

Cold War Revisionism: The Major Historical Task

One of the most vital struggles in the writing and publishing of history is the conflict between the government's propaganda myths, enshrined in "official history", and historical reality brought forward by "revisionism". In a time of foreign policy crisis the publishing of revisionist material is especially welcome; hence the importance of the recent all-revisionist issue of the quarterly Rampart Journal, as well as the publication of David Horowitz's study, The Free World Colossus.¹

Robert LeFevre's commentary in the revisionist issue of Rampart Journal is an estimable summary of the profound changes in ideological attitudes being forced upon

1. Particularly notable articles in the Rampart Journal are: Harry Elmer Barnes, "Revisionism: A Key to Peace", Rampart Journal (Spring, 1966), pp. 8-74; James J. Martin, "Revisionism and the Cold War, 1946-1966: Some Comments on its Origins and Consequences", *ibid.*, pp. 91-112; and Robert LeFevre, "On the Other Hand," *ibid.*, pp. 114-20. Also available from the journal is Barnes' important Select Bibliography of Revisionist Books, which can be obtained for 50¢ from Pine Tree Press, Box 158, Larkspur, Colorado 80118.

David Horowitz, The Free World Colossus (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965).

thinking people by the demands of developments in world affairs. On modern conservatism, LeFevre notes:

Traditionally, the world was divided by a series of vertical barriers erected around nations and called "national boundaries". Karl Marx sought to bring a revision in thinking by drawing a horizontal line and insisting that the world was actually divided between its classes. . .

The reaction against this attempt at revision, especially among conservatives, has been to reemphasize the national boundaries and to wage wars across them for economic reasons benignly cloaked in humanitarian terms calculated to elevate human sacrifice to the status of ultimate nobility. The military configurations and the geographic revisions emerging from this effort have done more to advance Marxist economics than the First, Second, and Third Internationals combined.²

Few people have analyzed the major contribution of the conservatives to the current catastrophic situation of the world. The conservative impulse toward aggressive violence, the waging of wars "for economic reasons benignly cloaked in humanitarian terms", has been the major international fact of the twentieth century. Revisionism's task is the destruction of the myths by which conservatives--i. e. governments and their supporters--obtain the people's acquiescence in aggressive violence. Revisionism substitutes for the conservative's vertical or State analysis a realistic horizontal or social analysis: "The world is not divided between those nations which are free and those which are not. The world is divided between those persons who seek to mind their own business and those who intend to mind the business of others by forceful interventions of every kind and description."³

LeFevre suggests that a "conservative movement" in the United States was formed by the crisis of Depression and New Deal. The possessors of power--the conservatives--were able to appropriate new labels by co-opting and rewarding the former liberal critics of that power. This process forced upon the opponents of New Deal imperialism, who had been called liberals and radicals when opposing the imperialism of Wilson and Hoover, the new label of "conservatives".

Thus, by the beginning of the 1940's the lines were

2. LeFevre, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-16.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

drawn. The conservative view was in favor of peace, individualism, lower taxes, smaller government, independence, and self-reliance. . . The liberals, who rallied to Mr. Roosevelt's banner, proclaimed a new "deal" in which. . . America would intervene in all international affairs and assume a position of "world leadership".⁴

But this situation was soon altered by the development of anti-Communism, through which many conservatives completely abandoned their principles.

And with this shift came a strange metamorphosis to the conservative objective. For where it had served originally as the champion of peace, it now began to urge the line of "stand fast", "no compromise", "war if necessary". And where it had originally championed the idea of smaller government, it began to clamor for larger bureaus to hunt down Communists. It called for expansion of the police powers, sought laws to arrest persons of non-conservative persuasion on the grounds that they were "traitors", and clamored for costly "investigations". . . All at once the government became the most important thing in the mind of the conservative. The government must be made strong. It must spend billions in missile and weapon research. It must develop "strong men".

Gradually, the theory arose that the way to prevent a war with Russia was to start one. . .

Where conservatives had joined ranks in opposing the military draft of Roosevelt and in criticizing the draft of President Woodrow Wilson, they now joined hands in branding anyone who refused to be drafted as a "dupe" or an outright "red". Those who had opposed Roosevelt's brand of intervention now began to favor outright assistance to foreign countries which would oppose Russia. . .

