

JOHN DEWEY

THE MIDDLE WORKS, 1899-1924

Volume 10: 1916-1917

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With an Introduction by Lewis E. Hahn*

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The Middle Works, 1899-1924

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victims. But the fact that the merely good, the merely conscientious, are the victims in every social crisis should lead us to inquire whether they are not the victims of moral futility. If at a critical juncture the moving force of events is always too much for conscience, the remedy is not to deplore the wickedness of those who manipulate events. Such a conscience is largely self-conceit. The remedy is to connect conscience with the forces that are moving in another direction. Then will conscience itself have compulsive power instead of being forever the martyred and the coerced.

THE FUTURE OF PACIFISM

There is no paradox in the fact that the American people is profoundly pacifist and yet highly impatient of the present activities of many professed or professional pacifists. The disposition to call the latter pro-German and to move for their suppression is an easy way of expressing a sense of the untimely character of their moves at the present juncture. But the war will pass, and the future of the profound American desire for peace, for amity, for unhampered and prosperous intercourse, is a topic which is intimately connected with the war itself. For upon its constant consideration depends whether the impulse to a better ordered world which reconciled America to war shall find satisfaction or meet frustration. And I know no better way to introduce the subject than a consideration of the failure of the pacifist propaganda to determine finally the course of a nation which was converted to pacifism in advance.

The explanation, I take it, is that it takes two to make peace as well as to make war; or, as the present situation abundantly testifies, a much larger number than two. He was a poor judge of politics who did not know from the very day of the *Lusitania* message—or at all events from that of the *Sussex* message—that the entrance of the United States into the war depended upon the action of Germany. Any other notion was totally inconsistent with any belief in President Wilson's sincerity; it imputed to him an almost inconceivable levity in a time when seriousness was the chief need. Those who voted for him for President on the ground that he "kept us out of war" and who felt aggrieved when we got into war have only themselves to blame. He had unmistakably plotted a line which led inevitably to conflict with Germany in case

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the latter should take the course which she finally adopted.

This indictment of professional pacifism for futile gesturing may seem to rest upon acceptance of the belief in the political omnipotence of the executive; it may seem to imply the belief that his original step committed the nation irretrievably. Such an inference, however, is merely formal. It overlooks the material fact that President Wilson's action had the sanction of the country. I will not enter into the question of legal neutrality, but morally neutral the country never was, and probably the only stupid thing President Wilson did was to suppose, in his early proclamation, that it could be. And this brings us back to the basic fact that in a world organized for war there are as yet no political mechanisms which enable a nation with warm sympathies to make them effective, save through military participation. It is, again, an instinctive perception of this fact which encourages the idea that pacifists who do not support the war must be pro-German at heart.

The best statement which I have seen made of the pacifist position since we entered the war is that of Miss Addams. She earnestly protests against the idea that the pacifist position was negative or laissez-faire. She holds that the popular impression that pacifism meant abstinence and just keeping out of trouble is wrong; that it stood for a positive international polity in which this country should be the leader of the nations of the world "into a wider life of coördinated activity"; she insists that the growth of nations under modern conditions involves of necessity international complications which admit "of adequate treatment only through an international agency not yet created." In short, the pacifists "urge upon the United States not indifference to moral issues and to the fate of liberty and democracy, but a strenuous endeavor to lead all nations of the earth into an organized international life."

That intelligent pacifism stands for this end, and that the more intelligent among the pacifists, like Miss Addams, saw the situation in this fashion need not be doubted. But as Miss Addams recognized in the same address there are many types of pacifists. I question whether any one who followed the pacifist literature which appeared in the year or two before we got into the war derived from it the conception

that the dominant ideal was that ascribed to pacifism by Miss Addams, namely, that the United States should play a "vitaly energetic rôle" in a political reorganization of the world. But even if this had been the universal idea of what was theoretically desirable, the force of circumstances forbade pacifists who drew back at war as a means of bringing about this role from pressing it.

