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Fourth International

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Twenty Cents

The Morale of the German Army

By LUCIEN

Under the Iron Heel, by Lars Moen. New York. Lip-pincot. \$3.50.

Lars Moen, an American engineer, left German-occupied Belgium toward the close of 1940, returning to the United States after an absence of about a dozen years. In his "Under the Iron Heel," he describes the mechanics of the occupation, the conditions in occupied Belgium. Moen is an ardent supporter of the bourgeois "democracies" in the present war. But in his book he does not at all times conform to the pattern followed in the outpourings of the foreign correspondents of the kept press. Moen sometimes draws conclusions from what he saw even when those conclusions do not please him. An interesting part of his story is told in the chapter, "What the German Soldier Thinks About."

Moen came into close contact with large numbers of German soldiers who were billeted at his hotel: "When their superior officers were absent, they often talked freely . . ." he writes. "On other occasions, the officers themselves talked with a frankness that astonished me."

What the German Soldier Thinks

Most of the German soldiers had been away from home a long time. Immediately after undergoing military training, they had been stationed for a time in Austria or Czechoslovakia, then participated in the various campaigns of the second World War. "The dominant, constantly recurring theme in all of their conversations is the desire to go home." In the earlier stages of the war, they had been led to hope it would soon be over. But they grew less and less certain of this. "Some soldiers said to me grimly: 'If the war isn't over by winter, we'll go home and let the politicians do the fighting!'" Criticism of the Nazi regime became more bitter and open. A German propagandist even went so far as to point out the lies of the German propaganda machine.

By and large, the German soldiers feel the war to be justified. They feel Great Britain to be their greatest enemy, nourish deep hatred for Churchill. This, Moen frankly enough admits, is not a consequence of Hitler's propaganda but of the well-known facts of history that Hitler has used for his own purposes—the Versailles Peace, the invasion of the Ruhr, and so on. "So long as the German soldier believes he is fighting to protect his family, he will put up with a great deal. . . ." Or, to put it more plainly, so long as the existing bourgeois governments outside Germany retain power, so long as they threaten the German people with a repetition of their sufferings during and after the first World War, so long will the German soldiers continue to tolerate the Hitler regime. The establishment of a socialist government in England would do more to undermine the Nazis than any military blows dealt to Hitler.

The German soldier is far from the stereotyped goose-stepping *Sieg-Heiler* that the politicians, the press, and the pulpit have depicted. Hitler, Moen maintains, is "idolized" by the entire German nation; but Hitler and the Nazi regime are not regarded as being one and the same. "In far more cases than I would ever have anticipated, German soldiers told me, in effect: 'Hitler is honest and sincere, but he is surrounded by a gang of crooks, and it is they who have gotten us into the present mess!' Again and again, I heard the

most bitter criticism of Goering, of Goebbels, of Hess, Himmler, Ley, and von Ribbentrop; again and again, German soldiers charged that these men were growing rich at the expense of the German people—that they were corrupt and unscrupulous."

The Germans feel that they are better off now, from the standpoint of material well-being, than before Hitler came to power. (The Weimar Republic was, of course, a poor yardstick of prosperity.) "Propaganda efforts aimed at the German people, offering them a restoration of their political freedom, will have little effect unless linked with some assurance of an order in Europe which promises them some sort of economic stability." This is no small hurdle for the bourgeois "democracies." The German soldiers would like to see Roosevelt's "four freedoms" firmly implanted in the British Empire and the Western hemisphere before they begin to think of entrusting their destinies to the mercies of the Roosevelts and Churchills.

Air-raid shelters are as much an issue in Germany as in England. The bombings of their home cities were a blow to the soldiers in occupied Belgium. "If anything ever leads them to lay down their arms, it is very likely to be the feeling that their families are exposed to grave danger from which the Nazis are no longer capable of protecting them."

The tank drivers and the air pilots, two "highly selected and trained groups," "were probably the most rabid fanatics in the entire German military organization." The loyalty and the services of the pilots were secured, in part, by high pay and extra bonuses after each flight.

The privations and suffering which the German soldier sees about him in the occupied territories do not exactly inspire optimism in Hitler's "New Order." It is far more likely that he will tend to sympathize with the local population. "To circumvent this, he (Hitler) moves them about frequently, but many of the men are specialists of various sorts . . . and once they become familiar with conditions in a particular community, it is inefficient to shift them elsewhere."

Another factor working to establish a bond between the soldiers and the inhabitants of the occupied territories is that the position of the troops, too, is growing worse. By the end of 1940, chocolate was no longer available to soldiers, they had to drink *ersatz* coffee, etc.

The Specter of Revolution

Moen states of the German army that "there are definite signs that, given certain conditions, it might very well revolt." Already, before the end of last year, there were overt signs of lowered morale such as a rise in drunkenness among the soldiers. There were cases of open insubordination, pilots refused to fly; Moen saw about two hundred German soldiers, who had revolted, being marched, hands manacled behind them, to a train headed for Germany. A young German naval officer remarked to him that the 1918 revolution began in Kiel "and that is where it will begin *this time*." A large proportion of the German sailors, the officer said, had had jobs on passenger ships before the war; they were accustomed to travel and had been in close touch with the outside world.