What we now see within the framework of conservatism is a new alliance between former liberals and latter-day conservatives. The liberal of the 30's wanted larger government, principally in the area of social legislation, welfare, and human experiment. The latter-day conservatives also want larger government, but they now want it in the police area of armies, navies, air forces, and rocketry. They also want more trials, more rigid domestic policing.

4. Ibid., p. 118.

. . . The latter-day conservative, while still critical of the "welfare state" of the former liberal, lends his support to the formation of a military or a "police state" where things will be controlled at the top by a "strong man".

Meanwhile, another strange shift is occurring. For while some of the former liberals are intrigued by this turn of events and are now jumping on the bandwagon of "anti-communism", other liberals, in the nineteenth century tradition of liberalism, are beginning to wonder about human liberty in the great sense, and are shifting over to oppose war-making, the draft, foreign intervention, and even high taxes. Thus, it appears that the liberal camp, as well as the conservative camp, is splitting.⁵

Cold War revisionism reveals how the New Deal liberals--i. e., the sophisticated conservatives, as C. Wright Mills called them--were able to keep possession of power from World War II to the present day by enmeshing the "conservatives" in the new crusade of anti-communism. As LeFevre has indicated, it has taken a generation for "conservatives" to wake up to their betrayal by anti-communist liberal-conservatism, and to begin the necessary work of aligning with those liberals and radicals who have remained faithful to American liberalism's traditional opposition to the national power-structure.

The radical tradition, betrayed by the liberals' adherence to New Deal-Fair Deal imperialism, was exemplified by Eugene Debs. As Harry Elmer Barnes states in his magisterial exposition of revisionism, "Eugene Debs was imprisoned by Wilson. . . Debs' crime was a statement that the war had a primarily economic basis, precisely what Wilson himself declared in a speech on September 5, 1919."⁶ During the 1920's and 1930's, the truth about the precipitation of World War I by the US government and its allies was able to dispel the myths still propounded by the "patriots" of the American Legion and the Ku Klux Klan. But the situation after World War II has been vastly different. First, the US government learned from its post-World War I experience with revisionism, and took the necessary steps to thwart the development of revisionism in the future. Propaganda was carried out "not only with

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-20.

6. Barnes, "Revisionism: A Key to Peace," *op. cit.*, p. 12.

the connivance but with the active assistance of prominent officials such as J. Edgar Hoover and Colonel "Wild Bill" Donovan, the heads respectively of the FBI and the OSS (predecessor of the CIA).⁷ The government made sure that its myths would be propagated by official history, and there has arisen hardly any group with the courage to mount an opposition to this historical blackout. Barnes points out:

The anti-interventionist groups of 1937 and thereafter, like America First, were primarily conservative and for the most part welcomed the early revisionist publications. But they soon fell in line with the Cold War because of the business advantages in industry, trade and finance which an extravagant armament program and foreign aid provided. Thereafter, they feared or refused to give any open support, financial or otherwise, to a scholarly movement which undermined the cold-war assumptions as thoroughly as it did the interventionist mythology of 1939-41. Hence, revisionism since 1947 has not only been unpopular or ignored but also poverty-stricken.⁸

Until reality replaces the myths of official history, Barnes notes, the process of deeper and continuing American involvement in foreign interventions, like US aggression in Vietnam, will be found to intensify. However, Barnes does hope that some of the current younger generation will have the courage to smash through the official history, confront the system that perpetuates the Cold War, and hopefully dismantle it. But that generation will have to stand together and steel itself against the smears of the system's apologists and the betrayals of the unprincipled, smears and betrayals such as Harry Barnes has long experienced. As Barnes writes:

In this era of Nineteen Eighty-Four, "The Organization Man", . . . even the average American college graduate became little more inclined to independent thinking than was a Catholic peasant during the papacy of Innocent III. As Irving Howell pointed out in the Atlantic of November, 1965, American higher education conformed to the Orwellian cold-war system about as conveniently as the Pentagon or American business. When, in the mid-1960's, a small minority of students began to show signs of restlessness, this caused widespread surprise

7. Ibid., p. 20.

8. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

and alarm, and public leaders like Senator Thomas J. Dodd of Connecticut suggested procedures which would have won them kudos from Hitler.⁹

Thus the New Left has become the contemporary repository and heir of the revisionism of the "Original Left" in America represented by Beard, Barnes, and Albert Jay Nock. For there exists what Barnes calls a "Lost Generation" in historical writing--the period when revisionism was in the hands of people who considered themselves "conservatives" and thus were not really committed to opposing the system threatened by revisionism. Hence, they did not truly support the efforts of those who did pursue revisionist study. But, as Barnes indicates, the Old Left failed even more starkly, for this was a Left that supported New Deal imperialism.

