

The Reform Mentality, War, Peace, and the National State: from the Progressives to Vietnam

by Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr.

Department of History, State University of New York, Albany

That the modern reform mentality has been imbued with a statist philosophy leading to imperialism and war is perhaps no surprise to libertarians. They may not always be aware, however, of the extent to which a statist philosophy, vaguely Neo-Hegelian, has characterized both American reform movements and European social democracy. Indeed much of American reform, from the Progressive Era to the New Deal and after, in its program and development has been similar to European social democracy. It owes more to the European example than to previous reform movements in the United States. Thus, American social and political reforms in the 20th century have been nationalistic, collectivist, and statist, rather than liberal in any traditional sense.

These hypotheses seem more acceptable today than a generation ago when American historians widely assumed that the progressives of the 1900's supported the Theodore Roosevelt who fought the trusts but opposed the Roosevelt who acted as a militarist in foreign policy. Those historians, forgetting the maxims of Charles Beard, made too rigid a distinction between the progressives' foreign policy and their domestic policy. The historians seemed to believe, and to imagine that the progressives too believed, that T. R.'s foreign policy was bad and his domestic policy good. This distinction first began to be questioned in the 1950's—most notably and concisely by William E. Leuchtenburg. In a now well-known article in 1952, Leuchtenburg wrote that "imperialism and progressivism flourished together because they were both expressions of the same philosophy of government, a tendency to judge any action not by the means employed but by the results achieved, a worship of definitive action for action's sake, as John Dewey has pointed out, and an almost religious faith in the democratic mission of America."¹

The Leuchtenburg thesis has been widely influential although far from universally accepted in American historiography. It has been questioned

chiefly in regard to such Midwestern progressives as Robert M. LaFollette and George W. Norris.² Critics of Leuchtenburg also stress the period of the Taft and Wilson Presidencies, rather than T. R.'s, overlooking the fact that the progressives after 1910 had partisan political reasons for being against Taft's dollar diplomacy and Wilson's somewhat hypocritical armed neutrality. Neither Leuchtenburg nor his critics have done detailed quantitative analyses of Congressional voting patterns. The critics do recognize that LaFollette, for example, was early in his career a conventional supporter of imperialism and of Roosevelt's foreign policy, and that many of the progressives, wholly absorbed in domestic affairs, went along with T. R.'s foreign policy from apathy rather than from conviction. The critics, however, neglect Leuchtenburg's main point, which is that the progressives' paternalistic reform mentality, even more than their politics, was sympathetic to imperialism and war.

This paternalistic reform mentality is admittedly illustrated better in the Eastern, T. R. wing of progressivism, than in LaFollette's Midwestern progressivism. This same nationalistic reform mentality also had the precedent of Bismarck in Germany and of the Fabian Socialists in England, plus the parallel of Lloyd George in England and the European socialists who supported World War I.

It is helpful to examine initially some of the opponents of progressivism in the United States in the early 1900s, since historical movements and popular social philosophies are often better elucidated and clarified through the arguments of their dissident critics. Thus, some of the contemporary conservative opponents of progressivism and social democracy first noted the peculiarly illiberal nature of their so-called reforms. In the United States the anti-imperialists, frequently dismissed as unrealistic idealists, out of step with the direction of world politics in the 20th century, were often quite discerning in their awareness of the affinity between progressivist and imperialist ideologies. Particularly attentive to this phenomenon were a number of academic figures, old-fashioned liberals or conservatives, who were suspicious of the recent and growing tendencies toward more governmental power.

Paul S. Reinsch, professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, and later United States minister to China and legal advisor to the Chinese government, was one of those who saw the significance at home of the new international currents abroad. In his book *World Politics*, a volume in the Macmillan Citizen's Library published in 1900, Reinsch stated that the exaggerated nationalism of the nineteenth century was now being transformed into "the age of national imperialism." Everywhere the spirit of individualism and the old cosmopolitan sense of European unity was being sacrificed to a Machiavellian and Hegelian philosophy of nationalism and statism. In England the liberalism of a Gladstone with its checks on the

power of government was nearly dead. "The simple questions of national greatness and glory, and of such social legislation as that of old-age pensions, are of greater interest to the new democracy,—and of these two, the former, with its constant appeals to patriotic feeling, has the stronger hold on the masses." Despite the popularity of social reform, Reinsch feared that the governing classes in both Europe and America would ultimately subordinate home affairs to imperial interests. "A nation that is rapidly expanding is quite likely to suffer in its social and political well-being at home." Mindful of the needs of the average American citizen, he warned that "the central government should not be turned into an instrumentality for advancing powerful centralized interests."³