But the revolution that Moën conceives as possible has nothing in common with the pipe-dreams of the Gerhart Segers and the Tony Senders who are waiting patiently in the *New Leader* offices for a return to the "good old days"—the Weimar Republic, cabinet posts, overflowing trade union treasuries. A high German officer told Moën, "Germany will soon go Soviet." And Moën himself feels, "There is little in German character or history to justify a belief that any revolt which did occur in Germany would be in the direction of capitalist democracy."

Toward the close of "Under the Iron Heel" Moen writes, "Thus far, the most consistent aspect of the whole war has been the uniform regularity with which both prophets and military experts have been wrong about practically everything. Most of them have been wrong, I believe, because they have thought of the war solely in terms of strategic military or geographic positions, raw materials and guns, forgetting that the fighting must... be done by human beings. The degree of sacrifice which men will make is conditioned very largely by their degree of faith in the cause for which they are fighting—by their faith in the social and economic system which they are defending. Few of the prophets and experts have considered these factors at all, *other analysts have recognized their existence, but have been so afraid of the underlying currents implicit in the situation that they have allowed wishful thinking to cloud their judgment.*" (Our emphasis.)

The paeans of praise for Roosevelt's achievements with which Moën closes his book are an example of wishful thinking on his part. But on the whole, his work is free from the errors which he criticizes. And the result? The result is to undermine the very bases upon which the holy crusade for democracy is being sought. If Moën shows anything, he shows that the continued existence of capitalist democracy acts not to destroy Hitler but to prop him up. If the Ger-

man soldiers must choose between a victory of Roosevelt and Churchill as against the continued existence of the Nazi regime, then they will choose the latter.

An "Infantry Journal" reviewer wrote as follows of Moën's book: "I have read reviews in which this book was criticized for its scientific detachment. But it is that very detachment which makes *Under the Iron Heel* so valuable a commentary. The book has the ring of hard facts, and the reason that some reviewers found it cold is probably because the author occasionally says something good about the German army of occupation."

Small wonder! Chauvinism is not confined to Hitler's side in this war. Vansittart pictured the Germans as a "race" of barbarians. And Churchill followed with his "seventy million Huns." Chauvinism is as much the guiding philosophy of bourgeois democracies in this war as it is that of Hitler. They all go hammer and tongs after any author bold enough to point out that there are Germans and Germans, masters and men, and that the men hate the masters. The Churchills and the Roosevelts don't want a German revolution—they want a German colony.

Every new fact, even the embarrassed observations of Moen, serves to corroborate the position of our party. The Soviet Union will not be defended by appeals to historical analogies—the German soldiers are indifferent to stories of how the Czars of old drove out Napoleon. They would listen to those who speak to them of how the Bolsheviks in 1917 overthrew their own bourgeoisie, how they waged a revolutionary war against imperialism. The German soldiers will not heed the gigantic propaganda machine of Churchill and Roosevelt; deluging them with leaflets, blaring over the air waves—they know these people for what they are. But they will listen to the honest voice of the revolutionary party, which inspires them by example, which by struggling against its own imperialism shows them the way.

From the Arsenal of Marxism

Our Aims and Tactics in the Trade Unions

(A speech delivered at the Party Conference of Coal Miners at St. Louis, Mo., July 27, 1924. First published in the Daily Worker, August 2, 1924.)

By JAMES P. CANNON

This speech by Comrade Cannon was delivered seventeen years ago when the trade union work of the Communist Party was first being developed on a practical basis and its guiding principles laid down. Most of what is said there is pertinent to the present stage of the development of our party trade union work.

The Political Committee has decided to publish a book containing selections from the speeches and writings of Comrade Cannon over the entire period since the foundation of American communism, and has appointed a commission to select and edit the material. This speech is one of the documents to be included in the selection. The editorial work of the commission is already well under way.—THE EDITORS.

* * *

Comrades:

These conferences of Party members in the important trade unions in which representatives of the Central Executive Committee take part are becoming frequent occurrences. We must regard this as a healthy sign. It indicates that we are maturing as a Party of theoretical and practical revolutionists, and getting a firm grip on our basic tasks. The close collaboration between the active comrades in the field and the

leading organ of the Party has a beneficial result all the way around.

The close and intimate contact with the practical problems of the daily struggle and with the comrades who directly face them, serves as an unerring corrective to any tendency there might be in the Party to deal with these problems in an abstract or purely doctrinaire fashion. On the other hand, the participation of the Party representatives insures that the fundamental political aspect of the trade union struggle will be brought to the front in these trade union conferences. The importance of this cannot be over-estimated. Otherwise there is constant danger of the work of our trade union comrades being influenced too much by expediency and so-called practicality. One-sided conceptions, purely trade union points of view, take the upper hand and the general class issues of the struggle are pushed into the background. Such a state of affairs must be guarded against. We know too well that it leads to reformism and futility.

We are meeting here today to consider the problems of