

## The Message to Congress

Mr. Roosevelt drops the "aid short of war." An emotional exhortation in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson. The real alternative for the American people. An editorial.

**P**RESIDENT ROOSEVELT's message to the 77th Congress was not a report on the state of the union. It was an emotional exhortation designed to prepare public opinion for a fundamental change in the state of the union. In spirit and by innuendo the message was a commitment to war.

It is important that all of us think hard about the meaning of the President's words. They are calculated to create a certain mood, to conceal behind phrases that appeal to the best in human beings the ugly realities, the crass tooth-and-claw struggle for profits and empire that are the true motivation of his policy. For many people it may be difficult to see behind the term "national defense" the actuality which Dr. Virgil Jordan, president of the National Industrial Conference Board, disclosed in a recent speech before the Investment Bankers Association: "Whatever the outcome of the war, America has embarked upon a career of imperialism, both in world affairs and in every other aspect of her life." It is difficult to see this truth, the operations of the banking and industrial monopolies beneath the slogans of democracy—but all of us *must* see it for the future of millions depends on it.

### LIKE THE FIRESIDE CHAT

The President's message is a further development of the program outlined in his fireside chat of December 29, though his argument is much more adroit. What is new is the abandonment of all "short-of-war" talk, and an attempt to overcome the opposition of large sections of the American people to a repetition of 1917 by offering them a vague, idealistic series of war aims centering about the new world that is to emerge when this conflict is over. The omission of all "short-of-war" qualifications is accompanied by a number of hints at direct American military participation. These hints appear in reverse, like the negative of a photographic plate, the blame for such participation being placed on "the dictators": "When the dictators—if the dictators—are ready to make war upon us, they will not wait for an act of war on our part." Senator Burton Wheeler's comment was very much to the point: "It is too bad this speech was not made before election. It was intended to frighten the American people to a point that they would surrender their liberties and establish a wartime dictatorship."

President Roosevelt seeks to justify his

efforts by saying that "In the recent national election there was no substantial difference between the two great parties" in regard to foreign policy—an unwitting admission of the tweedledum-tweedledee choice given the electorate. But the fact is that both he and Willkie found it necessary to give repeated pledges that they would do everything in their power to preserve America's peace. There was not the vestige of such a pledge in Roosevelt's message to Congress.

What he offered the people were bigger armaments, more taxes, and new steps to war. And he asked them to believe what he himself doesn't believe; that more guns would also mean more butter—"equality of opportunity for youth and for others," "jobs for those who can work," "security for those who need it"; that more power for Messrs. Knudsen and Stettinius would mean "the ending of special privilege for the few," "the preservation of civil liberties for all." Reality, of course, gives the lie to these promises. The President knows that when he sets out to change "a whole nation from a basis of peacetime production of implements of peace to a basis of wartime production of implements of war," he is sacrificing the peacetime needs of the people, increasing the privileges of the few and the insecurity of the many. He knows, too, the ripening fruit of his own concern about civil liberties; the Browder case, the Oklahoma criminal syndicalism cases, the prosecution of trade unions under the anti-trust laws, the alien registration act, and other anti-democratic measures, passed and pending.

The President also asked the people to believe that out of this unjust war can come a just peace. In fact, he attempted to do two contradictory things: to idealize the last imperialist war and its iniquitous Versailles peace—a war which the majority of Americans view with disillusioned eyes—and at the same time to link that war with the present imperialist conflict about which he seeks to create new illusions. The world of truth and freedom which he promised would emerge out of the fraud and servitude of this war, has a familiar look. In fact, haven't we met before? On Nov. 11, 1918, another President of the United States stood before another Congress and delivered his message.

Armed imperialism such as the men conceived who were but yesterday the masters of Germany is at an end [said Woodrow Wilson], its ambitions engulfed in black disaster. Who will now seek to

revive it? . . . The great nations which associated themselves to destroy it have now definitely united in the common purpose to set up such a peace as will satisfy the longing of the whole world for disinterested justice, embodied in settlements which are based upon something much better and much more lasting than the selfish competitive interests of powerful states.

Is it to repeat this monstrous deception, this treason to mankind that we are being asked to sacrifice our liberties, perhaps our lives? Let us remember that war is a law of life of capitalism; when Roosevelt talks about the future, it may seem like sincere hope, but inevitably it must be hypocrisy.

The President's whole attempt to justify waging war many thousands of miles away rests on a fundamental lie. It is the lie which paints American imperialism as an innocent, seeking to do good deeds, and being threatened with attack by German fascism. The invasion scare, whatever the military feasibility of an invasion of the United States (it is interesting that in this message the President considerably modifies his previous fantastic alarums), is also based on this lie. Yes, German imperialism threatens the peace and security of the American people—but not German imperialism alone. It is the frantic struggle for loot and empire among German, Italian, British, and American imperialism that has already invaded every phase of our life, that is raiding living standards, bombarding the right to strike, and threatening to drag the American people into war under a full-fledged fascist regime. We Americans, as well as the people of Britain, Germany, Italy and all capitalist countries, must learn the great truth enunciated by Karl Liebknecht in the last war: "*Der Feind steht im eignen Lager*"—the main enemy is at home—in Washington and Wall Street.

The real fight against fascism at home and abroad requires people united to secure and defend the things they and their families need for everyday life, a people strong in its organizations and in its control over government. There is a real alternative to both a Nazi victory and collaboration with Britain for war; it is collaboration with China and the Soviet Union, with the peoples of Britain, Germany, Italy, France, and Latin America for peace and freedom throughout the world. That is the message Congress needs today. It can come only from the men and women of America's factories and farms, from those who hold the future in their arms and hearts.

