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## Let the People Vote on War!

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### 1: Totalitarian War

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S.W.P IIRARY RFF Totalitarian War SN PAST civilizations, war was usually the business of a restricted class or caste of the population. The great majority not only took no part in the fighting, but, in point of fact, their lives were very little affected, even indirectly, by the conduct and outcome of wars and battles. In feudal times, for example, most of the people were serfs and vilians, who lived attached to the land where they were born. They gained their sustenance from locally self-sufficient agriculture and simple handicrafts, with scarcely any trade or commerce. They were required to turn over a certain percentage of their crops to their feudal lord, and usually also to work for a certain number of days each year on jobs assigned to them by their lord or his bailiffs. They were not, however, subject to any kind of military service. With the exception of one or two of the Crusades, wars were fought exclusively by members of the feudal nobility itself, assisted by their personal servants who acted, however, in non-military capacities. Fighting was considered, you might say, to be a "privilege" and prerogative of the nobility. In these feudal wars, not many persons, even of the nobility, were killed. Most weapons were crude, suited not for mass slaughter but for individual, hand-to-hand combat; and fairly adequate protective devices, such as armor and shields, were worn. The results of these wars, moreover, did not greatly affect the conditions of life of the great majority. Sometimes a chivalric army would commandeer all the crops of a given district, or even lay it waste by fire and pillage. But, since the armies were small and slow-moving, the roads few and poor and scattered, this did not happen often in any particular place. And the question of who won the war was of hardly any concern to the average serf. His duties and obligations were the same whether Baron X or Count Y was his lord. Even in the first centuries of modern times, the situation did not greatly change. In fifteenth century Italy, for instance, where the first stage of modern civilization reached 3

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its height, the powerful cities usually conducted wars by hiring mercenary armies. Most of the citizenry kept busy at its industrial and commercial tasks, and the major inconvenience of war was only an added drain on the treasury. Everybody involved. Now today, everything is changed. The world-wide division of labor, the development of a world economy, rapid transportation and communication, more or less universal education, have transformed war from the sport of nobles or the profession of mercenaries into a mass enterprise involving every single member of the population. Directly or indirectly, everyone is part of the war machine. In the first place, in our day, vast numbers of the population are directly concerned in the fighting of a war. The war armies are not restricted groups of professionals but mass armies made up of millions of individuals. Most of these millions are drafted or conscripted from the broad ranks of workers and peasants and farmers. In the battles of modern wars, great masses of people are killed or wounded. In the war of 1914-18 at least thirteen million were killed, and about thirty million more were wounded. But with the growth of new methods of fighting, such as airplane bombing and gas attacks, many persons who are not soldiers are killed and wounded in modern battles. A bomb or a gas shell does its work as quickly on old women or children as on men with uniforms. In modern war, moreover, death and wounds and disease are not confined to the battlefields. Scarcity of food, disruption of medical service, dislocation of hygienic and sanitary measures, all extend the casualty lists traceable to the war by untold millions. These factors, however, all of them directly bound up with war in its fighting aspect, by no means complete the picture. The war of 1914-18 taught us that in modern war, the entire population and all activities must be assembled into the war machine. The army is no longer just the soldiers in uniform; everyone belongs to the army. Every factory, mine and mill and farm go on a war basis. Education and movies and religion and art are harnessed to war 4

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propaganda. All organizations, such as political parties and unions and clubs and fraternal societies, either line up for the war or are illegalized. No "individual freedom" is tolerated. Everyone must think and talk and act for the war, or be subject to the most severe penalties. Includes All Humanity In short, war has become, in our day, totalitarian. War is no longer a matter for some sections of the population, and some types of activities. War dominates and controls the total life and activities of the totality of the population. The governments and general staffs of every nation recognize this to be the case. That is why the war plans of all governments include the organization of the whole country and the entire population along totalitarian lines. In the case of the United States, as elsewhere, these plans are fully prepared. Many of them are included in the famous document known as the "Industrial Mobilization Plan," the provisions of which are scheduled to go into effect on "M"-Day-the day that war begins. The problem of modern war is, thus, a problem for every human being. With the destiny of each one of us at stake, it would seem wise and proper for us to try to decide ourselves what to do, and not to turn ourselves blindly over to the hands of others. II The History of the War Referendum ACCORDING to the provisions of the Constitution of the United States, the power to declare war against a foreign nation is vested in Congress. The President may not declare war; he may recommend its declaration, but it must be voted by a majority in a joint session of both Houses of Congress. It is true, of course, that this technical separation of powers is not so decisive as it might seem. The Constitution designates the President as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the nation. Directly and through the subordinate Executive departments, he is in charge of the nation's diplomacy, in the case of the actual signing of treaties subject to confirmation by the Senate. Through 5