While Reinsch tended still in 1900 to think of imperialism as a possible threat to social reform, others perceived that progressivism might instead try to unite all interests through the instrumentality of a strong, centralized national state. "The socialist development of Liberalism paved the way for Imperialism," Leonard T. Hobhouse, the English philosopher and journalist, and the first professor of sociology at the University of London, wrote in 1905 in his book *Democracy and Reaction*. "So non-intervention abroad went by the board along with laissez faire at home; national liberty was ranked with competitive industrialism as an exploded superstition; a positive theory of the State in domestic affairs was matched by a positive theory of Empire, and the way was made straight for Imperialism. . . ." William Graham Sumner, author of the anti-imperialist essay, *The Conquest of the United States by Spain*, was an American counterpart of Hobhouse in much of his thinking. In his famous anthropological study *Folkways*, Sumner noted that, under the modern optimistic philosophy of progress, of which he was dubious, "The philosophical drift in the mores of our time is towards state regulation, militarism, imperialism, towards petting and flattering the poor and laboring classes, and in favor of whatever is altruistic and humanitarian." According to the economist Franklin Pierce, Sumner's New Haven neighbor, and like him a conservative in his social views, governmental paternalism and imperialism were intimately associated. "Everywhere in every direction," he observed, "we are putting on the airs and adopting the customs of a monarchical form of government, and we are doing this because we have become an empire and because our people are given over to the spirit of materialism."⁴

In his *Reminiscences of an American Scholar*, the political scientist John W. Burgess deplored the evil effect of the Spanish-American War on the national character. "We started then on the road of imperialism and we have not turned back. The exaggeration of government at the expense of liberty made a mightier spring forward than at any preceding period in our history. . . ." Burgess, one of Theodore Roosevelt's professors at the Columbia University Law School, and himself a firm admirer of German scholarship,

believed that the United States in its adoption of imperialism, an income tax, and direct democracy was aping Europe. America, he feared, was moving steadily away from liberty of the individual toward despotic government at home as well as abroad.⁵

The contemporary American rationale for imperialism, as conservative professors like Sumner and Burgess complained, seemed to anticipate and parallel progressivist ideology. Thus the democratic government sought by progressives at home, it was believed, could also prove beneficial abroad. Exhortations of reform and self-sacrifice at home as a means of simple justice for the less fortunate classes of society were readily translatable into demands that the American people shoulder the white man's burden and embark on missionary crusades overseas. The popular magazines of the early 1900's—the *Independent*, *Outlook*, *Century*, *Harper's*, and *North American Review*, for example,—were all filled with articles in support of imperialism, not only in terms of American economic interests, but as the democratic duty and world responsibility of the United States. Down in the heart of all Americans, the editor of the *Century* magazine wrote in April 1903, was "a sense of national superiority, as to our governmental system and our actual condition, that needs only slight excitation to make it vocal."

As early as 1900, Franklin H. Giddings, professor of sociology at Columbia University, in a book called *Democracy and Empire*, maintained that the two forms of government were not incompatible. Via imperialism the United States would spread its ideals of liberty and equality to the rest of the world. In an address before the annual meeting of the National Education Association in 1899, entitled "An Education Policy for Our New Possessions," William Torrey Harris, like Giddings, urged the benefits of imperialism. To Harris, the United States Commissioner of Education, it seemed obvious that "If we cannot come into contact with lower civilizations without bringing extermination to their people, we are still far from the goal. It must be our great object to improve our institutions until we can bring blessings to lower peoples and set them on the road to rapid progress. . . . Such a civilization," Harris stated, "we have a right to enforce on this earth. We have a right to work for the enlightenment of all peoples and to give our aid to lift them into local self-government."⁶

As educators like Harris and Giddings foresaw, greater democracy and progressive social reforms at home would add strength to the arguments for assuming the white man's burden abroad. After 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, now President, quickly became what Henry Demarest Lloyd called an admirable instrument for the Americanization of the world. T. R. tried to do just that, and his penchant for an aggressive foreign policy is, of course, well known. There has been less attention, however, to the importance which he attached to the foreign or diplomatic implications of his domestic reform policies.

