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Exasperating Essays

Imperialism and Peace

We do not have, today, the peace yearned for by millions all over the world. In Korea we see a full-scale modern war waged relentlessly against an entire nation whose one wish, for centuries, has been unity, with independence from foreign aggression. In Malaya and Indo-China two decaying imperial powers struggle desperately to maintain the privileges of an outworn colonial system over the opposition of people who will no longer be denied freedom. Military operations in Greece, Indonesia, Kashmir, Palestine, have shown us for five years other facets of the same malignant activity.

Yet the supporters of peace have a power which can stop this violence and bloodshed. For all these wars and acts of aggression-even the war in Korea-have been waged in the name of establishing peace. At first, we were given various mutually contradictory reasons why the Koreans were to be saved from themselves. Then we were told that General Mac- Arthur meant to supply the aggressive leadership which is all that Asiatics can appreciate. He seems to think that we Asiatics will naturally appreciate saturation bombing of peaceful villages, destruction of schools and hospitals, savage reprisals against civilians and prisoners of war. But this is an error. What we do appreciate is that his utterances show quite clearly who is the real aggressor in Korea. We Asiatics also belong to the human race; we also are made

of flesh and blood; we tread the same earth, breathe the same air.

The peace we want means true democracy. The experience of millennia has shown us that no other kind of peace will last. No man shall claim to be another's master whether by divine right, the right of birth, the right of armed conquest, or the right vested in accumulated private property. Such rights can only be exercised by fraud and violence against the vast majority of the people, by destroying the very foundations of peace, namely, truth and justice. The lowest in the land must raise himself to full stature as an individual member of a great society. He must exercise in full, by actual participation in governing himself and others, his right to receive according to his needs, his duty to contribute according to his ability. Formal recourse to the ballot-box for a periodic but ineffective change of masters will not suffice.

The stale proclamations of all imperialisms, from Rome to the present day, have again been proved false in the British, French, and Dutch empires. The people of China rejected, in favour of democracy, the aggressive leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, who was so amply supplied with foreign arms and money. But the only lesson imperialism can draw from these rebuffs is that puppets are unreliable, that open intervention is a far better road to conquest- provided the other side is poorly armed. The Pax Romana and the Pax Britannica should now be replaced by a dollar peace, the Pax Americana. Tacitus gave a candid opinion of a contemporary Roman emperor: "He made a desert and called it peace." A modern historian might say of Hitler: "He waged total war, and called it peace. This kind of "peace" did not succeed in Europe, nor will it in any other part of the world.

Let us trace this crazy logic to its source. The issue of peace or war does not depend upon a single individual who is ostensibly at the helm of a nation, but upon the dominant class which really holds the power. We are all convinced of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt's liberalism and sincere desire for world peace. Yet in attempting to "quarantine the aggressor" in Spain, he only helped to destroy the democratic victims of fascist aggression. Hitler's advance into Czechoslovakia went unchecked, as did Mussolini's into Abyssinia, Japan's into China. We can trace this kind of aggression right back to World War I and its aftermath, to the grim intervention against the young Soviet Union which had sounded the call for peace at its very birth. There is indeed a broad continuity of policy against peace and against democracy. This undercurrent has never changed its direction, no matter what appear on the surface. Leaders like Mr. Churchill just carry out the interests of the dominant class and would get nowhere without its backing; they are merely a symptom, not the main cause.

Look at another aspect of this underlying policy. Ploughing cotton back into the soil, burning up or dumping millions of tons of food into the ocean were desperation measures introduced at the beginning of Roosevelt's New Deal. Instead of changing the ownership of the means of production, or designing a better distribution mechanism, these transitional measures rapidly became a permanent feature of the American way of life. The United States government began regularly to pay subsidies to produce food which was then destroyed to keep prices up. Up to 1950, American farmers were paid by their government to destroy mountainous heaps of potatoes and to feed to livestock wheat produced by the most modern farming technique; at the same time, Canadian wheat was being imported into the United States because, even after

paying the protective tariff, it was cheaper than the subsidised American product. This insane economic system shows exactly the same kind of twisted logic as that of modern imperialism which wages war in the name of peace and calls any move toward, peace an act of warlike aggression, which bombs people indiscriminately to save them from Communism.

The crooked roots of imperialism lie deep in the need for profits and ever more profits- for the benefit of a few monopolists. The "American way of life" did not solve the world problem of the great depression of 1929-33. In the United States this was solved by World War II. But only for a time. Korea shows that the next step is to start a new war to stave off another depression. The one lesson of the last depression which stuck is that profits can be kept up by creating shortages where they do not and need not exist. War materials are produced for destruction. Producing them restricts consumer goods, which increases profits in double ratio. Any logic that proves the necessity of war is the correct logic for imperialism and for Big Business, which now go hand in hand. Mere contradictions do not matter for this sort of lunatic thinking where production of food is no longer the method of raising man above the animals, but merely a way of making profit while millions starve.

