IMPERIALISM : AN EXCHANGE

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AMERICAN IMPERIALISM AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Robert Wolfe

ONE OF THE WEAKNESSES of the American peace movement as presently constituted is that it lacks a clearly defined theory of imperialism. Various elements within the movement as a whole do hold definite views on this question, but there is neither general agreement as to their relevance nor much inclination to test conflicting interpretations against the available evidence. Precisely because the war in Vietnam is so manifestly unjust and inhuman, the protest against that war has stemmed in large part from a sense of outrage which requires no theoretical analysis or justification. What we are all beginning to discover, however, is that protest is one thing and political action another. If the peace movement is to break out of its current isolation and begin to build a political base in this country, it must learn to relate its opposition to the war in Vietnam to a continuing struggle against the policies which have produced that war and which must inevitably produce new Vietnams in the future. For this task of long-range political education protest is not enough. What is needed among other things is an analysis both of the origins of the current conflict, and of the nature of American foreign policy in general. What is needed, in brief, is a theory of American imperialism.

By the term "American imperialism" I mean that system of political, economic and military domination by means of which the United States today controls the greater part of what

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is sometimes known as the Free World. For almost twenty years the United States has sought directly or indirectly to manipulate the internal political life of the entire non-socialist world in order to simultaneously bar the way to indigeneous social revolution and to maximize opportunities for American capital investment and American access to strategic raw materials. This system of global domination has taken different forms in different areas; only as a last resort has it led to outright military intervention. Military bases and military training programs, large scale capital investment, economic and military aid, C.I.A.-sponsored coups, covert support for European colonial regimes: these are the "neo-colonial" techniques through which the United States normally pursues its objectives. The ramifications of this global strategy are too broad to be explained in terms of such subjective attitudes as anti-Communist hysteria or racism or a lust for power on the part of individuals in high places. American imperialism is in fact characterized by such attitudes; but its causes, its underlying goals, must ultimately be sought in the fundamental economic and political structure of American society itself.

Proceeding from this assumption, the logical starting point for any discussion of American foreign policy is the classical Marxist interpretation of imperialism, as formulated by Lenin in 1916. Simply stated, the Leninist thesis asserts that imperialism arises out of the growing inability of monopoly capitalism to invest surplus capital at home, and the consequent necessity of subjugating foreign nations in order to create a new, more profitable sphere for capital investment abroad. The relevance of this interpretation to contemporary American imperialism has been repeatedly demonstrated and requires no elaborate discussion here. As of 1963 American investments abroad were in excess of $40 billion, a sum which represented an increase of nearly six-fold since 1946. With close to $10 billion of that total invested in Latin America alone, it is not difficult to understand why the United States should want to overthrow the Cuban regime or to topple bourgeois nationalist governments in Guatemala, Brazil or the Dominican Republic. Valuable in themselves, these foreign holdings are of particular importance for the economy as a whole due to a range of special factors: the high rate of profit which they help to sustain; their concentration

in the hands of the largest and most influential corporations; the access to strategic raw materials which they provide. That American capitalism has a real economic stake in preventing the spread of socialism in the Third World is an elementary fact which no serious analysis of American imperialism can afford to disregard.

Nonetheless, as a comprehensive theory of American imperialism, the Leninist thesis is open to criticism on several grounds:

(1) Despite its growing importance during recent years, foreign investment still accounts for less than 5% of total American capital investment. For example, whereas the direct capital outflow from the United States in 1963 was just short of $2 billion, domestic investment in new plant and equipment (excluding farm and residential construction) reached almost $40 billion. One may well argue that this 5% of the total, magnified by the special factors noted above, does provide the economy with a crucial extra margin which represents the difference between stagnation and growth. All the same, it remains true that foreign investment does not play the same role for contemporary American capitalism as it did for, let us say, classical British capitalism—upon which Lenin's theory of imperialism was based.

(2) More important, although the scope of American investment abroad varies sharply from one region to another, American foreign policy is everywhere characterized by the same rigid anti-Communism and fear of change. Almost 60% of American foreign holdings are concentrated in Western Europe and Canada, two areas in which relatively little direct American intervention is now required in order to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, only 7% of American foreign holdings are to be found in Asia (including the Middle East), a fact which does not prevent the United States from pursuing an extremely rigid and ambitious course in this area. American investments in Latin America are more than twice as great as those in all of Asia and Africa put together; but the control of Vietnam is nonetheless deemed as vital as the control of Venezuela. In short, there is a certain disproportion between the actual pattern of American foreign investment and the global scale and uniform character of American foreign policy.

(3) Finally, the Leninist thesis does not adequately account for the belligerence of American policies *vis-à-vis* the socialist world. The United States has long since abandoned the hope of restoring capitalism in the Soviet Union or China; but it continues to encircle these countries with a ring of military bases and to threaten them with its gigantic nuclear arsenal. The American military presence in Western Europe and Southeast Asia clearly derives at least as much from a desire to isolate and encircle the Soviet Union and China as it does from the need to check social revolution in these areas. It is true that one reason for American belligerence is a desire to prevent Soviet or Chinese support for revolution in the Third World; but here again, there is a disproportion between the kind of support which the Soviet Union or China is actually prepared to give (as witness the current struggle in Vietnam) and the massive character of the American military threat.

On balance, then, it seems to me that the Leninist thesis provides a necessary but not a sufficient explanation for the basic policies of American imperialism. American foreign policy is indeed designed to protect American investments abroad; the point is that it *over-protects* them, that it operates on a scale and in a way which is all out of proportion to the magnitude of the interests at stake. American imperialism cannot be understood without reference to the Leninist thesis; but tha thesis alone will not suffice to account for the global scale of American policies.

A second theory which is sometimes advanced, often in conjunction with the first, is that American imperialism seeks to check the spread of socialism not only because its foreign holdings are endangered, but also because a capitalist America could not long survive in a socialist world. The emphasis here is less upon the direct economic effects of revolution abroad as it is upon the political and ideological repercussions of such a trend within the United States itself. From this standpoint, every social revolution, no matter what the immediate interests at stake, poses a long term threat because it represents a further step in the direction of a socialist world. Indeed, if the United States (or even the United States and Western Europe) were to find itself isolated in this way, it is hard to see how profound political and ultimately economic changes could be avoided.

That American policy makers are conscious of this possibility is perfectly evident; their constant harping on the theme of Munich has no other significance.

The chief difficulty with this theory is that it assumes that the triumph of socialism throughout the entire Third World is in fact so imminent that only the most desperate measures can turn the tide. There is, quite frankly, little evidence to support such a hypothesis. Since 1945 the dominant force in the Third World has been nationalism rather than socialism; although the Nassers and Sukharnos cannot resolve the fundamental problems which confront their emerging nations, it seems likely that a considerable period of time must elapse before genuine social revolutions can take place in such countries. Of course one of the reasons why social revolution in the Third World has not proceeded at a more rapid pace is precisely the role of American imperialism, without whose intervention more than one bastion of the Free World would by now have fallen. On the other hand, it must also be remembered that American imperialism often tends to strengthen the very forces which it seeks to oppose. In Vietnam and elsewhere the effect of American intervention has been to invest socialist movements with a broad national appeal, thus recreating those conditions which proved so conducive to the growth of socialism during the Second World War. Given the continuing viability of the nationalist alternative throughout much of the Third World, it is far from clear why American policy makers should be so obsessed with the threat of socialist encirclement as to embark upon a course of global repression whose political disadvantages may well offset whatever temporary military gains are achieved.

