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# LIVING MARXISM

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BOOK REVIEWS



# LIVING MARXISM

Vol. VI

No. 1

FALL 1941

P. O. Box 5343

Chicago, Illinois

## WAR AND REVOLUTION

The relation of war to revolution has become one of the most important problems of our epoch. It has become, furthermore, one of the most bewildering problems of a time in which former non-interventionists have become interventionists, pacifists clamor for war, National Socialism craves Empire and Peace, and Communist apostles of the revolutionary class war meekly renounce all use of violence as an instrument of national and international policy.

While it would be an utterly meaningless proposition to deal with the questions of war and peace in general, a careful historical investigation shows that war as we know it today has been implicit in present day bourgeois society from its earliest beginnings in the 15th and 16th centuries and that, more especially, every major progress in its historical development has been achieved, if not by war itself, by a series of violent events of which war was an essential part. This is not equivalent, of course, to a prediction that war, and other forms of collective violence, could not be gradually regulated and ultimately eliminated entirely from the life of human society. Such long range developments are not considered in this discussion. The only concern of the following study is the relation of war to revolution in our time and the various conflicting and complementary tendencies that can be discovered in the previous phases of its historical development.

While for most phases of the history of the last four hundred years a close relationship between definite forms of war and social change is readily admitted by most students of the subject, there are at least two periods for which such general consensus cannot be found. They are at the same time the favorite playground for writers of various descriptions who delight in dealing with war not in terms of a strictly empirical (strategical, social, political, economic, historical) investigation, but from broader aesthetic, philosophical, religious, moral or humanitarian viewpoints. Here belongs the famous description of the war (and the state) of the Italian Renaissance as a "work of art" by the German historian, Jacob Burckhardt. Another example is the frequent glorification of the wars of the pre-revolutionary 18th century as an all time high in the history of human



culture. Despite its characteristic counter-revolutionary bias, this class of literature has for our purpose the advantage of being comparatively free from the peculiar superstitions of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus it happens that just the writers of this class — a queer species of “historians in reverse”—have been able to bring to light a number of otherwise neglected phenomena that are of particular importance for the study of war and revolution.

\* \* \*

The first of the two apparent “exceptions” to the main contention of this study is presented by the middle period of the Italian Renaissance that was terminated by the French, Spanish and German invasions which began in the last decade of the 15th century and destroyed the indigenous political development of Italy for more than three centuries. There is indeed, at first sight, very little unity between the numerous little wars that were fought out between the leaders of the well equipped and well paid professional armies in the service of the various princes, republics and popes, and the incessant domestic disorders that were begun and terminated within every unit of that political microcosm.

Instead of one characteristic connecting link, we find here a bewildering mass of superficial connections. War was widely used as a means for internal as well as for external aims, and civil struggles were frequently decided on the battlefields of a war against an outside enemy. Yet this temporary overlapping of war and civil discord was of an occasional and accidental nature, without consequence either for the mercenary soldiers who fought the extremely bloodless battles of this period or for the subjects of the quarrelling parties. “A town may rebel a score of times,” said a contemporary observer, “it is never destroyed. The inhabitants may retain the whole of their property; all they have to fear is that they will be made to pay a levy.” Nevertheless all of these disconnected elements were already connected to a conceptual unity by the political genius of a great statesman, Niccolo Machiavelli. He dealt with the comparatively unimportant political discords and belligerent conflicts of his time in the manner in which Plato and Aristotle had dealt with an equally restricted experience in theirs. He thought that a revolutionary conspiracy from below or, if that failed, a revolutionary action by “the prince” from above would bring about the forceful unification of the Italian nation under a republican or monarchistic, but by all means a modern bourgeois government.<sup>1)</sup> This lofty dream of the great political thinker did not mature. It lost its basis and was swept away — just as was, in our time, a still greater revolutionary plan devised by another political genius — through the adversity of external conditions and an altogether unexpected turn of events. The scene of great historical action shifted from the Mediterranean world of Machiavelli’s city states to the

<sup>1)</sup>These two aspects of the expected event are discussed with complete impartiality in the two main books of Machiavelli, *THE DECADES OF TITUS LIVIUS* and *THE PRINCE*.

great monarchies that bordered on the Atlantic just as it is shifting today from the nationally divided areas of 19th century Europe to the greater battlefields of a world-wide war. Yet Machiavelli’s reasoning was valid in regard to the historical facts on which it had been founded. Even a more realistic thinker who would not admit that the chaotic and fragmentary relations between war and civil war in 15th century Italy had presented a sufficient basis for the far-flung political speculations of Machiavelli could still recognize in them the first undeveloped germs of that essential unity of war and revolution that is shown in more mature forms by subsequent phases of modern bourgeois society.

