

THE AMERICAN THAW: MILITARISM AND THE NEW LEFT

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THE story is told of a Liechtenstein prime minister who was refused economic aid by the United States State Department because "you have no Communist problem in Liechtenstein". The distraught premier, seeking a solution to his dilemma, telephoned his friend, the French Foreign Secretary, and appealed to him to "lend us a few Communists so that we can get some aid from the U.S." The Foreign Secretary listened attentively. "I'd like to help you," he said, "but we need every Communist we have ourselves."

This piece of political fiction is all too illustrative of the negative character of current American foreign policy. Ever since 1947 the primary objective of U.S. policy had been simply to check the advance of Communist power, relegating all other aspects of foreign affairs to secondary status. Before the Second World War, Russia was an isolated country, offering an ideological challenge to Western Capitalism but hardly a military or economic one. And then the Russians broke speedily out of their isolation and established a solid geopolitical unit stretching from Central Europe to the Pacific.

To American leaders, this was a discomfiting development. From each new set of hostilities—against Britain in 1776 and 1812, against Mexico in 1846, against Spain in 1898, and against Germany and Austria in 1917—the United States had emerged victorious, with its power enhanced and unchallenged (at least for a respectable period of time) by antagonisms of the peace. Protected by two oceans and confronting no great power within its own hemisphere, the United States could relax after each battle and march forward with jaunty self-confidence. World War II, however, removed the oceans as a military defence and confronted the U.S. for the first time with a threat that was ideological, military, political and economic at once. The country was now face-to-face with the most extensive nationalist revolution in all history; and foreign policy, whose primary concern for a century had only been trade and capital advantage, suddenly found itself hurtled into a new *kind* of world conflict—without a plan of how to cope.

By tradition the American people are strongly anti-colonialist. America, after all, was the first nation to win its freedom from British colonialism, back in 1776. It did take from Mexico, in 1848, a huge tract of land stretching from New Mexico to California, but this was incorporated into the United States rather than treated as a colony. Only a few relatively small areas, like the Philippines, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, were ever ruled as direct dependencies. Sympathy for the oppressed and the underdog therefore, has always been a feature of the American political morality. Thus when Indonesia won its independence from Holland after War II, it had whole-hearted U.S. acclaim. When Fidel Castro overthrew Batista in 1958, he excited the admiration of the average American. When dictator Perez Jimenez was overthrown in Venezuela, the grass-roots American applauded the result. Anti-colonial and anti-dictator sentiment is still so strong that U.S. governments cannot entirely by-pass it. They must explain all their acts, even when assisting dictators, in terms of "fighting for freedom" or "preserving the free world".

The basic hostility of the American people to dictatorship also accounts, of course, for their growing bitterness towards the Communist world after World War II. Opposition to Russia has grown most since the revelations by Polish and other inmates of Soviet labour camps, who were released during and after World War II. In the 1930's and during the war there was a reservoir of friendly feeling towards the Soviets in America, but as a new picture of Russia began to emerge it offended the American belief in "fair play", America's popular and pragmatically produced image of just government.

It is one of the grotesqueries of history that this democratic and anti-colonialist élan of the American people should have been put at the service of a foreign policy that props dictators and, more often than not, colonialism. In the face of what is considered the greater enemy—Communism—Americans are winking at what are considered the lesser enemies of dictatorship and imperialism. Communism, in the pragmatic American view, is considered not the *derivative* of imperialism, poverty, hunger, disease, and the revolutions that follow in their wake, but as the driving force that upsets the American *status quo*. This compartmentalization of the problem, fostered by successive regimes out of ignorance or venality, is at the root of the negativism in American foreign policy. If Communism would only

disappear, or if it could be prevented from "agitating" in underdeveloped (as well as advanced) countries, "we would be safe"—so runs the argument. A pragmatic people living in the warm climate of prosperity for two decades finds it difficult to visualize a world of so much poverty beyond its shores. The State Department, blinded itself to the import of a revolutionary age, fosters the hope that somehow or other Communism will "disappear" and the "American century" continue unchallenged. "The United States holds the view," said a State Department memo of August 1958, "that Communism's role in China is not permanent and that it one day will pass. By withholding diplomatic recognition from Peking, it (the State Department) seeks to hasten that day." There is little doubt that this estimate also holds for the Soviet Union and the other Communist countries. Communism is viewed as an episodic historical phenomenon that "one day will pass."