Yet another approach to the problem is the one adopted by, among others, the late Paul Baran in *The Political Economy of Growth*. Basing himself upon the Leninist thesis, Baran nonetheless admits that the economic importance of American foreign investment is of "incidental significance" in comparison to the economic importance of the means used to protect foreign investments, namely military spending and related expenditures. Arguing that "the means of imperialist policy overshadow almost entirely its original ends," Baran compares the relationship between the two to "an errant stone setting into motion a mighty

rock." His point is that in order to assess properly the economic significance of imperialism, one must consider the impact not only of foreign investment, but also of the entire military establishment, which exists only in order to safeguard the former.

That military spending and its by-products are of decisive significance for the functioning of modern American capitalism is a fact which no one can seriously question. Baran's estimate is that such expenditures directly or indirectly account for almost 20% of the annual Gross National Product, and the figure is undoubtedly not too high. It was defense spending and defense spending alone which enabled the American economy to pull out of the depression at the end of the 1930's, and which averted another depression at the end of the 1940's. For the last fifteen years through hot wars and cold the economy has received its annual $50 billion shot in the arm; and of late, it has even proved necessary to increase the dosage by another $10 billion. But while Baran's conclusions are unassailable, his logic is not; for if foreign investment, on his own finding, is merely an "errant stone," why is an enormous military establishment required to protect it? In *The Political Economy of Growth,* Baran provides no clear answer to this question, but the whole effect of his analysis is to demonstrate that American imperialism cannot be understood except in relation to its domestic repercussions. If we are to transcend the limitations of the Leninist thesis, it is from this standpoint that we must now proceed.

Whatever the need to protect foreign investments by military means, there is certainly an intimate connection between American foreign policy and military spending. It was the American commitment to the "defense" of Western Europe which provided the original rationale for the creation of a vast nuclear arsenal; and it was the American commitment to the "defense" of Southeast Asia which led to the massive build-up of our conventional military forces as well. At the same time as it has served to justify military spending, moreover, American imperialism has also had important political repercussions on the domestic scene. The link between the Korean War and the rise of McCarthyism is well known; but it is sometimes forgotten that despite the demise of McCarthy the continuation of the Cold War has made it possible to transform McCarthyism into a permanent feature of the American political landscape. The

elimination of the Communist Party as an active factor in American politics, the emasculation of the liberal and socialist left, the domestication of the trade union movement, all this and more can be traced in large part to the combined economic and political impact of American imperialism upon American society. In brief, there can be no doubt that imperialism has played an absolutely central role in assuring the survival and continued growth of capitalism in the United States.

To state the position in this form, it seems to me, is inevitably to raise the question: to what extent are military spending and domestic reaction not only the consequence but also the cause of imperialism abroad? The mere existence of the military establishment and the political attitudes associated with it tends to militate against the adoption of a foreign policy which might result in a lessening of international tensions and hence a reduction in military spending. As everyone knows, those who have the greatest vested interest in the military establishment are also ardent advocates of a hard line in foreign affairs. What ought to be remembered, however, is that the demands of the war hawks in the Pentagon are hardly more extreme than the actual policies followed during the last twenty years. After all, John F. Kennedy, the architect of the so-called detente with the Soviet Union, took office on a pledge to increase military spending and promptly discovered a Berlin crisis which justified that increase. And Lyndon Johnson, everybody's peace candidate in 1964, finds it so essential to defend freedom in Vietnam that he must ask Congress for an additional $13 billion in military appropriations. Is it not possible that the determination with which Kennedy and Johnson confront the foe in Berlin and Vietnam is related to the immense economic and political advantages to be gained from such a course?

In approaching the problem from this angle I do not mean to ascribe any deep Machiavellian cunning to the policy makers in Washington. To the contrary, there is every reason to believe that these men do in fact see themselves faced with a worldwide Communist conspiracy which must be resisted at every turn if the American way of life is to be preserved. The source of this perception is to be found in the actual spread of socialism since 1917; and the source of their opposition to that trend is to be found in the very real economic interests which social

revolution abroad endangers. But while Washington seeks to defend real interests, it seeks to do so on the basis of a mythological view of the world, a view which derives from a total inability to understand the spread of socialism except in terms of foreign aggression, mysterious subversion and Great Power intervention. Precisely because Washington itself pursues its goals by no other means, it believes its own propaganda which attributes the same techniques to the other side. Precisely because the United States is an imperialist nation, it finds no difficulty in accepting the myth of Soviet and Chinese imperialism. Were this mythological perception of no value to the system or even a positive hindrance, it would have long since been corrected. What perpetuates and gives substance to the myth is the massive military spending and atmosphere of political reaction which it engenders. The ultimate proof of the existence of the Communist conspiracy is that it is so profitable to combat. Just as the mythology of anti-Communism serves to justify military spending and domestic reaction, so military spending and domestic reaction serve to reinforce and preserve the mythology of anti-Communism and the foreign policies which derive from it.

It is, in the final analysis, this continuing interaction between imperialism abroad and its repercussions at home which give rise to that element of over-protection in American foreign policy noted earlier. Because it is now virtually an economic and political necessity to perceive the world through the categories of the myth, American imperialism has become increasingly incapable of distinguishing between real and unreal threats. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, it continues to behave as if by isolating and encircling the Soviet Union and China, it could halt the course of revolution in the Third World. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, it continues to act as if the socialist world were a monolithic bloc and the triumph of socialism in Vietnam a victory for Chinese imperialism. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, it continues to believe that if it does not intervene everywhere in the world, socialism must be everywhere victorious tomorrow. The final irony, of course, is that by pursuing such policies the United States ends by transforming its phantasies into realities. By treating the Cuban regime as a Soviet outpost in the Western Hemisphere, it

compels the Soviet Union to place missiles in Cuba. The mythology of anti-Communism not only justifies military spending and domestic reaction; it also provides the necessary confirmation for its own distorted perceptions. In this sense one might almost argue that the real goal of American imperialism today is not so much to preserve capitalist holdings abroad as it is to preserve and give substance to the myth upon which capitalism at home now rests.