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this military and diplomatic control, a President may, in spite of the Constitutional limitation, have a share in the war-making power equal to or even greater than that of Congress. We have been taught since childhood that, in theory at least, Congress is the "representative" of the people. When Congress declares war against a foreign nation, it is supposed to be acting as such a representative, to be expressing the "will of the people." People Are Dragged into War Whatever may be the truth about this in general, history and experience have made clear that in the case of declaring war Congress cannot at all be relied upon to act as the genuine representative of the people. Experience has already shown that the people can be, and probably have been, dragged into wars against their will. This seems to have been true of the war fought by the United States against Mexico in the middle of the last century. There is not the slightest evidence that the majority of the people of the country favored this ruthless war of aggression. Nevertheless, Congress declared war and called upon the people to support it. In doing so Congress acted not as representative of the people, but of those special industrial, agricultural and financial interests which had something to gain from the Mexican War. The same conclusion is even clearer in the case of the aggressive, imperialist war fought against Spain at the beginning of this century. The Spanish War was deliberately cooked up by a small handful of big capitalists and bankers, publicists and politicians. The opinions and sentiments of the great majority of the people were contemptuously flouted. The War itself was the occasion for some of the most shameless graft in history. Young workers and farmers were sent out to die from yellow fever and dysentery in order to give a few bankers and industrial privateers control over the sugar and fruit plantations of Cuba and Hawaii and the Philippines. The Mexican and Spanish wars were, in a sense, minor undertakings in the history of the United States. The lesson they teach, however, is hammered in by the experience of the Great War of 1914-18. The story of this country's

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entry into the last war has been studied in great detail during the past twenty years. Much of the material is contained in publicly available records of Congressional committees. Thorough and competent historians have completed the analysis. The Necessary Conclusion There is no doubt about the conclusions which must be drawn. The needs and wishes of the people were never consulted in connection with the decision to enter the last war. The gigantic loans made to the Allied Powers, the profits of bankers and big corporations, the maneuvers of a small group of financiers, diplomats and politicians, decided the issue, not the will of the people. Once again, in April 1917, Congress declared war not as the representative of the people, but at the will of and as spokesman for the Morgans and Whitneys and DuPonts and Rockefellers. We thus reach two conclusions about the problem of war as it faces the United States: (1) war is now a totalitarian enterprise, affecting everyone; (2) the method provided in the Constitution cannot be relied upon to carry out the will of the people on the question of war. Increasing numbers of people in this country have reached these conclusions. At the same time it is clear to all of us that a new world war threatens to break out at any moment. All nations are directing their chief energies to preparation for it. Last year more than seventeen billion dollars were spent on armaments. Tens of millions of men are under arms throughout the world. Every few months a new crisis occurs, each one bringing the world to the very edge of general war. In the United States, as elsewhere, the armaments are built up. The government intervenes constantly in the various danger spots. Whatever laws are on the books, banks and corporations become entangled through credits and supplies with warring or potentially warring nations. The pattern of the last war seems to be repeating itself. The people do not want war; but more and more fear that the war is coming and that the people of the United States will be dragged into it against their will. An understanding of the totalitarian character of mod

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ern war, a realization that on the question of war Congress cannot be relied on to carry out the will of the people, a fear that the people are going to be dragged into a war which they do not want: these are the sources that have led to a search for some means of protection against the war and the war-makers, and have brought so many in this country to favor the plan for a popular referendum on war. The proposal for a popular referendum is an extremely simple one. The Constitution would be amended so that war could be declared by the United States government only through a direct vote of the people, a direct popular referendum. To an ordinary human being, this proposal seems most reasonable, modest and democratic. It is the people and all the people who must fight and suffer from war (they do not fight and suffer by representation). Should not the people themselves, then, decide whether a war is worth fighting and suffering for? The United States is supposed to be a democracy. What could be more democratic than to decide the most important of all questions, the question of war, by a direct vote of the people? This is, indeed, what the people of the United States think. Authoritative surveys, such as the "Gallup poll," show that an overwhelming majority, two-thirds at the very least, favor the war referendum. In a democracy, you would think that such a majority would get what it wants. Why not? What has happened to the war referendum proposal? III The Opposition to the War Referendum SEVERAL years ago, Representative Ludlow of Indiana put the war referendum plan into a resolution which he introduced in the House of Representatives; and last year his resolution came up for a test vote in the House. From association with his name, the plan is often referred to as the "Ludlow amendment." It should be noticed that Ludlow's original bill did not embody the plan in its simple and direct form. He attached a proviso: the popular referendum was not to be held if the mainland of the United States were invaded.