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For the time being, the whole development with its visionary dreams and its modest achievements was interrupted, not only for Italy but for the whole European society, by the forceful inauguration of a new period. In this new period both the intensity of war and the intimacy of its connection with what we know today to have been the historical prelude to the political and social revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries reached an all-time high — not surpassed even by 20th century warfare — in the *Wars of Religion* beginning with the *Reformation* and reaching their climax in the *Thirty Years War* that exterminated one-third of the German-speaking people in Europe, seven and one-half out of twenty-one millions. This was indeed the first historical appearance of all the enormities of the “ideological” wars of the present epoch. It was for this reason denounced from the outset by men like Sir Thomas More and Erasmus as vehemently as the monstrosities of “total war” are denounced today by any 20th century pacifist. Even Francis Bacon was horrified by the consequences that would result for the political and cultural stability of his time from the inclination in cases of religion “to put the sword in the hands of the common people.” He called it “a thing monstrous,” that should rather “be left to the Anabaptists and other furies.”<sup>2)</sup> This recoiling of a certain section of the intelligentsia from the violent and plebeian aspects of a fundamentally progressive movement is typical of all revolutionary epochs. A common phenomenon of our time is that a belated discovery of the violence connected with the revolutionary struggle for socialism and its counterrevolutionary repercussions has alienated so many humanitarian people from a progressive aim that apparently could be reached only at such terrible cost.

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There has been much superficial speculation about the reason why that first catastrophic phase of the development of the modern ideological war came to such a rapid end just when it seemed to have reached its greatest intensity. It is of course sheer mysticism to assume that men at such extreme moments as those reached by Roman society in the last century before Augustus or by European society at the end of the Thirty Years

<sup>2)</sup> Bacon, *ESSAYS III — Of Unity in Religion*.



War in 1648 "drew back at the edge of the precipice" <sup>3)</sup> as it were. Nor is there any historical evidence for that most appealing assumption according to which — since the middle of the 17th century — the furious passion of the Religious Wars have been gradually replaced by a new and more tolerant attitude toward religious differences. It is safer to rely on the judgment of the learned scholar who says that in this new period "the devil of sectarian religious fanaticism was exorcised" not "through the grace of a deeper religious insight," but rather "in a spirit of cynical disillusionment."<sup>4)</sup>

In spite of the undoubted progress achieved during the 18th century through a comparatively successful restriction of the belligerent excesses of the preceding epoch,<sup>5)</sup> it is only the most reactionary-minded who today look back to this pre-revolutionary 18th century as an unmixed blessing, a truly "halcyon time" and the only "lucid interval" in the dismal history of human insanity.<sup>6)</sup> It was a "lucid interval," indeed, as far as the immediate atrocities of warfare are concerned. Yet from a more general point of view the virtue of this short interval between two dynamic epochs is mainly of a negative character. The apparent moderation of warfare resulted from the fact that war was now no longer being used as an instrument of ecclesiastical policy and had not yet begun to be used as an instrument of national policy. Thus it was transformed for the period of more than a hundred years known in general history as *The Enlightenment* into a veritable institution and perfectly adjusted to the needs of those powers who alone at that time were in a position to make use of this "peculiar institution." From the point of view of socialism, which today in this respect has become almost a general opinion, we can by no means agree with that eloquent praise which until recently was lavished upon a time when, it is assumed, war was a "sport of the kings." But in truth it was only conducted in the same backward manner as any other kind of capitalist business was under those immature conditions. We live today in an epoch when even in the economic field the motive-power of the so-called "enlightened self-interest" of independent commodity producers is no longer accepted as a sufficient substitute for a social control of production. How could we accept as a model of perfection a period in which this same spirit of "enlightened self-interest" was still naively applied to all fields of social and political life?

We need only look more closely into the vivid description of the "civilized" wars of the 18th century presented to us today by belated en-

3) Hoffman Nickerson, *THE ARMED HORDE, 1793—1939*. New York 1940; p. 35.

4) A. J. Toynbee, *A STUDY OF HISTORY*, vol. IV, London 1939, p. 143.

The author of this article is indebted to all the six volumes of Mr. Toynbee's work that have up to now appeared for many valuable facts and ideas.

