

THE
MEANING
OF
MACARTHUR

Letter to a Friend

by

Earl Browder

Price 10c. per copy

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Dear Joe;

You ask me what I think of the MacArthur jamboree. I can best answer you by first criticizing the current interpretation accepted by the left wing circles. For this purpose I pick the most literate of those who adopt the orthodox (which has come to mean doctrinaire) line, namely, the lead editorial in MONTHLY REVIEW, issue of June, 1951 (Vol.3 No.2). Here in 12 pages, the "independent socialist magazine" gives in sophisticated form the same view handed out as crude edicts in the DAILY WORKER.

The first paragraph speculates on MacArthur's motives in provoking his own dismissal. It surmises that "he might have believed that he could get away with it" and eventually "carry out his plans to attack China." Or perhaps he welcomed the dismissal as an opportunity to bid for power at home. Or he might have been indifferent as to which happened.

In the second paragraph, while affirming that this speculative problem is interesting, it admits "it is not a question of great importance." What is "much more important", it says, is "the identity, strength, degree of organization and so on, of his aids and accomplices inside the United States." But about this, also, it concludes that "nothing of a solid factual nature seems as yet to have

come to light." Therefore "there is little point in adding to the already over-inflated volume of conjecture and theorizing."

It concludes this introductory approach with the statement that "the facts that we do know are sufficiently worthy of attention and analysis", and that "those facts are ominous and pregnant with evil." These facts it sums up as denoting "an alarming degree of receptivity" to the MacArthur line, indicating that "probably for the first time in the history of the United States, Caesarism is a real danger."

The editorial then continues what appears as a method of negating its own logical steps as they are taken, by deflating MacArthur's role in this rise of Caesarism: "The chances are poor", it says, "that he will be able to attract the broad ruling-class backing that a successful Caesar must have." Ambitions of others to be Caesar arise. "The most eligible candidate, of course, is Eisenhower." Thus in two pages has the "meaning of MacArthur" been transformed into the "meaning of Eisenhower." Ike has been slipped into the toga intended for Mac.

The abrupt substitution of one Caesar for another causes our editors to take second thought, and so they abandon Caesarism, or at least deflate it: "It may well be", they meditate, "that the sudden upsurge of Caesarism will prove abortive."

After all these logical operations, which seem to apply the principle of "negation of the negation", our editors show us that from each step a residue has been saved. What remains

is: "The growth of the importance and authority of the military.....deeply rooted in the present situation as a whole." "If and when this domination is thoroughly consolidated, the United States will be to all intents and purposes a fascist nation." It is "the gradual unfolding of the specifically American form of fascism."

This profound historical judgement emerges from a little more than 4 pages, of which we have quoted the high points. By raising one speculation after another, rejecting the earlier and more immediate in favor of the later and more remote, it saves a residue from each one of them which forms the conclusion--that America is being transformed before our eyes into a military fascism, and that this is the broad over-all "meaning of MacArthur", of the "great debate" in the Congressional hearings.

"Let us now turn", as our editors say, "to the other face of the MacArthur affair, its implications for war and peace."

In the remaining 7½ pages, attention is confined to marshalling quotations to support the conclusion that the issue being debated, the "difference" between MacArthur and his partisans on one hand and the Truman administration on the other, "is merely a matter of timing. Both policies lead to the same result." It sums up the whole argument in these words:

"MacArthur would expand the war--today. The administration would wait until next year or the year after.....

"That, in a nutshell, is the lesson of the MacArthur affair."

Naive readers of this learned treatise will doubtless "feel caught in the grip of forces over which they have no control and which are hurrying them on to some terrible fate." Those are the words which our editors used earlier in their opus to describe and complain about as a "deep national malaise" of America. The editorial fully shares and helps to spread this disease of feelings of impotence which they ascribe to the nation as a whole. For indeed if their judgement of "the meaning of MacArthur" is even a rough approximation of reality, then there is nothing to give the smallest ground for believing that World War III can be avoided. If it is valid, one can only choose between wailing about the impending doom or concentrating all attention on what to do under the conditions of a general atomic-electronic-biologic war, the "final conflict."