Also important was the failure of European historians to fulfill the role that they had admirably played after World War I. American scholars often tend to be conservative and timid; such attitudes make them natural allies of the Establishment in the furthering of official history. The attention of American scholars after World War I was directed to historical realities by the documentary and analytic work of European scholars whose work could not be ignored. The situation after World War II was totally different. The official Axis documents fell into the hands of the United States and Britain, which controlled their publication. The German, Italian and Japanese governments as the new allies of US imperialism have treated the publication of such documents as a crime and have discouraged revisionist scholarship.

Ultimately, the contradictions of the Cold War have begun to force a revisionist breakthrough in Europe, and have thus opened discussion of it in America. This breakthrough was accomplished by the English historian, A. J. P. Taylor, who had written imperialist propaganda in World War II. Taylor began his revisionism as an opponent of the Cold War. Thus, he shared the platform with Bertrand Russell at the February, 1958 meeting from which emerged the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Indeed, Taylor called on all opponents of imperialist aggression to confront Western political leaders with the cry of "Murderers!" Taylor, as in the case of so many advocates of disarming imperialism, had often been confronted with the canard that "Western democracy" must destroy communists just as it had

9. Ibid., p. 37.

destroyed fascists in World War II. By a healthy re-examination of The Origins of the Second World War (1961) (a book termed by Barnes "a new epoch in revisionist historiography"), Taylor undercut the charge of German aggression as being responsible for World War II. Having cleared the air of such myths about the Second World War, revisionism is now in a position to undertake the main task of the present period, Cold War revisionism. As Barnes concludes, there is a direct link between the beginnings of the Cold War and the brutal act that ended World War II. As Barnes declares:

All other indefensible breaches of a humane code by either Hitler or the Allies were outdistanced by the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. . . The documents now available prove that the bombings were ordered and were approved by Stimson as technological exhibitionism and were carried out primarily to impress and intimidate the Russians.¹⁰

James J. Martin's article in the Rampart Journal forms an important bridge to the new task of revisionist history. Martin directs attention to the imperialist basis of US aggression by taking as his theme a quote from a 1938 report by the Office of Naval Intelligence:

Realistically, all wars have been for economic reasons. To make them politically and socially palatable, ideological issues have always been invoked. Any possible future war will, undoubtedly, conform to historical precedent.¹¹

Martin notes that the Cold War did not begin as commonly dated with Churchill's repetition of Goebbels' "Iron Curtain" attack on the Soviets in March, 1946. Rather, the imperialists launched the Cold War before the completion of their war against Germany and Japan, even before the first meeting of the UN in San Francisco in April, 1945; it was launched by Winston Churchill against the popular forces resisting the Allied re-establishment of Greek reaction in November, 1944. The Cold War became what Charles A. Beard had described in his famous phrase as "perpetual war for perpetual peace". Martin's summary of the way that the Cold War was fastened upon the American people in the late 1940's is worth quoting at length:

10. Ibid., p. 72.

11. Ibid., p. 91.

Reluctance to enlist (in the Cold War) was seen from one end of the ideological spectrum to the other, from Senator Robert A. Taft and former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy to William Z. Foster, but, as in the case of the Second World War, emotions and sentiments favorable to belligerence did not respect political lines either, and were seen to crop up in all camps. A "left"-right coalition favorable to a "halt the spread of communism" policy was only a few months in the making, after a shaky start. Conservative politicians, members of the business world, and prominent church dignitaries soon found themselves cheek-by-jowl with ex-Communists, Trotskyites, Menshevik Social Democrats, Socialists, and contingents of the well-left-of-center totalitarian liberals, who had devised and produced most of the rationale behind American participation in the global bloodbath of 1941-1945. . .

