“Decisive Peace”

Vegetius’ notorious motto “si vis pacem, para bellum” shows that since ancient times warmongers have presented war as a necessity to guarantee peace and stability. In that sense the rhetoric and the propaganda with which the Axis forces announced the beginning of World War II was nothing new. On 10 June 1940, Benito Mussolini announced to a jubilant mass of people the entrance of the Kingdom of Italy in the war, saying that the use of weapons was necessary to “finally bring justice and peace to Italy, Europe and the whole world.”

Peace and the victory of fascist Italy were recurrent topics in Ezra Pound’s writings, too: for instance, one article he wrote in March 1942 was entitled “Pace Decisiva” (“Decisive Peace”):

La pace decisiva significa, prima di tutto, una Vittoria del Fascismo nell’Italia stessa. Vittoria spirituale e la fine del pensiero mercantilistico-usuraio.

Ma la vittoria decisiva non si limita ad una vittoria limitata dalle frontiere politiche dei tre imperi, Italiano, Giapponese e Tedesco. Nella vittoria integrale non si lascia al nemico la facoltà di rintanarsi nel ghetto di Londra e nelle retro-botteghe di Wall St. Quindi la mia voce non tace.

(Decisive peace means, first of all, the victory of Fascism within Italy herself. Spiritual victory and the end of the habit of mercantilist-usurious thought. But decisive victory should not be restricted to the borders of the three Empires: Italian, Japanese and German. Integral victory means not to leave to the enemy the chance to take refuge in the ghetto of London or in Wall Street back shops. That’s why I won’t shut up.)

2 Ezra Pound, “Pace decisiva,” Meridiano di Roma (15 March 1942). All Pound’s articles quoted in this text are collected in the nine volumes of Ezra Pound’s Poetry and Prose: Contributions
Pound associates peace with the right to pursue enemies even outside the state boundaries. After all, for him the real responsibility for starting the war lay with the international usurers and the arrogant politicians of the liberal-democratic countries that protected them:

_Qu’este guerra aveva lo scopo di rendere il mondo sicuro per l’usura; per erigere la <<Federal Union>> al posto della Lega delle Nazioni, alias <<Bank of International Settlements>>; ossia per rendere tutto il mondo schiavo di una banda di usurai irresponsabili, internazionali e non al cento per cento ariani._

[...]

_Ad un certo punto il <<racket>> (truffa) oro ed il <<racket>> dello sfruttamento universale usuraio, si congiungono in un’unica e terribile minaccia contro tutta l’Europa, contro tutti gli abitanti delle terre che non producono questi metalli, cioè la Spagna, la Francia, l’Italia e la Germania._

(This war had the purpose of making the world safe for usury; to erect the “Federal Union” in place of the League of Nations, alias “The Bank of International Settlement”; that is, to make all the world slave to a gang of irresponsible usurers, international and not 100% Arian...The “racket” of the gold and the “racket” of the usurers’ universal exploitation join together, forming one terrible threat for Europe, against all the inhabitants of lands that can’t produce these metals [gold and silver], namely Spain, France, Italy and Germany.)

It is hardly necessary to linger on the evident analogies between Pound’s theories and the topics of Axis propaganda, which also repeated the idea that the war was (here in Hitler’s words) “the result only of the greed of a few international warmongers and the Jewish democracies behind them.” This use of propaganda helped to convince large sections of the public under the Nazi and fascist regimes that they were fighting “not only for our [their] own existence, but to free the world of a conspiracy which knows no scruples in subordinating the happiness of nations and man to its base egotism.”

During the war years Pound really felt he was taking a part in a sort of final battle between two opposing civilisations:

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