It must be admitted that our editors might have brought forward current quotations from some authorities greater than themselves to buttress this view. For example, a pamphlet just come from China sees the current task of "the people's democratic forces...especially those in the United States" as being to "rise up and overthrow the rule of their monopoly capitalists, abolish the imperialist domestic and foreign policies of their countries and carry out proletarian socialist domestic and national policies." ("Internationalism and Nationalism" by Liu Shao-chi, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, pp.33-34). But we really must not look to China for a definition of the historical task of the American workingclass at this moment of history. True, the proletarian socialist revolution in America may emerge from World War III, but it is the wildest unreality to expect it to prevent that war.

The facts are, however, not merely "ominous and pregnant with evil", to use the sonorous phrase of our editors. They are also "pregnant" with a lot of other things not so evil, and some of them quite promising. The birth to follow this "pregnancy" will not be a single one to be described by any such term as "evil"; it will be a multiple birth of all sorts of creatures. But any serious effort to estimate what will emerge from this crisis requires us to stop playing around with vague phrases and symbols such as "ominous", "pregnant", and "evil".

The bald truth is that the MONTHLY REVIEW editors have thrown not light but twilight over the "meaning of MacArthur". One could explain their failure as the natural product of a method made up of syllogisms, vague historical parallels, and doctrinaire formulae borrowed from here and there, even from Marx--in short, the method of eclecticism. Or from another angle, it may be explained as the result of a fetichism of words, of exclusive pre-occupation with "ideology" as contrasted with facts, of the hypnotism of phrases.

How is a sound judgement to be made, first of all, as to whether the split in the American bourgeoisie revealed in the MacArthur vs. Truman debate is a deep and growing one, with far-reaching historical consequences, which will have to be fought to a decision, or if it is merely a typical "family quarrel" which will be patched up and forgotten by tomorrow--"merely a matter of timing"?

Our editors decide the question by examining the aims and ideology of the two sides to the debate. Since they find a broad and imposing identity between the two sides, rooted in past history,

they conclude that the differences are negligible, mere details, in which both policies add up to the same result.

The fallacy, the shallowness, the unsoundness of this whole method of thinking, may be sufficiently exposed simply by transplanting ourselves, in our imagination, to former historical situations and ask ourselves what value this method would have to enable us to understand what was happening.

Imagine, for example, we are in the Boston or Philadelphia of the early 1770s, without any knowledge of later American history, and dependent as to the future of our country upon our judgement of the words and ideology of leading statesmen, publicists, newspapers, etc. It was the eve of the American Revolution, but we would find it impossible to understand that on the basis of the ideas publicly expressed by the very men who were going to lead that Revolution in a few months. One and all were loyal subjects of their Sovereign, King George, and the institution of Empire, and missed few opportunities to take "loyalty oaths". The ideology of the Colonial leaders was broadly identical with that of the ruling class of England. American ideology changed as a result of the Revolution; but the Revolution owed but a minimum to previous changes in American ideology. The debates that led up to the Revolution were not clashes of hostile ideologies; they were disputes on the interpretation of facts in the light of a common ideology. Guided by the method used by our editors in seeking "the meaning of MacArthur", we would conclude of those debates that "both policies lead to the same result", and that American independence was the idle dream of a few utopians.

Permitting our imagination to carry us to the France of the early 1790s, we would find ourselves in the opening scenes of the French Revolution. Since again we did not bring history books with us, but only the method of our editors, we turn to the study of public debates, ideas and aims of the leading figures who are desperately fighting among themselves over "trifles", although they share an imposing body of thought and culture. Under such conditions we might well conclude that the times are "ominous and pregnant with evil", but we could not possibly understand that we were taking part in the opening scenes of the greatest liberating revolution in the history of Europe up to that time. We would dismiss the debates as unreal--"both policies lead to the same results."