Roosevelt's attitudes toward the trusts and big business, as well as his views on conservation, were influenced in part by his recognition of the significance of each in terms of United States interests abroad. Thus Roosevelt took the lead in pushing the new progressivist stand on the trusts, which involved government regulation and control rather than trustbusting. Roosevelt also believed that big business as the chosen instrument of imperialism was necessary to compete with foreign cartels. In his first annual message to Congress in December 1901, he accordingly pointed out:

The same business conditions which have produced the great aggregations of corporate and individual wealth have made them very potent factors in international commercial competition. . . . America has only just begun to assume that commanding position in the international business world which we believe will more and more be hers. It is of the utmost importance that this position be not jeopardized, especially at a time when the skill, business energy, and mechanical aptitude of our people make foreign markets essential. Under such conditions it would be most unwise to cramp or fetter the youthful strength of our Nation.

In the domestic reform program of the New Nationalism, which he later outlined in his important Osawatomie, Kansas, speech in August 1910, Roosevelt also reiterated his belief in a strong army and navy and warned his fellow progressives "continually to remember Uncle Sam's interests abroad." From the University of Wisconsin, President Charles R. Van Hise, a United States cannot successfully compete in the world's markets without large industrial units."⁷ And the Progressive party platform in 1912 included the statement:

It is imperative to the welfare of our people that we enlarge and extend our foreign commerce. In every way possible our Federal Government should co-operate in this important matter. Germany's policy of co-operation between government and business has in comparatively few years made that nation a leading competitor for the commerce of the world.

In regard to conservation, Roosevelt emphasized the need to preserve scarce resources as a guarantee of national security in the struggle for world power. The American people, Roosevelt feared, did not understand that "conservation of our natural resources is only preliminary to the larger question of national efficiency, the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the Nation." To Gifford Pinchot, the nation's Chief Forester and progressive publicist, conservation simply meant the more efficient, planned use of nature's resources. Interpreted in this way, conservation seemed to provide a popular scientific answer to the new national problem of the twentieth century. It appealed, not only to the progressive reformer's nationalism and patriotism, but also to his interest in social control and planning. In the words of Charles R. Van Hise, author of the first history of

conservation in the United States, "He who thinks not of himself primarily, but of his race, and of its future, is the new patriot."⁸

Finally, Roosevelt's military and naval policies demonstrated the affinity of the progressives' concept of social control at home and a strong foreign policy abroad. The progressives in Congress generally supported T. R.'s army and navy bills. Many progressives were impressed too by the administrative reforms that they thought they saw in the General Staff and National Guard legislation. Conservatives or old-fashioned liberals, on the other hand, sensed the danger of an increase of the Executive power in such measures. In the celebrated case in 1908 of the four-battleship bill, Roosevelt had to overcome conservative and Old Guard opposition in order to send the Great White Fleet around the world to threaten Japan and impress the European powers.

This Roosevelt practice of power politics in America's foreign relations reflected full well his imperialistic outlook. Roosevelt had a keen sense of the importance in international diplomacy of cooperation among the strong powers, with which, he believed, "there is but little danger of our getting into war." Resentful accordingly of anti-imperialist pressures in favor of smaller nations, he wrote in 1905 that the United States "is too apt to indulge in representations on behalf of weak peoples which do them no good and irritate the strong and tyrannical peoples to whom the protest is made."⁹ Rooseveltian imperialism was probably more opportunistic than economic in base, motivated by his stress on political and military security, but security along nationalist and imperialist lines through an extension of American power abroad. Roosevelt was also more successful than Taft or Wilson in gaining the support of American progressives for the policies of imperialism and dollar diplomacy. Thus Senators like Robert M. LaFollette, who remained apathetic or who managed to go along with T. R. on foreign policy, later broke with Taft and refused to follow Wilson.