In no case has this mythological function of American imperialism been of more decisive significance than in Vietnam. The main reason why the war has aroused so much opposition within the ranks of the Cold War Establishment itself is that it is justified by neither economic nor strategic considerations commensurate with the grave risks involved. Not only are American investments in Vietnam of negligible significance, but American holdings in the entire Far East (as of 1963) totalled only $1.5 billion, of which the greater part was invested in Japan and the Philippines, two countries which are not even part of the Asian mainland. Even if the economic stake in the rest of the Far East were greater than it is, moreover, there is little reason to believe that the triumph of socialism in South Vietnam would endanger it to any significant degree. Ironically enough, some radical critics of the war have been compelled to accept the Administration's own rationale, the "domino theory," because they are rightly unwilling to attribute American policies to Johnson's personal caprice. All the same, the evidence that the United States is fighting in Vietnam in order to defend its interests in Southeast Asia is no stronger when presented by the left than by the right. The victory of the Viet-Minh in 1954 had no major international repercussions; and there is no country in Southeast Asia today, with the possible exception of Laos, where revolutionary forces are strong enough to derive a real impetus from an NLF victory in South Vietnam. As Johnson's liberal critics have not failed to point out, the actual effect of the war has been rather to undermine American influence in the area, most notably in Cambodia. Of course one might still insist that even if an NLF victory did not immediately alter the balance of forces in Southeast Asia, the knowledge that the United States could be forced to withdraw would provide a source of tremendous encouragement to other revolutionary

movements throughout the world. It is likely that the Administration believes this; but what it ignores is that the desperate conditions which produce revolutions do not permit revolutionaries to pause and consider whether or not they will offend the United States. The lesson of Vietnam—if it is intended as a lesson—is no lesson at all.

In order to understand American policy in Vietnam, it seems to me, one must have reference to the self-justifying logic of anti-Communism and military spending described above. Not only does the war provide a suitable occasion for an increase in military appropriations and a series of repressive measures—such as the attempt to register the Du Bois Clubs—directed against the left; it also serves to bolster that anti-Communist mythology without which even the normal rate of military spending could not be sustained. Both Kennedy and Johnson (prior to 1965) could easily have withdrawn from Vietnam without the slightest damage to American prestige or their own political standing. They had only to blame the whole thing on the perfidy of the South Vietnamese ruling class, whose belief in its own capacity to retain power had declined in direct proportion to the increase in its deposits in Swiss banks. They chose to remain because to have withdrawn would have been to give the lie to the whole myth of "aggression from the North" which they had so assiduously propagated. They chose to remain because to have withdrawn would have been an admission that there was no real reason for being there in the first place. They chose to remain because to have withdrawn would have dealt a serious blow to that whole doctrine of global resistance to Communist aggression which American capitalism no longer knows how to dispense with. Unwilling to expose the American people to such a rude awakening, and fortified by the economic and political advantages to be derived from such a course, first Kennedy and then Johnson determined to stay in Vietnam; and in order to stay, in the face of a rapidly deteriorating military situation, they were compelled to become ever more deeply involved.

The point at which American policy passed entirely into a phantasy world of its own creation was in February of 1965, when Johnson embarked upon the bombing of North Vietnam. It is quite possible that Johnson believed that by bombing the North he could compel Ho Chi Minh to call off the war in the

South. Such a notion, although totally mistaken, would be consistent with Washington's conception of what revolution is all about. But even this theory does not suffice to explain why Johnson continues the bombings long after their military and political futility has become entirely obvious. In the final analysis, Johnson is bombing North Vietnam because he wants to prove to himself, to his critics and to the American people that the United States is in fact confronted with a clear case of Communist aggression in the South. By devastating the North, Johnson declares: here is the proof of your complicity, for why else would we attack you? There is a strict historical parallel between this exercise in mad logic and Hitler's Final Solution to the Jewish question. The basic function of the extermination camps was not so much to eliminate actual enemies—political prisoners were not usually sent to Auschwitz—as it was to give substance to mythical ones. Every Jew who perished in the gas chambers became by his very death a confessed enemy of the German race: for why else was he killed? This is the logic not of Descartes but of Kafka, and Vietnam today is America's Penal Colony. The people of Vietanm, North and South, must be punished for their aggression, for without the punishment there would be no aggression and without the aggression no possible justification for that gigantic military-industrial complex which stands at the very core of American economic and political life.

This parallel between the American treatment of Vietnam and the Nazi treatment of the Jews is not accidental; it stems from a fundamental resemblance between 20th century German and American imperialism. For German capitalism even more than for American capitalism, capital investment abroad was always of secondary importance in comparison to the role of military spending at home. The early 20th century German equivalent to the American nuclear arsenal was a vast and costly fleet which never served any military purpose whatsoever. Having embarked upon a program of military spending of this kind, Germany found itself compelled to pursue a foreign policy commensurate with its military preparations; the effect of this system was to imbue German imperialism with an aggressive character all out of proportion to either the foreign interests at stake or the actual magnitude of German resources. The mad dreams of conquest entertained by Hitler during the Second

World War were hardly more grandiose than the German war aims formulated during the course of the First World War and embodied in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. If Johnson behaves like Hitler in Vietnam, it is not because Johnson is a fascist or America a fascist country, but rather because American imperialism like German imperialism has been driven to act out its phantasies in order to preserve them. To the extent that American foreign policy goes beyond the task of safeguarding American holdings abroad, to that extent does it threaten to recapitulate the truly insane and disastrous history of Germany in the 20th century.

What follows from the above is that the monstrous irrationality which characterizes American policy in Vietnam also causes American imperialism to pose a very real threat to world survival itself. British and French imperialism, for all of its barbarous atrocities, was at least compelled to preserve the peoples which it sought to exploit; and when it could no longer maintain its domination through military means, it found ways of accommodating itself to the changing situation. American imperialism, insofar as it derives from the implacable need to justify its own myths, can make no such accommodation. Mythical interests, unlike real ones, cannot be compromised or negotiated; they must stand or fall as an integral whole. Already during the Cuban missile crisis Kennedy proved that the United States government was perfectly capable of threatening nuclear war in order to preserve its own mythological universe intact. In Vietnam today only the incredible forebearance of the Soviet Union and China has prevented another major confrontation with the United States. Almost fifty years ago Lenin noted that imperialism, from the political standpoint, was more than a striving after foreign conquest, that it was "in general, a striving towards violence and reaction." It is this amorphous "striving towards violence and reaction" which has come to constitute the most dangerous feature of American imperialism today. Unless a way is found to wake the United States from that phantasy world in which it now acts, there is good reason to believe that the ultimate nightmare of nuclear war may also be played out on the stage of the real world.

There are two distinct and partially contradictory implications which can be derived from this analysis. On the one hand, it suggests that American imperialism is so integrally bound

up with the American capitalist system that it will prove difficult to modify the former to any significant degree without also transforming the latter. Such a conclusion is implicit in any theory based upon the Leninist thesis; it relates to the traditional Marxist argument that the effects of capitalism cannot ultimately be remedied without changing the system itself. On the other hand, the above analysis also suggests—and this in contradistinction to the Leninist thesis—that there is no inherent economic *necessity* for certain key aspects of American imperialism. Military spending belongs in the public rather than the private domain; it can be acted upon in a way that foreign investment cannot. Although the military establishment now forms an integral part of the American capitalist system, it is possible, at least in theory, to envisage a capitalist economy organized along different lines and geared to a different type of government spending. Were the United States to abandon large scale military spending and the mythological perceptions which both reflect and justify it, then American imperialism would no longer pose the same kind of threat to world survival as it does today. Of course it may well be that no government will prove capable of abolishing the military-industrial complex unless it is also capable of abolishing the capitalist system itself. To argue along these lines, however, means to argue that American imperialism must continue to play out its phantasies until the triumph of socialism in the United States. Since there is no way to test this hypothesis in practice at the present time, I prefer to assume that it may be possible to gain a partial victory over imperialism, a victory which will provide both the necessary time and the necessary political climate for the task of eliminating the roots of imperialism altogether.