Jumping to Central Europe and the times of Martin Luther, we study his debates with the Vatican and conclude that Luther is more papist than the Pope himself, that the whole polemic is a matter of splitting hairs, and therefore of course--"both policies lead to the same results."

Great historical readjustments in the social relationships of men usually begin in small and "insignificant" matters, so far as their expression in ideas is concerned. New ideas that are being born lag far behind the new facts and struggles that give them birth. The struggles arise against a background of inherited agreement and identity in the world of ideas common to both sides of the struggle. On the surface the disputes appear to have no deeper meaning than that of millions and billions of other quarrels that have been easily compromised and adjusted. Ideological forms of the first stages of such great historical movements rarely achieve much clarity, except after the ev-

ent and in the fires of the wars which settled them; they were deeply understood only after years of study had revealed the decisive factors that were but were little-known at the time of history's turn, especially economic factors. This rule particularly applies in the development of bourgeois society; the first great exception was the Russian Revolution which was given an unparalleled self-consciousness by Lenin.

This lesson of history may be brought closer to our own times by remembering the first years of F. D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" leadership of America. The first phase of the New Deal, in its ideological aspects, was fundamentally indistinguishable from the contemporary phase of German development under Hitler. Not only was it permeated with a parallel ideology (the cult of the leader ruling by edict), but it produced similar policies (autarkie, managed economy, governmentally fostered trustification, public works, corporatism in the NRA industrial codes, etc.). With the same dogmatic certainty with which the MONTHLY REVIEW editors make judgement on an identity of tendency between MacArthur and Truman, it was possible in 1935 to equallize Roosevelt and the "Liberty League", or even Roosevelt and Hitler and to conclude that "if and when it" (the New Deal) "is thoroughly consolidated, the United States will be to all intents and purposes a fascist nation", and that we were then witnessing "the gradual unfolding of the specifically American form of fascism."

If the American left wing in 1935 had followed this sort of logic (which is only a sophisticated and intellectualized version of the logic of W. Z. Foster that has dominated the

Communist Party since 1945), it would have blundered into the political blind-alley of proclaiming "a plague on both your houses." Fortunately, the left wing avoided that error in 1935, and sharply and clearly took up the banner of struggle against the "Liberty League" without mumbling a lot of qualifying phrases equalizing it with the New Deal. Thereby was laid the foundation for left-wing coalition with the Roosevelt forces which from that time (except for the interruption of 1939-1941, the period of confusion and "phony war") lasted until Roosevelt's death, until the defeat of Hitler had been guaranteed.

The correct and successful line adopted by the left wing in 1935, may be generalized as one of unconditional hostility to the camp of extreme reaction, and an offer to the centrist groupings of joint struggle against it, directed toward deepening the divisions between extreme reaction and the centre and to split them as irrevocably as possible, and not under any circumstances to belittle their differences and to unite them. This policy of the left wing from 1935 to 1945, was indispensable in order to fully unfold the progressive potentialities of the Roosevelt period; if the left wing said "a plague on both your houses", it would thereby have forced an early compromise and eventual capitulation of the Roosevelt camp before domestic and international reaction; that would have changed the whole course of world history for the worse.

Considerations such as these should be sufficient to warn us away from such facile and simplified judgements about "the meaning of MacArthur" as those which the MONTHLY REVIEW editors made.

All of which is not to say, of course, that the analogy between those 1935 events and the Mac Arthur putsch today is sufficient to tell us the "meaning of MacArthur". Not at all. It is sufficient only to dispose of the answer given by the MONTHLY REVIEW editors and similar ones current in leftwing circles generally. A scientifically sound approach to a positive judgement must needs rely upon neither a comparison of ideologies nor historical parallels. It must seek facts which are independent of ideologies, strong enough to force changes in policy despite all ideological resistance; and it must look for these facts among the NEW THINGS hitherto unrecognized, rather than in the long-established scheme of things.