A ponderous volume can be prepared on the early pro-Cold War literary propaganda alone. Some of the most widely read were ghost-written works by recent defectors to the "West" from the Soviet Union, mainly former military and political functionaries. But there were two particularly significant works which contributed to thinking of the showdown with the Communists on the level of global strategy, William C. Bullitt's The Great Globe Itself (New York: Scribner, 1946), and James Burnham's The Struggle for the World (New York: Day, 1947). These might have supplied most of the propaganda fuel for the Cold War by themselves, had no other works along such lines ever appeared.

. . . Bullitt, a prestigious diplomat during the Roosevelt era, had a well-known pedigree as an anti-Soviet strategist; his book contained the first dress rehearsal of the rationale of "containment". It was eclipsed by that of Burnham, whose background as a Marxist scholar and Trotskyite proponent disclosed no notable previous anti-Soviet works. Burnham's Struggle was published and reviewed the same month President Harry S. Truman announced his government's decision to take up the British "burden" of supporting the Greek and Turkish governments (March, 1947).

Despite owing a very heavy intellectual debt to Arnold J. Toynbee and his "challenge and response" theory, Burnham's book gained wide readership and was one of the first bridges thrown across to the American left and liberal-left to aid in mobilizing them in sub-

stantial numbers in behalf of the latest political offensive. It also had an important part to play in the sharp division of left-liberal politics, since many of the latter were most remiss about abandoning their decades of championing the post-1917 dispensation in Russia.

An example may be seen in the whooping enthusiasm for the Burnham thesis of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in his review for The Nation (April 5, 1947, pp. 385, 398-99), though Schlesinger shuddered a bit at the thought of Burnham as secretary of state.¹²

Martin contrasts the Cold War propaganda of anti-Soviet Marxists, ex-Communists and socialists with the non-communist opposition to the Cold War represented by Walter Lippmann and former Congressman Hamilton Fish. Fish, a consistent isolationist, knew exactly what Truman, Marshall, Acheson, William Bundy, etc. were up to in the interventionist Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan: "Fish, one of the half-dozen best known opponents of American involvement in World War Two, though a fierce anti-Communist, attacked Truman's aid to Greece and Turkey 'containment' program as 'dollar imperialism'."¹³ The core of Cold War propaganda for interventionist "containment" and "dollar imperialism" was "the assemblage of ex-Reds, former Soviet well-wishers, and dis-affected Mensheviks who were published in the American Mercury during the editorship of Eugene Lyons, or in the Social Democrat weekly New Leader."¹⁴

Martin agrees that a striking failure of the political opposition to US imperialism and aggression has been its Europe-centeredness. US exploitation and hope of exploitation in Asia, especially in China, has been noted as the main basis for the Anglo-American alliance by which the US entered World War I. The proponents and opponents of US involvement in World War II debated the European war exclusively, while New Deal imperialism in the Administration and the China Lobby took the main chance in Asia. While Berlin and the German problem engaged public attention in the late 1940's and again in the 1960's, the Truman and Johnson Administrations and the China-Vietnam Lobby acted to unleash US aggression in Korea and Vietnam, the two classic invasion routes into China.

Martin concludes that since the Cold War is the princi-

12. Ibid., pp. 99-101.

13. Ibid., p. 102n.

14. Ibid., p. 102.

pal continuing obstacle to revisionism, a concentration on the Cold War is the principal duty of revisionist scholarship:

The Cold War has done more to hobble revisionism than all other influences and forces combined. It is for this reason that revisionism, if it is to have any significance henceforth, must not only become involved more deeply in investigations of how the world went to war again in 1939-41 and what really went on during that war, but also devote increasing attention to the Cold War and illuminate its spurious and artificial origins and dimensions.¹⁵

The beginnings of Cold War revisionism in the last works of Charles Beard were smothered in the avalanche of abuse poured upon all who questioned the myths of official history. It took a dozen years after Beard's works before important criticisms of US imperialism could make an appearance. The scars of the attacks on Beard by the official historians (about whom A.J.P. Taylor has said: "they are as much 'engaged' as though they wore the handsome uniforms designed for German professors by Dr. Goebbels") were not overcome until the courageous revisionism of William Appleman Williams' Tragedy of American Diplomacy (1959). Into the fresh area of Cold War revisionism Williams has been followed by the works of D. F. Fleming, John Lukacs, Herbert Aptheker, etc.