It is at this point that the peace movement comes in. Peace has always been an issue for the left; but it is an issue which is of special relevance to the conditions created by the existence of the modern American military-industrial complex. That dependence upon a mythological world view which makes American imperialism so dangerous also renders it extremely vulnerable to attack. In the case of Vietnam the gap between myth and reality has become so great as to arouse serious disquiet in the most unexpected places. Moreover, given the self-justifying character of American foreign policy, any critique of its effects

tends to lead into a critique of its causes. Merely by calling into question the need for American involvement in Vietnam, the peace movement acts to undermine that military establishment which is in large part responsible for the war in the first place. Merely by calling into question the reality of an "aggression from the North," the peace movement acts to discredit that doctrine of global resistance to Communist aggression in whose name the war is being fought. It is for this reason that the relatively ineffective and isolated protest against the war in Vietnam has aroused such a hysterical reaction in certain quarters. The peace movement is not yet at the point where it can have any appreciable effect upon the outcome of the war itself; but by virtue of its very existence, it has already succeeded in posing a real challenge to the ideological framework which the war is designed to sustain.

If the peace movement is to achieve any lasting gains in the struggle against imperialism, however, it must learn to translate its implicit condemnation of American foreign policy into explicit terms. It is not enough to repudiate the anti-Communist crusade in Vietnam; one must also develop a frank and comprehensive critique of the entire doctrine of global resistance to Communist aggression. It is already clear to everyone except SANE and its allies that one cannot protest the war in Vietnam in the name of a more sophisticated version of anti-Communism without thereby lending credence to the very myths which have produced that war. What is not generally understood is that Vietnam is not a special case, that the lies which are used to justify American policy today have also served to justify the policies of the last twenty years. What this means in practice is that the peace movement must make a concerted effort to demonstrate to the American people and to its own members that there is not and never was any such thing as Soviet or Chinese imperialism. It means that the peace movement must not only call for an American withdrawal from Vietnam but must also press for a complete abandonment of those global commitments which make a new Vietnam inevitable. It means, in brief, that the peace movement must launch a concerted assault upon the basic doctrines of anti-Communism as applied both at home and abroad. By refusing to meet this issue head-on some elements in the movement may assure themselves of a certain respecta-

bility, but they will have done little to counteract the policies which must eventually produce not only future Vietnams but also a world conflagration.

If such a critique of the anti-Communist mythology is to gain wide acceptance, it must be accompanied by the progressive dismantling of the economic and political foundation of the myth, the military-industrial complex. It is at this point that the real difficulties begin; for military spending and the military establishment are so closely bound up with the whole fabric of American society that many persons, even within the peace movement, have ceased to regard their abolition as a realistic goal. The workers whose jobs depend upon defense contracts, the professors whose salaries are paid by corporate grants to institutions of higher learning, the scientists whose pure research is financed by General Dynamics, all of these potential allies of the peace movement are also accomplices in the bombing of Vietnam. It is precisely this sense of involuntary complicity which underlies much of the protest against the war; but the guilt which feeds the protest also defines the limits of that protest. The reluctance of some elements in the peace movement to repudiate openly the doctrine of anti-Communism stems directly from their involvement in a system whose monstrous consequences they are—to their credit—unwilling to accept. It must also be remembered that protest is not the only way of expiating guilt, and that the same atrocities which outrage some are a source of satisfaction to others. The inability of the peace movement to expand its current base within the academic and professional middle class strongly suggests that the guilt of suburbia will not suffice to build a mass opposition to the war. If the peace movement is to transcend its present limitations, it must begin to ask itself how one creates an opposition to a system which knows how to make accomplices out of its critics.

There are no easy answers to such questions; but one point is already clear. For millions of Americans military spending means nothing but higher taxes, inflation, impoverished social services and the blood tax of the draft. Even those who may directly or indirectly benefit from military spending in one way are almost sure to be victimized in another. It is to the victims of the military establishment—not only the urban poor but also blue and white collar workers—that the peace movement must

learn to address itself if it is to build a real political base in this country. The chief obstacle to such an approach, of course, is that those who benefit least from military spending are also those who are for good reason least optimistic about the possibility of effecting any significant change in American foreign policy. Unable to exercise even the slightest control over the basic conditions which determine their lives, the victims of the war see little chance of ending the war. As many in the peace movement have already discovered, there is little point in telling people about the connection between military spending and poverty unless one is also prepared to help give them some concrete experience of acting to eliminate both the one and the other.

In the final analysis, then, the struggle for peace and against imperialism cannot succeed if it continues to be waged on a single-issue basis. Precisely because American imperialism is so deeply rooted in the whole military-industrial complex, it must be fought on the level of domestic as well as international policy. In order to draw the connection between military intervention abroad and the inability of the government to meet basic human needs at home, we must learn how to organize the victims of the war around a program which provides meaningful solutions to those needs. In order to put an end to military spending we must learn how to build a movement capable of achieving the political power to make such changes. That many in the peace movement are already aware of this necessity is apparent in the growing trend towards political action, community organization and a multi-issue approach. The whole point of the above analysis has been to show that there is nothing arbitrary or willful about this trend, that it flows from the very logic of the movement itself. Only by transcending its own immediate objectives can the peace movement hope to achieve those objectives. This is the task—and also the opportunity—which confronts us today.

SOCIALISM: THE SUSTAINING MENACE

Ronald Aronson

ROBERT WOLFE RAISES a key issue for peace activists, for radical intellectuals working towards an illuminating account of contemporary society, and, indeed, for liberals who simply oppose United States involvement in Vietnam: does the spread of socialism really endanger American capitalism? Wolfe's answer is that, in Vietnam at least, this threat is more myth than reality. But, he argues, this myth of the Red Menace is the sole *raison d'être* for the military-industrial complex whose rulers hold positions of key economic and political power. To permit a Communist victory in Vietnam would deny the very basis of this power: that a mortal threat confronts us. In order to justify its own existence, the Cold War apparatus must oppose Communism wherever it appears, no matter how slight may be the American economic stake. In reaching this conclusion Wolfe rejects those explanations which turn on either the threat of socialism to American capitalism's actual foreign economic stake, or the eventual consequences of socialist encirclement of a capitalist America.

The issue is perplexing because every explanation, taken by itself, seems compelling. Wolfe is right: a military-industrial class, whose lifeblood is Cold War mobilization, *needs* the Communist threat. Their prosperity and power, as well as that of their brethren throughout the oligarchy, seem to require the wartime economy. But American capitalism *does* have a vital

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economic stake in foreign areas, and it *does* fear the example, the precedent of successful socialist revolutions. Moreover, the Soviet Union, as a working proof of socialism's viability, *is* a threat to a depression-prone, poverty-ridden, war-generating capitalist society.