The question that American foreign policy poses for itself is how to make it pass. If Communism is viewed as a derivative of hunger, poverty and imperialism, the obvious answer is to attack the hunger, poverty and imperialism themselves—to fight colonialism, to help develop underdeveloped countries, to organize a world campaign against ignorance and underprivilege. This would be a positive answer, but it is not the current American one. The policy-makers here are still fighting today's wars with yesterday's weapons. They understand the necessity for giving economic aid to weak countries in order to prevent internal Communist victories—and, in the last fifteen years, such aid has run into tens of billions of dollars. But their considered opinion is that, in the final analysis, it will be military power that will contain the enemy. Military power has always been the cornerstone of Western diplomacy; why not now? The fabric of U.S. policy, therefore, is cut to the military pattern: anything that strengthens the military hand is considered beneficial, anything that weakens or does not affect it is considered irrelevant or harmful. If the U.S. can forge a military alliance so powerful that the Russians will realize that they cannot win a war, then victory is assured. This is the compulsive feature of American policy.

The United States is thus willing to pay almost any price to gain a military concession. It supports dictators like Franco in Spain because Franco gives the Pentagon military bases. It supported Chiang Kai-shek long after his corruption and im-

potence were obvious because he was considered a solid military, though unworthy social, ally. In choosing between anti-colonialism and military pacts, American policy supports the military. Thus it continues to give aid to France despite its colonialist ventures in Algeria, because France's adherence to NATO is considered much more important than the possible friendship of the native population in France's colonies.

For a decade now the policy of "deterrence" has proved to be a god with clay feet. Despite America's military superiority during most of this decade (and probably even today), the Soviet world has not in fact been contained or the balance of power held intact. The United States gave \$3 billion in military aid to Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communists won China all the same. Northern Viet Nam went Communist, and a host of nations that were once included in the Western roster are now neutralist. Only a decade ago Western influence in the Middle East was decisive; today only Jordan and Saudi Arabia can be counted as moderately friendly, and how long that will last remains to be seen. In the colonial areas, the new nations—like Ghana or Guinea—tend to become "positive neutralist". Even in Latin America, a number of nations that were clearly and solidly in the American camp are drifting away as liberal and left-wing revolutions change the character of their governments.

The United States can, of course, record a number of minor victories. The Central Intelligence Agency, a super-secret organization directed by Foster Dulles's brother, Allan, played a large part in helping the Iranian Shah to overthrow the Mossadegh regime and Castillo Armas to remove the Arbenz government from power in Guatemala. Mossadegh was a neutralist; Arbenz somewhat closer to the Soviets. But these do not nearly offset Soviet victories. The balance of power on a *world* scale has definitely drifted Eastwards. Russian economic strength has made significant strides, and Russia is able to woo many a country that yesterday could look only to the U.S. for help. Recently, for instance, the Soviets granted aid of \$100 and \$35 million respectively to Ethiopia and Guinea. Considerable sums have been given to India and other Asian countries. The negative policy of military deterrence, viewed in any light, has been a failure.

For a time, in the early 1950's, the United States was the only nation that possessed atomic and hydrogen weapons. During that period, there was a small extremist group that favoured

“preventive war” to destroy Russian power before it became too strong. Since the Russians have developed their own atomic and hydrogen bombs, however, even the military balance has become less favourable. Almost no one any longer entertains ideas of preventive war. The nation flounders on with an antiquated policy which C. Wright Mills has aptly described as “peace through mutual fright”.

It is this negativism which accounts, at least in part, for the era of McCarthyism on the one hand, and the dilemma of the American liberals on the other. The late Senator Joseph McCarthy gained a significant following because, unlike Dulles and his Democratic Party predecessor, Acheson, he conceded that the U.S. was losing the cold war. Acheson and Dulles tried to reassure the people that the U.S. was not actually losing the peace, that all the setbacks were temporary and episodic. McCarthy, on the other hand, flamboyantly conceded that the nation *was* losing. He attributed the losses, however, to the naïve notion that the “Communists have penetrated our State Department”. To a people apathetic about international affairs, this oversimplified answer seemed more realistic than the Dulles-Acheson reassurances. Americans, uneasy over Russia’s gains, were finally being given a reason, however remote from reality; and McCarthy recruited millions of adherents.

