

THE REAL CAUSE OF WAR

BY M. H. COCHRAN

THE numerous and elaborate discussions of the origins and nature of war that began after the World War have contributed little or nothing to an intelligent understanding of the thing itself. The politicians talk about the elimination of war only to persuade their fellow citizens that if war results from their "peaceful" policies it will be necessarily "defensive". The pacifists seem to be interested chiefly in depicting the horrors of the battlefield, and the Socialists in condemning capitalism. From the social scientists we receive little more than dismal repetitions of absurd political propaganda. In all the discussion the chief preoccupation seems to be with the concoction of artful paper schemes to prevent war. Very little attention is given to the primary question, which should logically precede all others, namely, What is the real cause of war?

The result of this false emphasis on peace panaceas and on the horrors of war has been the propagation of many perverted notions about the origins of war, and they place almost insuperable obstacles in the way of understanding it. It seems worth while, therefore, to analyze some of these false ideas and thus clear the ground for a saner discussion. One of the most serious of them involves an unwarranted exaggeration of the difference between peace and war. According to the usual view, the whole world, at ease and in luxury, is imagined as thrown

into sudden turmoil by "the rolling of the iron dice". Yet everyone knows that much upsetting of individuals, families and nations also occurs in times of peace. Could anyone mistake the warlike character of the French withdrawal of cash from Britain in the Summer of 1931? Could any attempt at a French invasion have caused more misery than that ostensibly peaceful manœuvre? Exactly similar manœuvres stud the history of peaceful times. They are supposed to be beneficent, whereas the direct killing of men is wicked. But killing and destruction actually go on quite as well in time of peace. The chief difference is simply that war speeds up the process. To obscure this fact is to make of war something extraordinary, something beyond the social norm. It is not.

Another important obstacle to understanding war is the idea that international relations are primarily international in character. Publicists talk interminably of the foreign policy of this or that government; scholars delve deep into the archives for the nuances of Napoleon III's or Grey's foreign policy. Yet the plain fact is that foreign policy is always based upon internal policy, that the men who make this foreign policy belong to groups whose main and often only interest lies in acquiring, preserving or strengthening their control at home. Of late, students of diplomatic history have tended to recognize this principle to a considerable extent, but

so far they have not gone to the length of accepting it fully.

Another deep-seated idea back of the current peace proposals is the idea that the greatest danger to peace is nationalism. This is a popular bugaboo, hauled forth on every occasion. The pluralists attack the national state by denying it sovereign rights at home, and the internationalists want it subordinated to a super-state. All denounce it as the cause of war. Yet the fact remains that it was alliances or groups of nations that engaged in the last great war; it was something beyond the nation. At the same time it is clear that internal forces drove each nation into those alliances and hence into the war. No, nationalism is not the answer. One must get back behind it and discover who preached it and why, in each country, if one is to see why modern nations act as they do.

Another illusion, or whole series of illusions, can be found in the theories about the relative peacefulness of various forms of government. One reads today of the necessity of introducing true democracy in Japan by subordinating the Japanese military clique to political control, and similar good old war-time propaganda. But here again the facts lead to a totally different conclusion. For if there is one thing that is certain about international relations it is that the different governments in modern times all act in the same way, regardless of whether they are autocratic, aristocratic, democratic, or even socialistic.

The idea that public opinion in a democratic country can be used to prevent wars becomes completely fatuous the moment one recalls what has happened in the past and what is happening now. In truth, public opinion in every country, whatever its form of government, is always almost

completely at the mercy of the groups that happen to dominate that government.

Political parties seem to make little difference in foreign policies. Many writers maintain that Liberals are less bellicose than Conservatives, but this is flatly contrary to the facts. The English Liberals have made as many wars as the Conservatives. When they came into power in 1905 they continued to build up the coalition against Germany, a policy begun by the Conservatives. Some of the most belligerent statesmen in all Europe came from their ranks: witness Clemenceau and Lloyd George. Indeed, they seem peculiarly able to make wars, for they talk constantly about liberty, justice, and the other abstractions that men are foolish enough to fight for.

