

EDITOR'S NOTE

"Liberty and Violence" was M. Barnard Eldershaw's contribution to the unpublished volume "Writers in Defence of Freedom" compiled by the Fellowship of Australian Writers in 1939. Barnard's letters from the period reveal that the two suffered a great deal of anguish over the nature of their contribution to the volume and whether they should even contribute at all. Part of the essay was planned on board ship on their way back from a brief holiday in Tasmania in January 1939. They appear to have had considerable difficulty reaching agreement over their position and it is likely that the essay is ultimately more Barnard's work than Eldershaw's, although it was intended for publication under their joint pseudonym. This work shows the benefit of their studies in history and also the considerable influence of their reading of Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*, a book which Barnard described as being "like a chock under [her] mind". It also reveals the attraction Barnard in particular felt toward a Gandhian policy of passive resistance, a view which created tension in her relationship with Nettie Palmer. Contrary to the opinion offered in "Liberty and Violence", Nettie Palmer contended that the use of such a policy in the Spanish Civil War would have been disastrous. The ideas expressed in this essay find parallels in the philosophical underpinnings of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1947) and represent the only formal expression of the pacifist ideals which motivated many of their later political activities. The only extant copy of the essay is a typescript held in the papers of the Fellowship of Australian Writers [Mitchell Library ML MSS 2008]. It forms part of the manuscript of "Writers in Defence of Freedom" which appears to have been in the final stages of editing when the project was shelved. As is the case throughout the manuscript, the text "Liberty and Violence" has been edited and marked up by an unknown hand. These emendations have been retained here as they indicate fairly closely how the published essay would have appeared.

Liberty and Violence

We have seen war and the threat of war. We have seen its results immediate and delayed. We know that another war will only differ from its predecessors in being more terrible in its incidence and more universal in its application. War has enlarged its boundaries. In future there will be no non-combatants. We are in no wise ignorant. There can be scarcely a man or woman who claims to believe that war in itself, as violence seen out of relation to the cause for which it is invoked, has any virtue. The old theory that it was a biological necessity has been falsified by modern warfare. The death and mutilation of the strongest and most adventurous young men, and with them their potential children, the terrorization and starvation of mothers, young children (which is the inevitable by-product of war today) with its future results in constitutional feebleness and emotional instability, cannot by any exercise of the imagination be deemed of even the most ultimate benefit to the race. Even setting aside the human grief, agony and debasement that war brings, as phenomena of the day only, it is plain that there is not virtue in war. The comradeship of war — did that survive the battle and the necessity to make a better world? The courage of the soldier — was that created at the eleventh hour by war? There is no case for war as war.

While war as an end is unthinkable, war as a means is still preached. The question is, can war be a means to progress? Can there be such a thing as a war to end war, or a war to make the world safe for democracy? Does a just cause make a holy war? Does war ever succeed from the point of view of peace and democracy? This is the eternal problem of doing ill that good may come. The tragic truth is that the means inevitably corrupt the end. We have but to compare the noble sentiments of 1914 — and men died for those sentiments — with the Peace of Versailles, a peace that underbid the popular demand for vengeance, to assess the degradation of war. Surely it is plain to everyone now in its bitter fruits that it was a fools' peace as well as a knaves' peace.

The last one hundred and fifty years have been an intensive lesson in the results of violence. The phase of history that is closing now was initiated by the French Revolution. That was as genuine an upsurge of the human spirit as the Renaissance had been. Its crater was in France instead of Italy, but the whole Western world contributed to it. It

expressed a new attitude to life, the breaking down of the old feudal system, the establishment of individual liberty, the creation of a political system as a vehicle for the rights of man. In all its essentials the French Revolution was accomplished bloodlessly. A new world was created by ideas, not by force; then violence came to discredit, destroy and postpone it. The massing of foreign armies on the frontiers caused in France the panic called the Reign of Terror, the Reign of Terror gave a superficial justification to the external aggression.

The war against the Republic created Napoleon, the one man with the military genius to cope with the situation. He carried defence over into offence. Europe knew twenty years of almost continuous war, with all the loss and misery that it entailed. In England the Napoleonic Wars put back the clock of freedom, postponed reforms, stilled progress, yet England suffered least. The war ended at last in a reactionary peace and a Concert of Europe inspired by Metternich to maintain the *status quo*. This dead wall was blasted away bit by bit by successive revolutions, another twenty years of unrest. Forty years and more before Europe came within hail again of the principles of the French Revolution. Alone in England among the major countries did revolution come without bloodshed, though there were other means of oppression that amounted to violence. It did come without a hopeless sundering of the people.

