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WAR AND CIVILIZATION IN THE FUTURE

FREDERICK J. TEGGART

ABSTRACT

When we look to the future there are various neglected points which should be considered. (1) Modern warfare has become increasingly destructive by the military utilization of advances in knowledge and inventions made by civilians. So, too, warfare is being directed increasingly against civilians and their industrial activities. It is necessary, therefore, that civilians should begin to take a direct interest in military problems. (2) The possession of superior armament has been accompanied, in modern times, by the growing assertion of absolutist theories of government, especially by Fichte and his successors in Germany. (3) The difficulties inseparable from war do not end with the conclusion of peace. Demobilization creates more difficult problems than mobilization. We need a close-up investigation of what has happened in different countries after the return of armies to civil life. (4) The theory of the state is a doctrine of violence, but modern thought is dominated by theories of violence. Darwin's conception of a "war of nature" in which "the more dominant groups beat the less dominant" was welcomed in Germany as supporting militarist arguments. (5) We must look forward to the invention of ever newer agencies of destruction as long as we keep on insisting upon theories of violence. But we can readily trace the dissemination of the ideas which are undermining civilization, and we must face the difficulties which have been created by the work of men such as Fichte, Darwin, and Marx. The future of civilization turns upon the ability of scholars to meet the responsibility of intellectual leadership.

Once, not so long ago, we engaged in a "war to end all wars." Now war again envelops the world. Obviously there must have been some error in the ideas which we entertained after the conclusion of hostilities in 1918. It may be admitted that any peace conference will of necessity be beset with problems of such immediate urgency that matters, even though of importance, which merely look to the future can be accorded little consideration. We, however, who are not directly engaged in expediting warfare might well take time to examine some "points" which are again likely to be overlooked.

I

The first observation to be made in the present circumstances is that the renewal of warfare has been accompanied by the extensive use of weapons which were of minor importance a quarter of a century ago. In the past, successful wars have usually turned upon the exploitation of new inventions, and, in modern times at least, these inventions have been made by civilians.

Modern warfare dates from the development of machine tools in manufacturing plants—a departure which made possible the large-scale production of weapons on a uniform pattern. In the years from 1866 to 1871 the Prussians attained ascendancy in Europe when their famous “needle gun,” a breech-loading rifle, proved superior to the old muzzle-loading musket, and when the name of Krupp came into the foreground with the invention of the breech-loading field gun. In 1877 an American breech-loading rifle enabled the Turks to hold up the Russians at Plevna. Likewise the possession of quick-firing cannon enabled Menelek to defeat the Italians at Adowa in 1896. After 1890 the magazine repeating rifle and the Maxim machine gun represented developments of the highest importance. The weapons employed in the war of 1914–18, like those conspicuous at the present moment, require no comment. What, however, is likely to be overlooked is that the weapons to which the Germans have owed their successes were not of their own invention. The comment of a classical scholar is worth recalling: neither Germany nor ancient Rome, he says, invented the weapons they used with great effect. The Germans did not invent the machine gun, the submarine, the airplane, or the tank, but they utilized the models provided by others with a greater realization of their possibilities for warfare.

New weapons have always entailed new tactics and new departures in military training. It is of particular importance, therefore, to recognize that “experienced” officers have always been opposed to changes in equipment and drill and have been rigidly conservative in their judgment concerning innovations. The veteran officers of one war dictate opinion on military questions for their respective countries, and these leaders, as a class, have ordinarily been highly resistant to technical changes. It is not remarkable, then, that the army defeated in one war should be the successful one in the next. Success follows the adoption of inventions borrowed from any source; defeat follows over confidence in methods and appliances which had proved useful on earlier occasions.

Since 1850 each decade has seen the introduction of new weapons made possible by the inventive genius of civilians and methods of production devised by industrialists. Nevertheless, in time of peace

civilians take little interest in problems of military efficiency, though it is the civilian population which in the long run is most deeply affected by the outcome of war. The people of any country should be kept constantly reminded that the condition of the army is not the concern only of those permanently employed in military duties. As a means of enlightenment we need a history or histories of wars as related to inventions, with special reference, not to the antecedents of victories, but to the frequent source of defeat in the conservatism and overconfidence of commanders in time of peace.

The inventions now being employed for purposes of destruction are products of advances in physical science and technology. For three hundred years western Europeans have believed that increase of scientific knowledge would of necessity bring increased well-being in society at large and hitherto undreamed-of ameliorations of everyday life. In experience, however, the advancement of scientific knowledge has aided war and now threatens a destructiveness which may exceed the resources and capacity of civilization to repair. Seemingly, the more we advance in knowledge, the more war prospers. Nevertheless, the essential fact is that the sciences concerned with human intercourse and relations have failed to keep pace with physics and chemistry.

II

The improvement of firearms in the sixteenth century was accompanied by a remarkable growth of absolutism in national governments. So a second observation to be made at the present moment is that the renewed activity of Germany is associated at one and the same time with a superconfidence in new weapons and with a reassertion of the German theory of the War-State. This theory is not merely "totalitarian" in the sense that the State is supreme over the entire life of every individual but also in the sense that the prime business and end of the State is war. In German doctrine, "Peace counts for nothing in history."

