

The Present World Situation and What We Can Do About It

By SCOTT NEARING

IT IS NOT AN EASY MATTER to discuss the world situation in fourteen minutes and yet I think I have a formula that will enable me to say some things perhaps of interest in the comparatively brief time at my disposal. That formula appears at the end of the first chapter of a book published this year by a well known British economist, Barbara Ward, under the title, *The West at Bay*.

After analyzing the dollar famine, the author presents the world situation in four brief phrases, as follows: (1) Europe losing its old supremacy, (2) America gaining it, (3) Eastern Europe under communist control, (4) The Far East in revolt against the West. I should like to make some comments on these four points because, in the large, they do as well as any others to describe what is now going on.

I Until a few years ago, the center of western civilization was in Europe and, in the European field, the center of economic and political power rested in the British Isles and the British Empire. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the power of Britain was challenged by Germany in Europe, by the USA in America and by Japan in Asia. For the past forty or fifty years a bitter struggle has been going on in the world to decide whether England could retain its old supremacy or whether that supremacy of three or four hundred years' standing would pass to some other nation.

In the course of this struggle, European nations such as France, Germany, Russia, Britain fought bitter fratricidal wars, in which they mutually weakened and destroyed each other. As a result of these wars and of the contest to determine which nation should export its surplus and which should die economic-

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ally for lack of foreign markets, the European nations wore each other and themselves down to the point where, in terms of wealth, income, coal and iron production and other power indices, Europe ceased to be the center of the modern world and that center moved to America.

2 This brings us to the second point, namely, that, in the last fifty years, North America has become the industrial center, the power center, the center from which political authority and economic influence emanate. Thus, the old European center has disappeared and a new American center has come upon the world stage.

While European countries, and especially the British Isles, were in control of the world, the costs of maintaining that supremacy were necessarily borne by the European nations. In the United States at that time, prices were low, the currency was stable and the nation was leading a relatively isolated life.

With the transfer of power from Europe to North America, however, the USA has suddenly been thrust into a position of world dominance and been forced to shoulder the burdens which such a position entails. In 1897-1898, for example, the USA was spending on its army and navy about eighty million dollars a year. At present this country is spending *fifteen billion dollars in one year* on the army, navy, air force and other agencies of "defense."

When U.S. army and navy expenditures were less than a hundred million dollars a year, the British were taxing themselves into bankruptcy in order to maintain their huge military establishment. Today that role has been transferred to the USA. Specifically, this means that Greece, Turkey and other East European countries, which were formerly policed, financed and controlled by Britain at the expense of her taxpayers, are now being policed, financed and controlled by the United States and the burden is being carried by the U. S. taxpayers. This is in fulfillment of what some have described as the coming of The American Century.

In the nineteenth century Britain ruled the roost and paid the bill. In the twentieth century the USA is trying to rule the roost and is certainly paying the bill.

3 The third point in this résumé of the world situation is, Eastern Europe under communist control. The transfer of eastern Europe from semi-feudal, semi-capitalist control to socialist or communist control occurred after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Forty years ago, western Europe was chiefly industrial and eastern Europe chiefly agricultural, both regions being under business-class and landlord control. In four brief decades, the control in Russia, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and other states of East Europe has passed from businessmen and landlords to working people and farmers. Instead of a profit economy, operated as a means of enriching owners, they now have a use economy, designed for and dedicated to raising the standard of living of the masses of the population. This means that, between the goal or ideology of eastern Europe and the goal or ideology of western Europe, a great gulf has opened up. Western Europe is trying to perpetuate in one form or another a profit economy, whereas eastern Europe is concerned with socialist construction.

Prior to 1917, Europe was more or less a unit in the desire to retain property and class relationships which we associate with the British Empire and the reign of Queen Victoria. Socialist construction is predominant in the parts of Europe which are most under the influence of forces released during the Russian Revolution and the setting up of the Soviet regime. Today the European continent is divided along a line running from Stettin to Trieste. West of this line, the old economic and social system is being continued. East of it, a new social system is being set up.