5) According to Toynbee "the evil of war was reduced in the 18th century to a minimum which has never been approached in any other chapter of our Western history, either before or after, up to date."

6) Hoffman-Nickerson, l. c. p. 63.

thusiasts of the "age without enthusiasm," to discover the prosaic truth that underlies all such poetic metaphors. It was a time in which both business and warfare were still restricted by "small numbers, poverty, and the laws of honor."<sup>7)</sup> In the sphere of business these "laws of honor" were represented by the remainders of the rules of the medieval craftsmanship, in the sphere of war by a kind of artificially revived code of medieval chivalry which, however, had by now been filled with a new and entirely bourgeois content. The following is a description of this "sport of kings" by one of its most fervent modern admirers.

"A war was a game with its rules and its stakes — a territory, an inheritance, a throne, a treaty. The loser paid, but a just proportion was always kept between the value of the stake and the risks to be taken, and the parties were always on guard against the kind of obstinacy which makes a player lose his head. They tried to keep the game in hand and to know when to stop. It was for this reason that the great eighteenth-century theorists of warfare urged that neither justice, nor right, nor any of the great passions that move people should ever be mixed up with war. Hapless indeed are those belligerents who take up arms in conviction that they are fighting for justice and right. Both parties being persuaded that they are in the right, they would fight until they were exhausted, and the war would go on forever! One must go to war admitting that the cause of one's adversary is as just as one's own; one must take care to do nothing, even for the sake of victory, that may exasperate him, or close his mind to the voice of reason or his heart to the desire for peace; one must abstain from treacherous and cruel acts. For there is nothing that arouses an adversary to greater fury."

This is indeed the very essence of early bourgeois philosophy: *freedom, equality, property, and Bentham*. The ideas of the shopkeeper of the dawn of the capitalist era are raised to the dignity of a universal law and applied to all institutions and to all eras of human development. Even the curious paradoxical spirit of old Mandeville is conjured up: "*Private Vices — Publick Benefits*," wrote Mandeville in 1706. "*It was avarice and calculation that made war more human*," echoes the famous bourgeois historian in 1933.

Even for that epoch when the scope and intensity of warfare were reduced to their lowest level, the relationship between war and revolution still held good since this was also a time when all vestiges of revolutionary processes had been wiped from the surface of society. The comparative decline of war is closely connected with an equal decline of the revolutionary process. On the other hand, the events of the subsequent epoch show that just this apparently so peaceful and so well balanced period of the 18th century was both for war and revolution the time of a new incubation. Even greater revolutions and greater wars that were to break out in European and American society in the immediate future were already germinating under the surface of this apparently stable equilibrium of the political and social

7) The terms in quotes are used by the Italian historian, Guglielmo Ferrero in his description of 18th century warfare in his book, *PEACE AND WAR*, London 1933, pp. 7—8.



powers. From the viewpoint of present day psychology, psycho-analysis and so-called "psychology of the masses" it seems curious that historians and sociologists should still continue to treat as non-existent those forms and phases of the driving forces of a given epoch which do not appear on its surface but are temporarily repressed into unconsciousness or directed into other channels by a process of "social sublimation."<sup>8</sup>) All those much advertised forms in which the "Age of Reason" tried to restrict and civilize war were in fact only so many forms to prepare that hitherto unequalled outburst of the slowly-accumulated new driving forces of the fully developed bourgeois style of modern warfare that was to explode in the wars of the French Revolution.

It appears then that during the three centuries preceding the full maturity of modern bourgeois warfare there has never been a time in which the essential unity of war and revolution has been interrupted. More particularly, the much glorified period of the *Enlightenment* cannot be described as an interval during which the revolutionary passions of the Religious Wars had been really tamed and controlled by a supreme effort of human morality and reason. They had in truth only suffered a temporary check under the impact of the failure of either side to win the upper hand in the religious wars. An influential part of the population had become aware of the fact that they had begun to care much more for the newly opened ways of acquiring material wealth than for any further sacrifices of their personal comfort for the sake of a truer form of religion. The great revolutionary driving forces of the new bourgeois class that had made their first historical appearance in the fury of the Religious Wars and were to reappear in the violent social and political battles of the French Revolution were not weakened or destroyed during the intervening period of the so-called *Enlightenment*. They were only repressed and had gained tremendous future momentum just because of this temporary state of repression.