Even so, the unnecessary divisions caused by the mass desertion to support New Deal imperialism remain unhealed wounds, and the errors committed in the New Deal-Fair Deal decades have been institutionalized into dogmas. Thus, in his review of Williams' The Contours of American History, Dr. Aptheker (in Studies on the Left, Vol. III, No. 1, 1962) attacks Williams' refusal to view fascist countries as aggressive or expansionist when contrasted to the aggressive and expansionist aims and actions of New Deal imperialism. Aptheker says: "I would suggest that this is a reason why one has Mr. Williams expressing very warm feelings toward the isolationism of Charles A. Beard, in his last years, and towards Herbert Hoover." An irrational commitment to one or another aspect of US imperialism makes it difficult for many scholars to undertake the real task of Cold War revisionism, a task that requires the total rejection of US imperialism as exemplified in the works of Beard, Barnes and Williams.

Blindness to certain aspects of US imperialism was

15. Ibid., p. 112.

recently evidenced by a review in The Nation (Feb. 21, 1966), of David Horowitz's Free World Colossus by Arnold Kaufman of the philosophy department of the University of Michigan. Horowitz begins his work with a quote from William Appleman Williams: "Perhaps the major American casualty of the cold war has been the idea of history. This wound in the American intellect has, for the most part, gone unnoticed." It is doubtful, however, that Horowitz foresaw that this quote would be applicable to the "liberals" who have reviewed his own book (e.g. in the Nation, the New Republic.)

After criticizing Horowitz's rather lacklustre book for being too "exciting", Kaufman goes on to charge that it contains "three pervasive theoretical distortions." First, there is Horowitz's revisionist view that the use of US industrial capacity for the Cold War has been responsible for the current nationalization of the US economy. To Kaufman, that nationalization has been brought about simply by the "national response to the plight of the world's needy;" the Cold War thus being the conscious spearhead for US social welfare on a world-wide scale. It is unfortunate to find this point of view in the Nation; for it represents a reversion to the liberal, quasi-imperialist Nation of post-World War II. This was a myth taken up two decades ago by the ADA and adopted, in reverse, by the mindless right, which considers the collectivization of the economy since World War II as due solely to the growth of a welfare state. But, on the contrary, as pointed out years ago by Beard and Williams, the role of foreign aid and other aspects of the warfare-welfare tax-burden upon the American people has been the enrichment of the state monopoly system in the United States.

Secondly, Kaufman insists that the adoption of the Cold War by America was a response to "the nature of Stalinism, and to the experiences many good people had with domestic communism during the Thirties." As though the domestic policies of forced industrialization in the Soviet Union or of support for the New Deal in America can plausibly be offered as an excuse for US aggression in the Cold War! Thirdly, Kaufman attacks Horowitz's--and the New Left's--failure to "play the (liberal) U. S. political game," e.g. for his obvious preference for Eisenhower over the more war-mongering Harry Truman.

The Nation had promised to print in a subsequent issue the response of David Horowitz to this unfortunate review, as well as a reply by Kaufman. But nothing of the

sort has appeared, and it is clear that The Nation has decided not to allow Horowitz to answer the Kaufman attack. This is a disquieting setback for the cause of Cold War revisionism, for the Nation in the past several years had begun to return to the high standards of revisionism achieved by its pre-1930's editor Oswald Garrison Villard, who was later barred from the magazine for opposing the forward rush of US aggression in World War II. Furthermore, the review itself is an apt commentary on the weaknesses of the potentially dynamic teach-in movement, of which Professor Kaufman was one of the founding fathers.