The new course of American foreign policy, as it developed in the 1900's under progressive leadership, did not differ in its essentials from similar programs and policies already well under way in Great Britain and Germany. A strong nationalistic and expansionist mood gripped both of these countries. In Germany, militarism gradually spread from the army to industrial life, and even the academic community and the Social Democrats became a part of the state socialism fastened on the German Empire by Bismarck's leadership. By 1900, a bargain was sealed between agrarian interests and large landowners, each desiring a protective tariff, and the military-industrial groups pushing for naval construction and expanded export markets. Because big business could more easily absorb the higher costs and heavier taxation entailed by the navy and the welfare program of the Social Democracy, there was little opposition, even from labor, to the

cartels which marked the growing concentration and centralization of German industry. Nationalized liberals, now more and more the advocates of military, naval, and colonial expansion, no longer contested the leadership of the German military machine. Even those men considered the true representatives of democratic liberalism—Max Weber and Theodor Barth, for example,—hoped by supporting a navy and imperialistic policy to break down the privileges of the old conservative agrarians. And among German intellectuals generally, there was a revolt against interest politics and a desire to support “the national cause.”¹⁰

In Great Britain, the hold of historic liberalism was stronger and the national economic position weaker than in either Germany or the United States. But, at the same time, pressures for social reform, developing with the advance of democracy and industrialization in the eighties and nineties, could no longer be answered in the new century by the traditional policies and limited program of the Gladstone Liberals. Even more insistent now were the demands of the Empire and the navy.

Most interesting was the attitude of the British Socialists, including the Fabians, for whom the Boer War created formidable problems. Against general Socialist demands for denunciation of the government's Boer policy, a majority of the Fabians deserted the Socialist ranks and stood with the Liberal Imperialists. In 1900 George Bernard Shaw, supported by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, drafted the manifesto *Fabianism and the Empire*, providing a socialist rationale for the union of national reform and imperialism. Until the socialist federation of the world became a fact, Shaw contended that imperial federations like the British Empire must prevail. “The problem before us,” he wrote, “is how the world can be ordered by Great Powers of practically international extent. . . . The notion that a nation has the right to do what it pleases with its own territory, without reference to the interests of the rest of the world, is no more tenable from the International Socialist point of view—that is, from the point of view of the twentieth century—than the notion that the landlord has a right to do what he likes with his estate without reference to the interests of his neighbors. . . . The State which obstructs international civilization will have to go, be it big or little.”¹¹

Shaw's argument, rejecting the old liberal pacifism that was still strong in British Socialism, undoubtedly shocked many of his friends. Most of those in the Liberal and Socialist parties were probably still anti-imperialist in their sympathies after 1900, but British popular sentiment was now increasingly jingoistic as well as reform-minded. In theory the Liberal party, after its return to power in 1905, and in adherence to its historic anti-militarism and anti-imperialism, might have cut naval appropriations and still satisfied most of the popular demands for welfare measures. In practice, however, the

Liberals in the famous Lloyd George budget of 1909 adopted new taxes and began the road to eventual national bankruptcy via the twin means of social reform and armaments. In foreign policy especially, little remained to distinguish the new Liberal Imperialists and the Conservatives. For the former, Lloyd George, forsaking his Boer War pacifism and early efforts at German rapprochement, "came forward in opposition to Germany as the mouthpiece of British patriotism and imperialism." Moreover, it was not lost upon the pro-war Conservatives that, if the European crisis broke, the British masses would accept with better grace a declaration of war by the government and party identified with the social reforms and welfare program of 1909.¹²

Progressivism and war were, of course, not unrelated. The era of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson saw almost as much attention devoted to foreign as to domestic policy. War also defined the chronological limits generally ascribed to the main phase of progressivism in the United States. Thus Roosevelt became President three years after the War with Spain, and Wilson was by 1917 a war President. Measured in terms of the ensuing conservative climate of opinion, dearth of advanced social reforms, and reality of reactionary politics, the heritage of the First World War left progressivism in the United States and social democracy in Europe weaker than either had been in 1914. Yet our historical knowledge of its dismal aftermath could not stand revealed at the time to the great majority of the citizenry who viewed America's participation in the war in a "frenzy of idealism and self-sacrifice." It was in this latter sense that that great struggle marked, as Richard Hofstadter observed, "the apotheosis as well as the liquidation of the Progressive spirit."¹³

In America, as in the social democracy of Europe, the more nationalistic elements within the progressive movement gradually gained predominance over liberal pacifist opinion. Alarmed at Woodrow Wilson's success in making the New Freedom a practical political medium for many of the social reforms they had advocated, the followers of Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism turned with relief after 1914 to the issues raised by the war. Roosevelt personally lost interest in the Progressive party except as a vehicle for criticizing Wilson's policies in respect to American neutrality. The former President also exemplified, better than any of his political contemporaries, those values of militarism and nationalism that many progressives were increasingly happy to accept. Like some of the more right-wing American Socialist leaders who welcomed the "startling progress in collectivism" in wartime England and Germany, Roosevelt and his progressive friend, ex-Senator Beveridge, also admired Germany's military efficiency. Necessary to that achievement in England as well as Germany, Roosevelt pointed out, was the merging of social and industrial justice with military preparedness, "two sides of a common program."¹⁴

