

# A CENTURY OF WAR

John V. Denson

The most accurate description of the twentieth century, I believe, is “The War and Welfare Century.” This century is the bloodiest in all history. More than 170 million people were killed by governments with 10 million being killed in World War I and 50 million killed in World II. In regard to the 50 million killed in World War II, it is significant that nearly 70 percent were innocent civilians, mainly as a result of the bombing of cities by Great Britain and America.

This number of 50 million deaths does not include the estimated 6 to 12 million Russians killed by Stalin before World War II, and the several million people he killed after the war ended when Roosevelt and Churchill delivered to him one-third of Europe as part of the settlement conferences. George Crocker’s excellent book *Roosevelt’s Road to Russia* describes the settlement conferences, such as Yalta, and shows how Roosevelt and Churchill enhanced communism in Russia and China through deliberate concessions which strengthened it drastically, while Nazism was being extinguished in Germany.

It is inconceivable to me that America could join with Stalin as an ally and promote World War II as “the good war,” against tyranny or totalitarianism. The war and American aid made Soviet Russia into a super military power which

threatened America and the world for the next 45 years. It delivered China to the communists and made it a threat during this same period of time.

The horror of the twentieth century could hardly have been predicted in the nineteenth century, which saw the eighteenth century end with the American Revolution bringing about the creation of the first classical liberal government in the world. It was a government founded upon

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a blueprint in a written constitution, which allowed very few powers in the central government and protected individual liberties even from the vote of the majority. It provided for the ownership and protection of private property, free speech, freedom of religion, and basically a free-market economy with no direct taxes. Both political factions united

behind the first administration of President Washington to proclaim a foreign policy based upon non-interventionism and neutrality in the affairs of other nations, which remained the dominant political idea of America for over a hundred years.

These ideas of classical liberalism quickly spread to the Old World of Europe and at the end of the eighteenth century erupted into a different type of revolution in France, although a revolution in the name of liberty. The new ideal, however, adopted in the French Revolution was “equality” by force and it attempted to abolish all monarchy throughout Europe. The ideas of classical liberalism were twisted and distorted, but nevertheless were spread by force throughout Europe, thereby giving liberalism a bad name, especially in Germany; and this was accomplished by a conscripted French army.

The nineteenth century largely remained, in practice, a century of individual freedom, material progress, and relative peace, which allowed great developments in science, technology, and industry. However, the intellectual ferment toward the middle of the nineteenth century and thereafter was decidedly toward collectivism. In about 1850 the great classical liberal John Stuart Mill began to abandon these ideas and adopt socialism, as did

most other intellectuals. After the brief Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, Bismarck established the first welfare state while creating the nation of Germany by converting it from a confederation of states, just as Lincoln did in America. From this point up until World War I most German intellectuals began to glorify the state and collectivist ideas. They ignored one lone voice in Germany, a lyric poet by the name of Johann Christian Friedrich Hölderlin, who died in 1843. He stated, “What has made the State a hell on earth has been that man has tried to make it his heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Hegel and Fichte immediately come to mind.

### THE GREATEST TRAGEDY

Finally, the greatest tragedy of Western civilization erupted with World War I in 1914. It may be the most senseless, unnecessary and avoidable disaster in human history. Classical liberalism was thereby murdered, and virtually disappeared, and was replaced by collectivism which reigned both intellectually and in practice throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. The ideas of socialism began to take over the various governments of the world following World War I. Socialism was not initially a mass movement of the people but was a movement created by intellectuals who assumed important roles in the governments ruled by the collectivist politicians.

While I could quote from numerous political and intellectual leaders throughout the war and welfare century, I have chosen one who summed up the dominant political thoughts in the twentieth century. He was the founder of fascism, and he

came to power in 1922 in Italy. In 1927 Benito Mussolini stated:

Fascism...believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace.... War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.... It may be expected that this will be a century of authority, a century of the Left, a century of Fascism. For the nineteenth century was a century of individualism....[Liberalism always signifying individualism], it may be expected that this will be a century of collectivism, and hence the century of the State.... For Fascism, the growth of Empire, that is to say, the expansion of the nation, is the essential manifestation of vitality, and its opposite is a sign of decay and death.<sup>2</sup>

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### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Mussolini’s statement bears closer study because it dramatically states some of the guiding principles of the twentieth century:

1. It states that perpetual peace is neither possible, nor even to be desired.

2. Instead of peace, war is to be desired because not only is war a noble activity, but it reveals the true courage of man; it unleashes creative energy and causes progress. Moreover, war is the prime mover to enhance and glorify the state. War is the principal method by which collectivists have achieved their goal of control by the few over the many. They actually seek to create or initiate wars for this purpose.

