

Why Nations Go to War

By Frank Chodorov

War and poverty are economic twins, sired by absolute private ownership of land out of ignorance. They have other relations—tariffs, international finance, munition makers, etc.—who are sometimes mistaken for the real parents. The parents are quite willing to disown their hideous offsprings, and to have foster parents assigned to them.

Absolute private ownership of land leads to war in three ways: by creating a dangerous internal economy that finds an outlet in foreign ventures; by creating powerful vested interests in foreign lands which come into conflict with the vested interests of other countries, as well as with native monopolies; by affording an opportunity for avaricious monopolists to extend their empires.

Which of these three forces for war is most potent is a question that could be solved only by analyzing the conditions prevailing in the warring nations preceding an outbreak. I am inclined to believe that every war is an admixture of all three, but that the poverty of the people is a paramount prerequisite. So much so, that it is almost correct to say that the poor, the people, make war. Not in the obvious sense that they bear the burdens, in fighting and in paying taxes, but in the sense that they actually clamor for war. This is not to say that they are, as asserted by militarists, vicious by nature, nor that they demand war as a means of profit for themselves. But no war could be declared or waged unless the workers are, by economic conditioning, prepared to entertain the idea. And then they ask for it.

It is in the conditions that make for poverty that one must look for the first cause of war. All other causes are proximate, and are, in fact, irritants. When Englishmen are convinced that their jobs are jeopardized by German inroads on their trade they will hate Germans. When it is explained to Japanese that Chinese refusal to buy their products is the cause for low wages in Japan, it

is easy to incite them to war on China. Hitler tells his dupes that Germans are suffering, not from a wrong internal economy, but from lack of the bounties of nature to be found only in other lands, and the shouts of "Heil Hitler" are heard in neighboring countries. The promise of better wages in Ethiopia makes the Italian boy an easy prey to Mussolini's blandishments. Recruiting stations in our own country are always located in centers frequented by the unemployed.

War is a make-work program. That is why the workers are susceptible to it. Just as protective tariffs, which have no justification in economics or in horse sense, find ready acceptance because "they make jobs," just as the waste of public works programs is condoned during depressions, so is war accepted avidly by the unemployed, the underpaid, and by the business man who cannot find a market for his merchandise.

"What we need is a nice little war" is an idea which some of our smoking-room economists quite seriously advance as a means of overcoming the present depression. In their stupid way they have hit upon the fact that a great increase in production is necessary to restore prosperity to the people. Refusing to admit, if they have sense enough to see it, that removing the land speculator from the bounties of the earth will result in the desired increase of production, they are willing to accept the hardships, cruelty and waste of war as a temporary relief. They recall the halcyon days of the World War, when customers were many, wages were high, profits were plentiful. They conveniently forget the post-war reaction.

War is an expression of poverty, and the two have ever been co-ex-

istent. The one cannot be abolished without the other. The cause of one is the cause of the other.

The poverty of the people which prepares their minds for the acceptance of war is caused by the very instrument which makes possible a corollary cause of war—foreign investments. When we speak of poverty we mean a condition of some people; there cannot be poor unless there are also rich. For, if all people enjoyed the same equality of economic opportunity, nobody would be considered poor. Poverty is therefore a relative economic and social condition which presupposes the existence of an opulent class. If wealth were equitably distributed there would not be a large number barely able to eke out an existence, and a small number with much more than enough to supply their needs and their luxuries. The rich are so at the expense of the poor. The tendency of wages toward the minimum of a bare existence is due to the ability of the few to demand of labor tribute for the privilege of working. This tribute is called rent, and with every increase of the productive power of the people this fund of rent increases, and is collected by the owners of the earth.

As this fund of rent increases beyond the most extravagant requirements of its collectors, it seeks avenues of investment. Some is invested in more land and in government bonds, from both of which the private fund of rent is augmented. This fund, as society becomes more productive, bulges out until it finds an outlet in foreign bonds. The collection of interest on these foreign bonds is the irritant that results in foreign complications. For it must be remembered that the land owning crowd is universal. Every progressive country has developed a foreign investment group of its own, and in the exploitation of "backward" countries the interests of these groups come into conflict. Each group sends its own marines to collect the interest on its bonds—which is rent—from the natives. And since the land mo-



monopolists of all these nations control both the governments and the opinions of the respective countries it is possible for them to direct their international affairs and to demand that the marines be sent. The consular service is notoriously the tool of investing interests.