Roosevelt's main interest was America's military security with the tacit, if unstated, corollary of eventual entry into the war on the side of the Allies. Together with a number of university presidents, he extended progressive backing to General Leonard Wood's program of voluntary summer military training camps for college students and businessmen. Regularly scheduled military training in the schools and colleges also gained new support from the preparedness movement and the progressive-type arguments linking it with American democracy. Denying the validity of the traditional liberal attack on universal service as a Prussian concept, Brooks Adams praised the French and German masses going off to war as an example of the democratic ideal in practice. Harvard philosopher Ralph Barton Perry, a disciple of William James, also defended conscription in his essay, "The Free Man and the Soldier," published in the *New Republic*. And Roosevelt, too, contended that universal service represented "the true democratic ideal." At the same time T. R., like Brooks Adams, despite their talk of democracy, was impressed with the idea of an authoritarian state. "We should," he wrote in 1915, "in all humility imitate not a little of the spirit so much in evidence among the Germans and the Japanese, the two nations which in modern times have shown the most practical type of patriotism, the greatest devotion to the common weal, the greatest success in developing their economic resources and abilities from within, and the greatest farsightedness in safeguarding the country against possible disaster from without." Finally Leonard Wood voiced the similar view that in the United States "the time has come when we must cast aside selfish individualism and accept the principle of universal service to the state, or else we must yield what we have been taught to consider vital policies and be satisfied with a minor sphere in the world's affairs."¹⁵

Roosevelt was the biggest gun in the arsenal of the preparedness advocates in the United States and, as Walter Millis later pointed out, "Preparedness was an inspired idea. There was something in it for everyone. It provided all the excitement and glamour of war, while promising to keep the country out of combat." Yet, though Roosevelt's "progressivism could hardly be discerned through the clouds of his perfervid patriotism, it was there nonetheless, insistent and real," historian Charles Hirschfeld wrote. "In his preparedness philippics, he always demanded, within the context of his 'larger Americanism,' social justice for all as well as adequate military defense. We could not, he argued, have a sound foreign policy 'unless there is also a sound relationship among our own citizens within our own ranks.' Reform and national strength," Hirschfeld continued, "thus went together in the context of international crisis and war—an equation also accepted by Roosevelt's admirers among the leaders of the foundering Progressive Party in 1916."¹⁶

Before it expired within the fold of the Republican party in 1916, the

Progressive party adopted a platform calling for universal military training—a plank which incidentally Henry Cabot Lodge could not get his fellow Republicans to approve. Also the National Committee of the Progressives, after listing recent gains in progressive legislation, observed that the war had brought

an issue deeper than national advance, the issue of national unity and the nation's existence, of Americanism and of Preparedness. The Progressive Platform of 1916, therefore, placed foremost as our immediate need preparedness in arms, industry and spirit. . . . The Progressive National Committee recognizes that such are now the issues that immediately confront the country and *looks only to the duty that arises therefrom*.¹⁷

Among the more war-minded American progressives a vital center of intellectual influence was the *New Republic* under Herbert Croly's editorial direction. Croly, long an admirer of European ideas of state socialism in their American context of nationalism and democracy, believed in 1916 that the United States needed "the tonic of a serious moral adventure." Following in the stream of European history, America could hardly avoid adopting some of the features of European life, including a certain degree of militarization along with social democracy. With respect to the preparedness legislation, Croly frankly admitted that "there is a very real probability that the new Army and Navy will be used chiefly for positive and for aggressive as opposed to merely defensive purposes." The whole argument of defense, however, begged the question, Croly asserted, because in the case of a large nation like the United States, "no sharp line can be drawn between defensive and aggressive armament." Despite its dangers to American traditions and institutions, preparedness was justified because it might introduce a useful ferment into national life and give it a necessary "tonic effect."¹⁸

Croly and the *New Republic*, continually weighing the claims on America of peace versus war and the merits of Wilson's versus Roosevelt's stand on foreign policy, attempted to unite a romantic national idealism with a realistic progressivism. This same duality characterized the articles which John Dewey, America's senior philosopher and leading pragmatist, published mostly in the pages of the *New Republic* during the war years. Originally critical of German idealist philosophy for the way in which it had hardened into a narrow nationalistic justification of Imperial war aims, Dewey by 1917 moved steadily to a position favoring American entrance into the war on the side of the Allies. And, though he warned against the suppression of dissenting opinions, he also castigated old pacifist friends for their failure to recognize the "immense impetus to reorganization afforded by this war."

