
The Voluntaryist

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"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

August 1989

War Is the Health of the State

By Randolph Bourne

[Editor's Note: One of Randolph Bourne's (1886–1918) three causes was opposing World War I, and America's entry into it to "make the world safe for democracy." As one of his biographers put it, "By 1918, war hysteria, superpatriots, and edgy intellectuals had silenced much of his criticism, and Bourne came to speak of himself as an 'impossibilist.'" His bitterest denunciations were directed against the nation's intellectuals "who gave the war the sanction of their support and prestige." Bourne was at work on this essay, "The State," when he died in the influenza epidemic that followed the World War I armistice signing. The excerpts printed here are taken from Lillian Schlissel, *THE WORLD OF RANDOLPH BOURNE*, N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1963, pp. 246-250, and pp. 259-271.]

In addition to the classic statement that Bourne coined, "War is the health of the State," his essay contains a number of other important insights. His opening explanation of the distinctions between the people and their country, on the one hand, and the State and its government, on the other, is reminiscent of the differentiation between "society" and the "State" made by such people as Thomas Paine and Albert Jay Nock. Bourne's observation that "We cannot crusade against war without crusading implicitly against the State," is one that many war tax resisters and pacifists do not understand. His emphasis on foreign policy as the last stronghold of State power only shows how little the State has changed since he penned these lines.)

THE COUNTRY VS. THE STATE

The patriot loses all sense of the distinction between State, nation, and government. In our quieter moments, the Nation or Country forms the basic idea of society. We think vaguely of a loose population spreading over a certain geographical portion of the earth's surface, speaking a common language, and living in a homogeneous civilization. Our idea of Country concerns itself with the non-political aspects of a people, its ways of living, its personal traits, its literature and art, its characteristic attitudes toward life. We are Americans because we live in a certain bounded territory, because our ancestors have carried on a great enterprise of pioneering and colonization, because we live in certain kinds of communities which have a certain look and express their aspirations in certain ways. We can see that our civilization is different from contiguous civilizations like the Indian and Mexican. The institutions of our country form a certain network which affects us vitally and intrigues our thoughts in a way that these other civilizations do not. We are a part of Country, for better or for worse. We have arrived in it through the operation of physiological laws, and not in any way through our own choice. By the time we have reached what are called years of discretion, its influences have molded our habits, our values, our ways of thinking, so that however aware we may become, we never really lose the stamp of our civilization, or could be mistaken for the child of any other country. Our feeling for our fellow countrymen is one of similarity or of mere acquaintance. We may be intensely proud of and congenial to our particular network of civilization, or we may detest most of its qualities and rage at its defects. This does not alter the fact that we are inextricably bound up in it. The Country, as an inescapable group into which we are born and which makes us its particular kind of a citizen of the world, seems to be a fundamental fact of our consciousness, an irreducible minimum of social feeling.

Now this feeling for country is essentially noncompetitive: we

think of our own people merely as living on the earth's surface along with other groups, pleasant or objectionable as they may be, but fundamentally as sharing the earth with them. In our simple conception of country there is no more feeling of rivalry with other peoples than there is in our feeling for our family. Our interest turns within rather than without, is intensive and not belligerent. We grow up and our imaginations gradually stake out the world we live in, they need no greater conscious satisfaction for their gregarious impulses than this sense of a great mass of people to whom we are more or less attuned and in whose institutions we are functioning. The feeling for country would be an uninflatable maximum were it not for the ideas of State and Government which are associated with it. Country is a concept of peace, of tolerance, of living and letting live. But State is essentially a concept of power, of competition; it signifies a group in its aggressive aspects. And we have the misfortune of being born not only into a country but into a State, and as we grow up we learn to mingle the two feelings into a hopeless confusion.

The State is the country acting as a political unit, it is the group acting as a repository of force, determiner of law, arbiter of justice. International politics is a "power politics" because it is a relation of State and that is what States infallibly and calamitously are; huge aggregations of human and industrial force that may be hurled against each other in war. When a country acts as a whole in relation to another country, or in imposing laws on its own inhabitants, or in coercing or punishing individuals or minorities, it is acting as a State. The history of America as a country is quite different from that of America as a State. In one case it is the drama of the pioneering conquest of the land, of the growth of wealth and the ways in which it was used, of the enterprise of education, and the carrying of spiritual ideals, of the struggle of economic classes. But as a State, its history is that of playing a part in the world, making war, obstructing international trade, preventing itself from being split to pieces, punishing those citizens whom society agrees are offensive, and collecting money to pay for all. ...

Government on the other hand is synonymous with neither State nor Nation. It is the machinery by which the nation, organized as a State carries out its State functions. Government is the framework of the administration of laws, and the carrying out of the public force. Government is the idea of the State put into practical operation in the hands of definite, concrete, fallible men. It is the visible sign of the invisible grace. It is the word made flesh. And it has necessarily the limitations inherent in all practicality. Government is the only form in which we can envisage the State, but it is by no means identical with it. That the State is a mystical conception is something that must never be forgotten. Its glamour and its significance linger behind the framework of Government and direct its activities.

POLITICAL SALVATION AND THE STATE

Wartime brings the ideal of the State out into very clear relief, and reveals attitudes and tendencies that were hidden. In times of peace the sense of the State flags in a republic that is not militarized. For war is essentially the health of the State. The ideal of the State is that within its territory its power and influence should be universal. As the Church is the medium for the spiritual salvation of men, so the State is thought of as the medium for his political salvation. Its idealism is a rich blood flowing to all the members of the body politic. And it is precisely in war that the urgency for union seems greatest, and the necessity for universality seems most unquestioned. The State is the organization of the herd to act offensively or defensively against

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Editor: Carl Watner

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Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

1. "Graffiti"

One evening, the libertarian imperative "Question Authority" was penned on the wall of a washroom in a Richmond, Va. tavern. By the following evening someone had added: "Who the Hell are you to tell me what to do!"