\* \* \*

The phases of the historical development of war and revolution from 1789 to 1941 should not need a detailed explanation. It is of course a great shock for those naive democrats of Europe and the U. S. who until recently had quite honestly believed in the opposite claims of the Nazi propaganda to be reminded of the historical fact that modern "total war" is by no means one of the devilish inventions of the Nazi revolution but is really in all its aspects, including its very language, the genuine product of democracy itself and more particularly the fruit of the American War of Independence and of the great French Revolution. Nevertheless this is such an obvious fact of the most recent history of our society, and it has been so often expounded in

8) For a criticism of this attitude—somewhat mysterious in form but sound in substance — see Denis De Rougemont, *LOVE IN THE WESTERN WORLD*, New York 1940, Book V, *Love and War*, pp. 223 ff. and the same author's study on *PASSION AND THE ORIGIN OF HITLERISM*, in *The Review of Politics*, vol. 3 No. 1, January, 1941.

unambiguous terms by all historical and military experts<sup>9</sup>) that its utter neglect by the public opinion both in the totalitarian and the democratic countries presents in itself a major problem. The secrecy which until today surrounded everything connected with a modern war seems to be an intrinsic and necessary condition of the existence of present day society itself. "We do not know the war" — this means, among other things, that we cannot control what we do not know. If we did know, we would no longer live under the conditions of a society based on capitalist competition or even of a society based on those imperfect and fragmentary forms of planning that are compatible with the maintenance of private property and wage labor. A full knowledge, and an ensuing conscious control of the war by the people themselves pre-supposes that society of freely associated producers which will result from a genuine social revolution. Under such conditions, there would no longer be any need for war. Thus it appears that the amazing amount of plain ignorance and equally surprising unpreparedness to think hard, clearly, and realistically about the war do not result from an insufficient state of our general political education. They belong to the essential features of a pre-socialist society and are of the essence of war itself.

\* \* \*

The whole theory and practice of bourgeois warfare during the last 150 years is dominated by the idea of "total war". *Total war* was invented and first practised on a gigantic scale by the fourteen citizen armies organized and put in the field at the darkest hour of the new French Republic for the purpose of defending the revolution against a host of threatening enemies from without and from within. This was the meaning of the famous "levée en masse" that was decreed by the law of August 23, 1793 which, for the first time in history, put all the resources of a belligerent nation — its men, foodstuffs, labor, industry, the whole genius of the people, and the tremendous passion of its newly aroused enthusiasm — into the service of the revolutionary war. This was indeed, within the limits set by the degree of technical and industrial development, a "universal draft" and a veritable "total war". If we disregard for a moment the abysmal difference in language — between a period when the revolutionary spirit of the bourgeois class was genuine and powerful and the present phase of its beginning decay — what we read in the speeches of the National Convention and in the text of the revolutionary decree itself might indeed have been written yesterday.

"The young men shall fight; the married men shall forge weapons and transport supplies; the women will make up old linen into lint; the old men will have themselves carried into the public squares to rouse the courage of the fighting men, to preach hatred of kings and the unity of the Republic.

9) See for a most up-to-date, factual report on the gradual rise, survival and (hypothetical) decline of the mass army and other implements of modern total war the above quoted book of Hoffman Nickerson. For a masterful treatment of the same matter in condensed form see the chapter on "THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRACY AND INDUSTRIALISM UPON WAR" in Toynbee's work, vol. IV, pp. 141-151.



*"The public buildings shall be turned into barracks, the public squares into munition factories; the earthen floors of cellars shall be treated with lye to extract saltpeter.*

*"All fire-arms of suitable caliber shall be turned over to the troops: the interior shall be policed with shotguns and with cold steel.*

*"All saddle-horses shall be seized for the cavalry; all draft horses not employed in cultivation will draw the artillery and supply wagons." 10)*