As a pragmatist and instrumentalist, Dewey pointed out that war could not be dissociated from the ends that it sought to achieve. Thus he found the

customary pacifist objection to all use of force absurd and based on a lack of understanding of the function of a political state. What was objectionable was not the use of force itself, but the unwise or ineffective use of force. It "all depends," said Dewey, "upon the efficient adaptation of means to ends." His major concern with regard to governmental censorship in wartime, for example, was not that free speech might be lost permanently but rather that inept attempts of government and society to censor thought and speech would hamper effective United States participation and interfere with the solidarity of the war effort. "Here, I repeat," Dewey declared, "is the real danger in that policy of 'Hush, don't think, only feel and act' to which every forward step in the conscription of thought commits us."

To counteract what he considered the pacifists' muddled thinking, and to help overcome American apathy regarding the war, Dewey called for more attention to the means of its prosecution. Opposed to creating a war motivation by appeals to patriotic hysteria, Dewey stressed the need for a practical "businesslike psychology" that would perceive the ends to be accomplished and make an "effective selection and orderly arrangement of means for their execution." American national intelligence seemed to lie in the direction of the practical; and a realistic, businesslike attitude, he felt, should be emphasized along with the Wilsonian liberal note of "an underlying national idealism."

In attempting to find an answer to the age-old question, "What Are We Fighting For?", Dewey explored the progressive social possibilities of the war. The more extensive use of science for communal purposes, and the formation of large political groupings indicated that the world would be better organized, though not necessarily organized for a better world. Old conceptions of private property, however, had been killed by the war's emphasis on "the public aspect of every social enterprise." And these changes, Dewey believed, could no longer be dismissed by labeling them "state socialism." On the other hand, the state capitalism of a few super states would not lead to a true democratic federation of nations. Finally, in his assessment of social changes that might result from the war, Dewey noted that "conscription has brought home to the countries which have in the past been the home of the individualistic tradition the supremacy of public need over private possession."¹⁹

For Dewey, Croly, and many progressives a major justification of the war was the new sense of national purpose that it engendered. With its demands for social control and economic planning, war solved, or seemed to solve, Walter Lippmann's old concern over drift versus mastery. The sense of community achieved in wartime might serve as a prelude, not only to further domestic progress and reforms, but also to a new international order. Even more significant therefore than the sublimation of the New Freedom within the New Nationalism at home was their possible extension abroad under the

egis of the President's missionary diplomacy. "It was not, in those early days," Walter Millis wrote, "the conservatives who saw in the Allied cause, a holy crusade, for the rights of humanity. It was the liberals, the progressives, the leaders of reform and the standard bearers of the New Freedom." The war liberals, another historian has observed, "talked about democracy in Russia, a new spirit of internationalism and public responsibility, the possibility for permanent peace, and the likelihood of a world government supported by all the peoples and rulers of the earth. The prospect of a new international order and social reconstruction at home on a grand scale made warriors of pacifists, enthusiasts of cynics, well-wishers of radicals."²⁰

Thus many progressives, although in a number of instances formerly pacifists, "came to view the war despite its horror and its dangers, as a climax and culmination of their movement for social justice in America." Much of the economic planning vital to the war effort was reformist only by accident, but social workers along with businessmen, intellectuals, and progressives in general were caught up in the excitement of wartime Washington. Money was suddenly available, and for those on the inside there was the charm of being "a big shot," or what Harold Stearns later called the "Timidity and the Seductions of Office or Career." Progressives applauded the weakening of *laissez faire* under the government's mobilization of industry and agriculture, and its operation of the railroads. Still more they welcomed the war's encouragement to better labor standards, social insurance, improved urban housing, women's rights, jobs for Negroes, morals legislation, and prohibition of alcoholic beverages. Yet, as Allen F. Davis, a historian of social reform, demonstrates, "the progressives deluded themselves. They were the victims of their own confidence and enthusiasm, for the social reforms of the war years were caused more by the emergency situation than by a reform consensus. Quickly after the war, the Wilson administration abandoned public housing and social insurance. . . . The gains for labor and the Negro proved ephemeral. . . . By 1920 there was little left from wartime social reform except prohibition, immigration restriction and racist hysteria."²¹

