

Roosevelt Drives Toward War

AN EDITORIAL

THE bones of Woodrow Wilson must have stirred to an old familiar rhythm on Jan. 3, 1940. History was telescoped as his former assistant secretary of the navy, wrapped in Wilsonian piety, wielding the long-moldering Wilsonian phrases, addressed the Congress of the United States and set this country on Wilson's course—toward war.

We are not happy to record that President Roosevelt's message to the opening of the third session of the Seventy-sixth Congress fulfilled our worst forebodings. Nothing we could say is half as devastating as the comments of some of the leading capitalist political columnists. Wrote the pro-New Deal Raymond Clapper (*New York World-Telegram*, January 5):

There was certainly a strong whiff of the old crusade for democracy in this message. Carefully the President stopped short of any talk of intervention—except in peacemaking—but he put the case for the Allies in such terms that when the deep crisis comes in Europe and the desperate phase of the fight is on, we are going to feel like slackers who are not doing our share. . . . It is Woodrow Wilson's issue of making the world safe for democracy come to life again in the second generation. . . .

"This nation will remain a neutral nation," President Roosevelt said in a radio address on September 3, immediately after the outbreak of the European war. On September 21 he told the special session of Congress: "Our acts must be guided by one single hardheaded thought—keeping America out of this war." Today he sounds a different note. *Within four months Roosevelt has moved to the position which it took Wilson two and a half years to reach—an eve-of-war position.* With more than ten million unemployed and a nationwide relief crisis developing (see Adam Lavin's article in this issue), with the great mass of farmers still forced to sell their products at prices far below what they must pay for industrial goods, with small business men everywhere unable to make ends meet, the President sends this New Year greeting to the nation: ". . . the only important increase in any part of the budget is the estimate for national defense. Practically all other important items show a reduction."

The Republicans applaud (even Mrs. Roosevelt noted in her "My Day" column how vigorously the Republican side of the house responded to this part of the President's message). The bankers applaud. The American people, who were assured two years ago by this same President that "I do not propose to let the people down," have been most callously let down.

The Roosevelt budget is a war budget. Counting the allocations for the War and Navy Departments included in the general public works program, appropriations for so-called national defense total \$2,063,219,860—more than \$300,000,000 above the sum being spent for this purpose in the present fiscal year. Roosevelt's domestic program, with its sharp reductions in funds for WPA (this is cut nearly 50 percent), farm aid, National Youth Administration, CCC, public works, highways, etc., has been geared to the central aim of preparing for rapid entrance into the war on the side of the Allies. This is the most reactionary, anti-social budget in the entire seven years of the Roosevelt administration. No wonder Gen. Hugh Johnson, long an enemy of the New Deal, is able to taunt the President (*World-Telegram*, January 6): "What has become of the militant leader who, on the eve of the 1936 elections, said of the 'forces of reaction' that in his first administration they had met their match and in his second, they would meet their master?"

The *Wall Street Journal* observed with satisfaction that the

Roosevelt opening message "was notable in its lack of the fighting spirit which has characterized previous utterances of the Chief Executive." And Frank R. Kent, dourest of the tory columnists, wrote that the President's proposals "should have the support of the anti-New Deal Democratic and Republican coalition which in the last session frequently thwarted Mr. Roosevelt and took away control from the administration leaders."

Here is the true meaning of the national unity which Roosevelt demanded in his message—unity with Wall Street against the American people, unity with the warmongers against the peace of the United States.

Against whom is Roosevelt organizing his new world crusade for democracy? Raymond Clapper translated Roosevelt's lofty phrases into plain English as follows (*World-Telegram*, January 6):

The emotional wave which swept the United States after the Bolsheviks attacked Finland broke the ice of our rigid sense of emotional isolation and indifference which had existed from the start of the war. Finland now takes the place of the Belgium of 1914. Democracy is at stake again. Are we feeling around, psychologically, to find again the road to war?