The reason why the Liberals appear, superficially, to be peaceful is that they usually oppose imperialism—when they are out of office. But imperialism is simply another word that people use so as to avoid thinking about the causes of war. The Liberals often argue that imperialistic enterprises in backward countries, such as Turkey and China, lead to wars. There is some truth in this, but only enough to make it popular among the social scientists. Back of imperialism lie other more important things. It is necessary to delve into them in order to see how wars really originate.

Such are some of the intellectual hurdles we must get over before we can see clearly the problem we are investigating. They supply the underlying ideas of most of the literature on the subject. The notion that wars are started by wicked, imperialistic, undemocratic governments in wanton disregard of the established moralities in international relations is deep-seated. None the less, it must be discarded as contrary to fact.

II

Let us now lay aside these misleading notions, and keep in mind instead the fact that governmental policy almost always follows a constant line in peace times, in the diplomatic struggle preceding a war, during the war, and in making peace afterward.

The most extensive wars of modern times were those waged from 1792 to 1815 between revolutionary and Napoleonic France and feudal Europe. In Europe the dominating group in each country consisted of large landowners. With almost a monopoly of the government offices, with special privileges and exemptions, with estates, mines, colonial possessions, and other sources of wealth, they dominated the economic and political life of the different countries.

While the large landowners were enjoying their special positions, suddenly a great menace arose. The *bourgeois* class in France revolted, replaced the large landowners in control, took their lands, and tried to spread the new social system throughout Europe. At first the feudal powers believed that the new system could not endure, but soon they realized that it would not only endure but also spread unless they suppressed it by force. Numerous incidents arose to complicate the situation, but in the last analysis the large landowners of Europe feared that the spread of the French revolutionary system would deprive them of their control over their national social and political institutions. So they forced their governments to draw together to make a joint attack on France.

As Europe became ever more threatening to France, the *bourgeois* revolutionists decided to act first. They feared that their newly won lands and positions

would be swept away by the feudal Powers. More than three-quarters of the *bourgeois* French Legislative Assembly voted for declaring war on Austria and Prussia. The motive is well expressed in the words of the French historian, Mathiez, to the effect that war "was desired by all parties [in France] except the Mountain and the Lamethists as a move in their internal policy". These two minor groups feared that if war occurred France would be beaten, that disorders dangerous to property would break out, and that the large landowners would be restored. Thus both the pro-war and the anti-war parties reasoned primarily from the fact that they feared the loss of their economic and political power in France.

There can be no doubt that both sides in the ensuing wars, the *bourgeois* and the feudal, fought for the purpose of maintaining control at home. Nor is it an argument to the contrary to cite the motives given to the public by the opposing governments, for that was sheer nonsense, and nearly as ludicrous as the prating of the governments about the war of 1914-18. On the French side, patriotism, nationalism, the constitution, morality, were all invoked. "Our honor", said Brissot, "our public credit, the necessity of consolidating our Revolution and giving it a moral basis—all make this course of action obligatory". And the other side talked of the restoration of legitimate rulers, of loyalty to the sovereign, of the peril to civilization, etc. Burke's diatribe on the Revolution in France furnished the intellectual background for much of the anti-French propaganda. And the British government naturally and inevitably found a pretext in international law for entering the fray.

That was the real origin of the Napoleonic wars. They continued because nei-

ther side could gain a complete victory and neither could afford to compromise. In France Bonaparte imposed his rule on the *bourgeoisie* and created a dominating clique of his own. He continued to fight partly because he was forced to by various coalitions against France but also because his power at home depended upon his successes abroad. He had made his reputation in Italy and confirmed it by his much-advertised war in Egypt. When he returned to France in 1799 to grasp the helm he found everything very difficult until after he had beaten the forces of the second coalition in Italy. His own words later were literally true: France expected victories of him and would remove him if he failed to gain them. Of course, he was ambitious for the control of Europe, but the main motive was control at home. As for the rest of Europe, the motive for continuing the wars remained the same after Bonaparte arrived. To Europe he was the propagator of the revolutionary ideas so dangerous to the vested interests of the large landowners.