More realistic, therefore, than the social reformers' visions of a reconstructed liberal America was the impetus which the war gave to a stronger paternalism and nationalism. Wartime government-business relations did little to disturb the essentials of state capitalism or the soaring profit rates accompanying improved industrial production. Entrepreneurs like Bernard Baruch, head of the War Industries Board, and Daniel Willard, in charge of transportation, understood the importance of reconciling the interests of government and business. The kind of cooperation urged in the prewar years by the National Civic Federation now received, in the stress of hostilities, the accolade of progressive sanction and support. Wartime regulations, marked

by production quotas and price fixing, were carried out with the advice and consent of American industry. Moreover, governmental control of prices and markets tended to encourage the larger producers and manufacturers as distinct from small businessmen. Industry also reaped the benefits of a wartime suspension of the antitrust acts, while labor's cooperation was secured by higher wages and patriotic restraints on strikes and work stoppages.

In view of its strong support among progressives and businessmen, anxiety over the illiberal aspects of the war was left to a curious combination of radical intellectuals and old-fashioned conservatives. Among Wilson's supporters only a few Jeffersonian Democrats such as Frederic C. Howe, author of *Why War*, and William E. Dodd, the historian, protested the economic interests behind the war and the danger that, as Dodd wrote, "the President would be compelled to adopt the very programme which Bismarck had employed in the building of imperialist Germany."²²

World War I, verging upon the later climax of the New Deal and World War II, already immensely stimulated the power of the government over the individual citizen. The federal regulation demanded by the progressives in the 1900's as a part of a program of reform was achieved after 1917 in connection with a war economy. Regulation in the sense of trying to restore a competitive individualism now frankly yielded to regulation to achieve economic integration and greater industrial efficiency. The war made partners of government and business. According to David F. Houston, Wilson's Secretary of Agriculture and later Secretary of the Treasury, "The first impulse of many . . . was to turn to the government, and especially to the Treasury, as the sole recourse for their salvation. This disposition had developed before the war. It was reinforced during hostilities."²³

Meanwhile the individual, caught up in the rising tide of nationalism and patriotism, could offer only feeble opposition to the wartime corporate state. Because the new role of the state was subjected to less criticism in the midst of the fighting, the progressive reformers were able to indulge themselves in the illusion of success and power. In Randolph Bourne's famous phrase, "War is the health of the state." It offered the supreme example of the classless society, with country above party and all particular or individual loyalties. "All the activities of society," Bourne wrote, "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 peace times 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 cross-currents fade out, and the nation moves lumberingly and slowly, but with ever accelerated speed and integration, towards the great end, towards that 'peacefulness of being at war. . . .'"²⁴ Thus the progressives' exhortations of

sacrifice and duty, of social justice at home, were easily translated into a crusade to make democracy and peace, and indeed all desired values, available to the rest of the world.

In arguing the case for a more positive national state and government, American progressives, like the social democrats in Europe, confused ends and means and were reduced finally to accepting war as the best way to social change and reform. The Progressive Era and World War I also set precedents which continue to entwine social reform and an expansionist foreign policy. From the New Deal to the new world war under F. D. R., through the Fair Deal and Korean War of Harry Truman, to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and Vietnam, the association of reform politics and war has been intimate and seemingly inescapable. The warfare-welfare state has accordingly become one of the less pleasant realities of our time.

In the 1930s Walter Lippmann, mindful of his own wartime experience, was among the first to see that the growing worldwide adoption of social and economic planning tended inevitably toward war. In his *Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society*, published in 1937, he stated his belief that all collectivism was basically militaristic even though it might be masked as social reform. In the United States under the New Deal, there was at first the curious paradox that the advocates of a planned economy, though they were in most cases confirmed pacifists, nevertheless looked back with admiration upon the American experience of 1917 and 1918 as a tentative sketch of a rationally ordered society. Although a few ardent New Dealers remained isolationists who were strongly anti-war—Jerome Frank, Chester Bowles, and Rex Tugwell, for example—the situation in Europe and Asia by the late thirties easily persuaded most of the Roosevelt administration to espouse American entrance into World War II. At a press conference in December 1943, President Roosevelt joked puckishly about Dr. New Deal being supplanted by Dr. Win-the-War, but in truth those two famous physicians were partners in the rejuvenation and expansion of American state capitalism. At F. D. R.'s bidding, Wendell Willkie and Henry Wallace outdid each other in promising a New Deal for the entire world. And the President himself in his annual message to Congress in January 1944 offered a catalogue of "a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race or creed."