3. Individualism, the philosophy practiced in the nineteenth century, is to be abolished and, specifically, collectivism is to rule the twentieth century.

4. Fascism is recognized as a variation of other forms of collectivism, all being part of the Left, as opposed to the Right, which is individualism. It was not until the “Red Decade” of the 30s, and the appearance of Hitler, that leftist intellectuals and the media began to switch Fascism on the political spectrum to the Right so that the “good forms of collectivism,” such as socialism, could oppose the “extremism on the Right” which they said was fascism.

The founder of fascism clearly realized that all of these collectivist ideas, i.e., socialism, fascism and communism, belonged on the Left and were all opposed to individualism on the Right. Fascism is not an extreme form of individualism and is a part of the Left, or collectivism.

The ideals upon which America was founded were the exact opposite of those expressed by Mussolini and other collectivists on the Left. Why then was America, in the twentieth century, not a bulwark for freedom to oppose all of these leftist ideas? Why didn’t the ideas of the American

Founders dominate the twentieth century and make it the “American Century of Peace and Prosperity” instead of the ideas of the Left dominating and making it the “War and Welfare Century?” The failure of the ideas of the Founders of America to be dominant in the twentieth century was certainly not because America had been conquered by the force of arms of some foreign leftist enemy.

### THE U.S. EMPIRE

We need to learn the real reasons why America abandoned the principles of its Founding Fathers and allowed this tragedy to occur. We must determine why America became influenced by leftist thoughts, the ideas of empire, and the ideas of glorification of the state. How did America itself become an empire and an interventionist in World Wars I and II and help create the war and welfare century in which we now live?

We can begin by examining a quote from one of the main leaders of America in the nineteenth century and the answer will become apparent. This statement was made in 1838 by a rather obscure American politician at the time who would become world famous in 1861:

At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it? Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth...could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.<sup>3</sup>

Abraham Lincoln is the author of these words and he concluded his statement with the following:

If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.<sup>4</sup>

### FATHER ABRAHAM

Abraham Lincoln himself became the principal instigator of America’s suicide. It was not a foreign foe, but it was a war, even a “victorious” war, that ended the Founders’ dreams in America. However, leftist intellectuals

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-Acton

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have never revealed to the American people the real cause and effect of the American Civil War, and instead have proclaimed it a “noble war” to free the slaves, and therefore, worth all of its costs. In fact, it was a war to repudiate the ideas of a limited central government and it moved

America towards a domestic empire, which led inevitably to a foreign empire several decades later.

We can see photographs of Lincoln near the end of the war which show signs of strain. However, I think the strain was due mainly to the fact that at the end of this long and costly war, he understood that it had been unnecessary and that he had acted initially and primarily only to secure the economic and political domination of the North over the South. However, at the end of the war, President Lincoln finally understood the real costs as revealed by this statement:

As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until wealth is aggregated into the hands of a few *and the Republic is destroyed*. I feel at this moment more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever before, even in the midst of the war [emphasis added].<sup>5</sup>

Other key individuals also recognized the real effect of the American Civil War. One of these was the great historian of liberty, Lord Acton, who wrote to a prominent American, Robert E. Lee, immediately after the war and stated:

I saw in State Rights the only availing check upon the absolutism of the sovereign will, and secession filled me with hope, not as the destruction but as the redemption of Democracy.... Therefore, I deemed that you were fighting the battles of our liberty, our progress, and our civilization; and I mourn for the stake which was lost at Richmond more deeply than I rejoice over that which was saved at Waterloo.<sup>6</sup>

## LEE'S VISION

With a careful analysis of the results of the Civil War, General Lee replied to Lord Acton in his letter dated December 15, 1866:

I can only say that while I have considered the preservation of the constitutional power of the General Government to be the foundation of our peace and safety at home and abroad, I yet believe that the maintenance of the rights and authority reserved to the states and to the people, not only essential to the adjustment and balance of the general system, but the safeguard to the continuance of a free government. I consider it as the chief source of stability to our political system, whereas the consolidation of the states into one vast republic, sure to be *aggressive abroad* and *despotic at home*, will be the certain precursor of that ruin which has overwhelmed all those that have preceded it [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup>

Lee clearly saw the North's victory as the beginning of the growth of empire at home, the loss of freedom to Americans and the destruction of the original ideas of our Founders. He also saw that the domestic empire would lead to an empire abroad. Consolidation of power into the central government is the basic premise of collectivism, and it was the basic idea the Constitution attempted to avoid.