—from Libertarian International's
FREEDOM NETWORK NEWS, Nov/Dec 1988.

2. "Mises As a Hero"

Murray Rothbard's monograph, LUDWIG VON MISES: SCHOLAR, CREATOR, HERO (Mises Institute: 1988), "is an eloquent and moving tribute to his teacher, and the most definitive book on Mises thus far." In it, the author expresses his ire at the refusal of American universities to offer Mises a paid, full-time position. Yet interestingly enough, Mises himself was seldom ever bitter regarding his ostracism at the hands of American academia. Despite Rothbard's remonstrations, not being part of the establishment quite possibly could have been one of Mises' greatest stimuli. He met the challenge of being an outsider and foreigner, expressed his free market views in print, and created a small yet loyal following. One wonders if his writings would have been as voluminous and as uncompromising as they were if the challenge had been less, and if Mises had been accepted as 'one of the boys'?

3. "I Do Not Choose to Be a Common Man"

It is my right to be uncommon—if I can.

I seek opportunity—not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen, humbled and dulled by having the State look after me.

I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build; to fail and to succeed.

I refuse to barter incentive for a dole. I prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence; the thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of utopia.

I will not trade freedom for beneficence nor my dignity for a handout. I will never cower before any master nor bend to any threat.

It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid; to think and act for myself, enjoy the benefit of my creation and to face the world boldly and say, this I have done.

—"My Creed" by Dean Alfange

4. "Debts Are Always Paid:

Who Will Be Left Holding the Bag?"

In his November 29, 1988 column, Vermont Royster, editor emeritus of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, predicted "that the government's multi-trillion dollar debt will never be paid off, *not ever.*" (emphasis added) While observing that merely to pay the interest will be a burden to our children and our children's children, he failed to note that debts are always paid. There are never any unpaid bills; if the lender doesn't pay, the creditor absorbs the loss. History leads us to believe that the national debt will probably be paid off in a currency which has lost its purchasing power, or simply be repudiated by some future American government. And history also teaches that the receiver in bankruptcy for a rotting currency has usually been a dictator.

5. "Patriotism"

"Though it is based upon the natural and indeed instinctive love of home, (patriotism) has been elevated in the modern world into an unparalleled congeries of imbecilities. What it demands of the individual citizen, as a practical matter, is that he yield not only his judgment but also his property and even his life to whatever gang of scheming politicians happen to be in power. The essence of his virtue as a patriot is that he ask no questions, once the band is set to playing."

—H.L. Mencken

6. "Be Wary!"

How many times have our limited government friends forgotten that a government that is strong enough to protect them, is also strong enough to imprison them.

7. "We Love Freedom but Not Responsibility"

"Self-ownership is a fact, not a right. Self-ownership is part of the nature of man. Rose Wilder Lane premises her excellent work DISCOVERY OF FREEDOM on man's control of his own energy. To her, 'freedom' is 'self-control.' She believed that personal freedom comes, and eventually societal freedom will come, with the realization of this fundamental fact. Each of us must rid himself of the notion that we are controlled by some outside force whether it be embodied in our parents, the church, the state, or any of a myriad of foreign entities. Each of us is in control of his own life. Because we are in control, we are responsible for ourselves and our actions. It is true (that) we are sometimes confronted with very difficult choices,...(but) difficult choices do not, cannot absolve of us responsibility."

"Since the most important requirement for ownership is control, we can be said to 'own' ourselves. The fundamental fact, however, is that of self-control, not ownership. ... We only need to help ourselves reject the myth of outside control, and accept the fundamental fact of 'self control.' Most of us love freedom, but we try to avoid responsibility."

—Chuck Estes in LIBERTY, January 1989,
6 issues/\$18, Box 1167,
Port Townsend, Wash. 98368

8. "Nationalized Land Holdings"

"With the public lands officially the property of the 'people,' the United States began with a giant nationalized holding that would have made perfect sense if the country had been socialistic."

—Patricia Limerick, LEGACY OF CONQUEST (1987), p. 70

9. "A Vulgar Economic Concept"

In THE LONG VIEW IN ECONOMIC POLICY: The Case of Agriculture and Food (International Center for Economic Growth: 1987) Theodore Schultz points out that the U.S. parity price for farm products is based on 1910-1914 relative prices. Here is a perfect example of how socialism bears no relation at all to reality. Not only should there be no price supports, but if there are, by what standard should farmers' income relate to pre-World War I prices, when motorized agriculture was just beginning?

10. "Inflation"

The following definition of inflation is offered by the 1989 FARMERS' ALMANAC: "Inflation is the price we pay for those government benefits everybody thought were free."

11. "Communism Violates Natural Law"

"Morality lies in actions, not in ends. You can show a hundred times over...how communism has led to both inequity and cruelty whenever it has been practiced. ...Capitalism's superiority lies in its actions. That its result are superior follows from the premise that only a moral action can lead to a moral end,... . In a free market you benefit only because you successfully fill a genuine need of some consumers, not because in your selfishness or greed you have somehow hoodwinked them into parting with their wealth for some lesser value that you have delivered in exchange. As anyone who understands economics knows, a free-market exchange is mutually beneficial, else it never would have occurred."

"The theoretical essence of communism is forced equality."

There are no voluntary exchanges, only coerced immoral ones: people having to part with their labor and morally earned wealth in order to satisfy an arbitrary conception of equity. ...Capitalism deals with existents—individuals; communism deals with abstract concepts—populations. But populations are made up of individuals. How can one imagine that the sacrifice of an individual for the benefit of...the group, could ever lead to a morally satisfactory conclusion?"