Yet even that, the highest point ever reached in the history of bourgeois warfare, the revolutionary total war, showed the fateful marks of an intrinsic ambiguity. This war for the defense of the revolution and for the delivery of all oppressed peoples was inevitably conceived and carried on from the outset as a national war of the French people against foreign countries. From a war of defense it soon developed into a war of conquest; the promised delivery of the oppressed peoples degenerated into a mere propagandistic pretext for the annexation of their territories, and the revolutionary war was at all times conducted indiscriminately against every country, free or unfree, which did not side with the French republic in its mortal struggle against the coalitions of its enemies. It is characteristic that the first steps toward the "war of revolutionary expansion," that is, toward the use of revolutionary slogans as a means of external warfare, were not originated by the Jacobin radicals but by the moderate Girondist faction which was already secretly aspiring to conclude rather than to further expand and intensify the revolutionary process. Yet it was the revolutionary Jacobins who later carried through, with all their tremendous energy, the new policy of war and conquest which they had reluctantly accepted as a means for their internal revolutionary policies. A similar development was to recur, after a long interval but under closely analogous conditions, in the internal and external policies of the Russian revolution of 1917. At the present time the old Girondist slogan of revolutionary warfare is used as one of the chief ideological weapons of the Nazi propaganda in spite of the recent extension of the Nazi war into an indiscriminate attack both against the "decaying capitalist democracies" of the West and the new totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union.

This latest development was prepared during the whole 19th century through a gradual dissolution of the original revolutionary content of the bourgeois total war and a corresponding weakening of that tremendous striking force that it had manifested during the epoch of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars from 1792 to 1815. The long period of gradual disintegration and decay of the so-called National Wars in 19th century Europe can be subdivided, according to Marshal Foch, into three successive periods:

*"War became national in the first instance for the sake of winning and securing the independence of peoples — that of the French in 1792-93, of the Spaniards in 1804-14, of the Russians in 1812, of the Germans in 1813 and of Europe in 1814. At*

10) Translation by Hoffman Nickerson, l. c. p. 64.

*this stage it produced those glorious and powerful displays of popular passion known as Valmy, Sarragossa, Tarancon, Moscow, and Leipzig.*

*"War then went on being national for the sake of winning unity of races or nationality. This is what the Italians and the Prussians claimed to be fighting for in 1866 and 1870. In its name also the king of Prussia, after he had become German emperor, put forward a title to the German provinces of Austria.*

*"But if war is still national today, it is for the sake of securing economic benefits and profitable trade agreements.*

*"After having been the violent means whereby peoples wrested a place in the world for themselves which made them into nations, war has become the means to which they still resort in order to enrich themselves." 11)*

This is indeed a brilliant description of the various successive phases that bourgeois war had to pass through in close analogy with the simultaneous decline of the revolutionary tendencies and achievements of the ruling bourgeois class. And again we can observe the fallacy of the ordinary pacifist confusion of the periods of comparative peace with the truly progressive phases of human development. The last period of peace which was enjoyed by Europe during the so-called "colonial era" from 1879-1914 was, as de Rougemont observes, nothing more than a period of utter cultural decay. "War was growing middle-class. The blood was getting commercialized." "In short, colonial warfare was but an extension of capitalistic competition in a form that laid a heavier burden on the country at large though not on the great business firms."

The most impressive further consequence of this state of affairs was the eventual collapse of all Revolutionary-Napoleonic and Clausewitzian, competitive-capitalistic and nationalist-bourgeois warfare in the first world war of 1914-1918. This long-prepared-for, crowning war of the nationalistic age was no longer fought between single nations but between extremely heterogeneous groups of nations. It proved that the old competitive form of unrestricted total warfare was utterly impotent either to win victory or to allow for a real peace after the conclusion of the belligerent action. Even the revolutionary repercussions of the collapse of the war and the impossibilities of the ensuing peace in the defeated countries of Central Europe seem to enhance rather than to detract from the general picture of an irretrievable break-down and decay of the whole traditional structure of Western capitalist society.

Nor has the relation of war to revolution attained a new positive phase in the developments of warfare during the post-war period. From a purely formalistic point of view it might be said that the revolutionary significance of war has increased in the last 25 years in the sense that the former rigid distinction between war and civil war has shown a tendency to become more fluid and finally to dissolve altogether. Whereas during the first world

11) Marshall F. Foch, *LES PRINCIPES DE LA GUERRE*, Paris 1903. English translation by de Rougemont, pp. 245-46.



war the proposition to "transform the capitalist war into a civil war" was still regarded as an utterly impractical slogan by the majority of the socialist workers themselves,<sup>12)</sup> twenty years later the Spanish War originated as a genuine civil war and in its further process developed into a rehearsal of the present war between the totalitarian and democratic countries. With the outbreak of the present war the existing confusion has reached an even higher point. This war has revealed from the outset and at all its decisive junctures the features of a world-wide "ideological" and "political" war, that is, of a struggle between different factions of a civil war rather than of an old fashioned war of one country against another.