From this analysis of the internal factors driving governments to war in revolutionary days there springs naturally a theory as to the origins of all wars. The theory is that the control of foreign policy is always in the hands of dominating groups in each country, whether those groups be landowners, lawyers, manufacturers, bankers or leaders of the proletariat; that these ruling groups appoint the permanent and temporary officials in the foreign offices; that they color public opinion through education and the press, sending out the "information" necessary for public decisions on war and peace; and that they shape and dictate foreign policy in an effort to bolster up their control at home by increasing their economic and political power.

Whatever the dominating group thinks will perpetuate this internal control is the mainspring of the foreign policy of any government. If that interest seems to require an external war, then the government makes the war. If it seems to require peace and compromise, we have peace.

III

But for what purposes, one may ask, do groups force governments into war? The answer is that they desire war for four main reasons: (1) to get into control at home; (2) to avoid losing control at home; (3) to turn attention from unsatisfactory conditions at home; (4) to enrich themselves at home.

Examples of the first type of motivation, in groups struggling to get control, can be found in the France of 1792 and 1870 and in the United States of 1812. In 1792 all the various French groups desired war, and particularly the royalists, for they all hoped to obtain control by this means. In 1870 the French republicans, hoping to repeat the successes of 1792, proclaimed the Third Republic and called out the French nation to continue a war that was already lost. A third example is afforded by the ambitious American Westerners of 1812, who forced the United States to declare war on Britain in order that we might add Canada to our territories, and so greatly widen their own opportunities. Here are three cases of groups trying to rise into control by making wars; if they are not more numerous it is only because groups not in control cannot easily influence governmental decisions.

Much more frequent are the cases of groups in control making war in order to preserve their power when it is in danger.

A famous example is that of Charles X of France, who decided in 1830 to divert his discontented people from revolution by means of foreign aggressions. His advisers had two plans, one for an invasion of Germany, the other for an attack on Algiers. An expedition was actually sent to Algiers, but it proved insufficient to turn the *bourgeoisie* and workers from the idea of removing Charles.

Another example from French history is that of Napoleon III in 1870. The second French Emperor had acted contrary to the interests of the manufacturers, the workers, the Catholics and other groups, and he had been pressed so hard in consequence that he had already surrendered a large measure of control to the majority in the Chambers. From his point of view, his chances of staying in power with his clique were so slim that only a victorious war against Germany would save his régime. The Empress and various advisers, using this argument, persuaded him into a war that he personally did not want. Of course, they all later blamed Bismarck, saying that he had falsified the Ems telegram, but they neglected to explain that this famous dispatch had no influence on their own scheming. The plain fact is that Napoleon hoped a successful war would save his throne.

This same consideration, the desire to preserve control, had considerable influence in the making of Bismarck's two wars in the 60's, in the recent Japanese decision to jump into Manchuria, and in the American war on Spain in 1898, as well as in the South's determination to make civil war rather than surrender its control over the Federal government in 1861. It is a salient motive at all times when shifts in control are being made, from landowners to *bourgeoisie* or from *bourgeoisie* to proletariat.

Needless to say, every one of the wars just mentioned was advertised as a defensive, moralistic, and completely national expedition. Bismarck even went so far as to make an unworkable treaty with Austria so that he could claim, when Austria broke it, that he was waging war in defense of the sacredness of treaties. But no one should be deceived by such propaganda. All these wars were waged in order to maintain certain groups in control in the belligerent countries.

The third class of wars are those waged to turn attention from unsatisfactory conditions at home. Bismarck made three wars primarily in order to break the *bourgeois* ranks and overcome particularism in Germany. Napoleon III's expedition to Mexico was merely an effort to please the discontented Catholics at home. Last Spring there were indications that the American government was considering seriously the idea of a war with Japan in order to bring us out of the Depression. If the Five-Year Plan fails in Russia, and disorders break out there similar to the disorders in France in the four months preceding the declaration of war in 1792, we may expect the Russian government to try its hand at a war in order to turn attention from its failure. For this is a natural means of strengthening the hands of a government, of uniting the nation and thus preserving power. It works if you win.