—Gurdip S. Sidhu, M.D. in *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*,
Dec. 23, 1988, p.A-11

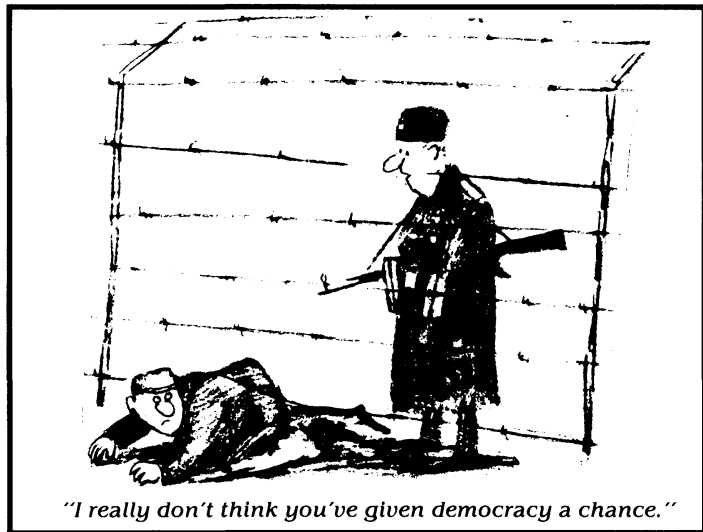
12. "New LeFevre Books"

Robert LeFevre's long awaited *THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LIBERTY* has been published by Rampart Institute, Box 26044, Santa Ana, California 92799. Hardback, 487 pages, \$24.95 postpaid. *ROBERT LEFEVRE: Truth is Not a Half-Way Place* is available from *THE VOLUNTARYIST* for \$14.95 postpaid.

13. "The Hibakusha"

One of the most forgotten chapters of World War II concerns some 30,000 Japanese-Americans who were in Japan at the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Approximately 1000 of these Nisei were also survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (the Japanese word for 'explosion-affected persons' is hibakusha) and now live in the United States. "Some had gone to visit relatives or to receive part of their education in Japan, and some to enter into marriage with Japanese nationals. Trapped in Japan when the war began, they were unable to return to their homes and families (most of whom would have been in relocation camps). Some were accused by the Japanese of spying for the United States; by Americans that they were working for a Japanese victory. Caught in the maelstrom of war they suffered a double isolation."

—from *THE CATHOLIC WORKER*, December, 1988.



The State

Continued from page 1

another herd similarly organized. The more terrifying the occasion for defense, the closer will become the organization and the more coercive the influence upon each member of the herd. War sends the current of purpose and activity flowing down to the lowest level of the herd, and to its most remote branches. All the activities of society are linked together as fast as possible to this central purpose of making a military offensive or a military defense, and the State becomes what in peacetimes it has vainly struggled to become—the inexorable arbiter and determinant of men's businesses and attitudes and opinions. The slack is taken up, the crosscurrents fade out, and the nation moves lumberingly and slowly, but with ever accelerated speed and integration, toward the great end, toward that "peacefulness of being at war," of which L.P. Jacks has so unforgettably spoken.

The classes which are able to play an active and not merely a passive role in the organization of war get a tremendous

liberation of activity and energy. Individuals are jolted out of their old routine, many of them are given new positions of responsibility, new techniques must be learned. Wearing home ties are broken and women who would have remained attached with infantile bonds are liberated for service overseas. A vast sense of rejuvenescence pervades the significant classes, a sense of new importance in the world. Old national ideals are taken out, re-adapted to the purpose and used as universal touchstones, or molds into which all thought is poured. Every individual citizen who in peacetimes had no function to perform by which he could imagine himself an expression or living fragment of the State becomes an active amateur agent of the Government in reporting spies and disloyalists, in raising Government funds, or in propagating such measures as are considered necessary by officialdom. Minority opinion, which in times of peace, was only irritating and could not be dealt with by law unless it was conjoined with actual crime, becomes, with the outbreak of war, a case for outlawry. Criticism of the State, objections to war, lukewarm opinions concerning the necessity or the beauty of conscription, are made subject to ferocious penalties, far exceeding in severity those affixed to actual pragmatic crimes. Public opinion, as expressed in the newspaper, and the pulpits and the schools, becomes one solid block. "Loyalty," or rather war orthodoxy, becomes the sole test for all professions, techniques, occupations. Particularly is this true in the sphere of the intellectual life. There the smallest taint is held to spread over the whole soul, so that a professor of physics is *ipso facto* disqualified to teach physics or to hold honorable place in a university—the republic of learning—if he is at all unsound on the war. Even mere association with persons thus tainted is considered to disqualify a teacher. Anything pertaining to the enemy becomes taboo. His books are suppressed wherever possible, his language is forbidden. His artistic products are considered to convey in the subtlest spiritual way taints of vast poison to the soul that permits itself to enjoy them. So enemy music is suppressed, and energetic measures of opprobrium taken against those whose artistic consciences are not ready to perform such an act of self-sacrifice. The rage for loyal conformity works impartially, and often in diametric opposition to other orthodoxies and traditional conformities, or even ideals. The triumphant orthodoxy of the State is shown at its apex perhaps when Christian preachers lose their pulpits for taking more or less literal (the) terms (of) the Sermon on the Mount, and Christian zealots are sent to prison for twenty years for distributing tracts which argue that war is unscriptural.