Certainly World War II, "the best of all possible wars," proved a boon for most Americans. United States casualties were far fewer in number than those of the other participants in the war. At home, the enormous output of American industry provided profits and jobs. All social groups—Japanese-Americans excepted—improved their status. American women, according to anthropologist Margaret Mead, "suffered no important and catastrophic hardships of any sort." A sociological study of Iowa families deprived of

their males by the war indicated that a number of wives "did not miss their husbands and were glad to be free." Of course, in the midst of this euphoria there were a few skeptics such as the historian Carl Becker. In his wartime essays, perversely entitled *How New Will the Better World Be?*, Becker concluded ominously: "We seem to live in a world in which the easiest and quickest way to abolish . . . unemployment and want is to practice on a grand scale . . . war."²⁵

Becker's fears received their answer when the Cold War succeeded World War II, and the United States adopted what a young economist, writing in Dwight Macdonald's *Politics* magazine in February 1944, had already called "a permanent war economy." The fact that this permanent war economy included the illiberal and undemocratic features of a garrison state was conveniently masked by the reform rhetoric of Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society. "If the sophisticated conservatives have their way," C. Wright Mills predicted in 1948, "the next New Deal will be a war economy rather than a welfare economy, although the conservative's liberal rhetoric might put the first in the guise of the second."²⁶

It is significant that Americans since the Progressive Era have been happiest with Democratic Presidents who have cloaked their penchant for war and intervention abroad with elaborate programs of social and economic reforms at home. In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith: "Wars, just or unjust, have come with devastating reliability every time the Democrats have enjoyed power. . . ." But, as Thurman Arnold had once pointed out in regard to "the folklore of capitalism," we should understand that the folklore of reform works best when the reforms, as well as the wars, are essentially fraudulent. The popular institutional creeds or beliefs of a society, Arnold observed, have to "be false in order to function effectively."²⁷ So President Truman's Fair Deal never amounted to much, and the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson was bankrupted by Vietnam.

Still Americans prefer to have their wars in the guise of reforms, real or pretended. Avowed militarists such as Douglas MacArthur, John Foster Dulles, and Barry Goldwater have accordingly not been popular with the electorate. And, in the presidential election of 1964, Goldwater's inconsistent marriage of militarism and laissez faire fell an easy prey to President Johnson's warfare-welfare state. The ever-expanding military budget of the 1960s now became a device to implement a planned economy. It was easier to get the voters to approve governmental spending when it was couched in terms of the national defense. In any event, the business community in the Northeast, which supported the Democrats in 1964, was not worried over the radical rhetoric of the Great Society. As sophisticated conservatives, the most successful businessmen understood that the warfare-welfare society helped the rich more than it did the poor. The only voters whom Johnson

misled were the academic-type liberals who failed to perceive that the President's admiration for F. D. R.'s political methods included the latter's deception of the American people in regard to peace and war. In this regard, William V. Shannon, a *New York Times* columnist, pointed out, not unfairly, that "When Roosevelt sent fifty destroyers to Britain and Johnson sent the Navy skirmishing off the coast of Vietnam and asked for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, their actions spoke far louder than any honeyed words of peace. . . . Beyond dispute," Shannon adds, "both Presidents sacrificed something of this nation's precious tradition of candor and accountability by elected officials."²⁸

The Shannon column is entitled "Mr. Jefferson's Return." Unfortunately Jeffersonian principles of limited government, honesty, and frugality all seem sadly lacking in today's society. Americans look upon Jefferson as a mythic figure who no longer speaks to the problems of the modern complex world. And so progressives and liberals, from their original Jeffersonian revolt against corporate power and the old formalistic absolutisms in thought, have turned increasingly in the 20th century to the new Leviathan of the contemporary warfare-welfare state. But modern war, one must realize, merely exaggerates the nationalism and statism always implicit in American progressivism and European social democracy. Thus the irony of reform swallowed up in the fact of war is a paradox only for the more naive and uninitiated children of America's past.

NOTES

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