Let us now consider the deeper fact that food is itself a weapon-a negative weapon, but no less deadly than the atom- bomb for bacteriological warfare. A bomb or a bullet shortens a man's life. The lack of proper nourishment also shortens a man's expectation of life by a calculable number of years, even when there is no actual famine or death by starvation. Deprive a man of food and you make him prey not only to hunger but to disease; do it year after year, generation after generation, and you produce a race whose minds and bodies are stunted, tortured, warped, deformed. You produce monstrous superstitions, twisted social

systems. Destroying stockpiles of food is the same kind of action as building up stock-piles of atom- bombs.

But the war waged by means of food is different in one very important respect from national and colonial aggression. It is war against the whole of humanity except that tiny portion to whom food is a negligibly small item of expenditure, war also against millions of American workers. In a word, it is class war, and all other wars of today stem from attempts to turn it outward. Even the Romans knew that the safest way to avoid inner conflict, to quiet the demands of their own citizens, was to attempt new conquests.

Quite apart from the destructiveness of total war, the crooked logic of Big Business and warmongers is fatal to the clear thinking needed for science. The arguments that modern science originates with the bourgeoisie, that the enormous funds devoted to war research are a great stimulus to science, are vicious. The scientific outlook came into being when the bourgeoisie was a new progressive class, struggling for power against feudal and clerical reaction. Science is cumulative, as is large-scale mechanised production which congeals the result of human labour and technical skill in increasingly large and more efficient machines. But for modern capitalists, a class in decay, the "findings of science (apart from profit-making techniques) have become dangerous; and so it becomes necessary for them to coerce the scientist, to restrict his activity. That is one reason for vast expenditure on secret atomic research, for putting third-raters in control to bring big-business monopoly to the laboratory. The broad co-operation and pooling of knowledge which made scientific progress so rapid is destroyed. Finally the individual scientist is openly and brutally enslaved for political reasons. Science cannot flourish behind barbed wire, no matter how much money the war offices may pay to 'loyal' mediocrities. Freedom is the recognition of necessity; science is the

investigation, the analysis, the cognition of necessity. Science and freedom always march together. The war mentality which destroys freedom must necessarily destroy science.

The scientist by himself can neither start nor stop a war . Modern war has to be fought by millions in uniform and greater numbers in fields and factories. But a scientific analysis of the causes of war, if convincing to the people at large, could be an effective as well as a democratic force for peace. We have to make it clear to the common people of the world that any aggression anywhere is, in the last analysis, war against them. We have to tell them not to be misled by the familiar but insidious whisper: "Things were better when we had a war". This is just like a criminal drug peddler saying to his victim: "See how much better it was for you when you had the drug than when you sobered up afterwards. Buy another dose." The real problem is how to straighten out our thinking and to change our economy, to transfer control of all production to society as a whole. Only then can we have real democracy and lasting peace.

It must be understood quite clearly that the war between nations, World War III, is not inevitable and can be stopped by pressure of public opinion. The inner conflict, the class war, on the other hand, must be settled within each country without foreign armed intervention. The peace movement cannot deny to any people the right to revolution (including counter-revolution), nor even the right to wage civil war. It can only demand that no nation's armed forces should go into action upon foreign territory. That is aggression even when done under cover of "defence", restoration of law and order, or a forced vote in the United Nations: The purpose of the United Nations was to settle all international differences without war, not to provide a joint flag for the ancient imperialist "police actions". If unchecked, such an adventure is a clear invitation to the aggressor

to initiate the next world war as can be seen by the history of appeasement during the 1930's.

But there is one important difference between that period and the present. There were then large powers such as the British Empire and the United States which could assume a position of formal neutrality while fascism was being built up as a military and political counterpoise to Communism. Even this formal neutrality is impossible today; only mass action by the common people of the world remains as the bulwark of peace.

Monthly Review, (New York) 3,1951, pp. 45-59. Colonial liberation greatly promotes world peace because it wipes out the great tension between the imperial power and the subject people, and because it does away with the outcry for colonies by the "have-not" nations of the West. The previous exploiting nation will actually profit, for it would logically be the best source of help for the liberated colony to develop its own resources on a free and equal basis. This is because of long' contact, cultural influences, and local knowledge. The loss to the small group of people who monopolised colonial profits and made money out of armaments would be negligible as compared to the national savings in armaments and the total profit by the new trade. The sole condition for all these mutual benefits is that liberation should take place before the colonial population is enraged beyond all limits. The British seem to have learned this lesson (except in places like Kenya where there is virtually no strong native bourgeoisie), whereas the French show by their behaviour in Algeria that the lesson of Vietnam has not yet gone home.