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'A splendid little war'

Arthur Moyse

Spring 1995

In 1895 Spain sent in 200,000 troops to quell the revolt of the Cuban people and in 1898 the McKinley American government sent in an American armed force to aid the Cuban people. After three months the Spanish army went back to Spain leaving the American flag and the dollar as a permanent absentee landlord, for the American army moved on to take Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines and any odd souvenirs that tourists and soldiers also accumulate. It was left to John Hay, the American ambassador in London, to write to 'Teddy' Roosevelt that 'it has been a splendid little war' and, allowing for the temper of the time and that the only access to information about the 'war' was through a biased media, it was an understandable but flawed reaction to sanctioned mass killings.

War is a blanket term that covers an unmapped history of mass human conflict and to ask what is the 'anarchist interpretation' of World War Two has the fey lunacy of the asylum, for it is the logic of asking what is the anarchist interpretation of malaria: 'on deep consideration we're against mosquitoes with an abstaining disagreement by our Buddhist comrades'. War has taken many fashions and many forms and there are those who choose that their own particular bias will rubber-

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stamp all mass human conflict with the same value added cost price. It is argued that historians falsify and distort history by adding or omitting 'facts' and creating a conduit for the final and definitive particular history that they favour, but the fault is not theirs but ours if we choose to be selective in our readings, for given a choice of historians we can make our own selective choice to suit our own particular bias and beating the bare breast cry out that here at last is the truth. I read and enjoy every 'authority' but believe no one, not even A.J.P. Taylor when he tells me that the German Army beat the French (and the British) in World War Two because the German High Command used the railway timetables to move the German front-line troops. I read and enjoy the historians' true history with the same pleasure that I read the truth of who killed Kennedy; who wrote *Hamlet*; which is worse for the heart, butter or margarine; the lost city of Atlantis, Clause 4 or the political manifestos.

War has taken many forms and many fashions and has been fought for many reasons and I would state, with complete authority, that the First World War was the last of the great classic wars that was to be fought in the fashion of the Battle of Waterloo with bands and banners, mounted troops and lances and the kiss of the fingertips to the enemy as one died among the scarlet flowers that bedewed the field of battle, but the machine-gun altered the face of war and turned it into carnage. If Britain had stayed out of World War One the German Army would have defeated the French Army, there would have been the triumphant parade through Paris, the takeover of French colonies, indemnities, the frantic writing of history according to one's side and the Frenchmen weeping in the boulevard cafés, but the political balance of power had to be maintained and two generations dined off a meal of carnage.

The answer, comrades, is that we should all sit round a table working these things out in a comradely sensible fashion, but tell it not to the starving mob hammering on the doors of

for a particular bus or choosing a barricade by absentee postal vote. Not as in the Charge of the Light Brigade, comrade, one does not charge to the sound of guns but to the battle and pray that one finds solidarity with those next to you in the line of fire.

Old soldiers, 'old fools', will march on aching feet and wear their medals and bands will play and politicians will make speeches and the television will be a bore over that period, but spare a little charity for those who stood their ground. They could in another fashion have obeyed the state, pleaded with their adviser to miss the roll call, served the mandatory sentence and, one assumes, led not unpleasant war years. Each one of us has to make their own choice. 20,000 anti-militarists were executed by the Nazis. I respect them and the lumpen-proletariat, 'neither hammer or anvil of the revolution', who neither protested to the state nor came to terms with the state but survived among the ruins and the rubble, for if we have any salvation it will be because of them and not in the 'messages' to the academic few. I did not have their courage or amoral attitude to life, so I failed and picked up a rifle for a cause I believe just.

shovelling the dead into mass graves, heigh ho if you survive, comrades, it is Grand Theatre and if you are among the honoured kaput then it is Grand Guignol. In battle zones, comrades, there are no newspapers, no magazines, no radio chat shows and no propaganda, for that is for civilian consumption and it is on that that opinions are based and made and regurgitated with the voice and the air of informed authority.

War, like common assault, is a stupid and a mindless evil thing, but when Ghengis Khan and Attila the Hun come riding over the brow of the hill, then fax me an answer, comrade. In 1933 the German Nazi Party came into power, but before 1933 *Mein Kampf*, the manifesto of genocide and the destruction of human liberty, was already in print and on sale in every country in the western world. And in 1933 the first concentration camps in Germany became official government policy and the first to be thrown into them were Germans of all faiths, political, social or religious, and as it spread to each country in Europe the evil therein collaborated in that death of human liberty be it the body politic or physical.

I know that there are those who have never entered a major or minor art gallery except to use the lavatory, but protest the 'destruction of works of art' and of their canting and sanctimonious hypocrisy never remember Guernica, Warsaw or Rotterdam, and one can assume, comrades, that it was the same pilots, same 'planes and the same surplus bombs.