The pacifist literature of the months preceding our entrance into war was opportunistic—breathlessly, frantically so. It did not deal in the higher strategy of international politics, but in immediate day-by-day tactics for staving off the war. Because the professional pacifists were committed to the idea that anything was better than our getting into the war, their interest in general international reorganization had no chance for expression. They were in the dilemma of trying to accomplish what only definite political agencies could effect, while admitting these agencies had not been created. Thus they were pushed out of the generic position of work for the development of such agencies into the very elementary attitude that if no nation ever allowed itself to be drawn into war, no matter how great the provocation, wars would cease to be. Hence the continuous recourse to concessions and schemes, devised *ad hoc* over night, to meet each changing aspect of the diplomatic situation so as to ward off war. The logic seems sound. But the method is one of treating symptoms and ignoring the disease. At the best, such a method is likely to remain some distance behind newly appearing symptoms, and in a critical disease the time is bound to come (as events demonstrated in our case) when the disease gets so identified with the symptoms that nothing can be done. All this seems to concern the past of pacifism rather than its future. But it indicates, by elimination, what that future must be if it is to be a prosperous one. It lies in furthering whatever will bring into existence those new agencies of international control whose absence has made the efforts of pacifists idle gestures in the air. Its more immediate future lies in seeing to it that the war itself is turned to account as a means for bringing these agencies into being. To go on protesting against war in general and this war in particular, to direct effort to stopping the war rather than to determining the terms upon

which it shall be stopped, is to repeat the earlier tactics after their ineffectualness has been revealed. Failure to recognize the immense impetus to reorganization afforded by this war; failure to recognize the closeness and extent of true international combinations which it necessitates, is a stupidity equaled only by the militarist's conception of war as a noble blessing in disguise.

I have little patience with those who are so anxious to save their influence for some important crisis that they never risk its use in any present emergency. But I can but feel that the pacifists wasted rather than invested their potentialities when they turned so vigorously to opposing entrance into a war which was already all but universal, instead of using their energies to form, at a plastic juncture, the conditions and objects of our entrance. How far this wasted power is recoverable it is hard to say. Certainly an added responsibility is put upon those who still think of themselves as fundamentally pacifists in spite of the fact that they believed our entrance into the war a needed thing. For the only way in which they can justify their position is by using their force to help make the war, so far as this country can influence its final outcome, a factor in realizing the ideals which President Wilson expressed for the American people before and just upon entering the war. All such pacifists—and they comprise in my opinion the great mass of the American people—must see to it that these ideals are forced upon our allies, however unwilling they may be, rather than covered up by the débris of war. If the genuine pacifism of our country, a pacifism interested in permanent results rather than in momentary methods, had had leadership, it is not likely that we should have entered without obtaining in advance some stipulations. As it is, we (so far, at least, as any one knows) romantically abstained from any bargaining and thereby made our future task more difficult.

Not that the difficulty is all abroad. We have plenty of Bourbons and Bureaucrats in international diplomacy at home, and war undoubtedly strengthens their position by making them appear the genuine representatives of our war motives and policies. Their attitude is well expressed in the fact that since their imagination is confined to the flat map,

their intellectual preparation for the post-bellum scene consists in redrawing the future map of Europe and the world—a form of indoor sport which even the literary men of England have now well nigh abandoned. Thus the present task of the constructive pacifist is to call attention away from the catchwords which so easily in wartime become the substitute for both facts and ideas back to realities. In view, for example, of the unjustified invasion of Serbia and Belgium, the rights of small nationalities tend to become an end in itself, a means to which is the “crushing” of Germany. The principle of nationality on its cultural side must indeed receive ample satisfaction in the terms of war settlement unless fuel for future conflagrations is to be stored up. But to get no further than setting up more small isolated nationalities on the map is almost wilfully to provoke future wars. If the day for isolated national sovereignty in the case of large nations has been rendered an anachronism by the new industry and commerce, much more is that the case for small political units. The case of Ireland, the clutter of nationalities in southeastern Europe, the fact that all the smaller neutral nations are now leading a distressed existence as appanages of the warring Powers, show how much more important questions of food supply, of coal and iron, of lines of railway and ship-transportation are for the making and ordering of states than the principle of isolated nationality, big or small. Germany was realistically inclined in its belief that the day of the small nation—in its traditional sense—had passed. Its tragic error lay in that egotism which forbade its seeing that the day of the big isolated nation had also passed.