4 The fourth point in our analysis of the world situation presents the Far East in revolt against the West. In the nineteenth century, especially after 1870, the European countries divided up parts of Africa and Asia into colonial areas militarily subjugated, politically controlled and economically exploited by empires centered in Europe. At the present time (starting really with the revolts in Cuba and the Philippines in 1895-1896) the eastern world—India, China, Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, Indo-China—has revolted against the West. This revolt, led for a while by Japanese imperialists and now by

nationalist groups, is a movement by the peoples of eastern and southern Asia, aiming—in the words of the Atlantic Charter—to “set up governments of their own choosing.” This movement has two consequences for Europe and the American world. First, the old order, built in part on the profits drawn by capitalist countries from colonial areas, is pretty well finished. Secondly, colonial peoples can no longer be relied upon to serve capitalist interests. In important sections of Eurasia, the world of 1910 is a vanishing world and vigorous efforts are being made to set up a new world in its place.

Stenographic report of a broadcast over Station WCFM, Washington, D. C., December 4, 1948.

What Can We Do About It?

WE NORTH AMERICANS live in a community whose policies point toward social suicide. Its most learned men are formulating the theories upon which wholesale destruction depends. Its cleverest technicians are putting these theories into practical form as atom bombs, guided missiles, mass poisons. Its factories are busy night and day, turning out the finished destructives. Its legislatures are making appropriations. Its taxpayers are pouring billions into the federal treasury. Its diplomats are feinting and threatening. Its armed services draw up plans which will spread destruction and death over city and countryside even more effectively than they were spread across broad sections of Europe and Asia during the years following 1914. We are wasting the products of our labor and deliberately shortening our own lives. This is social and individual suicide.

Perhaps it would be less incriminating and more comforting to assure ourselves that we are participants in the concluding phases of the historical period known as “western civilization.” Like every death process, this one is wasteful, frustrating, disillusioning and painful.

WE WHO LIVE IN THE WEST should not forget, however, that we see only one side of the picture. The death process of the old social order is accompanied by the

birth process elsewhere. Were we living in liberated China, for example, we would feel the aspiration and uplift of spirit which always accompany a mass effort to step out of the old and up into a new society.

In the face of powerful repressive forces, some of us have tried to prepare the public mind in the United States and Canada for what is happening. Step by step we have been excluded from channels through which the public gets its information. We have done our utmost to warn our friends and neighbors as to what is taking place. We are either ignored or looked upon as fools or madmen.

AS REASONING, RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS of the human family, we cannot be indifferent to the doom that hangs over our heads, nor can we cease our efforts to inform, advise and warn our fellows of their danger and do what we can to relieve the distress and suffering which accompany social disintegration.

Aside from these duties, we can turn our energies into a number of useful channels.

1 We can picture clearly to ourselves what we mean by "the good life". We can review the situation in which we find ourselves and formulate the policies which, in our individual opinion, would make the good life possible for the largest number of people. By this means, while we remain in political opposition to the present regime, we maintain a positive attitude and thus contribute our bit to the establishment of a positive public opinion aimed at construction, rather than destruction.

2 We can refuse to take part in any effort to preserve the institutions or life of the old social order. At the same time we must be prepared to do everything possible to assist in the development of the new order.

3 We can pass on word concerning the possibility of the good life to any who will listen or read. The number of such persons always increases as the failures of existing policies and institutions become more glaring.

4 We can join forces with all and sundry who are moving in the same general direction. The journey together may be brief or it may be of long duration. Backed by mutual fellow feeling and goodwill, all must benefit from the contact.

THUS, IN THE COURSE of a change-process which will not be instantaneous and which may extend through generations, outmoded ideas, practices and institutions will pass from the stage of history and their places will be taken by other strands of a new social fabric. Those who strive for the new will have a share in the conscious process of reshaping the social order. Those who survive the transition will have the satisfaction of having played a part in shaping a better way of living together.

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