After the creation of the domestic American empire as a result of the Civil War, and then after the next three decades, America specifically repudiated its 100-year old foreign policy and initiated the Spanish-American War, allegedly to free Cuba. We now know, however, that the original and ultimate purpose of the war was to take the Philippine Islands away from Spain in

order to provide coaling stations for the trade with China which was considered by many American economic interests to be essential to America's expansion. McKinley ordered the American warships sent to the Philippines at approximately the same time he sent the battleship *Maine* to Cuba and instructed the American Navy to support the Philippine rebels against their Spanish rulers. McKinley asked Congress to declare war because of the sinking of the battleship *Maine*, but we know today that the

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explosion occurred within the ship and, therefore, could not have been done by the Spanish.

In the Philippines, the native rebels were successful in throwing off their Spanish rulers and were aided in their effort by the American Navy. Once the rebels had succeeded, McKinley ordered the American guns turned upon the rebels, murdering them in cold blood by the thousands, and snatched their island away from

them. McKinley then ruled as a military dictator without authority from Congress. Next, without any authority from Congress, he sent five thousand marines into China to help put down the Boxer Rebellion which was an effort by the Chinese to expel foreigners from their own soil. McKinley joined with other European nations in seeking the spoils of China and sacrificed America's integrity and her right to be called a leader for freedom.

Next came the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century which was America's late entry into World War I. America's entry drastically changed the balance of power of the original contenders in the war and resulted in the horrible Treaty of Versailles, which paved the road to World War II.

## THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

America's entry into World War I was a result of the so-called Progressive Movement which worshipped the idea of democracy *per se*, and wished to spread it throughout the world, by force if necessary. It was this movement which in one year, 1913, caused monumental changes in America, all in the name of attacking the rich for the benefit of the poor.

The first change was the creation of the Federal Reserve System allegedly to control the banks, but instead it concentrated power into the hands of an elite few unelected manipulators. The Sixteenth Amendment allowed for the income tax and it was alleged that the Amendment only attacked the rich. However, in World War I, the tax was raised

and expanded and has become the most oppressive feature of American life in this century. Today it causes middle-class Americans to work approximately five months of every year just for the government before they earn anything for themselves.

The third drastic change was the Seventeenth Amendment which gave “power” to the people by letting them elect U.S. Senators rather than the state legislatures. The Founding Fathers had devised a system of state legislatures electing U.S. Senators in order to give the states the ability to restrain and limit the power of the federal government.

The Progressive Movement also promoted the personification of Isabel Paterson’s “Humanitarian with a Guillotine,” described in her book, *The God of the Machine*, by electing President Woodrow Wilson. He was a naive, idealistic, egomaniac, who took America into World War I. He did this to play a part in creating the League of Nations and help design the new structure of the world, thereby spreading the democratic gospel. Wilson allowed the House of J.P. Morgan to become the exclusive agent for British purchases of war materials in America and further allowed Morgan to make loans and extend credit to the allies. Eventually, Wilson made the U.S. Government assume all of the Morgan debt and issued Liberty Bonds so the American taxpayers could help pay for it. When the allies refused to repay their debt, America stood on the precipice of an economic disaster, which was another major factor in Wilson’s decision to enter the war. However, it was World War I and its destabilization of the

economies of Western nations which led directly to the disaster of the Depression of 1929. There was no failure of the free market or the ideas of freedom which led to this economic disaster. It was caused by government interference in the market primarily resulting from World War I and the reaction of various governments to that war.

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### WAR FEVER

As the war fever spread and the war drums beat, few people paid attention to such editorials as appeared in the *Commercial and Financial Journal* which stated:

If war is declared, it is needless to say that we shall support the government. But may we not ask, one to another, before that fateful final word is spoken, are we not by this act transforming the glorious Republic that was, into the powerful Republic that is, and is to be?...Must we not admit that we

are bringing into existence a new republic that is unlike the old?<sup>8</sup>

Wilson, like Polk, Lincoln, and McKinley before him, deceitfully made it appear that the alleged enemy started the war by firing the first shot. The German embassy warned Secretary of State Bryan that the British passenger ship, the *Lusitania*, was carrying illegal weapons and munitions, and was therefore a proper and perfectly legal target for submarines. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan tried to get Wilson to warn Americans not to sail on this ship but he refused to do so, seeing that the opportunity for the loss of American lives would present him with an apparent reason for entering the war. Wilson failed to give the warning and Bryan later resigned. Over 100 Americans were killed when a German submarine sank the *Lusitania*.

