

THE RED FLAG

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GOVERNMENT AND PROPAGANDA

From the New York Nation, March 1, 1919

"The war has revealed to the groups of men who govern the several great nations new and hitherto undreamed of ways of fortifying their control over the masses of the people and of suppressing the opinions of hostile minorities. Not until the world war came had we Americans beheld loyalty to the policies of men temporarily chosen to represent the people in Washington made synonymous with loyalty to our institutions. Then it came about that if you believed our going into this war a mistake, if you held, as President Wilson did early in 1917, that the ideal outcome would be "peace without victory," you were a traitor. The government maintained this attitude toward dissenters by censorship of the press, by suppression of books, by the extraordinary powers of the department of justice, by the tremendous influence exerted by the secretary of the treasury over banks and business, by the use of private detective associations, and above all through propaganda of various kinds.

"For the work of propaganda our extraordinary American power of organization came into full play, stimulated by the appeal to patriotism, which, if not the last refuge of the scoundrel, as Johnson put it, certainly covers a multitude of sins. It speedily became a crime to think for oneself if one thought differently from the bulk of one's articulate fellow-citizens. On the other hand, the American love of a contest and of a game was utilized to the uttermost to put town, village, city, county and state "over the top," and the failure of any citizen to join in became thus an offence not only against loyalty but also against his neighbors and his community.

"After all, however, the most effective weapon in the hands of Washington has been the control of the press and the creation of a bureau of propaganda. In our civil war there were the beginnings of propaganda by the government in the sending to England by President Lincoln of Henry Ward Beecher and other to present the cause of the north to the British public. But in no other war, so far as we are aware, has there been the creation of official departments of propaganda, possessed of vast sums of money, headed, in some cases, by men of light and leading, and recognized as an important adjunct to the fighting forces.

What has happened in regard to Russia is the most striking case in point as showing what may be accomplished by government propaganda. Owing to its geographical situation Russia easily lends itself to news control. Particularly since the appearance of the Czecho-Slovak movement and the capture of Vladivostok by our own and Japanese troops, it has been possible practically to isolate Russia. For months past only such news has emanated from that country as the English censor and American government have desired. Wireless messages from Petrograd and Moscow have been "jammed," and the cable despatches so withheld that our American Associated Press correspondents voluntarily withdrew from Russia—to their credit be it said—because their position was utterly incompatible with self-respect.

"Our own policy with regard to Russia was, first to inform the Russian peoples, through the medium of the Root Commission, what they ought to do with their newly won liberty. Then, the refusal of Lenine and Trotzky to take advice produced the Sisson "documents"—intended to justify our attacking Russia without a declaration of war. Never could there be a clearer case of what government control of news sources can do than the fact that the bulk of the American people still believe Trotzky and Lenine to be the sum total of human depravity and wickedness, corrupt, lining their pockets with blood money. Bloody enough they doubtless are; yet it is an unqualified misfortune that the many good features of the Soviet republic, the wonderful qualities inspiring the revolution, the glorious vision that came with it of a freed and redeemed humanity, are not allowed to reach the American people. For months there have been issued from Russia, not the facts, not the truth that because of Allied intervention the Bolshevist government is growing stronger and stronger, but chiefly inventions. Bartholomew nights that never take place, together with the wildest rumors of communism in women, and of murder and bloodshed, taken from obscure Scandinavian newspapers, are hastily relayed to the United States, while everything favorable to the Soviets, every bit of constructive accomplishment, is suppressed. Thus are our opinions shaped.

"It may, of course, be said that all these things are justified as temporary war measures—but when peace comes? Shall we never see a yielding to the temptation to use these new and vast powers of propaganda for the benefit of those in office or for the propagation of the views that they hold? The right to control news from abroad will cease; no longer will Mr. Creel "prove" this or that as to happenings overseas. The daily newspapers will be relieved from the necessity of approving everything the government does. Yet the thought will not dawn that, having discovered how easy it is to "sell" opinions, we may see attempts to sell them in the years to come. And this is no idle fear. Have we not witnessed this very thing in connection with our recent adventures in the Caribbean?

"Again, suppose that Mr. Wilson or one of his successors should decide on a new war. Is there any one who still believes that the power to make war resides in congress as called for by the con-

stitution of the United States? Mr. Wilson has three times shown us, as Mr. Cleveland did in the Venezuelan crisis, that this power belongs practically to the president. Mr. Wilson puts us into war with Mexico at Vera Cruz and again when he sent General Pershing's army to invade Mexican soil. Our entry into the world war rested with the president; had he in April, 1917, still insisted that peace without victory was the desideratum, the country would have stood firmly behind him. Suppose now, on the other hand, the president should aver that we were ill-treated at the peace conference, should rouse the country's patriotic spirit and demand the support of all Americans in a final war to end war—by breaking the British naval menace and thus winning the complete freedom of the seas. He could at once denounce any opponent as traitor to our ideals, could incite the passions of the people against any leaders urging time for sober second thought by calling them wilful men, and having them morally lynched as Messrs. La Follette and Norris and the others were lynched. He could moreover set in motion vast propaganda along precisely the lines so ably utilized since we went into the present war. Santo Domingo shows what can be done. Strange things are being done in these days in the name of loyalty. The pity of it is that nowhere has this government propaganda been used for healing or reconstructive purposes. It has all been destructive—instinct with the spirit of hate."

This is an American liberal protest. It supports the Socialist contention that the bourgeois press under its mask of being the public press is nothing else but the mercenary tool of predatory capitalism ready and willing to campaign, on behalf of any vile, imperialistic adventure.

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SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

PROPAGANDA MEETINGS

SUNDAY, MARCH 23

At 8 p.m. Sharp

EMPRESS THEATRE

Corner Gore and Hastings

Speaker W. A. Fritchard