Wolfe has illuminated a single and historically very recent phase of the political economy's foreign policy needs. But in arriving there he has cast away other vital dimensions of the historical development of American foreign involvement. Thus I think his discussion is a partial, a distorted view of the Behemoth that confronts us.

What shall we do in our search for a complete explanation of the connection between American foreign policy and the spread of socialism and socialist movements? If none of the explanations is complete, shall we lump them all together? I think this would be incorrect. We certainly need a full-scale description of this Behemoth, its major needs, difficulties and tendencies. But we can see precisely how far situations like Vietnam are connected to the basic workings of the system only if we clearly grasp those basic workings.

In these pages I will try to sketch some of the lines of a fuller description of American capitalism's relationship to socialism abroad. I will try to indicate the place of those key elements, like foreign investment, which I believe Wolfe's discussion wrongly minimized. And I will sketch what I feel to be the prospects ahead for American foreign involvement. My goal is obviously not a full analysis, but a point of view on the whole. Much work has to be done, and there are many materials available to us: Marx, the theories of imperialism, Mills, Marcuse, Baran and Sweezy. Our goal, eventually, should be a theoretical model of contemporary American society which explains its basic workings, needs, contradictions and lines of development. Here I can only argue for a specific perspective for that eventual work, and present a few insights.

My major point is that the contest with socialism has become *the* decisive fact of the American political economy, the framework within which it operates. American capitalism's needs, problems and tendencies are developed and expressed in a Cold War context which affects, influences and even determines them. Communism, as the Enemy, has become a

constituent of American society which the society needs in order to keep functioning, and yet which threatens it. Such general phrases encompass the concrete and possibly conflicting dimensions of the American stake *vis-à-vis* socialism; protection of the foreign economic empire; response to the threatening example and alternative of socialism; the economic and political basis for Cold War mobilization; the attempt to keep the American people's support for capitalism; and the Cold War consciousness required for the waste consumption which helps to support the economy. Let us examine each of these areas.

II

Imperialism proper refers to the direct economic stake of the developed capitalist nations in foreign lands. As distinguished from Wolfe's all-embracing use of the term to include the Cold War apparatus, it originally meant the conquest of the markets, areas of investment and raw materials necessary to capitalism's continued growth. While other devices and tendencies have since been introduced to buoy up the economy, such as armaments spending, non-competitive pricing and massive waste consumption, the role of foreign investment has certainly not diminished in importance. Here I directly disagree with Wolfe.

If anything, the relationship of the metropolitan economy to its colonial satellites has grown more interdependent, sophisticated and complex, as Baran and Sweezy point out.[1] American capitalism must be described as an international system, and the protection of its foreign interests is a keystone of American political and military involvement overseas. The full description of American foreign policy must begin with America's economic empire.

As regards Vietnam, Wolfe rejects this position. As he indicates, the issue in Vietnam is not America's slight current stake there. But what then? Can we say that world-wide interests of American capitalism are at stake in Vietnam? Wolfe's answer is that foreign investment is only 5% of total American capital investment. Centered as it is in Europe and Latin Ameri-

1. See Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital, An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1966, ch. 7.

ca, Wolfe argues, this relatively small percentage of total investment could hardly justify the rigidity and militancy shown *everywhere* by the American government, especially in Vietnam. I think Wolfe's position here is based on a misreading of the data and a misunderstanding of the truly global character of American capitalism's stake.

First, the most telling figures indicate not the amount of American capital invested, but the percentage of total profits *drawn from* overseas—about 11%. Distinguishing developed from underdeveloped countries, the breakdown is even more striking. While less than 2% of total American capital invested, domestic and foreign, is located in underdeveloped areas, such areas pay to the United States—after re-investment of part of the earnings—a sum equal to about 8% of the total domestic after-tax corporate profits. This makes up nearly one dollar in every six paid in dividends. The profit rate in underdeveloped countries is a staggering 15%, compared with a rate of 8% in developed countries. Furthermore, this exploitation of underdeveloped countries is focused in a very specific and strategic area—raw materials. Most of this enormously profitable investment is in extractive industries, chiefly petroleum and mining, which would be difficult if not impossible to replace were these countries liberated from American exploitation.[2]

Now most of the capital invested abroad is centered in the giant corporations—45 corporations control half of American overseas investments. Just as in domestic politics, the vital needs of the handful of giant corporations are likely to become the "national interest," rather than those of the sum total of domestic businesses of all sizes. We are dealing here with the fact of power concentration: American foreign holdings are perceived as vital to the large corporations in the center of policy-making. This has been the case from the beginning of American economic expansion overseas. Corporate America has vigorously asserted control over its economic domain, ordering the military to intervene whenever and wherever its interests were affected. As today, countries were occupied, governments

2. The source of this information, the U.S. Department of Commerce's monthly *Survey of Current Business* (see the issues of August 1964 and September 1965) was suggested by a communication from John Maher—who disagrees with the conclusions drawn from the figures.

were overthrown, favorable local cliques were promoted. (In the 90 years from 1851 to 1940, over 120 instances of overseas intervention are reported by the State Department. See *Studies on the Left*, Vol. III, No. 2, "The Use of United States Armed Forces Overseas, 1851-1945.") Thus long before socialism threatened the empire, a military apparatus had been developed to assure the control of that empire by elements favorable to the needs of American corporations.

Today it is socialism that threatens this long-established domain of American capitalism. At stake in this struggle, according to Baran and Sweezy, is the international monopoly character of the major corporations. They require, more than ever, to dispose without hindrance over an enormous variety of foreign resources in order to secure their most profitable utilization. Here the threat of socialism is obvious: a successful revolution establishes a precedent for local control over local resources. The danger posed by Cuba lies in its effect on the rest of the American empire.

Wolfe rejects this notion of the *example* of Vietnam, Cuba, etc. But his disregard for the incentive and precedent offered by successful socialist revolution is hardly shared in Washington. There the fear of being proved a paper tiger seems real, and the desire to provide a terrifying example of the fate of "the new Chinese tactic" of wars of national liberation seems equally real. I would suspect that the Vietnam outcome is equally important, especially in terms of morale and confidence, to the guerrilla movements in the hills of Central and South America.

My point is that American response is not and should not be expected to be in direct proportion to the immediate stake involved in Cuba, say, or Vietnam. The long-range purpose of terror in any system of subjugation is the same: to keep the entire population in line. Terror works by example. On this level the American destruction of Vietnamese villages is intended at least as much for the peasants of Central and South America as it is for the Vietnamese villagers who support the National Liberation Front. High policy statements from Washington make it clear that American actions in Vietnam must be taken as an example of what will happen to all who rebel.

Imperialist economic interest thus remains a basic strand of American foreign policy. As we have seen, this economic stake and the military involvement stemming from it, is prior to and was originally independent of the Cold War. Whether or not Communism exists, American capitalism has always sought to protect its vital foreign interests.

At this point, with the foreign stake of key American corporate interests clearly before us, we may still dispute the role of Vietnam. Wolfe argues that American policy is marked by a rigidity everywhere, and not merely in the American economic empire proper. In a "conservative" estimate Baran and Sweezy list 14 countries plus Latin America as belonging to the American empire.[3] Cuba may be considered vital because because of its proximity both to the United States and to Latin America. But, the argument goes, why Vietnam, where the role of American investment is comparatively slight?