WAR AND THE STATE

War is the health of the State. It automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate cooperation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense. The machinery of government sets and enforces the drastic penalties; the minorities are either intimidated into silence, or brought slowly around by a subtle process of persuasion which may seem to them really to be converting them. Of course, the ideal of perfect loyalty, perfect uniformity is never really attained. The classes upon whom the amateur work of coercion falls are unwearied in their zeal, but often their agitation instead of converting, merely serves to stiffen their resistance. Minorities are rendered sullen, and some intellectual opinion bitter and satirical. But in general, the nation in wartime attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values culminating at the undisputed apex of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war. Loyalty—or mystic devotion to the State—becomes the major imagined human value. Other values, such as artistic creation, knowledge, reason, beauty, the enhancement of life, are instantly and almost unanimously sacrificed, and the significant classes who have constituted themselves the amateur agents of the State are engaged not only in sacrificing these values for themselves but in coercing all other persons into sacrificing them. ...

For war is a complicated way in which a nation acts, and it acts so out of a spiritual compulsion which pushes it on, perhaps against all its interests, all its real desires, and all its real sense

of values. It is States that make wars and not nations and the very thought and almost necessity of war is bound up with the ideal of the State. Not for centuries have nations made war; in fact the only historical examples of nations making war are the great barbarian invasions into southern Europe, the invasions of Russia from the East, and perhaps the sweep of Islam through northern Africa into Europe after Mohammed's death. And the motivations for such wars were either the restless expansion of migratory tribes or the flame of religious fanaticism. Perhaps these great movements could scarcely be called wars at all, for war implies an organized people drilled and led; in fact, it necessitates the State. Ever since Europe has had any such organization, such huge conflicts between nations—nations, that is, as cultural groups—have been unthinkable. It is preposterous to assume that for centuries in Europe there would have been any possibility of a people *en masse*, (with their own leaders, and not with the leaders of their duly constituted State), rising up and overflowing their borders in a war raid upon a neighboring people. The wars of the Revolutionary armies of France were clearly in defense of an imperiled freedom, and, moreover, they were clearly directed not against other peoples, but against the autocratic governments that were combining to crush the Revolution. There is no instance in history of a genuinely national war. There are instances of national defenses, among primitive civilizations such as the Balkan peoples, against intolerable invasion by neighboring despots or oppression. But war, as such, cannot occur except in a system of competing States, which have relations with each other through the channels of diplomacy.

War is a function of this system of States, and could not occur except in such a system. Nations organized for internal administration, nations organized as a federation of free communities, nations organized in any way except that of a political centralization of a dynasty, or the reformed descendant of a dynasty, could not possibly make war upon each other. They would not only have no motive for conflict, but they would be unable to muster the concentrated force to make war effective. There might be all sorts of amateur marauding, there might be guerrilla expeditions of group against group, but there could not be that terrible war *en masse* of the national State, that exploitation of the nation in the interest of the State, the abuse of the national life and resource in the frenzied mutual suicide, which is modern war.

MILITARISM AND THE STATE

It cannot be too firmly realized that war is a function of States and not of nations, indeed that it is the chief function of States. War is a very artificial thing. It is not the native spontaneous outburst of herd pugnacity; it is no more primary than is formal religion. War cannot exist without a military establishment, and a military establishment cannot exist without a State organization. War has an immemorial tradition and heredity only because the State has a long tradition and heredity. But they are inseparably and functionally joined. We cannot crusade against war without crusading implicitly against the State. And we cannot expect, or take measures to ensure, that this war is a war to end war, unless at the same time we take measures to end the State in its traditional form. The State is not the nation, and the State can be modified and even abolished in its present form, without harming the nation. On the contrary, with the passing of the dominance of the State, the genuine life-enhancing forces of the nation will be liberated. If the State's chief function is war, then the State must suck out of the nation a large part of its energy for its purely sterile purposes of defense and aggression. It devotes to waste or to actual destruction as much as it can of the vitality of the nation. No one will deny that war is a vast complex of life-destroying and life-crippling forces. If the State's chief function is war, then it is chiefly concerned with coordinating and developing the powers and techniques which makes for destruction. And this means not only the actual and potential destruction of the enemy, but of the nation at home as well. For the very existence of a State in a system of States means that the nation lies always under a risk of war and invasion, and the calling away of energy into military pursuits means a crippling of the productive and life-enhancing processes of the national life.

All this organization of death-dealing energy and technique is not a natural but a very sophisticated process. Particularly in modern nations, but also all through the course of modern European history, it could never exist without the State. For it meets the demands of no other institution, it follows the desires of no religious, industrial, political group. If the demand for military organization and a military establishment seems to come not from the officers of the State but from the public, it is only that it comes from the State-obsessed portion of the public, those groups which feel most keenly the State ideal. And in this country we have had evidence all too indubitable how powerless the pacifically minded officers of State may be in the face of a State obsession of the significant classes. If a powerful section of the significant classes feels more intensely the attitudes of the State, then they will most infallibly mold the Government in time to their wishes, bring it back to act as the embodiment of the State which it pretends to be. In every country we have seen groups that were more loyal than the king—more patriotic than the Government—the Ulsterites in Great Britain, the Junkers in Prussia, L'Action Francaise in France, our patrioteers in America. These groups exist to keep the steering wheel of the State straight, and they prevent the nation from ever veering very far from the State ideal.