The growth of McCarthyism was aided in some measure too by a decline of liberal and radical fervour. Hundreds of thousands of men who in the ’thirties were Socialists or Communists, drifted away from radicalism in the prosperous two decades that followed. The philosophy of revolution, potent in the 1930’s when over 12 million were unemployed, seemed unreal in a country with almost 60 million automobiles, relatively full employment, a pyramiding middle class, and many millions of workers earning \$6,000 a year or more. There were still distressing features, of course—in the discrimination against Negroes in many areas, or the two million agricultural workers with incomes of only \$1,500 to \$2,000 a year; but there had been an undeniable and sensational rise in American living standards, particularly after the war. In such an economic climate yesterday’s radicals—inside and outside the labour unions—accommodated themselves more and more to the *status quo* and began to look on American capitalism as less of an evil than Soviet totalitarianism. They too became fervent adherents of the policy of containment. They felt that America

should give much more aid to underdeveloped countries—Walter Reuther wrote a pamphlet calling for expenditures of \$13 billion a year for 100 years—but they also endorsed the Pentagon's program of "massive retaliation" and military deterrence. Differing only in emphasis, they marched parallel with the Pentagon. Some even berated Eisenhower for "not spending enough" on armaments. A force that had berated Roosevelt when the armament budget was less than a billion dollars a year now endorsed enthusiastically a \$42 billion a year expenditure.

And so for the first time in American history the military has become a political factor in peacetime. The American revolutionaries of 1776 insisted that after every war the military had to be stripped of all its influence. Until post-War II, that has always been the case. Now, in the face of "the Communist danger", the military has risen to unprecedented power. That power stems, first of all, from its role as the nation's number one customer. The military, in 1958, contracted for \$47.2 billion worth of goods and material. Its establishment has been estimated at a value of \$160 billion. It operates 950 military installations in 73 countries around the world, where it barracks 1.2 million troops. It owns 32 million acres of land (five times as much as all the arable land in Egypt), plus 2.6 million acres in foreign countries. Whole industries depend on it for sustenance: in 1955, for instance, 85 per cent. of aircraft production was for the military. So important is the factor of military buying that 88 large companies reported recently that they employed 723 retired military men of the rank of colonel and above, ostensibly to help in liaison with the Pentagon.

As if this burgeoning economic power were not enough, the military has become a political and propaganda force. In 1953 there were nine Army generals and 58 colonels assigned to civilian governmental agencies; by 1957, the assigned had grown to 200 generals, 1,300 colonels and 6,000 officers of lower grades. The *'Army and Navy Bulletin'* of January 18, 1947 boasted that "today the Army has virtual control of foreign affairs . . ." This is certainly more true in 1960 than it was a decade ago. A minimum of \$12 million a year is spent for military public relations. In 1953 the *'Saturday Evening Post,'* one of the two largest weekly magazines in the country, published 57 articles friendly to the Pentagon—more than one a week. The Pentagon has a staff of more than 3,000 propagandists

selling the military way of life to all and sundry.

This has become necessary because America's foreign policy conceives of the military as the main answer to Communism. In today's world it is not only the soldiers who are important in war, but the civilians in the factories and on the farms who make an equal contribution. If, therefore, you are going to be ever ready to wage "massive retaliation," you must have a people ever ready to obey orders, to follow instructions. That is why the American government has perfected a "loyalty" and "security" programme, supposedly to ferret out potential spies and subversives. Not a single spy has as yet been uncovered by all these measures, though the FBI has looked into the history of millions of government workers to see if they had ever been associated with "subversives". But the ceaseless investigation has created a mood of fear and conformity—precisely what a nation that is ever ready to fight must have.

In this policy the military has the eager support of big business. American entrepreneurs in 1957 sold \$26 billion in goods and services to foreign customers. Branches of United States firms overseas sold another \$32 billion, for an astronomical total of \$58 billion (ten times the national income of South Africa). "Foreign earnings", wrote *Fortune* in January 1958, "will more than double in ten years, more than twice the probable gain in domestic profits". The \$37.5 billion invested abroad in 1957 was approximately double what it was only seven years before. Ten years from now it will probably rise to \$60 billion. A business community that invests so lavishly and does so much business in foreign countries curries to "safe" governments. It is satisfied with a King Ibn Saud in Saudi Arabia because his dictatorial regime is supposedly "stable" and quite willing to make favourable financial arrangements with foreign companies. The dictator does not talk of nationalizing foreign firms. He permits them to earn profits which in many instances are five times the rate of domestic profits. Military objectives and business objectives thus coincide: the military wants "strong" governments that will give it military bases; the business community wants "strong" governments that will permit super-profits.