### VICTORY OVER FREEDOM

After World War I ended, and much like the regret expressed by Lincoln at the end of the Civil War, President Wilson looked back to the harm he had brought on America and saw part of the true nature of World War I. In an address at St. Louis, Missouri on September 5, 1919, President Wilson stated:

Why, my fellow-citizens, is there any man here, or any woman—let me say, is there any child here, who does not know that the seed of war in the modern world is industrial and commercial rivalry?... This war, in its inception, was a commercial and industrial war. It was not a political war.<sup>9</sup>

It is sad to contemplate the loss of liberty caused to Americans by the “victorious” wars we have fought when you look back

and see that almost all of them were unnecessary to defend Americans or their freedom, and were largely economically instigated. In so many instances, the president provoked the other side into firing the first shot so it was made to appear that the war was started by America's alleged enemy. Not only did Polk, Lincoln, McKinley, and Wilson do this, but also later, Roosevelt would do it with Pearl Harbor and Johnson would do it at the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution for the Vietnam War.

It is not truly a study of history to speculate on what might have happened if America had not entered World War I, but here are some very reasonable, even probable, consequences if America had followed the advice of its Founders:

1. Almost certainly there would not have been a successful Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, giving communism a homeland from which to spread throughout the world.

2. A negotiated treaty between Germany and France and Great Britain, when all were wounded but undefeated, would have prevented the debacle of the Treaty of Versailles, the greatest single tragedy of World War I. Without America's entry there would have been a treaty negotiated with co-equal partners, similar to the way the Congress of Vienna settled the Napoleonic Wars in 1815–16, with a defeated France still represented at the table by Talleyrand, and where a sincere effort was made to promote peace rather than cause a future war.

The Treaty of Versailles excluded Germany and Russia from the negotiations and declared Germany

alone guilty of causing the war. It saddled her with tremendous payments for war damages and took away much of her territory. The Treaty of Versailles paved the way for Hitler whose support came democratically from the German people who wanted to throw off the unfair Treaty. Without the rise of communism in Russia and Nazism in Germany, World War II probably would not have occurred.

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### OUR ROYAL GUEST

Because of our special guest from Austria, Karl von Habsburg, I want to add a footnote here relative to the settlement of World War I as it relates to the Habsburg Monarchy. In his excellent book entitled *Leftism Revisited*, Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn reveals that President Wilson probably was unaware of the wisdom of Disraeli's words: "The maintenance of the Austrian Empire is necessary to the independence and, if necessary, to the civilization and even to the liberties of Europe." The book points out that President Wilson

had as one of his main foreign-policy representatives a confirmed socialist preacher by the name of Reverend George Davis Herron. The Habsburg Monarchy petitioned Wilson to negotiate a separate peace treaty in February of 1918, before the war ended later in November and sent as its representative Professor Heinrich Lammasch to meet with the American representative Reverend Herron. They spent two days together and Professor Lammasch revealed the plan to create a federated political body which was entirely in keeping with one of Wilson's Fourteen Points; i.e., that individual nations (ethnic groups) would be "accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development." The book states:

During the night he [Herron] began to wrestle with this "temptation," as "Jacob wrestled with God near the Yabbok." By morning he knew that he had gained complete victory over himself; Lammasch had been nothing but an evil tempter. No! The Habsburg Monarchy had to go because the Habsburgs as such were an obstacle to progress, democracy, and liberty. Had they remained in power the whole war would have been fought in vain.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, one of the winners of the war, Great Britain, was allowed to keep its monarchy.

### BOLSHEVIKS AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The book continues with an interesting event relating to Reverend Herron after his travels in Europe. He wrote to the socialist, Norman Thomas, in 1920 and stated that:

The "Bolsheviks" were bad, but the "future civilization of Europe is coming out of Russia and it will be

at least an approach to the Kingdom of Heaven when it comes.”<sup>11</sup>

The leftist bias and bent of mind of Wilson’s representative is crystal clear and communism is proclaimed to be the great political system of the future.