Thus the private collection of rent



which drives wages down is the very source of those investments which result in the interference with the affairs of other nations. The public collection of rent at home, which would destroy land-speculation and open up the bounties of nature to labor, would also destroy those vast accumulations of wealth which find their way into foreign countries and create conditions that lead to war. The rent that robs laborers drives them to their destruction.

The third phase of land ownership as the primary cause of war is its desire to exploit the peoples of other lands, to extend its rent-producing empires. This movement, which in modern times has been dignified with the name of imperialism, is the common denominator of nearly all recorded struggles. In fact, one must stop to think to name a war which was entirely devoid of the land-grabbing motive.

But, what is the urge that drives people to struggle for a few more miles of the earth's surface? In ancient times, perhaps, before man had developed a technique for harnessing the forces of nature, the desire to secure sustenance with less effort may have driven men to fight for more fertile areas. History, however, hardly reveals an instance where necessity forced people to conquer the lands occupied by other people. In practically every instance the conquerors enslaved the conquered, either as chattels or as workers. In either case the objective was, and still is, the desire of one group of people to rob another group of the product of their labor, and the most convenient instrument of robbery, especially in modern times, is the private appropriation of rent. England

in Ireland, Japan in Manchukuo, America in the Philippines—all are merely extensions of the monopoly privilege of collecting rent from workers.

In ancient times, before war became "civilized," when loot-dividing was an accepted principle of the military act, the soldiers shared in the theft, and since they alone take the risk of battle this method of compensation had some sense. The modern soldier, however, enjoys neither the sense of conquest nor the spoils of war; he is a mechanical instrument for satisfying the greed for more and more rent, which is collected by the monopolists who plan the adventure.

If land were common property, if rent were publicly collected, would the banking fraternity care one whit about getting more land? If the land of Ethiopia were, after conquest, to become the property of Italian soldiers, would Mussolini have sent them there? And what is the war in Spain but a struggle for the natural re-



sources of Spain, desired by Spanish, English, Italian, French and German monopolists?

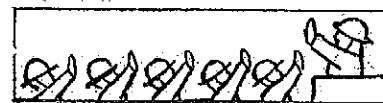
Obviously, they desire these resources for their own profit, not for the benefit of the soldiers who fight, nor for the people back home who pay. The French poilu who fought for Alsace-Lorraine, and settled there after the war, is paying rent for the privilege to a French landlord. The descendants of our veterans of the Indian Wars who homesteaded in the west are, if they have not been driven off by foreclosures, slaves of their mortgagors.

Sometimes the need for natural resources is used as an excuse for grabbing land occupied by other peoples. This is the "place in the sun" argument. Does Hitler, now demanding colonies, promise the Germans that when these resources are acquired title in them will be vested in all the German people? Will the forests of Austria yield a profit for all his Aryans, or will the sale of this lumber merely add to the profits

of his Nazi friends? Only a stupid brown shirt (or a stuffed-shirt American professor of economics) will swallow this "need for natural resources" argument as a legitimate excuse for war. No people who own resources refuse to sell the output, at a profit, of course. What the conqueror wants is not the resources for his people, which can be readily acquired by an exchange of labor products, but the profit from the sale of these resources to his people.

It is true, of course, that in the economic warfare now going on between the principal powers of the world, a prelude of the open, declared war that is being brought on, each imperialist nation is denying to its foe raw materials needed for munitions and accessories. This type of undeclared warfare is being carried on, among other means, by export restrictions, exchange control and by channeling capital investment, and most of all by market control, at heavy cost not to yield advantage but to disadvantage an adversary. The home government, when it squeezes a foe from an open market, must outbid him—to the advantage of the raw materials monopolist. Here the economic warfare may be the cause of succeeding military warfare; but it itself is caused by the condition which brings on war.

Thus, all the roads that lead to war converge upon the absolute private ownership of land. And war cannot be abolished until the profit from this privilege, rent, is collected for all the people. The destruction of our iniquitous system of land tenure will both open up opportunities for a greatly increased production, for both labor and capital, which is



the prerequisite for permanent prosperity, and remove the profit-incentive from war. The poverty which prepares peoples' minds for slaughter, the irritating foreign investments of accumulated rent, and the rent-collecting privilege which impels monopolists to extend their empires, will be removed. There is no other way.