But the three types of motive so far considered are not nearly so frequently encountered as the fourth type, the making of war to strengthen and enrich a dominating group. Once such a group is firmly in the saddle it always uses the opportunity to further strengthen its own economic and political power. In this class of wars we may include all the colonial wars of modern times, the British (opi-

um) war of 1840, the Boer War, the Franco-British intervention in the Crimean War, Napoleon III's war on Austria in 1859, Russia's numerous wars on Turkey, the Russo-Japanese War, and our own war on Mexico. Each of the governments which forced these wars was pushed on by groups at home so powerful that they could dictate its policy. The Boer War is a perfect example of a class dominating foreign policy and making war to fill its own pocketbook.

IV

The World War furnishes examples of all these different types of motivation. The military clique in Serbia striving to get into control, the governing Germans and Magyars in Austria-Hungary fearing to lose control, the dominating manufacturers, bankers and landowners in the other countries hoping to increase their wealth by destroying dangerous competition—such were the internal forces that, in 1914, produced war. Out of the interests of the dominating classes in the principal countries of Europe arose the foreign policies and alliances that led to the war.

Take first the antagonism between Austria-Hungary and Russia. In the Austro-Hungarian monarchy one finds that the dominant Germans and Magyars were afraid of losing control at home if the various subordinate nationalities grew too strong. As most of these were Slavic, the creation of large Slavic states in the Balkans would draw the Southern Slavs from Austria-Hungary and induce the Northern Slavs and Rumanians to demand more power or even independence. If Russia destroyed the Ottoman Empire, took Constantinople and created large Slavic states in the Balkans, the Austro-

Hungarian monarchy would go to pieces. Naturally, the dominating groups, particularly the Hungarian nobles, hated and feared Russia and turned to Germany for support against her.

As for Russia and her ambitions in the Near East, back of her colossal capacity for expansion lay the interests of a dominant landowning class faced with the alternative of either internal reforms weakening to its power or else expansion. In the Near East the interests of landowners desiring to export their grain and of textile manufacturers wishing to control the markets of Asia produced numerous wars on Turkey. Of course, the Russian government maintained piously that it was trying to free the Balkan Slavs from the oppression of the un-Christian Turks, and one of the chief articles in the programme of Pan-Slavism was the release of the Greek Orthodox Slavs from Roman Catholic oppression in Austria-Hungary. But this propaganda should deceive no one. The interests of the landowners and textile manufacturers provided the whole driving force for Russian expansion in the Near East, and as a result, for Russian antagonism to Austria-Hungary.

In the Russo-German feud, the conflict started with the building of railroads in Russia that could transport grain cheaply into the German market. Germany, in alarm, raised her tariff on grain, and Russia retaliated with various bellicose measures, including a heavy tariff on manufactures, and a transfer of her loans from Berlin to Paris. This procedure antagonized the German bankers, manufacturers and large landowners—the dominating classes in Germany. The Russians were alarmed too by the growth of German commerce in the Near East and angered by the German support of Austria-Hungary. For all these reasons, the famous

break between Germany and Russia, which happened to come in 1890, was inevitable. The dominating classes in the two countries had too many conflicting interests; not even their common, but rather general interest in the conservative principle could prevail over their other disagreements.

As between Germany and Great Britain, the conflict for the markets of the world was alone sufficient to engender hostility. British consuls began complaining of German competition in the 80's, and after 1900 this competition became so serious that British manufacturers had to lower wages, and strikes and other troubles resulted. Efforts to bring about a compromise between the German and British manufacturers failed because both wanted to sell everything everywhere. The British talked grandly of the German desire for world hegemony, but they meant only the German effort to dominate the world's markets. The British also talked of the menace of the German fleet, but in reality it was never large enough to threaten seriously Britain's control of the seas. And the Germans, on their side, talked of the insult to German national honor whenever the British excluded them from Morocco, or Persia, or some other profitable market.