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 was a pendant of the Napoleonic Wars and a direct inheritor from the aggression of Louis XV which had robbed Germany of Alsace Lorraine. The vengeful peace of 1871, with its obvious will to cripple and humiliate a great nation, left in every French mind a bitter grudge against Germany to be a factor in the next war. The torch of violence was passed from decade to decade to light the great bonfire of 1914. Competition in trade sought resolution in violence, playing upon the spirit of nationalism — my country right or wrong — that had been aroused against Napoleon, and utilizing the angry hang-overs from previous wars.

That is the course of events in the Old World. Has the New World done any better? Was, for instance, the American War of Independence a struggle fruitful of progress? If ever there was a war that should not have been fought it was this one between men of the same race. It was the answer of brute force to brute stupidity. It resulted in the independence of the American States. That it furthered peace and democracy is less certain. Independence and liberty are not synonymous. The War of

Independence paved the way psychologically for the Civil War. Violence has twice been applied as a solution in that country, and these have left a bias towards violence in the national psychology that shows itself endemically in lynchings, the Ku Klux Klan, gangster warfare and, most seriously, the use of armed force in industrial disputes. It is more than doubtful if America has reaped any ultimate advantage from her wars that she could not have got otherwise, though both, it might be argued, were "just" wars. If there were no past wars it is improbable that there would be any future wars.

It is easy to imagine an event inevitable because it happened, and doubtless many of the wars of the past were inevitable, the world and human nature being what they are. But must they be inevitable in the future? By indulging in wars the human race has become a war addict. Habit is really the greatest argument for war. It argues in our blood beneath the threshold of our reason. Disillusionment has done something to break the habit. To-day there is a will towards peace, strong and widespread, otherwise one or other of the recent crises must have resulted in war. There is, in the rising horror of war, a willingness to try any other means of settlement. There is in arbitration, conference, peace missions, and in the living body of opinion and emotion, a move towards the creation of machinery, visible and invisible, to implement the will to peace. In such a context, war is losing its last excuse of inevitability.

The historic phase which began with the French Revolution is spent, and a new phase has begun. We have discovered that a Constitution is not a panacea, that universal suffrage does not provide an answer to the most pressing problems of life. The political revolution was accomplished — parliamentary government, universal suffrage, the definition of the individual's liberties, the impartiality of the law, were established in theory at least. The machinery of democratic government, slowly evolved in England, arbitrarily established on the continent, provided at least the means for further growth. Democracy can be adapted to a change, even a radical change in the will of the people.

Such a thing is, I believe, at hand. The political revolution failed of ultimate results. A social revolution has been long preparing; it has come with some degree of mutual consent, but it has now struck a most serious obstacle in the financial structure of civilisation. The rights of man and the rights of finance are in opposition. Civil and political rights cannot help a man if his right to eat is imperilled. Finance is the party in

possession. The conflict is national and international. Within each state it is a conflict between classes; in the international sphere it is the clash of ideologies.

Fascism is the name broadly given to the social and political attitude that places vested interests and the rights of property above all others and desires to use the state to implement this attitude, using nationalism as impetus and moral sanction. Its natural resort is violence, because it is forcing the whole of life into an unnatural mould; and to survive must hold it there. Wars and threats of wars supply fascism with the excuse to apply repressive and disciplinary measures. They have a similar effect upon the democracies opposing fascism.

The democracies are showing a disposition to fight fascism with its own weapons, and this reinforces the fascist element within the democracies. The surest way to defeat fascism abroad is to defeat it at home and the only way to defeat it is through progress and by social and industrial reform to remove the underlying reasons for bitterness and humiliation which cause a people to snatch at the straw of fascism. That arming and reforming do not go together is made plain enough here to-day. The national insurance scheme and many other matters must go by the board in favour of guns.

Some sort of war against fascism must be waged. But the question, perhaps the most burning question of all questions, is, how is it to be waged? Must it be by violence and force of arms?

There is no simple answer to the issue before us. Its solution, without the bitterest hardships and retrogression, can be attained only through goodwill, co-operation, and the patient exercise of the best minds. Australia is far along the road towards a social democracy. The concentrated will of the people can carry her farther. In a hundred and fifty years we have avoided internal violence. No angry heritage shuts the door to negotiation, there is no unbridgeable division in the people.

The problems before us, Australia and the world, are obviously problems of the mind and the will. Violence will not solve them; it can only leave everyone in a worse frame of mind for solving them. The financial machine cannot be adjusted by force; it can only be smashed — and in the dislocation it is not the steady builders of the future in the light of men's needs who will find their opportunity, but the most ruthless elements at both ends of the population. Once nations, or sections of the one community go to war, they automatically provide one another with

cogent reasons for hate. War is not fought without injustice, cruelty, depravity on both sides.

It is as illogical as the trial by ordeal or the ducking of witches as a means of justice. If the alleged witch drowned she was innocent, if she floated she was guilty and sentenced to death. That too is the logic of war. The great attraction of force is that it is a substitute for thinking, for patience, for sacrifice; but these are the only things that can carry humanity forward. The lack of liberty in any state is in itself an incentive to war, for where lives are cramped and expression measured out by a niggardly state release into violence is a relief. Small lives find stature in the hysteria of war.