Thus, the whole development traced in this study seems to have moved in a circle. In the latest phase of bourgeois society we come right back to the ideological wars of the 16th and 17th centuries. Yet, closer investigation reveals this apparent revival of the intimate relationship between war and revolution to be a matter of appearance rather than of real historical significance. What has actually happened is much better described by the paradoxical formula that in the present epoch not only war, but even "civil war," has lost its former revolutionary character. Civil War and Revolution are no longer synonymous terms.

Moreover, it is not at all certain that this new pseudo-revolutionary feature of present-day totalitarian warfare, which stirred up such intense feelings throughout the world, has come to stay. The opposite event is equally possible, — and this possibility has been further increased through the recent extension of the war to Russia. The present tendency of the Nazi regime to improve its comparatively weak position within the existing power-field of capitalist competition by a concomitant drive toward a totalitarian reconstruction of the whole existing system of society may still be entirely abandoned in the further course of the war. The totalitarian war would then return to the forms of an ordinary capitalistic war that is conducted from both sides merely for an external gain of national power. It is true that even the continuance of the war in such an old fashioned bourgeois style may ultimately result in an internal change of the given structure of the society. Yet in that case the internal repercussions of the war will not result from any conscious action of either belligerent party, whatever the "aims" proclaimed by their ideological propaganda. They will result, if at all, from the force of unforeseen circumstances as, for instance, from the action of a new revolutionary class that was not represented in the councils of this war. They will result without and against the common intentions of both the belligerent powers. The question whether such further developments of the present crisis can be expected at all on the basis of the existing conditions, will be discussed in the concluding section of this study.

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The main differences between the present "totalitarian" form and the

12) See *Living Marxism*, vol. V no. 4, Spring 1941, pp. 2—4.

older forms of bourgeois total war are not — as both Nazi propaganda and its foolish democratic antagonists would have us believe — derived from the fact that bourgeois society today has entered a new phase of its revolutionary ascendancy. Yet these differences do express a real change in its objective economic structure and development. As already shown, war in capitalist society was at all times a necessary complement to the normal conduct of business. Already the great theorist of 19th century warfare, General Carl von Clausewitz, followed up his famous description of war as a "continuation of politics by other means" with the remark that war is "even more closely related to trade which also presents itself as a conflict of human interests and activities, and that politics itself must be regarded as a kind of trade on an enlarged scale." <sup>13)</sup> He described the war of the first part of the 19th century as being "much like business competition pushed to its logical consequences and unrestrained by any law other than expediency." This is how "the great interests of the nation", that is, the common interests of the capitalist class and more particularly those of the leading groups, were attended to at a time when capitalist production was still predominantly regulated by the competition of apparently independent commodity producers. In the same manner also the most recent methods of total warfare, as they are applied in more or less perfect forms by both sides in the present world war, represent a later and more highly developed form of the conduct of the old capitalist business. "New forms of material production," said Marx "appear earlier in the forms of warfare than in peace-time production." Thus the present totalitarian war anticipates those new economic forms which will be achieved at a later date through the complete transition of all capitalist countries to a planned rather than to a market-conditioned and to a monopolistic and state-capitalist rather than to a competitive and private mode of capitalist production. It is mainly for this reason that the present war is not just a "repetition" of the 1914-1918 conflict, but seems to show an "essential difference" from the characteristic form of its predecessor.<sup>14)</sup>

This difference, among other things, appears in the lessened importance of the "armed horde." According to a generally reliable source, only one third of the German army is even nominally infantry and much, if not most, of its real work is done by the long-service professionals of its tank corps

13) C. v. Clausewitz, *VOM KRIEGE*, 1832—Book II, chapter 3, section 3.

14) See Clement Greenberg and Dwight MacDonald, 10 PROPOSITIONS ON THE WAR, in *Partisan Review*, vol. VII, no. 4, July-August 1941, p. 271. The authors do not agree on the character of this existing "difference". One of them believes that the novel characteristics of the present war arise from the fact that "a new kind of society" is already existing in present-day Germany. They do not further clarify this point, but lose themselves in a discussion of the greater or lesser "desirability" of fascism and other mainly subjective problems. This tendency detracts to a certain extent from the otherwise considerable value of their attempt at a serious discussion of the main problem of our time.



and air force.<sup>15)</sup> Most of its military operations up to the Russian campaign have been performed by a surprisingly small contingent of selected "shock troops" and with a comparatively low number of casualties.