I think two interconnected historical developments account for this world-wide inflexibility and militancy in protecting what seems to be a less-than-world-wide empire. The first turns on the nature of American economic involvement overseas, and the second turns on the polarizing effects of the Cold War context. First, in pursuing its interests overseas, American capitalism has not required direct colonial rule of its economic empire. A wide and sophisticated variety of devices, including proprietorship through foreign-based subsidiary corporations, diplomatic pressures, CIA and USIA activities, military aid to the cooperating ruling class, and, when necessary, direct military intervention, have created the proper climate for investment. With few exceptions, American capitalism has always sought conditions favorable for American investment rather than direct colonial rule. And today the historical situation makes a widespread renewal of direct colonial control unthinkable.

Thus the subtle and indirect character of many of its forms of control make American capitalism's empire an invisible one. Without overt American political control, actual control over a country is always a matter of degree, subject to shifting local of the original role of American capitalism's holdings there, and

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

political situations and the success of various manipulative tactics. This character of the American overseas stake means that all "Free World" nations belong in some degree to the American empire. This very lack of boundaries extends rather than diminishes the defense perimeter of American capitalism. If almost every country is a partial member, all must be "protected." Brazil's status, for example, is quantitatively, not qualitatively, different from Vietnam's in spite of the more extensive American investments there. Where American control is indirect it is also more fragile. The example of the successful defection of a country with slight American investments threatens those areas under more direct control. The invisible nature of the empire, therefore, makes it necessary to provide a firm, unmistakable example of American intentions towards all who rebel, regardless of the size of the American stake.

The notion of the "Free World" makes clear this all-embracing commitment to defend American capitalism everywhere. But it does this with reference to the second element determining the world-wide character of American involvement, the Cold War. The role of the Cold War in American society will be discussed further below. We may say here, however, that the specific threats to the American network of control and influence have become Communist-oriented national liberation movements. The American empire is at stake against its alternative, Communism. The recent Cold War polarization of political forces throughout the world has wedded the defense of the American empire to the struggle against socialism. This polarization leaves only two sharply different alternatives for colonial peoples: continued domination and stagnation under capitalism, or economic development under some form of socialism. All forces struggling to throw off foreign economic domination must increasingly look towards a national liberation movement whose goal is socialism; Cold War polarization permits no more moderate solution. In this context, a victory for one is a defeat for the other: a successful Communist-oriented revolution in areas *not* under American hegemony and economic control still spreads the example of socialism. Regardless of direct economic stake, then, the defense perimeter of the American empire has extended to the entire non-socialist world.

III

Since the Cold War began, foreign intervention on behalf of the economic interests outlined above has been consistently justified by the "danger of Communism." But Cold War mobilization was not originally rooted in those specific interests: it represents a new and different stage in the development of American foreign involvement. The military-industrial elements most directly served by Cold War mobilization are not those most interested in foreign economic exploitation; the Cold War itself occupies a place in the development of American capitalism initially quite distinct from that of American imperialism.

Certainly the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan encompassed areas in which American investments are today enormous, and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe withdrew other areas from investment. But this division of Europe had been accepted by the major powers long before the Cold War began. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were simply attempts to secure those capitalist spheres of influence, already conceded by Stalin, from indigenous Communist movements. Seen as American capitalism's response to the post-war threat of Communism, these policies hardly required American mobilization against the Soviet Union.

But if Cold War mobilization was not an attempt to regain lost areas and protect threatened ones, it clearly served other more visible needs. The old Marxian notion that foreign wars are projections outward of internal contradictions and class conflicts may illuminate these needs. This notion appears obscure to us because class conflict seems to have vanished from the United States, and because the contradictions of the economic system seem to be so neatly contained. But that of course is just the point: the Cold War mobilization has been so successful as to disguise its function.

To recall the Great Depression puts the matter in a clearer light. In 1939, immediately before mobilization began for World War II, one-sixth of the labor force was unemployed, nearly 30% of industrial capacity unused. The Great Depression had not yet stimulated a social revolution in the United States, but the economy had found no solution to its malfunctioning. American capitalism continued to limp along. Demands for social

reform continued to come from a growing, militant working-class movement. On the other hand, the Soviet Union demonstrated that a rational economy was possible under socialism.

Only the war ended the stagnation of the economy, returning it to full employment and productivity. Without war, American capitalism was a system unable to overcome its own structural malfunctioning, which generated a potentially large internal opposition, and which had before it the working example of a rational alternative. After the war the unresolved structural threat of returning to stagnation and mass unemployment, plus the visible extension of the alternative, socialism, to vast new areas, provided the basis for transferring the threat from within to without. If it had not united against this external threat, the system's own internal dynamic, contained during the war, might well have resumed after the post-war boom cycle subsided.

The system, then, *was* threatened. Was it threatened by the Soviet Union? Although it posed no military threat, the Soviet Union certainly embodied the alternative to a structurally faulty capitalism. Capitalism's own malfunctioning was the real threat, and socialism the visible embodiment of that threat. The institutional response was obvious: unite all forces against that external embodiment.

The Cold War, then, was quite an understandable course, given the developed interests in wartime mobilization, the threat of the Great Depression, and the presence of socialism. Mobilizing against the Soviet Union helped to contain the threats to the system. The economic fruits are obvious: assured demand at assured profits for the specific interests in armaments research and production, and a powerful stimulant to demand and production throughout the economy. The political consequences of the situation are also obvious. Owing to the "threat of Communism" a far-reaching "national interest" is proclaimed which absorbs class differences and overt political struggles. The remaining internal opposition is identified with the external Enemy. The existence of Communism abroad permitted both the suppression of the system's malfunctioning and the suppression of the alternatives implied by that malfunctioning. The system was rescued from the potential threat of socialism at home. Capitalism's Enemy became its deliverer.

We can now see Wolfe's point more clearly: the Vietnamese involvement is to be explained by referring to the domestic stake in continued Cold War mobilization, to military-industrial interests which have their own need to "overprotect" their brothers' foreign empire. But even aside from the question of the American overseas economic stake, I disagree with Wolfe here. He empasizes a specific class, with specific interests in mobilization which are not necessarily shared by the remainder of the oligarchy. Thus he can conceive of an American capitalism purged of its Cold War apparatus. I think he arrives at such utopian hopes by failing to examine the stake in the Cold War of the entire oligarchy. I have argued above that the political economy as a whole has come to need Communism as the Enemy, for without mobilizing against that Enemy, the system's own threatening dynamic would be resumed. Real needs, and not mythical ones, are at stake, although, as Wolfe points out, those needs can only be served by erecting the colossal myth of the Communist military threat. Certainly specific military-industrial interests have come to depend most immediately on mobilization; they direct it and live entirely by it. But in spite of their more militant ideology and their more distorted perception of reality, they serve the interests of the oligarchy in general. That, after all, is the reason for their position and power. Their immediate interests may well diverge from those of other sectors of the oligarchy, but this does not cancel American capitalism's basic stake in the Cold War.