At home the outlooks of these two élites also mesh. The military wants an obedient people, conformist and complacent about social problems; big business similarly seeks moderation and conservatism to protect its investment. These two forces

in American society have become staunch allies, and they tend to blend and coalesce into a new type of ruling class. The new power élite generates its own momentum for internal and external support of the *status quo*, no matter how many times this policy has been proven futile. The State Department, expressing the inherent logic of this new oligarchy, puts its support behind reactionary and dying regimes. The federal government internally tends to oppose social reform or "go slow". It yields grudgingly to necessary change. It continues the wide gap in income. It fails to spend anywhere near enough—considering America's wealth—for schools, hospitals, or medical research. Its eyes are glued to the *status quo* in everything.

In the last two years there has been a small, but insistent, re-awakening amongst the American people. The McCarthyist tide has spent itself; people are now looking for more realistic answers. Wherever lecturers speak of a *social* answer to Communism, they find increasing acceptance. Men like Senators Fullbright and Mansfield are more and more questioning official policy. Adlai Stevenson, twice defeated for the presidency, has been speaking forthrightly on foreign affairs of late, in contrast to the conventional role he played during his campaigns. In the House of Representatives there are perhaps a dozen new faces, elected in 1958, who oppose the theory of deterrence. Foremost amongst them is Chester Bowles, former Ambassador to India and a brilliant writer on the subject of foreign affairs. In the State of Vermont, which for nearly a hundred years has never returned a Democrat to Congress, William Meyer ran as a Democrat on a programme of recognizing Communist China and changing basic policy—and won. Byron Johnson, a Gandhian pacifist and member of the board of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, squeezed through to victory in Colorado. Able writers like George Kennan and James P. Warburg continue to hold an ever more receptive audience for their policy of "disengagement".

Most of the Left has been quiescent in recent years; but beginning two years ago, the Gandhians—led by a septuagenarian named A. J. Muste—have been fighting militarism with greater vigour. Four of them captured the nation's imagination by attempting to sail a small boat into the hydrogen bomb testing area of the Pacific Ocean as a protest against the spread of nuclear fall-out. They were arrested and their ship temporarily

confiscated, but another small boat achieved its purpose while they were in jail. Demonstrations have been organized near missile bomb sites, prayer meetings conducted and other mass action taken in an attempt to dramatize the war danger for the American people.

The American people, contrary to notions abroad, are quick to reverse themselves. Being pragmatic, they may follow a false course for some time, then make a 180-degree shift. It is conceivable that the present reverse of momentum, the declining hold of McCarthyism, the limited thaw in the cold war with the Krushchev visit and Eisenhower's planned visit to Russia, may yet see a complete change in policy and the whittling away of the power of the military-business alliances. Chester Bowles calls this the "new consensus". He looks to the day when Americans will fundamentally change their present foreign policy, shifting from an emphasis on the military to an emphasis on developing the underdeveloped world.

For such a change, the Negro question is pivotal. The one-party Southern States, disfranchising the bulk of their large Negro populations through poll taxes, literacy tests and other laws, elect conservative Senators and Congressmen year after year, who accumulate seniority and so control all the important Congressional Committees. But the Negro in the South, led by Ghandians like Rev. Martin Luther King, is making sizable gains—fortified in his endeavours by the pressures of the Negro vote throughout the rest of the country upon the Administration and the leaders of both political parties. The elimination of the one-party system in the South, with the resultant disappearance of the most conservative element within the Democratic Party, cannot but help enormously to change the direction of the country.

Such a basic change is not pre-determined. But three times before in United States history its people have made a fundamental reorientation, have achieved the "new consensus". The first time was the American Revolution of 1776, which freed thirteen colonies from British rule and established the United States. The second was the Civil War of 1861-65, when America removed the barriers to becoming a great industrial nation. The third was in the 1930's when *laissez-faire* capitalism was replaced by controlled, welfare capitalism. Now America awaits the fourth great historical turn. It may or may not make it. I believe that it will.