Another feature in the character of the present totalitarian war which points to the general decline of the enthusiastic competitive spirit in the present phase of monopoly capitalism is the notable decrease of that wave of general enthusiasm that was aroused by the national wars of the 19th century and that reached its climax during the first years of the world war, 1914-1918. Despite the vastly increased efforts of expert professional propaganda, there is nothing in the attitude of the general public toward the present war that reminds one even slightly of the strong ideological intoxication of whole nations that was so characteristic of the wars of the preceding epoch.

Finally, although every war of the last century and every successive year of warfare between 1914 and 1918 evidenced an increasing extension of the principle of planning beyond the traditional limits of the military field, this principle has now for the first time been consistently applied to a complete mobilization of all resources and manpower of a society that by its technical and industrial development has far transcended all previously existing levels. What is new here is not the idea of the "universal draft" *per se*, but the fact that in its application today nothing is left to individual initiative and competitive strife. Another novelty consists in the fact that this time the principles of "war economy" were already applied in the preceding time of peace. The whole industrial system of such nations as Germany and Russia had been methodically subordinated in advance to the needs of a war that was not to begin until many years later.<sup>16)</sup> Since the outbreak of the present war the traditional barriers between production for war and production for peace have been broken down everywhere. The resources of all countries have been pooled for the use of a world-wide war economy.

In all these respects the present "total war" of Nazism shows a different character from the older forms of total warfare which reflected the spirit of a predominantly competitive capitalism. Today's total war thus appears as a new form of total war — a total war of monopoly capitalism and state capitalism as against the competitive total wars that pertained to a preceding economic epoch.

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15) Hoffman Nickerson, p. 397.

16) Ironically, the first formal adoption of the principle of "total war" in post-war Europe was decreed not in Soviet Russia or Nazi Germany. A bill for the mobilization of all forces and resources of the nation for "la guerre totale" was submitted to the French Chamber of Deputies under the sponsorship of the socialist leader, Paul-Boncour, and passed overwhelmingly over the votes of the Communists on March 3, 1927.

The same economic developments that have gradually destroyed the positive function of war as an instrument of the bourgeois revolution have created the objective premises of a new revolutionary movement. The problem of war and revolution assumed a new aspect through the rise of an independent movement of the working class. Against this new threat the ruling bourgeois class has now to fulfill a repressive function. Under the changed historical conditions it becomes increasingly difficult to decide whether a given form of war or even war itself has still retained any positive significance for the revolution of the 20th century.

First of all it must be stated that on the various occasions during the last two or three decades when the proletarian class has embarked on a struggle for its independent aims, the social revolution of the workers has not derived any benefit from those positive functions that assumedly can be fulfilled by a revolutionary war for the emancipation of an oppressed class. As far as the bolshevik revolution in Russia is concerned, its "revolutionary wars" mark a particularly dismal chapter of its history. It found its tragic conclusion in the broadcast address of July 3, 1941, in which Stalin no longer referred to socialism and the working class at all. Instead, he asked the various peoples of the U.S.S.R. to defend their national state existence within the Russian Empire and generally to display "the particular qualities that are inherent in our people." Since then, the tremendous new forces that were released in Russia by the revolution in 1917 have been used as tools for the ambiguous defense of the capitalist *status quo* in Europe and the U.S.A. against the equally ambiguous innovations that would result from the defeat of the "democratic" powers of the West in their competitive struggle with the "totalitarian" forces of Nazi-fascism.

How are we to understand the paradoxical contention that war, the mighty tool of the bourgeois revolution of the past, may have lost all positive importance for the socialist revolution of the present epoch? Surely, the historical movement of the 20th century is not separated by a Chinese wall from its predecessors. If it were true that war fulfilled an entirely positive function in the revolutionary change of society in the past, it would be difficult to see how it could have lost its progressive function today.

The answer is to be found in the already discussed ambiguities that were inherent in the bourgeois war from the outset, and in the underlying ambiguities of the bourgeois revolution itself. There is no doubt that the revolutionary and nationalist wars of the 18th and 19th centuries were necessary steps in the process that led to the establishment of the existing capitalist society and its ruling bourgeois class. Yet, in spite of the glowing revolutionary passion in the hearts of the citizen soldiers who did the violent and bloody job, their real function had much less to do with the genuinely emancipatory and democratic aspect than with the simultaneously repressive effect of the revolution. It is an unjustified historical generalization to refer to modern mass war as an outcome of the French Revolution in general. A closer examination reveals that it sprang from one particular phase of that revolution. It originated at the critical juncture when the rise of the



*Vendée* and outside aggression had enforced the replacement of the much more democratic principles of the first phase of the revolution by the authoritarian and violent measures of the revolutionary dictatorship of the Jacobin party.