Militarism expresses the desires and satisfies the major impulse only of this class. The other classes, left to themselves, have too many necessities and interests and ambitions, to concern themselves with so expensive and destructive a game. But the State-obsessed group is either able to get control of the machinery of the State or to intimidate those in control, so that it is able through use of the collective force to regiment the other grudging and reluctant classes into a military program. State idealism percolates down through the strata of society; capturing groups and individuals just in proportion to the prestige of this dominant class. So that we have the herd actually strung along between two extremes, the militaristic patriots at one end, who are scarcely distinguishable in attitude and animus from the most reactionary Bourbons of an Empire, and unskilled labor groups, which entirely lack the State sense. But the State acts as a whole, and the class that controls governmental machinery can swing the effective action of the herd as a whole. The herd is not actually a whole, emotionally. But by an ingenious mixture of cajolery, agitation, and intimidation, the herd is licked into shape, into an effective mechanical unity, if not into a spiritual whole. Men are told simultaneously that they will enter the military establishment of their own volition, as their splendid sacrifice for their country's welfare, and that if they do not enter they will be hunted down and punished with the most horrid penalties; and under a most indescribable confusion of



"Tell him you're a lawyer, Dear ... There's supposed to be honor among thieves."

democratic pride and personal fear they submit to the destruction of their livelihood if not their lives, in a way that would formerly have seemed to them so obnoxious as to be incredible.

In this great herd machinery, dissent is like sand in the bearings. The State ideal is primarily a sort of blind animal push toward military unity. Any difference with that unity turns the whole vast impulse toward crushing it. Dissent is speedily outlawed, and the Government, backed by the significant classes and those who in every locality, however small, identify themselves with them, proceeds against the outlaws, regardless of their value to the other institutions of the nation, or to the effect their persecution may have on public opinion. The herd becomes divided into the hunters and the hunted, and war enterprise becomes not only a technical game but a sport as well.

It must never be forgotten that nations do not declare war on each other, nor in the strictest sense is it the nations that fight each other. Much has been said to the effect that modern wars are wars of whole peoples and not of dynasties. Because the entire nation is regimented and the whole resources of the country are levied on for war, this does not mean that it is the country *qua* country which is fighting. It is the country organized as a State that is fighting, and only as a State would it possibly fight. So literally it is States which make war on each other and not peoples. Governments are the agents of States, and it is Governments which declare war on each other acting truest to form in the interests of the great State ideal they represent. There is no case known in modern times of the people being consulted in the initiation of a war. The present demand for "democratic control" of foreign policy indicates how completely, even in the most democratic of modern nations, foreign policy has been the secret private possession of the executive branch of the Government.

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE STATE

However representative of the people Parliaments and Congresses may be in all that concerns the internal administration of a country's political affairs, in international relations it has never been possible to maintain that the popular body acted except as a wholly mechanical ratifier of the Executive's will. The formality by which Parliaments and Congresses declare war is the merest technicality. Before such a declaration can take place, the country will have been brought to the very brink of war by the foreign policy of the Executive. A long series of steps on the downward path, each one more fatally committing the unsuspecting country to a warlike course of action, will have been taken without either the people, or its representatives being consulted or expressing its feelings. When the declaration of war is finally demanded by the Executive, the Parliament or Congress could not refuse it without reversing the course of history, without repudiating what has been representing itself in the eyes of the other States as the symbol and interpreter of the nation's will and animus. To repudiate an Executive at that time would be to publish to the entire world the evidence that the country had been grossly deceived by its own Government, that the country with an almost criminal carelessness had allowed its Government to commit it to gigantic national enterprises in which it had no heart. In such a crisis, even a Parliament, which in the most democratic States represents the common man and not the significant classes who most strongly cherish the State ideal, will cheerfully sustain the foreign policy which it understands even less than it would care for if it understood, and will vote almost unanimously for an incalculable war, in which the nation may be brought well nigh to ruin. That is way the referendum which was advocated by some people as a test of American sentiment in entering the war was considered even by thoughtful democrats to be something subtly improper. The die had been cast. Popular whim could only derange and bungle monstrously the majestic march of State policy in its new crusade for the peace of the world. The irresistible State ideal got hold of the bowels of men. Whereas up to this time, it had been irreproachable to be neutral in word and deed, for the foreign policy of the State had so decided it, henceforth it became the most arrant crime to remain neutral. The Middle West, which had been suddenly pacifistic in our days

H.L. Mencken: A Frank Confession of Faith

"I believe," he said, "in only one thing and that thing is human liberty. If ever a man is to achieve anything like dignity, it can happen only if superior men are given absolute freedom to think what they want to think and say what they want to say. I am against any man and any organization which seeks to limit or deny that freedom."

I made the obvious comment, that he seemed to limit freedom to superior men. His reply was simple, to the effect that the superior man can be sure of freedom only if it is given to all men. So far as my observation goes, that little exchange gets close to the core of the Mencken philosophy.

from Hamilton Owens,

"A Personal Note"

in LETTERS OF H.L. MENCKEN

SELECTED BY GUY J. FORGUE,

NY: 1961, p. xiii

of neutrality, became in a few months just as suddenly bellicose, and in its zeal for witch-burnings and its scent for enemies within gave precedence to no section of the country. The herd mind followed faithfully the State mind and, the agitation for a referendum being soon forgotten, the country fell into the universal conclusion that, since its Congress had formally declared the war, the nation itself had in the most solemn and universal way devised and brought on the entire affair. Oppression of minorities became justified on the plea that the latter were perversely resisting the rationally constructed and solemnly declared will of a majority of the nation. The herd coalescence of opinion which became inevitable the moment the State had set flowing the war attitudes became interpreted as a prewar popular decision, and disinclination to bow to the herd was treated as a monstrously antisocial act. So that the State, which had vigorously resisted the idea of a referendum and clung tenaciously and, of course, with entire success to its autocratic and absolute control of foreign policy, had the pleasure of seeing the country, within a few months, given over to the retrospective impression that a genuine referendum had taken place. When once a country has lapped up these State attitudes, its memory fades; it conceives itself not as merely accepting, but of having itself willed, the whole policy and technique of war. The significant classes, with their trailing satellites, identify themselves with the State, so that what the State, through the agency of the Government, has willed, this majority conceives itself to have willed.