Signs abound that the answer, as far as the Roosevelt administration is concerned, is yes. That is why the administration has adopted the slogans of the shattered anti-Comintern axis in foreign affairs and of the un-American Dies committee at home, and has already launched a war against civil liberties.

But do the American people want this country to fight another Wall Street war? On the contrary, every recent poll shows that the people are even more overwhelmingly opposed to our involvement than they were at the outbreak of the imperialist war. This sentiment is beginning to make itself articulate. Appropriately, the youth—the recent conventions of the American Student Union and the National Student Federation are examples—are showing the way. The American Youth Congress has sent a letter to the President protesting the reduction in social expenditures and the increase of war funds. In Pennsylvania one hundred AFL and CIO leaders have issued a peace proclamation branding the European conflict a war "for the benefit of the rich at the expense of the laboring people," and demanding that we keep out. The CIO has likewise attacked the Roosevelt proposals and put forward a legislative program based on unwavering pursuit of peace and further social advance for the American people. In a New Year's message John L. Lewis epitomized the issue in these words:

Within the new year, 1940, this nation will make decisions of profound importance to its future. It must decide whether it will listen to those who would divert attention from the difficulties of our internal problems and stake the nation's future on the vagaries of wars abroad. . . .

Labor believes that the American people will vigorously reiterate their conviction that America's problems must and will be solved in this country by American methods, that we must steadfastly turn aside from giddy dreams of foreign ventures. The American people will, we believe, demand that those who are without work, food, and shelter shall not be abandoned.

In this crisis of world capitalism, when the peace, the living standards, and the liberties of America's millions are in peril, it is around principles such as this that real national unity of the vast majority of the common folk of our country needs to be forged.

U. S. Budget for War—Not Relief

Social security is gone with the wind as Roosevelt lays war economy plans for the country. One step before the "cannon instead of butter" stage.

Washington.

IN FORTY-FOUR situations flu, colds, pleurisy, and pneumonia and other lung conditions were reported in families where relief had been cut," the Cleveland Chapter of the American Association of Social Workers said in its study of 374 cases chosen at random from the sixteen thousand families which had been deprived of all forms of aid. "In one case a fifteen-year-old girl who is paralyzed was suffering from the lack of heat. . . . There were thirteen cases reported where cardiac conditions were aggravated by the insecurity resulting from the relief crisis." There is no way of summing up this story of how families try to live without heat, shelter, clothing, food, medical care. The impact of the report is cumulative.

Behind the tragedy of Cleveland is the breakdown of an entire relief system—federal, state, city. The suffering in Cleveland was perhaps most acute. But the breakdown of relief is taking place throughout the country. Soon there may be other Clevelands.

Federal and local relief systems are supposed to supplement each other. The President has repeatedly stated that the federal government has assumed responsibility for providing work relief to the employable unemployed. Direct relief is to be furnished by cities and communities, with the assistance of the states, to those who cannot work. Old age pensions and unemployment compensation programs are supposed to act as a backstop, giving the aged and the temporarily unemployed a degree of security and keeping them off the relief rolls.

IT DOESN'T WORK

This elaborate machinery is now creaking in every joint. WPA is not giving work relief to all the unemployed who are able and willing to work. States and cities are not taking care of home relief. The old age pension and unemployment compensation programs are woefully inadequate.

The relief slashes in the Woodrum act (passed at the last regular congressional session) helped precipitate the Cleveland crisis. In a few months the WPA rolls in Cleveland were reduced from more than 75,000 to about thirty thousand. With about \$1,000,000,000 sliced from every form of aid to the unemployed, youth, and farmers to make room for armaments in the new Roosevelt budget, even more drastic cuts in relief must be expected in the months ahead.