**W**E WANT you to know that everyone here is doing some hard thinking about England. What's happening now? What's likely to happen this spring? There's not a serious man or woman in the United States who's not thinking about these questions. The newspapers and radio are full of stories about the devastating bombardments over London, Birmingham, Bristol, and other British centers. Out on the farms and in the villages, this may not be easy to comprehend. But in the big cities, people understand what it must mean to live with the sirens blaring, the anti-aircraft guns barking all night, a million people trying to sleep on the subway platforms, with no heating or plumbing—and then coming up out of the damp darkness to find the city burning, the horror of the smoldering ruins that once were factories, hospitals, homes.

The budget figures don't mean very much. But we can understand the 12½ percent tax on all purchases, tobacco, beer, clothing, books. We appreciate what it must mean to live on 28 cents worth of meat a week, on two ounces of tea, on the least of green vegetables and fruit. And then there were the figures for the number of people killed and wounded in November alone, some 14,795. It was not lost on any American father and mother that of all the casualties, 4,000 were women, and close to 1,000 were children under sixteen.

The head of the Trades Union Congress, Sir Walter Citrine, is one of the many Englishmen now touring our country. He hobnobs with William Green, of the American Federation of Labor, which doesn't recommend him to millions of American workers. But it did mean a great deal to every trade unionist when Sir Walter admitted—in fact boasted—in a speech on December 16, that British working men are putting in "seventy hours and more per week in the armament factories. Hygienic standards have declined. All of our factories are blacked out. All ventilators are closed, which keeps out air as well as light. At night, there is much danger; whenever a bomb bursts, the windows are shattered with terrific force and many are killed and injured by flying glass. . . ."

Particulars of this kind don't make us warm up to Citrine; in truth, it's hard to warm up to a Labor leader who carries a "sir" in front of his Christian name. But such admissions give us an inkling of the misery and suffering which this war has brought to the people of England, the bleak future which continuation of the war promises.

We don't know what your newspapers tell you about the American people, how they feel. Probably no more than our own press is telling us the whole story of how the British people feel. But you mustn't judge America from Mr. Roosevelt's speeches. There's much talk about England here, among people who do all the talking. Among the upper third, there are banquets and balls, "bundling for Britain" we call it. Many are the gold-plated words, the beating of drums for the sake of

King George. But behind the scenes, the moneyed men of this country are quite cynical about Britain. A good part of them are ready to divide up the empire with Hitler; they are so fearful of the future of capitalism in central Europe that they will not be committed to the prospect of a long and exhaustive war. The greater part of the American ruling class wants England to keep fighting. But at the same time, they're cleaning British trade out of South America, they're pushing their way across the Pacific to India, they're driving a hard bargain for every gun and plane they send across. They make sure, as their year-end figures show, that this business of "aid to Britain" is big business for them. As one of their most conscientious servants, Dr. Virgil Jordan, of the National Industrial Conference Board puts it: "Even though, by our aid, England should emerge from this struggle without defeat, she will be so impoverished economically and so crippled in prestige that it is improbable she will be able to resume or maintain the dominant position in world affairs which she has occupied so long. At best, England will become a junior partner in a new Anglo-Saxon imperialism in which the economic resources, the military and naval strength of the United States will be the center of gravity. . . ."

As for the common man in America: he hates Hitler and everything that Hitler stands for, make no mistake about that. But he suspects that this war is being used by the American ruling class to undermine his living standards, break up his trade unions, blackout his liberties. Moreover, to speak frankly, the average American is deeply suspicious of the men who hold the reins of government in Britain today. Their refusal to protect the civilian population with deep air-raid shelters—that inspires only anger and disgust in this country. And for all the Cabinet changes and Mr. Churchill's fine language, the men who are running the war strike us as no more worthy of confidence than the men who brought on this war, the Chamberlain government. After all, Churchill has taken over the official chairmanship of the Tory party. That party still controls Parliament on the basis of an election held five years ago, which in terms of representing the people of England today, might have been held five centuries ago. And that Tory party: are not its MP's among Eng-

land's wealthiest men, tied in with the highest finance, interlocked with the royalty, with hardly a man who works for an honest living among them? And when Lord Halifax was appointed ambassador, "the Holy Fox" as you call him, did not the Tammany boss of the Tories, David Margesson, step into no less than the ministry of war?

This is the same crowd which built up Hitler, handed him Austria and Czechoslovakia and thereby opened the gates of Paris. These were the same men who garrotted the Spanish republic. And that republic of the Spanish people was dear to millions of Americans: we gave millions of dollars for Spain and sent an expeditionary force, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, to help them. No one will ever forgive and forget what the rulers of England did to Spain. Nor will Mr. Roosevelt here be forgiven either. And your Labor leaders, now in the Cabinet, how long it took them to give lip-service to the Spanish struggle! How quick they were to give up that struggle, and find excuses for the way it ended! Only a year ago, moreover, the British government, Labor leaders and all, were simply panting to get up a war against Soviet Russia. They have never yet explained what criminal intoxication led them to send all those guns and planes to the Finnish wasteland when, three months later, they were so badly needed in Britain itself. They are pious and right honorable fellows, all of them. They wanted so badly a pious and right honorable war against the Soviet working men and women. They were even quite ready to shake Herr Hitler's hand to get that war going.

And only a few days ago, Mr. Churchill made a speech to Italy. He said not a word of what fascism had done to the Italian people. He said nothing about overthrowing the *system of fascism* in Europe. He asked only that one man, Mussolini—"that he is a great man I do not deny"—be replaced by someone more likely to do business with Churchill and The City. Truly, the men who rule England today are the men who brought this war upon England, even as Hitler and Goering are the scourge of the German people. These are not the men who can possibly liberate Europe. They will never bring a permanent peace to the British Isles, much less to the rest of the world.

That is where your People's Convention

# THE BRITAIN

## *An open letter to the People's An example to the war-*