So one might, I think, go over, one by one, the phrases which are now urged to the front as defining the objects of war as the terms of peace and show that the interests of pacifism are bound up with securing the organs by which economic energies shall be articulated. We have an inherited political system which sits like a straitjacket on them since they came into being after the political system took on shape. These forces cannot be suppressed. They are the moving, the controlling, forces of the modern world. The question of peace or war is whether they are to continue to work furtively, blindly, and by those tricks of manipulation which have con-

stituted the game of international diplomacy, or whether they are to be frankly recognized and the political system accommodated to them. The war does not guarantee the latter result. It gives an immense opportunity for it, an opportunity which justifies the risk. Military men continue to think within the lines laid down in the seventeenth century, in the days when modern "sovereign" nations were formed. Statesmen, guided by historians and that political science which has elevated the historic facts of temporary formations into an abstract and absolute science, work on the same model. As a result, too many influential personages are pure romanticists. They are expressing ideals which no longer have anything to do with the facts. This stereotyped political romanticism gives the pacifists their chance for revenge. Their idealism has but to undergo a course in the severe realism of those economic forces which are actually shaping the associations and organizations of men, and the future is with them.

WHAT AMERICA WILL FIGHT FOR

Politics means getting certain things done. Some body of persons, elected or self-constituted, takes charge, deciding and executing. In the degree in which a society is democratic this governing group has to get the assent and support of large masses of people. In the degree in which the things to be done run counter to the inertia, bias and apparent interests of the masses, certain devices of manipulation have to be resorted to. The political psychology of the older school, that of Bentham and Mill, taught that in a democratic state the governing body would never want to do anything except what was in the interests of the governed. But experience has shown that this view was over-naïve. Practical political psychology consists largely in the technique of the expert manipulation of men en masse for ends not clearly seen by them, but which they are led to believe are of great importance for them.

Thus the psychology of the professional politician resembles that of the prestidigitator. The attention of those to be influenced is directed to objects and acts which habit has rendered congenial and attractive, and meantime something quite different is carried forward to an unforeseen result. As a rule the most effective form of motivation is one which combines appeal to highly idealistic ends with appeal to immediate profit: the Old Flag and an appropriation, the prevention of the vicious schemes of the opposing party plus a larger price for crops and general prosperity.

The political leader perpetually forgets, however, that the state of public imagination and interest is in flux, and that the time comes when the cumulative effect of minor changes is so great that the people cannot be "handled" after the old

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fashion. Then the politician goes on repeating the old slogans and cries and is baffled by failure to get the wonted reaction. Is this going to happen in connection with the demand for intense and unified motivation imposed by the war? There is an old and established technique of supplying motive in wartime. Many newspapers and some public men do not seem capable of now responding in any other way than the old, and hence they are incapable of imagining people at large being moved in unprecedented ways. If these men guess wrong and have any large influence in determining the course of popular appeal, the error in practical psychology will have incalculable consequences for evil.

The orthodox technique is exhibited in gross in any collection of war posters; in more refined ways it is seen in any anthology of patriotic poetry. Home and hearth, defense of ancestral altars and graves, glory and honor, bravery and self-immolation are its familiar themes.

There are serious reasons for doubting the availability of this mode of procedure at the present time. The domestic politics and issues of the last few years, the history of the war as reported to the American people up to the time of our entrance, our geographical isolation and our racial composition cooperate to make reliance upon it an exceedingly precarious undertaking. Yet many souls which are ardent for the war and who suspect the country of undue apathy are urging wholesale recourse to it. The Washington correspondent of a newspaper which has been insistent as to our share in the war ever since the sinking of the *Lusitania* recently clearly set it forth. It is not hard, he said in effect, to account for a general apathy. The motives which have usually led nations into war have been promise of national gain, urgent fear of an immediate danger and smouldering habits of hate, which are readily blown into flame. But the United States has deliberately eschewed all national aggrandizement; it does not sincerely believe that its national destiny or security is threatened, and we have been officially warned to set aside hatred and rancor. It would seem as if these premises pointed to some psychology of appeal unlike the time-honored one. But the implication of this writer is indicated in his sigh for a Zeppelin or for German submarines at our coast. Wait, he

seemed to say, until our men get into battle, and the casualty lists come in. Then fear and hate will awake and we may expect "enthusiasm" for war. One expects this line of argument from confirmed pacifists when they set forth the evils of war, but when it comes from a journal devoted to the war cause it shows how serious may be the consequences of a wrong reading of popular psychology. For if fear and hate are the things which are to be chiefly aroused, is there not a probability that, with our historic commitments, they will turn against war itself rather than against Germany?