In March, 1966, the libertarian-pacifist magazine Liberation celebrated its tenth anniversary, an anniversary which should not go unnoticed, considering the importance of the journal for Cold War revisionism. Edited by Dave Dellinger, Paul Goodman, Sidney Lens, and A. J. Muste, Liberation has among its permanent contributors Kenneth Boulding, Erich Fromm, Staughton Lynd, Lewis Mumford, William L. Neumann, Linus Pauling, and Kenneth Rexroth. For this anniversary, Liberation reprinted its "Tract for the Times" from its first issue. Liberation's viewpoint, that editorial made clear, would be based upon the Judaeo-Christian tradition, pacifist and non-violence philosophies, libertarian movements, and the American tradition of "Jefferson, Paine, Thoreau, Emerson, Debs, Randolph Bourne." Thus, Liberation declared: "The national, sovereign, militarized and bureaucratic State and a bureaucratic collectivist economy are themselves evils to be avoided or abolished. . . Our emphasis is rather on possibilities for decentralization, on direct participation of all workers or citizens in determining the conditions of life and work. . ."

The original Liberation world-view, influenced by Gandhi and Indian "neutralism", was marred by an unthinking Third Camp position that weakened its struggle against US imperialism. But Liberation has since evolved out of a negative Third Camp approach. Staughton Lynd's articles, for example, have been invaluable in clearing the air. Thus, in the anniversary issue he effectively answers the critics of his statements made in Hanoi last January:

When I said in Hanoi that American policy in Vietnam was "illegal, immoral and antidemocratic", I said something which to the best of my knowledge as a scholar and historian was true. I believe I can document each contention. . . But when Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. recently said that he, when in government during

the Bay of Pigs crisis, had deliberately lied, but that he hoped he would be forgiven for acting in the public interest, I noticed no statement from the President of Harvard condemning Mr. Schlesinger for violating the most elementary precept of intellectual integrity. It would seem then, that for one historian to lie in Washington is almost patriotism, while for another to try and tell the truth in Hanoi, is almost treason.

It is upon such a spirit of scholarship and devotion to the truth that historical revisionism is built.

One of Liberation's major contributions to revisionism was made by its publication of two significant articles by Harry Elmer Barnes: "Revisionism and the Promotion of Peace" (Summer, 1958), the subsequent Symposium on Revisionism in its October and November, 1958 issues, and Barnes' "Revisionism Revisited" (Summer, 1959). Barnes' first article was reprinted by Peace News in England, and translated on the Continent, but Dr. Luigi Villari failed in his attempts to have it reprinted in Italy. Professor D. F. Fleming, the Dean of Cold War Revisionism and a major foundation for the Horowitz book, commented thus on Barnes' article: "The case of the Revisionists deserves to be heard. They may help us avoid the 'one more war' after which there would be nothing left worth arguing about." Harry Paxton Howard's contribution to the Symposium was particularly prophetic in his recognition that the wars of Roosevelt and Truman provided the basis for such later wars as Lyndon Johnson's: "Every effect of the Roosevelt War contained the seeds of further war. We have already had one in Korea--and President Truman did not even bother to ask Congress for a declaration. We can have another one any time the warlords in Washington so decide."

It is not surprising that Barnes found the comments of Professor William L. Neumann among the most significant, especially the "vigor with which Professor Neumann exposes the lack of logic, consistency, realism, and good sense on the part of those who were ardent Revisionists with respect to the first and second World Wars but are now in the vanguard of those who are whooping it up for planetary destruction in a third World War." Barnes pointed out that the overwhelming majority of the old leaders of the America First movement were now far more interested in America's "Third Crusade" than in any revisionist revelations on the second World War. He noted a few honorable exceptions

such as Bruce Barton and Hamilton Fish, "who spoke out boldly against Mr. Dulles' apparent willingness to launch the final war of nuclear extermination to enable Chiang Kai-shek to linger on gracefully and comfortably at the American 'farm club' in Formosa."

Harry Barnes, in his Rampart Journal essay, ends on a bleakly pessimistic estimate of the chances for the future acceptance of revisionism. But his own and the Martin articles in this issue, as well as the recent emergence of Rampart Journal itself, is just one of the important straws in the wind for a far more optimistic prognosis. And a particularly important development has been the emergence of revisionist ideas and scholarship on the New Left, and in major works of recent years by such historians as Gar Alperovitz, David Horowitz, James J. Martin, William L. Neumann, and William Appleman Williams. And recently, a brilliant young New Left historian was heard to praise the Union Party of 1936 as isolationists and radicals who refused to be co-opted into the New Deal system of imperialism and state monopoly. For the success of revisionism, it may well be later than we think.

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