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Ludlow has re-introduced his resolution, with several more provisos, at the present session of Congress; and a similar resolution has been sponsored in the Senate by a group of Senators headed by LaFollette of Wisconsin. In both of the current resolutions, the referendum would not operate if either the mainland of the United States or any of its territories and possessions or any part of Latin America were invaded or immediately threatened by invasion. In other words, the present Ludlow and LaFollette resolutions provide for a referendum only in the case of a war conducted by the United States in Europe, Asia or Africa. Congress would otherwise retain the present Constitutional right to declare war. What Is Behind the Opposition? It might be supposed that these sweeping provisos about which I shall have something to say in the next section-would remove all the "objections" to the plan. Does not everyone from Roosevelt down assure us that the United States will never go to war for "aggressive" purposes, that the young men of this country will never again be sent to fight abroad, that the armament of the United States is being built up for purely defensive purposes? What possible objection can they have when the people ask to vote, not on all wars, but just on those obviously and blatantly aggressive wars which they say the United States will never fight? Nevertheless, the fight against the war referendum plan, in any and all of its forms, has from the beginning been as powerful and bitter as the strength of its opponents can bring to bear. Through every channel of public opinion, speech and newspaper and magazine and pulpit, the attack has been conducted. What lies behind this fierce opposition to this plan, approved of by more than two-thirds of the people? The people have the right to know. Among the sharp opponents of the war referendum, we discover: the heads of the Democratic Party, including Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull; the heads of the Republican Party, including Herbert Hoover, Alfred M. Landon, and the influential Henry L. Stimson,

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Hoover's Secretary of State; the Liberty League, and the American Legion officials; all of the most powerful newspapers, particularly the most reactionary newspapers such as the New York Herald-Tribune and the New York Times, and the Chicago Tribune; all of the most widely read of the big-shot columnists, especially Walter Lippman, General Hugh S. Johnson, and Dorothy Thompson; and the Communist Party. For the most part, the attacks on the war referendum plan are in a tone of hysterical frenzy; all supporters of the plan are denounced as "unpatriotic" and it is suggested that they are influenced by paid propaganda agents of foreign nations: the lack of real arguments is covered by heavy flag-waving and big adjectives. Arguments Hold No Water When we examine the arguments which some of the opponents try sometimes to put forward, they boil down to three: (1) the referendum would be contrary to "our representative theory of government" established by the Constitution; (2) holding a referendum would show other nations that "the country is divided"; (3) the requirement of a referendum before entering a war would "hamper" the government in its foreign policy. Each of these arguments is a complete absurdity from the point of view of genuine democracy. Granted that the United States has a representative form of government. But what is the government supposed to represent? The will of the people, presumably. No question could be more important than that of war. If those who claim to be representatives of the people believed that the nation should enter a war, then a popular vote on the issue could only help to prove whether they were in truth representatives. If a freely conducted popular vote went against the war which they proposed, that would prove that they did not really represent the will of the people; if it went in favor of the war, they would be strengthened as the genuine representatives. Similarly in the case of the other two arguments. If the people are in fact divided on the question of the war, do they not have the right to say so? What if in a division, a majority were against the war? Do the "representatives"

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want to fight the war in any case, against the will of the majority? The argument against the referendum on the grounds that it will disclose a division of opinion indicates indeed that those who will be for the war when the time comes intend to suppress all contrary opinion. The same argument of course applies to anyone who will express opposition of any kind to the war, quite apart from a referendum. Again, the referendum could hamper U. S. diplomacy only if the diplomatic maneuvers were going in a direction contrary to the will of the people. If the diplomacy were in line with the will of the people, the referendum would strengthen and reinforce the diplomacy. Under the barrage of the opposition, on January 10th, 1938, the House of Representatives voted down the Ludlow motion. Earlier in that same week, the Gallup poll had shown that 72% of the people favored the bill! Could there have been a more striking demonstration that on the question of war the Congressmen are not the "representatives of the people", that the people are correct in distrusting the President and Congress, that the President and Congress do not express the people's will! Lurking behind the fake arguments which the opponents of the referendum use on the surface, we can find the real meaning of their fierce opposition. By their attitude they are proving that in reality they are against democracy and democratic processes of government, and that their aim is to drag the people of this country into a war of imperialist aggression and conquest for the sake of profits. What other real reason could they possibly have? If they actually believed in true democracy, if they were fully and sincerely against any war except perhaps a war of honest defense, they could only welcome the plan for a people's referendum. It is because they are planning a war for the benefit of the banks and the big corporations, for the Sixty Families, that they oppose the referendum so bitterly. They dare not let their plans see the light of day; they dare not submit them to the verdict of the people. They plot behind the backs of the

people with secret diplomacy, closed-door meetings, secret treaties and military agreements. And, when they are ready, they prepare to whip the people into