There is a saturation point for all human emotions. All the warring nations manifest war weariness. To some extent this is because it is impossible to keep year after year the emotions at the pitch to which they rose at first. And we who have shared in the war only vicariously, only through reading, have gone through a like satiation. The earlier days, the days of Liège, Louvain, the *Lusitania*, the days when hope and dread trembled in suspense, cannot be relived. Along with this repleteness of feeling goes political skepticism. Although capable of great ruthlessness in action, we are lenient and amiable in our judgments. Very large numbers of our citizens, including those of strong pro-Allies feeling, have systematically taught themselves to discount all of the more violent appeals to passion. The resulting skepticism extends to pretty much the entire apparatus of traditional slogans. The once burning catchwords of honor and glory, prestige and power, fall coldly on the ear. To be actively stirred by these ideals at the same time that one has been taught to believe that Germany's surrender to them is responsible for the world tragedy is not a congenial or natural attitude. To create a war motivation by resort to "patriotic" appeal when large numbers of people are convinced that nationalistic patriotism was chiefly responsible for the outbreak of war is to operate against the tide of events and almost to invite failure. Burnt-out ashes cannot be made to glow, no matter how fervid the appeal.

If one asks for the alternative motivation, analysis of the motives which have been operative up to the present time seems to give the answer. There is the sense of a job to be undertaken in a businesslike way, and there is a vague but

genuine vision of a world somehow made permanently different by our participation in a task which taken by itself is intensely disliked. There comes to mind the picture of the young men who responded to the call for officers in training. There was no hip-hurrah, no illusions of glory and grandeur, no enthusiasm if enthusiasm means excitement and intoxication of motive, no hatred, no desire for revenge. Conventional heroics and self-hypnotism stirred by crowd-hypnotism were replaced by a serious earnestness, whose chief trait was the sense of a job to be done, a hard job, but one which had to be done so that it could be done with. Such a motivation lacks the glamor and impetuous rush of traditional war psychology. By way of compensation it is infinitely more potential for intelligence, and it is in line with our habitual national psychology—the psychology of a businesslike people.

So conventional are our views, however, that there is little perception of its availability and efficacy for intense and collective motivation. The American people has inherited the romantic European tradition, according to which the business-wise disposition is merely a sign of a mercenary and dollar-chasing mentality. Consequently we disguise its hold over us. If we recognized the feudal, landlordly and predatory bias back of the tradition we should perceive that a businesslike psychology is one of intelligent perception of ends to be accomplished and effective selection and orderly arrangement of means for their execution. And our national intelligence is as shrewd and quick in this direction as it is slow and insensitive in esthetic perceptions or in sustained hatreds. Anyone who cares to observe the type of war interest which exists all around him instead of feeding his eyes with his hopes and fears may note how largely it is an interest in specific results and in the technology of their accomplishment. This is, indeed, a novel psychosis for war, so unheard of that it will require sincerity of insight to trust it, to appeal to it. But any other course involves a dangerous underestimation of the political education undergone by the American people during the past years and of the average level of political intelligence. We are in a peculiar situation. There is dense ignorance of European conditions, histories and policies; but there is a lively and fairly accurate sense of the drift of events

and of the type of results to be attained. To inform this sense with knowledge, to translate the anticipation of what is desired into a workable program of measures, to take the American people into confidence with respect to what has to be done and the ways of doing it is a method strangely remote from bellicose heroics, but one likely to prove strangely effective.

This sense of a job to be accomplished cannot be segregated from an underlying national idealism. Here, too, history is prophetic. What various leagues and societies totally failed to accomplish in the way of stirring up the American people when they appealed to fear, hatred and revenge, when they emphatically harped on rights and honor, that President Wilson effected when he addressed himself to the American desire for stable peace and an established amity of peoples through comity of democratic nations. A task has to be accomplished to abate an international nuisance, but in the accomplishing there is the prospect of a world organization and the beginnings of a public control which crosses nationalistic boundaries and interests. It is not, in my opinion, fair to say that these aims are as yet immediate actualities; too much remains to be done. But it is ridiculous to say that they are mere idealistic glosses, sugar-coatings of the bitter pill of war. They present genuine possibilities, objects of a fair adventure. And almost any day the shifting course of events may give them an engrossing actuality. If that day comes, the fervor of the crusader in behalf of the heart's desire will add itself to interest in a workmanlike performance in behalf of a necessary task. Meantime the course of those interested in securing the necessary motivation for war is to keep the ways open and clear for the coming of this reinforcing and consummating impetus.