There are many important lessons that the twentieth century, this “War and Welfare Century,” should teach us. One of these is summed up by Bruce Porter in his excellent book entitled *War and the Rise of the State* wherein he states that the New Deal “was the only time in U.S. history when the power of the central state grew substantially in the absence of war.”<sup>12</sup> He concluded that:

Throughout the history of the United States, war has been the primary impetus behind the growth and development of the central state. It has been the lever by which presidents and other national officials have bolstered the power of the state in the face of tenacious popular resistance. It has been a wellspring of American nationalism and a spur to political and social change.<sup>13</sup>

The same lesson is contained in a warning issued by the great champion of liberty and student of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, who warned America in the early part of the nineteenth century that:

No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom of a democratic country.... War does not always give over democratic communities to military government, but it must invariably and immeasurably increase the powers of civil government; it must almost compulsorily concentrate the direction of all things in the hands of the administration. If it does not lead to despotism by sudden violence, it prepares men for it more gently by

their habits. All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and the shortest means to accomplish it. This is the first axiom of the science.<sup>14</sup>

Both Porter and Tocqueville are warning us that even “victorious” wars cause the loss of freedom due to the centralization of power into the federal government.

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-Tocqueville

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Another lesson is that democracy *per se* will not protect our freedom or individual liberty. I have heard college students ask the question: “Why did the Greeks, who invented democracy, remain so critical of it?” The answer, of course, is that democracy, without proper restraints and limitation of powers as provided in the original American Constitution, can be just as tyrannical as a single despot. F. A. Hayek made this point when he stated:

There can be no doubt that in history there has often been much more cultural and political freedom under an autocratic rule than

under some democracies—and it is at least conceivable that under the government of a very homogeneous doctrinaire majority, democratic government might be as oppressive as the worst dictatorship.<sup>15</sup>

### LIMITING THE STATE

We should learn from the war and welfare century that the greatest discovery in Western civilization was that liberty could be achieved only through the proper and effective limitation on the power of the state. It is this limitation on the power of the state which protects private property, a free-market economy, personal liberties and promotes a non-interventionist foreign policy, which, if coupled with a strong *national* defense, will bring peace and prosperity instead of war and welfare. It is not democracy *per se* which protects freedom.

Too many people living in democracies are lulled into believing that they are free because they have the right to vote and elections are held periodically. If you take conscription for military service as an example, I think you would find that if it was proclaimed by a sole monarch, the people would revolt and disobey. However, in a democracy, when the politicians vote for it, the people comply and still think they are free.

The fall of the Berlin wall and the demise of the Soviet Empire do not assure us that collectivism is dead. I predict that the next assault on freedom by the new leftist intellectuals will be through the democratic process, maybe coupled with a religious movement, but certainly not coupled with anti-religious ideas. Many, maybe most Americans,

who opposed Communist Russia, were convinced it was wrong and evil because it was atheistic and not because its political and economic ideas were wrong and evil. I think the new collectivist monster will be dressed in different clothing advocating equality, justice, democracy, religion, and market socialism.

### INTELLECTUALS OF THE FUTURE

It will then be more important than ever for intellectuals of the future to have a correct understanding of the philosophy of individual freedom and of free-market economics in order to fight collectivism in the twenty-first century. It will be most important for Americans to understand why Ludwig von Mises, in his book, *Omnipotent Government*, stated:

Durable peace is only possible under perfect capitalism, hitherto never and nowhere completely tried or achieved. In such a Jeffersonian world of the unhampered market economy the scope of government activities is limited to the protection of lives, health, and property of individuals against violence or fraudulent aggression....

All the oratory of the advocates of government omnipotence cannot annul the fact there is but one system that makes for durable peace: a free-market economy. Government control leads to economic nationalism and thus results in conflict.<sup>16</sup>

The definition of a free market, which Mises states will allow us to have peace and prosperity, is one where the economy is not only free of government control, but also where economic interests do not control the government policy, especially foreign policy, which has been the case throughout the twentieth century and continues to the present time.

The highest risk for war is where various economic interests are able to control foreign policy to promote their particular interests rather than the well-being and liberty of the individuals within a society.

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The Mises Institute is working to promote the ideas of Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, Murray Rothbard, Henry Hazlitt and many others who have been the true champions of freedom. These are the ideas which can make the twenty-first century one of peace and prosperity, rather than war and welfare. That is why the Mises Institute is so important to the future of America and to the world. ■

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