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line and to plunge them into mass slaughter. In the eyes of Roosevelt and Stimson and Browder and Lippman and Hoover, war is not an issue for the people to decide. It is for the people, like slaves and cattle, to obey the orders of the masters, to suffer and to die in order to make the world safe for the Sixty Families. IV The Referendum and the Fight Against War The basic reason why the great majority of the people are in favor of the war referendutn is because they are afraid a war is coming and they do not want a war. The bulk of the people-the workers and farmers and teachers and professionals and small shop-keepers-know that they have nothing to gain and everything, from their lives to all of their liberties, to lose from a war. They are looking for some way to stop the war, or at least put a big obstacle in its path. They believe that the popular referendum is the way in which the war can be stopped, since everyone knows that if the people had a free chance to decide, they would vote against participation in any war which is now or is likely to be on the horizon of the United States. A Democratic Demand Revolutionary socialists, and their party, the Socialist Workers Party, do not think that a popular referendum can, in and by itself, stop war. We believe that modern wars spring from causes which are deep within the present capitalist system of society; and that to get rid of war per manently we shall have to remove those causes by over throwing capitalism and building in its place a free socialist society. The Sixty Families and their agents who administer the government for them will go to war whatever laws are on the statute books. In an article attacking the Ludlow bill, Walter Lippman once gave this cynically away: "If an American President," he wrote, "wants to go to war, he can go no matter what the Ludlow amendment says." Nevertheless, we, as revolutionary socialists, fully and firmly support the demand for a popular referendum on war. We stand with the great majority of the people 12

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against the war-mongers and the war-makers. The proposal for a war referendum is truly democratic, and revolutionary socialists favor every genuinely democratic process. The question of the war must be brought into the light of day! The people, in endorsing the war referendum, give expression to their hatred of the war and their wish to struggle against it. We share that hatred, and take our place in that struggle. The fight for the war referendum, whatever its limitations, is unquestionably one powerful means of fighting against the war. This is shown plainly by the nature of the opposition to the referendum. The movement for the referendum finds itself at every stage in the sharpest conflict with the war-mongers. If there is still disagreement about the best means for fighting war, we can learn from the experience of common struggle. Upon Whom Shall We Rely? One lesson can already be drawn from the experiences of the movement for the war referendum. That lesson is that the "official" leaders of the movement, the Ludlows and LaFollettes, cannot be relied upon. They give lip service in speeches and at election time, but they have already shown in practice that they cannot be counted on to carry the struggle through. In the first place, they have not rallied the people behind them in a great popular wave that would sweep over the heads of the opposition. They jockey around in the of fices or committee rooms of Washington, and permit the war-mongers to file their bills away in dusty pigeon-holes. For such a cause as the war referendum, there is no hope in legalistic by-play at the top; strength can come only from the surging voice of the people. In the second place, they have tacked so many modifica tions onto the simple, clear demand for the referendum that they have warped it beyond recognition. With all

of Latin America, all United States possessions (including, no doubt all consulates and embassies, which are technic ally possessions, in every country) excluded not merely if invaded but even at the immediate "threat" of invasion, a clever statesman could find a way of maintaining that the 13

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referendum could never apply. In order to bring the proposal back to its clear original form, and to put it on the most solid foundation, three changes in the current versions are necessary: (1) It should call for a direct, popular, referendum vote in the case of any and all wars. This is the only safeguard. History has shown that diplomats in each and every country are always able to claim that any war into which their nation enters is a "defensive" war. Calling a war defensive is only a way of trying to make it look respectable. The people who should decide whether to fight a war, are also the ones to decide whether or not a given war is defensive. (2) The referendum decision should be required not merely prior to any declaration of war, but prior to the use of any of the armed forces of the United States in any armed conflict whatsoever. Nowadays wars are sometimes not "declared", but undeclared wars can be just as destructive as any others. The point is for the people to decide not only the partly formal question of the declaration of war, but the concrete question of the war itself, which means armed conflict. (3) In the war referendum, the right to vote should be given to all of the age of 18 and over. Those who are 18 and over are called upon to die in the war, are drafted. If they are old enough to fight in the war, they are old enough to vote on the question of entering it. The people want the war referendum. That is the unchallenged fact. What must be done is for the people themselves to take the fight for the referendum into their own hands. Nothing has been or will be done by waiting for Congressmen and Senators. The issue of the referendum must be brought into every trade union, farm organization and farmers' cooperative, every fraternal society and club and youth group. Rallies, petitions, speeches, meetings, canvassings must gather the already vast but unorganized support of the referendum into a powerful, united force. Before the assembled might of the people, the secret diplomats, the star-chamber heroes, the war-mongers and their fellow conspirators, will be routed into the open and compelled to give their accounting. Let the people decide!

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