

The Real Causes of the War

SINCE THE ADVENT OF HITLER 385,216 square miles of land have been added to the area under domination of German masters. The Stalin realm now includes three countries and parts of three others which before the war had different boundaries. Albania is now Mussolini-owned. Hungarian and Bulgarian politicians have altered the geographies of their countries to include land formerly called Rumanian. Britain is fighting to prevent a transfer of lands to the Axis Powers over which its flag flies.

This war, therefore, like all its predecessors, is over land. But land, as land, is valueless. In itself it yields no satisfactions. By itself it produces nothing that would warrant the spilling of a drop of blood, the expenditure of one bullet. Its possession does not, in itself, make for one thing that the possessor might crave. It is just land.

But, living and working on the land which Hitler has overrun are 93,300,000 people. By the exertion of effort on this land these people produce a lot of wealth. It is this production of labor that makes possession of the land they work on desirable. And since the land is essential to production, possession of the land is equivalent to possession of the production.

The acquisition of land has for its purpose only the power to compel the workers to give up what they produce on it. In ethics this would be called "robbery," because the right to retain what one produces is a basic ethical concept. In economics it is

termed "exploitation." In politics it is venerated with such cloudy phrases as "manifest destiny," "living room" and "imperialism."

The political techniques for depriving the worker of his produce are various and sometimes complicated; but rid of their superficialities they reduce to taxes and the private collection of rent. So long as these two methods of confiscating labor products are accepted by the workers the struggle for the land on which they live and work will go on. In that sense, it is the people who make war on themselves.

People can be conquered; but they can be enslaved only by themselves. It is true that conquerors may condition the people—by laws, education and tradition—to an acceptance of the methods necessary to a slave society. For instance, the people of no country in the world recognizes the exploitive character of rent, the robbery of taxation.

Centuries of habit have so entrenched these iniquities that they are not recognized as such; they are so firmly accepted as a necessary condition of life

that the very sufferers are the first to resist any attempt to abolish these shackles. Only the people can enslave themselves.

This being so, the transfer of lands from one ownership to another cannot possibly alter the economic condition of the people. The methods of one dominating group may be more ruthless than those of another; the ideology or the religion of the conquerors may be contrary to the mental habits of the conquered; their language, their traditions, their cuisine may be as repulsive as they are strange. But economically there is no change because there remains the system of taxation and rent-collection, to which the people have become inured by centuries of exploitation; the transition has been only in the personnel of the exploiters.

It is because the system of taxation and rent confiscation is universally accepted that the instrument

of war to acquire land is universally practiced. No one would fight for land if the possession of it did not automatically involve the power to exploit the people thereon.

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Two notes of explanation are required.

First, it must be remembered that the soldier is as oblivious of causes as are his people; therefore it never occurs to him that he is fighting for a continuation or extension of the exploitive system which occasioned the war, or that he might share in the spoils by obtaining possession of some of the conquered area.

Second, the Soviet nationalization of land merely makes landlords of the political group, and the collection of rent by them is as economically disastrous as the collection of rent by individuals under other political systems.