One arrives at anarchism not by sitting in the green shade on the green lawn with the river lapping by and crumpets for tea, for in that brainwashing one becomes a decent kindly liberal for one cannot conceive of altering the basics of one's society. One can only be forced into a position and a desire to alter one's society when one is forced to confront its very evils, and 1939 and 1946 forced one to make that choice. Human conflict in the mass comes in many forms, be it war, revolution, jihad, civil war, mass demonstration and the barricades, and there are those who hold that one can pick and choose like unto waiting

the empty food stores, for human despair breeds its own politicians. It is foolish to deny that war has its own romance providing that it is aged in the barrel and on a distant shore for we are of that aged generation who still dine on the printed romance of the Spanish Civil War and still re-quote Kronstadt and the mass death of those sailors to show our hands are clean. Without Shakespeare no Agincourt when Henry VII's 5,000 archers and 750 men at arms defeated 22,000 French knights and 3,000 crossbow-men under Charles d'Albret.

Is it important? A British officer stood on the invasion beach in World War Two calling our Shakespeare's 'Once more into the breach dear friends, once more ...? And talk of propaganda and how often was the brutal bombing of the small town of Guernica used for passing round the hat in all those 'support the Spanish people' meetings, and how could Hollywood have survived without the Crusades, and I know, comrades, that what started out as a holy war became a hypermarket for loot. We can toss around statistics and I will give you a death list of World War Two with 55,000,000 dead, 15,000,000 Chinese, 3,000,000 Poles and to top the glass 70,000 Chinese civilians slaughtered in Nanking when the young Japanese Officer Corps had their demand for an invasion of China rubber-stamped by the Emperor and the government of the hour. But what I choose to remember is the shelling by artillery of the workers' tenements in Vienna under the Dollfuss government as Europe came under the domination of their home-spawned Nazi military forces. Dollfuss was murdered in 1934 and Vienna, Austria's land of the Valse, cheered the German troops as they marched in in 1938 to take over, and the trucks to the concentration camps became part of the European railway schedules.

I have no use for war but there comes that moment when one has to stand up and be counted, when the alternative is bureaucratically organised technically first-class genocide. Of the war in Northern Ireland — and Sinn Féin, the IRA and the

Loyalists claim it is a 'war' — I would not walk across the road to unite one square foot of peat with another for the sake of politicians and their gunmen, yet how many among us have not nodded their heads in approval or marched in safe towns chanting 'troops out, troops out' and let war rage in the streets of Northern Ireland?

I hold that World War Two was a thing of grim inevitability for there was an acceptance that as the Nazi movement took over European governments and legalised the mass murder of its opponents, then *Mein Kampf* and what the Nazi rule-book printed was but a matter of time, not years but months. On the Sunday of the declaration of war there was no cheering in the streets but a grim silence and acceptance of an inevitable confrontation with an evil as inevitable as a plague. Quote me the statistics of the dead and quote me an alternative that does not include the words 'fuck you Jack, I'm alright'.

There are those who mark their cards, and I can quote by declaiming, though in abstention, that they support the Kronstadt sailors, the Basques in the Spanish Civil War but not the defence of Madrid, World War One or World War Two as ideological non-starters and it is to their, if not credit at least excuse, that in one of the most traumatic periods in history they overslept. I have a feeling that this issue of *The Raven* will be a *De Profundis* for a few. Of myself it can be rightly asked what are my credentials for sounding off (Glenn Miller) and comrades, they are slight. In World War One as a puling infant I was being pram'd through dark streets amid running people during my first air raid, in 1929 at the age of 15 I marched on my first demonstration 'For Winter Relief'. I threw bricks at the uniformed police-protected fascists when the people of the East End halted them at Cable Street, E1. I was in the small squads dragging bodies, beaten and bloodstained, out of the huge Olympia fascist meeting and faced and ran from the police horse charges. Always to march against the police in protest! Forgotten wars such as the 'Green Hell of the Grand

Chaco' or Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia when the clown was collecting sand dunes for an empire, and we marched to Knightsbridge to cheer Haile Selassie the Lion of Judah as he waved to us from his balcony. We marched in support in 1934 when the Dollfuss Austrian government used heavy artillery to shell the Ottakring workers' hostel on 14th February 1934 before Dollfuss himself was murdered, before the Nazi pre-war 1938 take-over of gay Vienna, city of song and shellings. By God, we marched and protested and the liturgy of murder still went on. We protested when the Japanese Army invaded China and 70,000 men, women and children were deliberately slaughtered in Nanking.

To run up the French beach in World War Two leaving behind any guilty consciences for others and with a small group of others to have to stand and be interviewed by Military Intelligence as to how an unfortunate sergeant got shot and in a battle zone have to hold up a Bible and swear on it. In pre-invasion England to be with a weeping fellow-soldier in a makeshift guard-room facing a charge for which over 300 British soldiers were executed by firing squad in World War One and in 1995 still feel sick at the thought of it and the small miracle that freed us. To mount guards in Bolton with no rifles but just a length of gas piping with a bayonet rammed in the end and to stand on the coast in the freezing dark night for an invasion alert stand-to. To get paralytic drunk in Armentières, when the wartime convoy had moved on, and carried shoulder-high drunk and incapable to the cheers of the population shouting 'Cognac no bon'. In a huge German tank barracks just outside Hamburg in a Beckett landscape as the war dribbled to its close, where British soldiers shared their mess-tin meals with German soldiers as they drifted to their unknown destinations. To have led a small mutiny in the north of England and to have seen a large *political* meeting of ambulance drivers before the crossing of the Rhine when they refused to carry armed military in their ambulances, and to cross the Rhine and see bulldozers