IV

I have said that by casting the threat outward and mobilizing against the Soviet Union, American capitalism has managed to preserve itself intact, to contain its own internal dynamic of boom and depression. Thus the system's irrationality leads it to a bizarre solution: *American capitalism now requires the existence of Communism.* But on the other hand, as I have tried to show, foreign economic interests are vital to the stability of American capitalism, and they must therefore be protected. There are here two major strands of American foreign involvement, stemming originally from the needs of different periods in the development of American capitalism, and most directly benefiting different corporate sectors.

If imperialist and Cold War interests nevertheless emphasized different dimensions, the recent challenge to capitalism from pro-Communist movements in the colonial world has made possible their amalgamation. The chief threats to American imperialism were once posed by other imperialist powers, such as Japan, or by nationalist leaders, such as Mossadegh or Nasser. Today the chief threats are Communist-oriented national liberation movements. The original Enemy of the military-industrial complex was Soviet Communism: it is now guerrilla nationalism-Communism. The Communism which threatens vital imperialist interests also justifies the new "counter-insurgency" direction of Cold War mobilization. In Santo Domingo, Vietnam, Cuba and the Congo, the vital needs of both interests coalesce. The direct military threat of the Soviet Union was a myth: the threat to American business in Vietnam is actual.

This suggests that American capitalism, far from being stabilized and consolidated, has yet to face its sharpest threats. While the pseudo-threat of the Red Army was compatible with nuclear sabre-rattling and big-power diplomacy, the actual threat to America's foreign empire is not easily defeated. Diplomatic chess games and the threat of annihilation cannot stop the revolution in Vietnam, just as it could not stop the revolution in Cuba. In each case American intervention only intensifies the movements. Bombing the North and genocide in the South, incredible political maneuvering among the local military cliques, and plans for "social revolution" drawn up by the United States State Department—these are frantic castings about for an answer. But no answer has yet been found. Because it is uncontrollable, this threat to American capitalism is all the greater.

Contrast the uncontrollable stituation in Vietnam with the litany of State Department liberals: the long-range interests of American security and economic stability can best be served by promoting rapid economic development, parliamentary democracy and the growth of a middle class. Popular revolutions must be accepted when they are inevitable, treated gently and even subsidized, in order to counteract their most radical tendencies. Partial nationalization must be permitted, as in Mexico. In the light of the current Latin American counter-revolution, of Cuba,

the Congo, Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, it is grimly ironic to rehearse these prescriptions. For the opposite is actual American policy everywhere. James O'Connor has listed the new forms of United States imperialism in Latin America in *Studies on the Left,* Vol. IV, No. 4. Although as O'Connor points out, "the counter-revolution has grasped the initiative and intends to retain it at nearly any cost," this policy hardly serves the long-range economic interests of American capitalism. For that, intense economic development and a loosening of class structure would be necessary: but the Alliance for Reaction can hardly be expected to benefit the Latin American peasant. The short-term prospect may be more profits and more repression, but the long-term prospect under such conditions can only be ever more furious, ever more violent revolution.

Certainly this deviation of the immediately secure but ultimately threatening real policy from the liberal ideal is rooted in the balance of actual forces at play. I would add one further element to those which restrict American options and make a more "enlightened" policy inconceivable: the Cold War itself.

Obviously if anyone is to formulate and carry out a policy whose long-range goal is to protect American interests, it cannot be the corporations themselves. Their response when confronted by any threat is to call for government military intervention to protect their immediate interests. A more intelligent and foresighted course must come from elsewhere. This is what happened in the New Deal: the government assumed the role of protecting those long-range interests which the majority of capitalists were incapable of protecting, and often understanding, because of their own fixation on their immediate interests.

A more sophisticated colonial policy must thus come from elsewhere than the colonialists themselves. But can a government whose entire orientation is to sustain and promote the Cold War abandon its Cold War responses and categories upon approaching the colonial world? In fact it cannot: the Cold War apparatus, whose insight into the colonial peoples cannot reach beyond defining them as *personnel* and their homes as *structures,* plus the immediate needs of business interests, make a rigid posture all but inevitable. Here I think is the place of Wolfe's major point—that the military-industrial

apparatus does seek a policy which justifies itself, for its existence and pressure limit the options actually available to the government. Of course this is only possible insofar as the government itself and all the interests it represents remain committed to the Cold War and perceive reality according to its categories. And now that the Cold War against socialism has become amalgamated with the defense of the empire, now that Communism does directly threaten vital national interests, no voice of sanity —representing capitalism's own long-range interests—will be heard. There is no sphere in ruling circles from which it can come. Having created the Cold War to sustain itself, American capitalism must move within the narrowing space of its own political and conceptual trap—eliminating the slight chance for a more foresighted policy.

Repressive and manipulative techniques carry a clear message to the colonial peoples: meaningful change can come only through revolution. And given the Cold War polarization of political forces, that revolution has no choice but to align with the Communist camp. American capitalism leaves no alternatives.

While temporary stability may be won (see the O'Connor article mentioned earlier), the long-range prospects have barely begun to show themselves. American landings, CIA-installed governments, support for the most reactionary and despised elements: the American response re-creates those conditions of foreign occupation under which the wartime resistance movements flourished. American capitalism is creating the need abroad for violent and bloody revolution. Through the New Deal reforms and the Cold War it has contained the dynamic which would generate its own gravediggers at home. But its gravediggers are being created by its own operation—in the colonial world. Having shifted its contradictions overseas through imperialism and the Cold War, it has also shifted the class struggle there. Its various props and devices have only succeeded in postponing that struggle.

V

I have argued so far that American capitalism's dynamic and problems have been decisively shifted overseas through the struggle against socialism. This suggests that basic domestic

problems are at an end, that the American people have become tied to the system, and that their support in this struggle may be taken for granted. But the struggle is, at least in part, *for* the support of the American people. At a time of post-war prosperity and comparative Soviet poverty and tyranny it was relatively easy to create popular support for mobilization—without the actual sacrifices of war—against the apparent foreign designs of the Red Army. But it will be far more difficult to sustain popular support for the actual sacrifices involved in counter-revolutionary wars against whole peoples, especially as socialism, exemplified by the Soviet Union, grows more attractive and less frightening.

There is already difficulty in sustaining public support for the war in Vietnam. Although capitalism's stake is not obvious, it is clear that American soldiers are dying to sustain a right-wing military clique. Only the right wing at home considers this war anything but a regrettable burden whose purpose is unclear. Thus, to disguise the real imperial interest at stake and to promote popular support for the war, an external enemy must be located which seeks, in line with Cold War rhetoric, to "conquer" South Vietnam. To prevent erosion of popular support, the would-be foreign conquerer of the South Vietnamese people must be attacked: first North Vietnam, and then perhaps China. Here I think Wolfe's discussion is most insightful, pointing as it does to the domestic need, as well as the more questionable military need, to attack North Vietnam. The split developing in Washington around the war indicates that the government has failed to deceive at least some of the liberals that its stated goals are its real goals. As the war draws on without any improvement in the American position the problem of support will probably grow acute.

