

## An excerpt taken from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

... Once joined with England and Russia in the war (Germany and Italy declared war on the United States right after Pearl Harbor), did the behavior of the United States show that her war aims were humanitarian, or centered on power and profit? Was she fighting the war to end the control by some nations over others or to make sure the controlling nations were friends of the United States? In August 1941, Roosevelt and Churchill met off the coast of Newfoundland and released to the world the Atlantic Charter, setting forth noble goals for the postwar world, saying their countries "seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other," and that they respected "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." The Charter was celebrated as declaring the right of nations to self-determination.

Two weeks before the Atlantic Charter, however, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, had assured the French government that they could keep their empire intact after the end of the war: "This Government, mindful of its traditional friendship for France, has deeply sympathized with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories and to preserve them intact." The Department of Defense history of Vietnam (*The Pentagon Papers*) itself pointed to what it called an "ambivalent" policy toward Indochina, noting that "in the Atlantic Charter and other pronouncements, the U.S. proclaimed support for national self-determination and independence" but also "early in the war repeatedly expressed or implied to the French an intention to restore to France its overseas empire after the war."

In late 1942, Roosevelt's personal representative assured French General Henri Giraud: "It is thoroughly understood that French sovereignty will be re-established as soon as possible throughout all the territory, metropolitan or colonial, over which flew the French flag in 1939." (These pages, like the others in the *Pentagon Papers*, are marked "TOP SECRET-Sensitive.") By 1945 the "ambivalent" attitude was gone. In May, Truman assured the French he did not question her "sovereignty over Indochina." That fall, the United States urged Nationalist China, put temporarily in charge of the northern part of Indochina by the Potsdam Conference, to turn it over to the French, despite the obvious desire of the Vietnamese for independence.

That was a favor for the French government. But what about the United States' own imperial ambitions during the war? What about the "aggrandizement, territorial or other" that Roosevelt had renounced in the Atlantic Charter?

In the headlines were the battles and troop movements: the invasion of North Africa in 1942, Italy in 1943, the massive, dramatic cross-Channel invasion of German -occupied France in 1944, the bitter battles as Germany was pushed back toward and over her frontiers, the increasing bombardment by the British and American air forces. And, at the same time, the Russian victories over the Nazi armies (the Russians, by the time of the cross-Channel invasion, had driven the Germans out of Russia, and were engaging 80 percent of the German troops). In the Pacific, in 1943 and 1944, there was the island-by-island move of American forces toward Japan, finding closer and closer bases for the thunderous bombardment of Japanese cities.

Quietly, behind the headlines in battles and bombings, American diplomats and businessmen worked hard to make sure that when the war ended, American economic power would be second to none in the world. United States business would penetrate areas that up to this time had been dominated by England. The Open Door Policy of equal access would be extended from Asia to Europe, meaning that the United States intended to push England aside and move in.

That is what happened to the Middle East and its oil. In August 1945 a State Department officer said that "a review of the diplomatic history of the past 35 years will show that petroleum has historically played a larger part in the external relations of the United States than any other commodity." Saudi Arabia was the largest oil pool in the Middle East. The ARAMCO oil corporation, through Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, got Roosevelt to agree to Lend Lease aid to Saudi Arabia, which would involve the U.S. government there and create a shield for the interests of ARAMCO. In 1944 Britain and the U.S. signed a pact on oil agreeing on "the principle of equal opportunity," and Lloyd Gardner concludes (*Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy*) that "the Open Door Policy was triumphant throughout the Middle East."

Historian Gabriel Kolko, after a close study of American wartime policy (*The Politics of War*), concludes that "the American economic war aim was to save capitalism at home and abroad." In April 1944 a State Department official said: "As you know, we've got to plan on enormously increased production in this country after the war, and the American domestic market can't absorb all that production indefinitely. There won't be any question about our needing greatly increased foreign markets."