All of which goes to show that the State represents all the autocratic, arbitrary, coercive, belligerent forces within a social group; it is a sort of complexus of everything most distasteful to the modern free creative spirit, the feeling for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. War is the health of the State. Only when the State is at war does the modern society function with that unity of sentiment, simple uncritical patriotic devotion, cooperation of services, which have always been the ideal of the State lover. With the ravages of democratic ideas, however, the modern republic cannot go to war under the old conceptions of autocracy and death-dealing belligerency. If a successful animus for war requires a renaissance of State ideals, they can only come back under democratic forms, under this retrospective conviction of democratic control of foreign policy, democratic desire for war, and particularly of this identification of the democracy with the State. How unregenerate the ancient State may be, however, is indicated by the laws against sedition, and by the Government's unreformed attitude on foreign policy. One of the first demands of the more farseeing democrats in the democracies of the Alliance was that secret diplomacy must go. The war was seen to have been made possible by a web of secret agreements

between States, alliances that were made by Governments without the shadow of popular support or even popular knowledge, and vague, half-understood commitments that scarcely reached the stage of a treaty or agreement, but which proved binding in the event. Certainly, said these democratic thinkers, war can scarcely be avoided unless this poisonous underground system of secret diplomacy is destroyed, this system by which a nation's power, wealth, and manhood may be signed away like a blank check to an allied nation to be cashed in at some future crisis. Agreements which are to affect the lives of whole peoples must be made between peoples and not by Governments, or at least by their representatives in the full glare of publicity and criticism.

FOREIGN POLICY AND WAR

Such a demand for "democratic control of foreign policy" seemed axiomatic. Even if the country had been swung into war by steps taken secretly and announced to the public only after they had been consummated, it was felt that the attitude of the American State toward foreign policy was only a relic of the bad old days and must be superseded in the new order. The American President himself, the liberal hope of the world, had demanded, in the eyes of the world, open diplomacy, agreements freely and openly arrived at. Did this mean a genuine transference of power in this most, crucial of State functions, from Government to people? Not at all. When the question recently came to a challenge in Congress, and the implications of open discussion were somewhat specifically discussed, and the desirabilities frankly commended, the President let his disapproval be known in no uncertain way. No one ever accused Mr. Wilson of not being a State idealist, and whenever democratic aspirations swung ideals too far out of the State orbit, he could be counted on to react vigorously. Here was a clear case of conflict between democratic idealism and the very crux of the concept of the State. However unthinkingly he might have been led on to encourage open diplomacy in his liberalizing program, when its implication was made vivid to him, he betrayed how mere a tool the idea had been in his mind to accentuate America's redeeming role. Not in any sense as a serious pragmatic technique had he thought of a genuinely open diplomacy. And how could he? For the last stronghold of State power is foreign policy. It is in foreign policy that the State acts most concentratedly as the organized herd, acts with fullest sense of aggressive power, acts with freest arbitrariness. In foreign policy, the State is most itself. States with reference to each other may be said to be in a continual state of latent war. The "armed truce," a phrase so familiar before 1914, was an accurate description of the normal relation of States when they are not at war. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the normal relation of States is war. Diplomacy is a disguised war, in which States are recuperating from conflicts in which they have exhausted themselves. It is the wheedling and the bargaining of the worn-out bullies as they rise from the ground and slowly restore their strength to begin fighting again. If diplomacy had been a moral equivalent for war, a higher stage in human progress, an inestimable means of making words prevail instead of blows, militarism would have broken down and given place to it. But since it is a mere temporary substitute, a mere appearance of war's energy under another form, a surrogate effect is almost exactly proportioned to the armed force behind it. When it fails, the recourse is immediate to the military technique whose thinly veiled arm it has been. A diplomacy that was the agency of popular democratic forces in their non-State manifestations would be no diplomacy at all. It would be no better than the Railway or Education commissions that are sent from one country to another with rational constructive purpose. The State, acting as a diplomatic-military ideal, is eternally at war. Just as it must act arbitrarily and autocratically in time of war, it must act in time of peace in this particular role where it acts

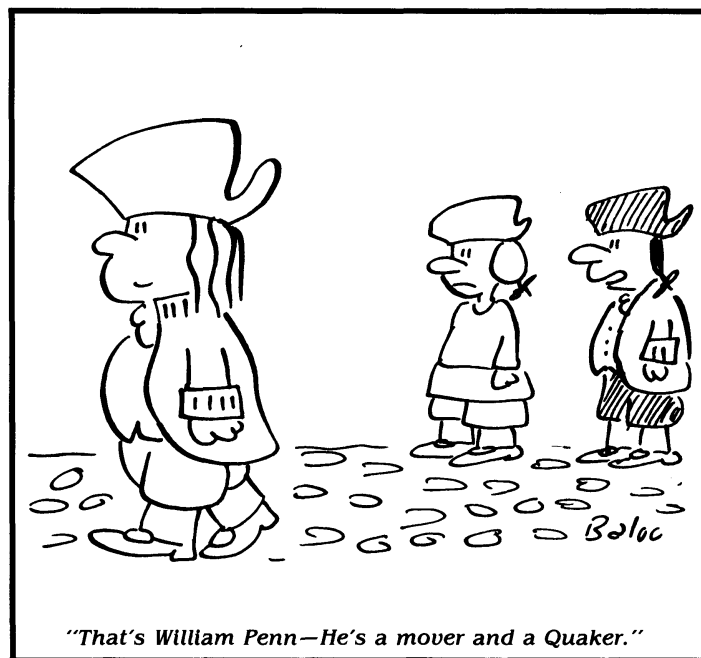
as a unit. Unified control is necessarily autocratic control. Democratic control of foreign policy is therefore a contradiction in terms. Open discussion destroys swiftness and certainty of action. The giant state is paralyzed. Mr. Wilson retains his full ideal of the State at the same time that he desires to eliminate war. He wishes to make the world safe for democracy as well as safe for diplomacy. When the two are in conflict, his clear political insight, his idealism of the State, tells him that it is the naiver democratic values that must be sacrificed. The world must primarily be made safe for diplomacy. The State must not be diminished.