The theory of the War-State goes back to Fichte's hysterical *Addresses* after the German defeat at Jena in 1806. Fichte gave expression to the view that the State is an institution based on force and presupposes war of all against all. He asserted that there is

neither rule nor law governing the relations of one state to another except the will of the stronger. He promulgated the doctrine that "the goal of the German nation is to dominate mankind." In the generation after Fichte, Bernhardi maintained that in war "a truly civilized nation finds the highest expression of its strength and vitality." The doctrines of Fichte found a professorial exponent from 1874 to 1896 in the person of Treitschke, who taught at the University of Berlin. In his lectures Treitschke maintained that the essential function of the State is to make war. War is the mold of nations. Without war there would be no State. All states have come into existence through war. War will last as long as more than one state continues to exist. Peace is merely a condition of veiled warfare. A state cannot possibly bind itself for the future by the treaties it may make; every State must reserve to itself the right to decide upon its treaty obligations. States do not arise out of the sovereignty of the people—they are created against the will of the people. And to descend to mere particulars, this university professor asserted that the acquisition of Holland "is as necessary to us as our daily bread." Nietzsche expressed the same views in ecstatic utterances, and Spengler's pronouncement that "war is the creator of all things great" is simply the echo of a drumbeat which has sounded in willing German ears since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The theory of the War-State proclaims war and demands war as the condition of its self-realization.

III

The War-State is organized consciously for the prosecution of war, but in every country the prosecution of war calls the War-State into being. The immediate effect of actual war is an assertion of the total dominance of the government and, if need be, the coercion of every individual within the country.

The difficulties inseparable from war, whatever the outcome of the conflict, do not end with the cessation of fighting, for demobilization presents in the long run problems which have graver issues than the calling out of troops. The men drafted as soldiers are "returned" to civil life, and a grateful country suggests that they should be given preference in employment. Yet, contemporane-

ously, those who were engaged in war industries—many of them experts diverted to the construction of the elaborate equipment now required for military action—are also “disbanded.” And where, as in England, the majority of able-bodied men and women have been drawn into war work, the disbanding process must eventually assume bewildering proportions. We most urgently need a detailed and thorough study of what has happened in different countries at different times when those engaged in the efforts demanded by war have been released from their war activities.

There is another aspect of the cessation of war which should not be forgotten. Governments do not make money; they spend it. The expenditure of money is the only means by which governments attempt to solve the problems of war and the problems which arise in succession to war. So all types of aid for the readjustment of life are conceived of in terms of dollars and cents. Similarly, depressions in business and periods of unemployment evoke agitation for governmental aid. Consequently, men are employed in avowedly “unprofitable” projects. In Germany the same situation has been met by governmental employment of men in the “unprofitable” project of preparation for war, and sooner or later all other governments have been compelled to follow suit. But elaborate preparation for war means ultimately the prosecution of war, and the new war must be followed eventually by new demobilization, new difficulties of readjustment, and new calls upon the government for money. Owing, moreover, to the vast destruction of buildings and dwellings in civilized countries occasioned by the newest type of warfare, governments will be forced to discover resources for the physical rehabilitation necessary to the continuance of existence. In rebuilding men will, of course, make provision for protection against air raids in the future—protection which will be obsolete when, twenty years hence, new inventions will have increased the possibilities of destruction.

IV

The theory of the War-State is a doctrine of violence, but it is not the only doctrine of violence preached in modern times.

In 1776 Adam Smith formulated the opinion that “the natural

course of things," if undisturbed, would result necessarily in "the natural progress of opulence." As one of his contemporaries said:

The great and leading object of his speculations was to illustrate the provisions made by nature in the principles of the human mind, and in the circumstances of man's external situation, for a gradual and progressive augmentation in the means of national wealth; and to demonstrate that the most effectual plan for advancing a people to greatness was to maintain that order of things which nature has pointed out.

Had human institutions, Smith remarked, never disturbed the natural course of things, the improvement of every growing society would have followed a certain specified series of steps. But, he goes on, though this natural order of things must have taken place in some degree in every society, it has, in all the modern states of Europe, been, in many respects, entirely inverted. Measures imposed by governments have retarded, instead of accelerating, the progress of society toward real wealth and greatness. He put his faith, then, in "the natural order of things" and advocated a strict limitation of the sphere of governmental action.

A hundred years later Herbert Spencer thought that some guidance for political action could be reached by asking, "What is the normal course of social evolution?" He argued, in a manner not incompatible with the views of Adam Smith, that existing institutions "raise impediments to the development of better institutions" and supported this view by the argument that "though structure up to a certain point is requisite for growth, structure beyond that point impedes growth. . . . The completion of structure involves arrest of growth." At this point he comes to a stop—"the process of social evolution will take its own course in spite of us." He admits that his conclusion is disappointing but ends with the thought that "comparatively little can be done" beyond "uniting philanthropic energy with philosophic calm."

