

Truth Faces War Hysteria

EMOTIONALISM has its proper place—in love and in politics, in loyalties and in propaganda. But when it enters the field of reason it is as out of place as the proverbial bull in the china shop.

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"My country right or wrong" is a beautiful sentiment. But that's all it is—a sentiment. When one fails to define "the country" as an aggregation of individuals and treats it as a nebulous thing apart from the people, a premise which is completely devoid of reality has been established; all reasoning from such a premise must be fallacious. Or, unless standards of "right" and of "wrong" can be ascertained, "my country right or wrong" merely means that my country—the entity we have not defined—determines its own moral values. Reasoning from that premise will lead to incongruous conclusions.

In the field of social action this confusion of emotion and reason leads to dangerous incongruities. In times of great stress—political campaigns or war—we suffer from mental conflicts which make logical processes difficult. Objectivity is difficult save in times of emotional tranquillity. The aim of philosophy is to fortify the mind against the irrational thinking superinduced by waves of emotional strain, and to guide one's action in the light of proved principle.

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Now, then, if it was true a year ago that war is the result of economic forces it is true now. Unless, indeed, new facts have been discovered which disprove the earlier conviction, such as those which would demonstrate racial inferiority or substantiate the Malthusian doctrine. Is it likely that such war-born fantasies are more reliable than the headlines from which they are culled?

If it was true a year ago that the conditions which enslave men bring about armed conflicts, then the only way to prevent such armed conflicts is to abolish those conditions. If one now believes there is any other way, one must have been wrong a year ago.

If it was true a year ago that the private collection of rent and the public appropriation of private property are the ingredients of the war economy, then it must follow that nothing short of the abolition of these two institutions will

stop war. Or, shall we "re-evaluate our philosophy in the light of current events" and maintain that the way to prevent war is to have a larger war machine?

If it was true a year ago that in a condition of freedom all men will seek to satisfy their desires by production and exchange, are we now to say that we were wrong; that a condition of freedom is impossible because some men, say Communists or Nazis, act upon some other principle of behavior?

If it was true a year ago that the dignity of the tribe, nation or race is merely the sum total of the dignity of the individuals who comprise that community, what reason have we now to substitute the jingo idea of the sanctity of the State?

If it was true a year ago that taxation is an unmitigated evil, we can justify the claim that more taxation for war purposes is a good thing only by admitting that we were wrong a year ago. A principle is not an expedient.

If it was true a year ago that war entrenches the forces of monopoly, degrades the individual, strengthens the political machine and destroys democracy, then to argue now for war as a means toward freedom is either a denial of principle or a rationalization that defies all reason.

If it was true a year ago that conscription is a complete denial of man's inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, any justification of conscription now as a democratic principle is intellectual prestidigitation.

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And so it goes. Principle after principle which in more tranquil times were held as axiomatic in the philosophy of freedom have been questioned by some who profess to follow this philosophy. That the instability is caused by war hysteria is quite obvious; the frank admission that hate and fear (or a policy of expediency) has replaced principle as a motivating factor could be accepted, albeit with a mental shrug. But such is the conceit of the human mind that it seeks logical justification for its emotional complexes.

Thus the tendency to "re-evaluate the philosophy in the light of current events"—which means either that one never understood the philosophy or lacks the intellectual integrity of the true philosopher.