bankruptcy staring us in the face, or to get around the table, leaving a disillusioned German people to settle their own accounts with Hitler.

Since President Roosevelt is not altogether disinterested in a third presidential term—and what could better ensure it than being the world's peacemaker—I anticipate diplomatic and economic pressure on recalcitrant military powers ensuring a conference some time in the summer. But that conference, if it is to succeed, must without any doubt include the United States and the Soviet Union. Should this bring peace in the West, might it also not bring peace to the East, to poor China? I can well imagine that Japan would welcome a peace that would save its face.

So my reason argues. I am well aware, however, that we live in an irrational and dangerous world where blind folly akin to madness might at any moment precipitate disaster.

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