Liberty, could it be recognised in full, would drive out violence; but, surer still, war drives out liberty. We have seen it happen. In the heat of conflict a people is easily persuaded to give up its liberties under a Defence of the Realm Act or some such. Public opinion banishes equality, and even formal equality before the law is soon no more. A habit of violence and of looking to violence as an ever handy solution is created. Propaganda with its lying and distortion corrupts the judgment of the citizen, fools and betrays him and, in the end, when he inevitably finds out the truth or some part of it, undermines his faith at large. In war time the publicity which alone gives democracy its element of safety, the only real safeguard of the public liberties, is suspended.

To suffer the agonies of war or the internal conflict to no end is surely the greatest perversity the human spirit can know. It is man's flight from the responsibility of being himself. It is the counter-evolution, the under-tow back to the pit whence we were dug. The hope that a world safe for democracy will emerge from a world war to-day, whoever nominally wins, is a reliance, pious rather than intelligent, on a miracle. Do we hope that a god will suspend the natural laws in favour of a good cause? The essential character of violence is not altered by the intentions or principles of those who invoke it. In invoking force we may call on the worst elements in our past to make our future, we invite the ape and the tiger to be our arbiters. To take up arms effectually against dictatorship abroad would make it necessary to create a dictatorship at home. Violence creates violence and always has.

As the world is constituted, is violence escapable? If we lay down our weapons, what about the other fellow? Are we to stand like the Lamb of God and be slain; and to see all that we care about trampled and erased?

Or should we join with our enemies in the work of destruction? Fight or go under are offered as the only alternatives, and that is one way of loading the argument in favour of war. It is an undue and intolerable simplification of life. It presupposes that every crisis is a sort of referendum to be answered Yes or No, and that no one does anything until the crisis is upon him. The only victory worth two beans is a moral victory, and that can only come out of the matured union of steadfast minds. The fight for democracy, its preservation and extension is a day to day, lifelong struggle. Vigilance and resistance to oppression of all kinds directed against the community or any section of it, is no counsel of passivity. To lay aside violence in public life as it has, by the majority, been laid aside in private life, is the next great step forward for humanity to take. If we can take it, we will survive; if we cannot, we will go back to barbarism.

What is the alternative? Not acquiescence, but passive resistance and the refusal to resort to violence come what may. Peace has made less clamour in the world than war, but it has had its victories. China achieved and held greatness by non-violence. The growth of liberty has been greater in England and her autonomous dominions than in any other European country, and it has been attended with far less bloodshed. To take a small instance near to us in time, Gandhi has survived ridicule to become honoured and a power through the use of passive resistance alone. Had he led an insurrection against the British rule in India with arms in his hand, the chances are that he would have been suppressed out of hand and long ago forgotten. Passive resistance has barely been tried, yet it is the weapon of the greatest value. Its strength and its weakness is that it depends upon moral integrity. It is a weapon that winnows its users, and is not susceptible, as is armed force, to the use of hypocrites. It is valueless without the courage and steadfast purpose behind it. Given those two things, it is irresistible.

The test question is Spain. It was perhaps inevitable that in Spain, with its long tradition of civil strife, violence should be met with violence, and the long agony of her civil war has set back the clock of progress by many years. Did the Spanish Government have any alternative to fighting? I believe the answer is yes. Franco might have seized the machinery of government, but he could not have governed against the mass resistance of the people, the steady unarmed refusal to obey a government it neither willed nor trusted. There would have been martyrs, but scarcely the mass martyrdom that Spain has suffered. The effect upon European opinion

of mass mutiny without armed resistance, so that every death would have been a murder at Franco's door would have been immense. The final result could not have been worse than the one that the war has brought about, nor would the two sections of the Spanish people have been so hopelessly alienated one from the other as they are now.

This is not a negative creed. It is a doctrine of resistance but not of bloodshed. To apply it to the rebuttal of invasion would require almost superhuman strength and courage; yet I believe it could be made the policy of hope and victory. Twice have the great generals of the world, Hannibal and Napoleon, been conquered by a policy of non-resistance. To insist that man's problems be solved on moral and intelligent grounds instead of by force requires high courage and initiative. For the individual it may well involve death without the excitement of battle. The blood of the martyrs is the only form of bloodshed that has ever been productive of good.

Progress is founded on the belief that the life is worth living and that it can become fuller and freer. To invoke mass murder to this end is the poorest of logic. It devolves upon those who love liberty and justice to make a stand against violence. No one else will. If any cause is worth the tribute of life and death it is peace, for peace alone will give what is best in life time to grow, will liberate our attention for the solution of our problems, will direct the material resources of the world towards the betterment instead of the destruction of life.