

Suicide's No Fun—Turn Around Those Guns

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Our leaders are in trouble, and they are calling on us. As our forebears were called upon to give their lives to clear the continent of native tribes and people to make room for 'civilization' on these shores, so now we are being called upon to preserve this hard-won bastion of Progress.

At stake are not merely the revenues of the oil interests, not merely the diminishing control over the world's resources held by American-dominated multinational corporations. What is at stake is the very concept of Progress. We find ourselves at the culmination of the era in which—according to some—nature has been tamed, chaos has given way to government, and primitive conditions (a life where people had only each other to depend on) have been replaced by a way of life dominated by economic realities. But many of us have begun to ask, Has it all been worth it? Is it worth maintaining?

U.S. agribusiness and chemical-biological industry have given the world a new way of growing food. But the 'miracle' crops and fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides have depleted soils and increased crop vulnerability to disease and infestation here and around the world. They have brought on famines and an increased dependence on technology for mere survival.

Nuclear energy, supposedly harnessed to serve the needs of 'the people,' has meant suffering and slow death for those who mine and process the fuel and those who deal directly with the finished product, and danger to those who live in surrounding areas. Not to mention the anxiety over the threat of nuclear holocaust we all feel.

Like the development of nuclear energy before Hiroshima, genetic engineering is claimed to hold bright promise for the future. The signs are nothing but ominous. The advanced techniques of modern medicine have already brought us such benefits as drug-resistant diseases (including strains of gonorrhea and bubonic plague), and machine-facilitated survival beyond life. Everyone is familiar with the role played by medicine in easing the stress of modern life through tranquilizers, barbiturates and other habit-forming drugs. The steady increase of industrially related health problems is also the result of ongoing Progress.

Modern science has provided the means for intellectually stereotyping the sexes and races, justifying conquest and domination, and perpetuating and justifying hostility between people at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Such things as massive hydro-electric projects, mining, oil and gas drilling, and industrial plants that cause acid rain and other forms of pollution are clearing much of the continent of

plant and animal wildlife. In their place we have the factories, offices, schools, hospitals, prisons, shopping centers and highways that form the core of modern life.

The state has usurped the functions of the community. No longer are social problems dealt with directly by the people involved. The authorities and the specialists—the police, the army, the prisons, the mental hospitals, the schools, and so forth—integrate one into, or eliminate one from the modern world. In addition, we all suffer from sexual conditioning, constant emotional and physical insecurity, the need to sell our time and labor in order to survive, and boredom. Such is the legacy of Progress. During this, the close of what has become known as the ‘American Century,’ we face a renewed challenge to our imagination and ingenuity. Is this ‘good life,’ based on industrial development and all that it entails, the kind of life we really want? Perhaps we can create a better way of life.

The leaders need us, but we don’t need them! The recent events in Iran and Afghanistan are of great concern to the politicians, bankers and oil billionaires; but we should not be confused about our stake in their game. The ordinary people on both sides have been the losers of every war.

The diplomatic crisis in Iran has helped the fanatical Islamic dictatorship there to quell internal revolutionary opposition from those who saw the overthrow of the Shah’s tyranny as an opportunity to take control of their own lives. The Russian government moved into Afghanistan to replace a relatively independent pro-Soviet Marxist regime which seemed to be proving itself incapable of putting down internal resistance to its rule. While we consider the ‘intervention’ to be a heinous act against the potential for freedom of those in revolt, it would be hypocritical to condemn it and not the U.S. government’s countless ‘interventions’ to assure the rule of compliant dictatorships in places like Iran, Chile and Vietnam. The bolstering of the current authoritarian Islamic regime in Pakistan by U.S. military aid certainly cannot lead to greater freedom in the region, especially since some of the Kurdish rebel groups that are part of Afghanistan’s internal opposition are also causing problems within Pakistan, where they have already been dealt with brutally. Other mideastern ‘allies’ have similar reputations for harsh treatment of internal dissent.

Here at home, the dramatic capture of spies and other state employees in Iran, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan have proved valuable not only in shoring up Carter’s sagging popularity, but also in resuscitating interest in the political spectacle in general. These events have also served to shut off discussion of the deeper problems of American society and modern industrial society as such. Carter’s request that all men of fighting age be registered for military conscription is more than just another political ploy. It involves the restoration of police powers eroded during the last twenty years of social criticism and unrest. Registration will enable the government to keep further track of the population through dossiers kept both on those men (and possibly women) who register, and on those who refuse and all those who criticize.

Given the domestic atmosphere generated around events in Iran and Afghanistan, and the fear of the loss of foreign oil supplies, proposals for increasing the powers of the C.I.A. and other undercover agencies, curtailing civil liberties through new criminal code legislation, and for a new draft have suddenly become acceptable to an uneasy populace.

Even before the present crises arose, fuel and utility prices had been going up steadily—despite all the special exemptions, rebates and privileged access to resources, and unprecedented profits—enjoyed by the energy industry. And who can doubt that fuel and energy prices, and prices in general, will soar again this year, regardless of what happens in the mideast, draft or no draft.

Meanwhile, the problems of deteriorating and brutalizing cities, of unemployment, depression and inflation, of increasing poverty for most in the face of fantastic prosperity for a few, the ongoing social plague of alienating labor—to mention but a few—are being shunted aside with relief by the country's leaders. The threat of war is being used to create the kind of peace they want. But we must not forget that there can be no winners in a great power confrontation. And with the spread of nuclear weapons to more and more states, the possibility of nuclear confrontation increases. The current impulse to patriotism is but the latest form of self-sacrifice and illusion, the traditional sources of cannon fodder. The cost of the illusion of participation in their game is high. We lose every way, and many pay in blood.

We must refuse to be distracted by the squabbles of leaders over which of them will dominate the world. We have our own battles to fight—against these very leaders, not in support of the oppression of our likes here and in other parts of the world. We say No! to capitalist's and the state, No! to their wars, No! to patriotism of any sort. No to registration and drafting of youth. No to the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. The only war worth fighting is for self-emancipation, The only world worth fighting for is one without politicians and leaders, without all authorities, where we can determine our own lives. Let us begin by refusing to be the pawns of leaders and politicians.

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