What is the State essentially? The more closely we examine it, the more mystical and personal it becomes. On the Nation we can put our hand as a definite social group, with attitudes and qualities exact enough to mean something. On the Government we can put our hand as a certain organization of ruling functions, the machinery of lawmaking and law-enforcing. The Administration is a recognizable group of political functionaries, temporarily in charge of the government. But the State stands as an idea behind them all, eternal, sanctified, and from it. Government and Administration conceive themselves to have the breath of life. Even the nation, especially in times of war—or at least, its significant classes—considers that it derives its authority and its purpose from the idea of the State. Nation and State are scarcely differentiated, and the concrete, practical, apparent facts are sunk in the symbol. We reverence not our country but the flag. We may criticize ever so severely our country, but we are disrespectful to the flag at our peril. It is the flag and the uniform that make men's heart beat high and fill them with noble emotions, not the thought of the pious hopes for America as a free and enlightened nation.

PATRIOTISM AND WAR

It cannot be said that the object of emotion is the same, because the flag is the symbol of the nation, so that in reverencing the American flag we are reverencing the nation. For the flag is not a symbol of the country as a cultural group following certain ideals of life, but solely a symbol of the political State, inseparable from its prestige and expansion. The flag is most intimately connected with military achievement, military memory. It represents the country not in its intensive life, but in its far-flung challenge to the world. The flag is primarily the banner of war; it is allied with patriotic anthem and holiday. It recalls old martial memories. A nation's patriotic history is solely the history of its wars, that is, of the State in its health and glorious functioning. So in responding to the appeal of the flag, we are responding to the appeal of the State, to the symbol of the herd organized as an offensive and defensive body, conscious

There is a superstition held by the natives of Malaya that the orangutan is really human but that he remains speechless in order to avoid the payment of taxes.



of its prowess and its mystical herd strength.

Even those authorities in the present Administration, to whom has been granted autocratic control over opinion, feel, though they are scarcely able to philosophize over, this distinction. It has been authoritatively declared that the horrid penalties against seditious opinion must not be construed as inhibiting legitimate, that is, partisan criticism of the Administration. A distinction is made between the Administration and the Government. It is quite accurately suggested by this attitude that the Administration is a temporary band of partisan politicians in charge of the machinery of Government, carrying out the mystical policies of State. The manner in which they operate this machinery may be freely discussed and objected to by their political opponents. The Governmental machinery may also be legitimately altered, in case of necessity. What may not be discussed or criticized is the mystical policy itself or the motives of the State in inaugurating such a policy. The President, it is true, has made certain partisan distinctions between candidates for office on the ground of support or nonsupport of the Administration but what he means was really support or nonsupport of the State policy as faithfully carried out by the Administration. Certain of the Administration measures were devised directly to increase the health of the State, such as the Conscription and the Espionage laws. Others were concerned merely with the machinery. To oppose the first was to oppose the State and was therefore not tolerable. To oppose the second was to oppose fallible human judgment, and was therefore, though to be depreciated, not to be wholly interpreted as political suicide.

The distinction between Government and State, however has not been so carefully observed. In time of war it is natural that Government as the seat of authority should be confused with the State or the mystic source of authority. You cannot very well injure a mystical idea which is the State, but you can very well interfere with the processes of Government. So that the two become identified in the public mind, and any contempt for or opposition to the workings of the machinery of Government is considered equivalent to contempt for the sacred State. The State, it is felt, is being injured in its faithful surrogate, the public emotion rallies passionately to defend it. It even makes any criticism of the form of Government a crime.

OPPOSITION TO THE STATE

The inextricable union of militarism and the State is beautifully shown by those laws which emphasize interference with the Army and Navy as the most culpable of seditious crimes. Pragmatically, a case of capitalistic sabotage, or a strike in war industry would seem to be far more dangerous to the successful prosecution of the war than the isolated and ineffectual efforts of an individual to prevent recruiting. But in the tradition of the State ideal, such industrial interference with national policy is not identified as a crime against the State. It may be grumbled against; it may be seen quite rationally as an impediment of the utmost gravity. But it is not felt in those obscure seats of the herd mind which dictate the identity of crime and fix their proportional punishments. Army and Navy, however, are the very arms of the State; in them flows its most precious lifeblood. To paralyze them is to touch the very State itself. And the majesty of the State is so sacred that even to attempt such a paralysis is a crime equal to a successful stroke. The will is deemed sufficient. Even though the individual in his effort to impede recruiting should utterly and lamentably fail, he shall be in no wise spared. Let the wrath of the State descend upon him for his impiety! Even if he does not try any overt action, but merely utters sentiments that may incidentally in the most indirect way cause someone to refrain from enlisting, he is guilty. The guardians of the State do not ask whether any pragmatic effect flowed out of this evil will or desire. It is enough that the will is present. Fifteen or twenty years in prison is not deemed too much for such sacrilege.

Such attitudes and such laws, which affront every principle of human reason, are no accident, nor are they the result of hysteria caused by the war. They are considered just, proper, beautiful by all the classes which have the State ideal, and they express only an extreme of health and vigor in the reaction of the State to its nonfriends.