We are talking here about the problem involved in sustaining the identification of interest of rulers and ruled in fighting colonial wars. In fact this identification came about only through wartime mobilization and has been consolidated only through the Cold War. It presents difficulties on a completely different level: the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

I have suggested that the Soviet Union was and is an actual

threat to American capitalism because it pointed to a rational, working alternative to the chaos and inequity of the American economic system. The consequence of this is relevant at this point: by making the Soviet Union into the Enemy, thereby creating the basis for suspending any possible class struggle at home, American capitalism took on the burden of its challenge. It must outperform socialism.

The Cold War message to the American working class is twofold: you are threatened by an evil and ruthless tyranny which seeks to conquer you and destroy everything you value. Not only is it a menace, but socialism, embodied in the Soviet Union, offers a far inferior form of life than American capitalism. This is central to its very nature as menace. In mobilizing against socialism, then, American capitalism takes on two burdens: to defend itself against the real and supposed threats; and to convince its people that it is the superior society. As the rulers of East Germany and South Korea know, a freer and more prosperous alternative is a vital danger.

This is the point: the Soviet Union, as the Enemy, *must not* become the superior society. Having organized itself against Communism, having made the invidious comparison with Communism central to its public support, American capitalism is endangered if Communism does prove to offer a superior way of life. A system not organized against an Enemy may be able to withstand unfavorable comparison. But the *raison d'être* of American capitalism in the Cold War is its superiority to Communism: to fall behind is to endanger the domestic consensus based on the menace and inferiority of the Enemy.

But in thus projecting its problems onto the international scene, American capitalism has in one important sense placed them beyond its control. For the Soviet Union is itself developing. American militancy can force continued mobilization of the Soviet Union and thus hinder the full productivity of a more rational economy, but it can not basically control Soviet development. Soviet growth demands American growth. Its successes demand American successes. Its progress towards elimination of poverty demands an American attack on poverty. From this point of view the competition with the Soviet Union can be seen to be one spur behind many domestic reforms.

But peaceful competition favors the most rationally organ-

ized system—the Soviet Union. By staking its domestic support on its alleged superiority over the Soviet Union, American capitalism has placed its future on a very precarious footing. If and when the Soviet Union does produce more, demand fewer hours of work, offer a freer and better life, as Isaac Deutscher has pointed out in *The Great Contest,* the alternatives available to the American oligarchy may be only two—the rational one of drastic changes at home, or the irrational one of nuclear war.

In connection with this Cold War competition, the American government's need to convince the public that its foreign wars are intended to defend freedom against Communism will restrict its ability to suppress dissent against those wars. Cold War justification of counter-revolutionary wars will necessarily limit the fascistic tendencies of American politics. "Freedom" must be sold to the American people as the reason for their sacrifices. Otherwise the very propaganda basis for what is at heart an economic struggle will be cut from under it. Thus there are very real difficulties involved in maintaining support for a long series of counter-revolutionary wars. Opposition will probably have to be tolerated, but counter-revolutionary wars are long wars. The base of public support will likely dwindle unless the wars are continually expanded. In this respect as well, then, the long-range alternatives facing American policy-makers are narrow and unencouraging.

If its intense struggle with socialism reveals American capitalism's problems in keeping the support of the American people, this competition also serves American capitalism well in relation to the demands it must make on that public! The economic system has come to require that the American people consume enormous quantities of goods far beyond their actual needs for physical and psychological well-being. A key new dimension has been added to the economy since the onset of the Cold War: the need to produce and consume waste. To this end, individuals' vital needs do not suffice, they must be induced to *believe* they need things which stunt rather than promote their development, which provide socially acceptable forms of consolation rather than well-being, which violate all rational standards of use, durability and production. These things must

be the very goods that the system turns out in great quantities, and at sufficiently high profits. We enter here a basic problem in the critique of American society, one at the heart of many liberal-radical disputes (see the Gans-Weinstein-Lynd exchange, *Studies on the Left*, Vol. VI, No. 1): who is to say what individuals *really* need?

The key, I think, is that life-patterns and life-commitments develop in relation to the actually available alternatives. Where no alternatives are available, individuals may freely choose a life of senseless labor and spiralling waste consumption. As Herbert Marcuse has pointed out, where meaningful alternatives are rigorously excluded, the subjective feeling of freedom may well coincide with actual enslavement. The basic question to ask in determining whether free choice has any content is, what are the alternatives?

This helps to illuminate the relationship between the Cold War and waste consumption as a needed prop of contemporary American capitalism. My point is that a one-dimensional consciousness, in Herbert Marcuse's term, is necessary to waste consumption, a consciousness which has no alternative before it but continued expansion of the same style of life. And the Cold War, in terms of its effect on consciousness, is precisely mobilization against any alternative. In however distorted a form it may take in the Soviet Union, socialism *is* the alternative form of society, and the Cold War has made it into the Enemy. To foreclose the alternative form of society, as the Cold War has done, is to foreclose meaningful alternatives for consciousness. Social change is excluded, and a society is created whose goal is larger and larger quantities of itself. Individuals succumb to it not because they want to, not because they approve, but because they have no alternative towards which to orient themselves. Thus they direct themselves, however cynically, at the accepted goals of American society—to buy beyond their needs—to the great benefit of American capitalism.

If a class struggle existed *within* American society rather than having been projected out onto the international scene, it would pose the goal of socialism, of another, a humane way of life. This massive waste production would then be impossible. Choices and possible commitments would exist which are now unavailable. Other standards for evaluation would exist than

the self-validating ones of American capitalism itself. The unsatisfying and irrational nature of the American style of life is intelligible only if measured in terms of something else. But the Cold War eliminates the internal opposition which would make this possible, and tabooes the alternative. Thus the struggle against socialism is basic to the ever-expanding waste production of American capitalism.

VI

What emerges from this discussion is the tremendous dependence of American capitalism on the struggle against socialism. On the one hand the system *needs* this struggle, has organized itself around it and won stability through it. On the other hand the struggle is beyond control. American capitalism seems unable to prevent itself from generating the conditions for revolution throughout its empire. And, having pitted itself against the Soviet Union, it faces possible Soviet developments in productivity and the reduction of the working day which it may be incapable of equalling. The most vital wars, counter-revolutionary ones, do not lend themselves to the ready use of Cold War rhetoric to maintain popular support; yet the professed commitment to freedom required for public support makes it difficult to suppress the opposition to those wars at home.

Being dependent on and yet threatened by socialism, American capitalism is far from being the firmly entrenched, stable Behemoth we are accustomed to see it as. It is already in trouble, and the trouble will grow. What matters is the long-range perspective, not the immediate containment of its malfunctioning, of colonial revolution, of the prospects for an internal opposition movement. The system is not stable, but fragile, for it depends on a dynamic beyond its control.

Thus, while I agree with Robert Wolfe that the key thrust of political organizing should be to combat anti-Communism, I think that to do so is to attack more than the prop holding up a specific sector of the ruling class. It is to do no less than attack the whole. If successful, the attack on anti-Communism will become a revolution. The present conditions for such success are slight, but in the long range, I believe we have every reason to hope.