In the second place, the further development of universal conscription and all other features of "total war" during the 19th century lay not so much in the hands of democratic France as in those of the anti-democratic Prussian state. This was not, as some people have said, mere historical irony. It had its foundation in the greater appropriateness of an exalted use of force for the purpose of the reactionary governments of Central Europe who restricted their "Wars of Liberation" to the recovery of the national independence of their parochial states from the French Empire while at the same time refusing to grant the institutions of a genuine democracy to their own people. Again, in the following decades, when the new form of mass war reached a still higher pitch in the American Civil War and Bismark's three Prussian wars of aggrandizement, it was bourgeois nationalism in its narrow parochial sense rather than democracy that was entrenched in the centre of Europe through the outcome of these increasingly violent and sanguinary wars.

From that time onward all capitalist and imperialist wars up to 1914 were opposed more or less consistently by all shades and currents of the international movement of the working class. It was only under the impact of the world war and the ensuing economic and political crisis that two minorities within the German socialist party rediscovered the "positive" value of war for the socialist revolution. One of these minorities led the abortive revolution of the German workers and later took refuge in the pro-Russian activities of the Communist Party. The other accepted the war itself as a genuine fulfilment of the social aspirations of the workers and thereby anticipated the "revolutionary" war that is waged today, against Soviet Russia and democratic capitalism alike, by the counter-revolutionary forces of National Socialism.

The significance of war for the future revolutionary movement of the working class is today entirely in the balance. Whatever the outcome of the present "total" war will mean for the rival factions of the international ruling class, it is clear that for the workers the assumedly "revolutionary" war is only another and further-enhanced form of their normal condition of oppression and exploitation. In spite of all the clamor and turmoil this internecine struggle within the ruling capitalist class is no longer — as former capitalist wars have been — a necessary form and part of historical progress. It produces even those minor changes of the existing economic and political structure which are indispensable to keep the old system going in an altogether distorted form. The capitalist war has exhausted all its revolutionary potentialities.

The struggle for the new order of society does not take place on the battlefields of the capitalist war. The decisive action of the workers begins where the capitalist war ends.

*Karl Korsch*

## STAGES OF TOTALITARIAN ECONOMY

A comparison of the evolution of Italian and German economics after the establishment of the respective totalitarian governments gives rise to speculation as to whether there are any inherent laws which have determined the parallelism of their development. Despite the differences in the economic structure of Italy and Germany, both countries have run through a sequence of economic stages which, though longer in one country than in another, and occasionally brought about by different events, are nevertheless related by their consecutive order and essential characteristics.

Before a more detailed inquiry into the functioning of the system during each of these stages enables us to name either of them, let us first characterize them by those external characteristics which the totalitarian parties themselves emphasize.

The first period was called "sindacalista" in Italy, "Staendestaat" in Germany, and in Portugal, Spain, France, "corporatism", "Corporativism", or "Etat Corporatif". The fact that totalitarian ideologues and legislators mistook the intention for the achievement and regarded this period as the inauguration of their final aim created a good deal of theoretic confusion. It led either to their giving up the corporatist ideology in the later stages (Germany) or to declaring the inaugurative act of each of the following stages as the "final achievement of the realm of corporatism" (Italy). In the countries which have not yet progressed to the later stages, every legislative act is considered as the first true fulfillment of corporate state ideas (Spain, France).

The corporate State period was characterized by a variety of new class organizations, institutions and offices, which among them carried on a good amount of the class struggle to the exclusion of the workers' class organizations. The latter were rooted out. In contrast to this, the one party state established its supreme authority by incorporating and co-ordinating into its frame-work as many organizations as possible, by carrying on experiments in the social and economic field and by directly interceding in the class struggle where it aimed not at equilibrium but at satisfying completely one class or another.

This period came to an end when the state was no longer able to prevent open class struggle from breaking out. The bloody suppression of "left wingers", ideologues of the "second revolution", totalitarian "integralists", "national bolshevists", corporativists, etc., left the economic sphere to the organizations of big business and the political power concentrated in the hands of an economically independent and, socially speaking, relatively homogeneous group.

The second period was usually described by totalitarian authors as the stage of the "economic miracle". It coincided with a period of world prosperity. The intervention of the state into economy was restricted to main-