Such attitudes are inevitable as arising from the devotees of the State. For the State is a personal as well as a mystical symbol, and it can only be understood by tracing its historical origin. The modern State is not the (r)ational and intelligent product of modern men desiring to live harmoniously together with security of life, property, and opinion. It is not an organization which had been devised as pragmatic means to a desired social end. All the idealism with which we have been instructed to endow the State is the fruit of our retrospective imaginations. What it does for us in the way of security and benefit of life, it does incidentally as a by-product and development of its original functions, and not because at any time men or classes in the full possession of their insight and intelligence have desired that it be so. It is very important that we should occasionally lift the incorrigible veil of that *ex post facto* idealism by which we throw a glamor of rationalization over what is, and pretend in the ecstasies of social conceit that we have personally invented and set up for the glory of God and man the hoary institutions which we see around us. Things are what they are, and come down to us with all their thick encrustations of error and malevolence. Political philosophy can delight us with fantasy and convince us who need illusion to live that the actual is a fair and approximate copy—full of failings, of course, but approximately sound and sincere—of that ideal society which we can imagine ourselves as creating. From this it is a step to the tacit assumption that we have somehow had a hand in its creation and are responsible for its maintenance and sanctity.

Nothing is more obvious, however, than that every one of us comes into society as into something in whose creation we had not the slightest hand. We have not even the advantage like those little unborn souls in *THE BLUE BIRD*, of consciousness before we take up our careers on earth. By the time we find ourselves here we are caught in a network of customs and attitudes, the major directions of our desires and interests have been stamped on our minds, and by the time we have emerged from tutelage and reached the years of discretion when we might conceivably throw our influence to the reshaping of social institutions, most of us have been so molded into the society and class we live in that we are scarcely aware of any distinction between ourselves as judging, desiring individuals and our social environment. We have been kneaded so successfully that we approve of what our society approves, desire what our society desires, and add to the group our own passionate inertia against change, against the effort of reason, and the adventure of beauty.

Every one of us, without exception, is born into a society that is given, just as the fauna and flora of our environment are given. Society and its institutions are, to the individual who enters it, as much naturalistic phenomena as is the weather itself. There is, therefore, no natural sanctity in the State any more than there is in the weather. We may bow down before it just as our ancestors bowed before the sun and moon, but it is only because something in us unregenerate finds satisfaction in such an attitude, not because there is anything inherently reverential in the institution worshiped. Once the State has begun to function, and a large class finds its interest and its expression of power in maintaining the State, this ruling class may compel obedience from any uninterested minority. The State thus becomes an instrument by which the power of the whole herd is wielded for the benefit of a class. The rulers soon learn to capitalize the reverence which the State produces in the majority, and turn it into a general resistance toward a lessening of their privileges. The sanctity of the State becomes identified with the sanctity of the ruling class, and the latter are permitted to remain in power under the impression that in obeying and serving them, we are obeying and serving society, the nation, the great collectivity of all of us.

"A penny of tax is a trifling, but the power of imposing that tax is never considered a trifle, because it implies absolute servitude in all who submit."

A Short History of Liberty

By Dean Russell

From biblical times onward, the history of liberty and progress among various peoples seems to have followed a remarkably similar pattern. There are exceptions, of course—and the time element varies widely—but the pattern may be generally described by ten key ideas in sequence:

1. *Bondage*. At some point in their histories, all peoples seem to have existed in some form of bondage or slavery—frequently even to their own domestic rulers by their own votes or acquiescence. But when thoughtful persons finally become aware that they are no longer free men, they want to know why. When they ask themselves that question, they automatically turn to contemplation and soul searching. Out of this grows...

2. *Faith*. If people in bondage have no faith—either in a personal Creator or impersonal ideal—they will remain slaves and eventually die out or be absorbed by another culture. But an intelligent faith will almost always develop into...

3. *Understanding*. A person's faith needs to be buttressed by an understanding of why it is evil to force any peaceful person to conform to the will and ideas of another person. Otherwise he is apt to remain a faithful slave or attempt to become a slave owner. But the combination of faith and understanding results in the necessary...

4. *Courage*. You may depend upon it, courageous men with faith and understanding will neither remain in bondage nor keep others in bondage. Even against great odds, this combination leads to...

5. *Liberty*. Liberty is a relationship among persons wherein no person molests any other peaceful person in his ideas, possessions or actions. Liberty may also be viewed as the responsibility one assumes for himself and recognizes in all

others; for there can be no liberty where there is no responsibility. Liberty has never existed completely among any people at any time, but where it has existed to a high degree, the resulting freedom to work, trade, choose, win, lose and bargain has always meant...

6. *Abundance*. But if an abundance of material things is the primary aim of a person, his life is devoid of any real meaning. For if the goal is abundance, its achievement logically results in...

7. *Complacency*. Complacency and self-satisfaction (the "full barns" of the biblical lesson) inevitably lead to...

8. *Apathy*. With apathy comes a dullness and a loss of interest—a "let George do it" philosophy. And there will always be many political "Georges" around to accept this invitation to seize both the reins and the whip. This always degenerates into...

9. *Dependency*. For a time, it is possible for dependents to be unaware that they are dependents. As they continue to shed the personal responsibilities which are freedom, they also continue to delude themselves that they are still free so long as they themselves are able to participate in the mechanical processes of selecting their rulers—"We can still vote, can't we?" But dependents are at the mercy of the persons or groups of parties upon whom they depend for their housing, or security in old age, or subsidies, or education, or medical care, or any of the other "aids" from political authority which cause persons to depend on others instead of themselves. Sooner or later, this dependency becomes known by its true nature...

10. *Bondage*. Fortunately, the record shows that people can regain their faith, understanding and courage. They can again become persons and citizens who are responsible for their own welfare, rather than units and subjects identified by numbers for purposes of regimentation and subsidization. The record shows that people can, by their own intelligent actions, regain their liberty any time they want it.

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