Contemporaneously, however, Karl Marx (in London) went a step further. He accepted the view that societies go through the same stages of evolution: "The country," he says, "that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future." (He appears, in this statement, to have overlooked the all-important "if" clause of Adam Smith's reasoning.)

He then goes on to say that "the successive phases of the normal development" of a society present obstacles which cannot be removed by legal enactments. What follows this reversal of Adam Smith's view of social evolution is, as everyone is aware, the declaration of the necessity of "revolution." To overcome the development inherent in "the natural course of things" Marx advocated "the complete destruction of the capitalist State, and the substitution for it of a quite different type of State made by the workers in the image of their own needs, as the instrument of a proletarian dictatorship" (G. D. H. Cole). The "normal development" of society must be broken down as a necessary preliminary to the establishment of a new order. Marxism is an appeal to violence in the name of inferiority. But violence has also been approved in the name of superiority.

In 1860 and 1861 Marx expressed the opinion that Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) "serves me as a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history." One or two aspects of this judgment invite remark. First, as everyone knows, and as Engles noticed, a principal element in Darwin's theory of natural selection was taken from the *Essay on Population* of T. R. Malthus. Since, however, the views of Malthus were derived from observation of social phenomena, it follows that Marx discovered a scientific basis for his own theory in Darwin's application to natural history of the conception of "the struggle for existence" in human society. Second, Marx entirely overlooked the main contention of Darwin that change in the forms of life is invariable "slow, gradual, and continuous," that species have descended from other species by "slow and scarcely sensible mutations," that natural selection "can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance by short and sure, though slow steps." Consequently, there would be no basis in natural science, as represented by Darwin, for the theory of "revolution."

Darwin conceived of a "war of nature" in which "the more dominant groups beat the less dominant" and in which "the old forms are beaten and yield their places to the new and victorious forms." "New species become superior to their predecessors, for they have to beat in the struggle for life all the older forms." In the *Descent of Man* he applied this principle to human existence. "In the rudest

state of society," he says, "the individuals who were the most sagacious, who invented and used the best weapons or traps, and who were best able to defend themselves, would rear the greatest number of offspring." He then goes on to remark that "the tribes which included the largest number of men thus endowed would increase in number and supplant other tribes. . . . As a tribe increases and is victorious it is often still further increased by the absorption of other tribes." From the remotest times, he continues, successful and thus superior tribes have supplanted other tribes, and, at the present day, superior nations are everywhere supplanting barbarous nations. In the course of this discussion he came, however, to a view which is directly opposed to that in the *Origin of Species*, for he abandoned the conception that evolution was always "slow, gradual, and continuous." History, he said, "refutes the idea that progress is normal in human society"; man has risen from a lowly condition of culture by slow and interrupted steps. Changes, then, have been occasioned at different times and in different places by exceptional events, and the path of progress has been marked by the triumph of superior nations over those less well equipped.

Darwin's later view received wide recognition. Thus, in Germany, D. F. Strauss (author of the famous *Life of Jesus*, which was translated by George Eliot), in a work entitled *The Old Faith and the New*, upheld military conquest and social inequalities as right because natural. History, he thought, consists in the eternal development of races, the subjugation of one by the other, and, at last, of many by one. The humanitarian zeal of our time, he said, has declared itself against war. Societies are formed and conferences held to insure its complete abolition. But why do they not also agitate for the abolition of thunderstorms? Cannon will continue to be the *ultima ratio* of nations. So Darwinism may be said to have joined hands with the German theory of the War-State and to have supported the view that possession of superior military equipment demonstrates the cultural superiority of those who have acquired it.

V

In the world as we find it we must look forward to the invention of ever newer agencies of destruction. We may well be dismayed at

the conditions created by modern advances in physical science and technology, since we can expect no future without rapidly recurring periods of "total war."

Civilization is menaced by war, but because it is dominated by theories of violence and by preachments of strife as the means to the establishment of a millennium—such as Nietzsche imagined. Strife, war, and revolution are openly advocated as the procedure necessary for the settlement of difficulties, not only in the external relations of states, but within every nation.

But the ideas which play an all-important part in modern existence were formulated by individuals—whose names and works are known to us—for the purpose of exciting populations, classes, and individuals to acts of destructiveness. Onward from 1808 the mind of the German people has been obsessed by the glory and necessity of war. For the forty years from 1860 to 1900 the intellectuals of France, England, and America accepted the domination of the doctrine of struggle and violence inherent in Darwinism. With the coming of the twentieth century, the fashion of thought underwent a change, and the new generation of intellectuals submitted to what they conceived to be a new type of thought by exchanging Darwinism for the teachings of Marx.

The essential difficulties of the modern world are difficulties in thought. Are we to admit a permanent intellectual bondage to views put forward in the nineteenth century by Fichte, Darwin, and Marx? The future of civilization turns upon our ability to face the difficulties in thought which confront us. Preparation for the future is the obligation of scholarship, just as the prosecution of the struggle of today is the responsibility of government. We may look forward confidently to the ruin of our civilization if we cannot bring ourselves to face the burden of intellectual leadership. All great periods in history have been times when men were found willing to face difficulties in accepted ideas. The opportunity lies open.

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