Finally, we come to the Franco-German antagonism. This is older than any of the others and an understanding of it is made difficult by the enormous literature that befogs the subject. Yet it is clear that France, like Great Britain, was controlled by her bankers and manufacturers. These classes found it easier to dominate the deputies in a democratic republic than the king in a monarchy. But the republicans had got off to a bad start in 1870-71 when they lost the war; to them Alsace-Lorraine was the symbol of their defeat. Until they

recovered Alsace-Lorraine their Third Republic, with its jobs and grafts, would never be secure. So the French lawyers who administered the government in the interests of the bankers and manufacturers worked the country into a neurotic state of mind over the sad fate of two districts whose chief desire was, and is, to be independent. This combination of lawyers, bankers and manufacturers found in Germany the natural enemy of their control at home—economic and political. There has been much nonsense printed about Franco-German relations: but the facts are comparatively simple.

Out of these antagonisms arose the World War. In all of them the real issue was control at home.

V

If my analysis be correct, all the wars of modern history have thus sprung from the internal struggles of groups for control at home. At times these groups have had what were primarily purely political interests, as in the case of the cliques about the two Napoleons, and that of the American Republican politicians in 1898. But more often the battle has been fought out on deeper levels of the social structure.

It is not strange that a government should do the bidding of a dominant economic group. What else, indeed, can a government do? Its principal members belong to the group, think as it does, and have exactly the same interests. Mr. Mellon, as a manufacturer, as Secretary of the Treasury, and as Ambassador is always the same person. Foreign offices can no more rid themselves of this control than can parliaments and courts.

The doctrine that internal policies are always dictated by dominating classes is a commonplace of political science. But few

seem to realize that foreign offices are subject to the same influences. In this country our State Department lately indulged in a classic example of servility to a dominant group. It found out that several South American countries were in such a precarious position that investments there were unsafe. It sent the news to Wall Street and asked it not to lend any money to these states. When Wall Street, despite this warning, continued to float more bonds which the State Department knew were likely to injure our investors it should have informed the investing public of the facts. But instead, it kept quiet and let American investors lose their money.

But though it is an indisputable fact that governments always act, whether in peace or in war, in accordance with the interests of the dominant economic and social groups, this does not mean that they can afford to neglect the pretense of protecting the interests of other groups. Louis Philippe lost his throne because he made no effort to persuade the classes other than the manufacturers and bankers that he was working for them. The French lawyers who run the Third Republic know better than this; they keep up a constant chatter about their radical reforms for the benefit of the workers and peas-

ants. Yet all their measures show who their real masters are.

Nor can it be argued that the theory of dominating groups controlling foreign policy is made invalid by the fact that diplomats as a class betray some of the most naïve intellects in the governmental circle. Their chief function, in fact, is simply to exercise a peasant-like cleverness in cheating other diplomats. They do what they do with a sincere belief in their own propaganda, and without realizing who it is that is kicking them about.

Finally, no one can object to the theory of dominant groups on account of the fact that such groups are often very shortsighted in the matter of their real interests. It is true that they are often shortsighted; but what they conceive to be their interest is what they force the government to do. That this interest is not often that of the whole country is another matter, —and something that the late Norman Angell, in "The Great Illusion", failed to understand.

If it be true, then, that dominating groups control foreign policy and make wars to maintain their dominance, what chance is there that these groups can be persuaded to avoid war by giving up their control? The answer is, practically none.

AMERICANA

ALABAMA

LITERARY news and criticism in the *Florida Herald*:

William Faulkner's latest production is entitled "Sanctuary," and is well worth reading. Other books challenging favorable comment among the literati of the South is "I Lay Dying" and "The South and the Fury." He bids to go far as a writer as he comes from a distinguished family of North Mississippi, his father being a writer of note in the 70's.

CALIFORNIA

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Power and Apparatus: Christ and myself.

Procedure: Connect myself with the Generator—Christ—so as to produce a direct current of Christianity. This I shall do by joining the Dynamo Class of the First Presbyterian Sunday-school of Rockford, Ill.; which meets, with Mr. Hugh T. Brown, each Sunday morning at 9:45 in the main auditorium of the church. There in the magnetic field of fun and fellowship, with the tightly wound coils of friendship, and the commutator of conscience I shall become a Dynamo. This I shall do because in myself I am insufficient, but when empowered by the Generator can produce unusual power and influence.