What is the most decisive NEW FACT in the world today, hitherto unrecognized, which, when thrust into the center of the disputes of the Mac Arthur hearings, begins to throw real light upon them and to disclose a new historical trend?

Unquestionably this NEW FACT, only now forcing its way into general recognition, is the NEW RELATION OF FORCES among the great powers of the world. America has enormously increased her power both absolutely and relatively within the capitalist sector of the world, and now overshadows and dominates all other powers within this orbit; but the capitalist sector of the world has shrunk and declined in power in relation to the socialist sector and its allies, organized under the leadership of the U.S.S.R. This new relationship between the two major divisions of the world--summed up and symbolized by the U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. relation--is such that neither side can hold a realistic expectation of settling matters with its rival by military means.

A military settlement of the antagonism between the capitalist and socialist sectors of the world has become impossible, if only for the reason that the destructiveness of weapons and the relative balance of their distribution between the two sides, creates the guarantee of mutual destruction to the point of exhaustion far short of any possible victory of either side.

This FACT is not directly posed in the Congressional hearings on the MacArthur case. It is, nevertheless, the pivot around which the whole debate swings. This is not the first debate in history in which what is not said carries greater weight than what is said.

The MacArthur-Truman split is an expression of a split in the decisive circles of the American bourgeoisie of the most far-reaching consequence. It is not a split of ideology or aim; it is quite simply over the issue of recognition or non-recognition of the military stalemate on a world scale.

The split is none-the-less profound for lacking any clear ideological form in this early stage. The ideology lags behind as it always has in past history. The "identity" of ideology of the two sides is not absolute, and it is grossly exaggerated by all who take the position of the MONTHLY REVIEW editors. But even if it were an absolute identity, the single difference in recognition of this fact would soon give birth to two sharply antagonistic trends of ideas. Short of a general recognition of this decisive fact, no healing of the split is possible.

The most cursory reading of the Congressional hearings, censored as they are of the most signi-

ficant military considerations, is sufficient to disclosely clearly this central issue of the debate, once one is conscious of it. All the painstakingly marshalled evidence to prove the ideological unity of the two sides is only "love's labor lost" because it is quite irrelevant. It merely proves that both sides are bourgeois and imperialist--which might be taken for granted, it would seem. The only quotations from the debate that make any sense out of it are those which show the Truman administration trying to force consideration of THE FACT that the U.S.S.R. and its allies cannot be defeated by military means, and the critics of the administration led by MacArthur either ignoring or denying the FACT.

"That, in a nutshell, is the lesson of the MacArthur affair."

The debate about MacArthur represents, quite simply stated, a return after six years of detour and experiment with all possible alternatives, to the point where Roosevelt left America when he died, that is, to the point of recognition that everything depends upon finding the path of co-existence without war in a single world of the capitalist and socialist systems.

Roosevelt had recognized this fact early in the course of World War II, and upon this recognition had shaped the policies that won the war. It was, in all probability, the discovery and use of the atom-bomb and the intoxication springing from the illusion of monopoly over this tremendous new force, that caused America to forget so quickly and thoroughly the wisdom of Roosevelt after his death. The policy of "get-tough-with-the-world" that sprouted from this illusion is now reaching its predestined dead-end. American foreign policy must readjust itself again to the reality.

The first big efforts in that direction are taking place in the MacArthur hearings. Looked at from the viewpoint of ideas and reason as the guide to policy for our country and the world, the picture is one of confusion to the point of chaos. But when viewed from the angle that it is the facts of world development which guide the changing course of ideas, with ideas lagging behind the facts with considerable stubbornness, then the picture makes a lot more sense. It indicates the possibility that World War III may in fact be avoided, and it throws a brilliant light on the problem of what ordinary men and women might do to throw the balance in that direction.

Whether the possibility of peace is realized depends upon men and women to whom facts are more important and decisive than doctrine--on both sides of the great world-division.

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Well, that is enough for one letter. It may be necessary to discuss the issue more deeply before many months have gone by.

Sincerely yours

Earl Browder.

June 6, 1951.