It has become fashionable in administration circles to admit that an appropriation of somewhat less than \$1,500,000,000 for WPA in 1937 helped precipitate the recession of that year. Secretary of Commerce Hopkins, who was then WPA administrator, beat his breast

on this score a few days ago in his annual report to Congress. The President made the same point in his budget message. Strengthened by this confession of his error, the President is now proceeding to slash relief all over again but on a much more grandiose and disastrous scale.

After the 1937 debacle, WPA expenditures went up to about \$2,250,000,000. Business began to pick up, and there were immediate demands from the right for another economy move. The President obliged. Last year he recommended to Congress a WPA appropriation of only \$1,477,000,000. Representative Woodrum and his associates eagerly accepted this estimate, and spent their energies in wrecking the relief program with restrictions.

The ax fell suddenly and sharply. In July 1939 there were 2,500,000 persons on the rolls. With the average for the preceding fiscal year, which had just ended, at around three million, this represented a seasonal low. Two months later, at the beginning of September, there were only 1,661,000 left on the rolls. Because of the inadequate appropriation, and the provision in the Woodrum act requiring the discharge of all workers who had been on the rolls for eighteen months or over, more than 800,000 persons were thrown off in two months. At the end of December 1939 there were about 2,150,000 workers on WPA. The figure will rise slowly until it reaches a maximum of perhaps 2,300,000 in February. Then the cuts will start again, with a couple of hundred thousand being taken from the rolls each month in the spring. In June only 1,500,000 workers will be left.

If Congress approves the President's \$1,000,000,000 budget estimate for the coming fiscal year, which represents a cut of \$477,000,000, the downward trend begun in the Woodrum act will be sharply accentuated. As against the average of two million on the WPA rolls for the current fiscal year, the average, starting this July, will be only 1,350,000. This means that the rolls will be cut to less than a million during the summer of 1940 and the spring of 1941, and go up briefly to a maximum of perhaps two million during the winter.

There is no use even discussing the proposition that there will be only 1,350,000 employable unemployed workers during the coming year. The war boomlet of the last few months, together with the upturn which had already begun, absorbed only 1,250,000 jobless; everybody knows that they were not drawn primarily, or even to any appreciable extent, from the WPA rolls. Three to four non-relief unemployed workers are rehired by private industry for every WPA worker.

There are still between nine and ten million unemployed.

Unemployed workers who should be on WPA are forced on home relief. But most of the large cities are somewhere near a state of actual bankruptcy. They went broke in 1930-33 when there was no federal relief of any sort. They do not have adequate funds to take care of home relief cases, not to speak of employables who should be provided for by the federal government.

State governments have for the most part not been particularly helpful in attempting to solve the relief problem. Usually they have not made sufficiently large contributions to the cities and communities. In some states, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and New Jersey, Republican and reactionary Democratic politicians have been active in dismantling necessary social services and causing general disruption. But granting the state governments the best of intentions, they would have been hardpressed to take care of the employable workers fired by WPA, and they have been in no position to plan in advance to meet the drastic fluctuations of the WPA rolls.

RED TAPE

The relief situation would be serious enough even if there were a functioning, adequate social security system. But this of course is not the case. Workers usually have to wait several weeks and wade through a morass of red tape before they are taken care of by the state unemployment compensation setups. Benefits are too small and do not last long enough. So far workers have received only one dollar for every three collected. Many categories of workers are not provided for at all. In the absence of definite federal standards, the states are on the whole moving backward. The seriousness of the situation is perhaps best indicated by the fact that Bill Green was compelled to agree with John L. Lewis that something ought to be done. The inadequacies of the administration's old age pension program are too well known to need prolonged discussion. During 1940 a maximum of \$100,000,000 will be paid out as against the \$500,000,000 to be collected during the same year. That won't provide much ham and eggs for our senior citizens.

This is the way the relief perspective looks now during a period of industrial upturn—which is not absorbing the mass of the unemployed workers. But many government economists think that a sharp drop in production will take place during the first months of 1940; CIO analysts share this point of view. In his budget message the President admitted that he was basing his estimate on