Anthony Sampson, in his study of the international oil business (*The Seven Sisters*), says:

**By the end of the war the dominant influence in Saudi Arabia was unquestionably the United States. King Ibn Sand was regarded no longer as a wild desert warrior, but as a key piece in the power-game, to be wooed by the West. Roosevelt, on his way back from Yalta in February 1945, entertained the King on the cruiser Quincy, together with his entourage of fifty, including two sons, a prime minister, an astrologer and flocks of sheep for slaughter.**

Roosevelt then wrote to Ibn Sand, promising the United States would not change its Palestine policy without consulting the Arabs. In later years, the concern for oil would constantly compete with political concern for the Jewish state in the Middle East, but at this point, oil seemed more important.

With British imperial power collapsing during World War II, the United States was ready to move in. Hull said early in the war:

**Leadership toward a new system of international relationships in trade and other economic affairs will devolve very largely upon the United States because of our great economic strength. We should assume this leadership, and the responsibility that goes with it, primarily for reasons of pure national self-interest.**

Before the war was over, the administration was planning the outlines of the new international economic order, based on partnership between government and big business. Lloyd Gardner says of Roosevelt's chief adviser, Harry Hopkins, who had organized the relief programs of the New Deal: "No conservative outdid Hopkins in championing foreign investment, and its protection."

The poet Archibald MacLeish, then an Assistant Secretary of State, spoke critically of what he saw in the postwar world: "As things are now going, the peace we will make, the peace we seem to be making, will be a peace of oil, a peace of gold, a peace of shipping, a peace, in brief . . . without moral purpose or human interest . . ."

During the war, England and the United States set up the International Monetary Fund to regulate international exchanges of currency; voting would be proportional to capital contributed, so American dominance would be assured. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development was set up, supposedly to help reconstruct war-destroyed areas, but one of its first objectives was, in its own words, "to promote foreign investment."

The economic aid countries would need after the war was already seen in political terms: Averell Harriman, ambassador to Russia, said in early 1944: "Economic assistance is one of the most effective weapons at our disposal to influence European political events in the direction we desire,.. ."

The creation of the United Nations during the war was presented to the world as international cooperation to prevent future wars. But the U.N. was dominated by the Western imperial countries- the United States, England, and France-and a new imperial power, with military bases and powerful influence in Eastern Europe-the Soviet Union. An important conservative Republican Senator, Arthur Vandenburg, wrote in his diary about the United Nations Charter:

**The striking thing about it is that it is so conservative from a nationalist standpoint. It is based virtually on a four-power alliance. . . . This is anything but a wild-eyed internationalist dream of a world State.... I am deeply impressed (and surprised) to find Hull so carefully guarding our American veto in his scheme of things.**

The plight of Jews in German-occupied Europe, which many people thought was at the heart of the war against the Axis, was not a chief concern of Roosevelt. Henry Feingold's research (*The Politics of Rescue*) shows that, while the Jews were being put in camps and the process of annihilation was beginning that would end in the horrifying extermination of 6 million Jews and millions of non- Jews, Roosevelt failed to take steps that might have saved thousands of lives. He did not see it as a high priority; he left it to the State Department, and in the State Department anti-Semitism and a cold bureaucracy became obstacles to action.

Was the war being fought to establish that Hitler was wrong in his ideas of white Nordic supremacy over "inferior" races? The United States' armed forces were segregated by race. When troops were jammed onto the *Queen Mary* in early 1945 to go to combat duty in the European theater, the blacks were stowed down in the depths of the ship near the engine room, as far as possible from the fresh air of the deck, in a bizarre reminder of the slave voyages of old.

The Red Cross, with government approval, separated the blood donations of black and white. It was, ironically, a black physician named Charles Drew who developed the blood bank system. He was put in charge of the wartime donations, and then fired when he tried to end blood segregation. Despite the urgent need for wartime labor, blacks were still being discriminated against for jobs. A spokesman for a West Coast aviation plant said: "The Negro will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities. . . . Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ them." Roosevelt never did anything to enforce the orders of the Fair Employment Practices Commission he had set up.

The Fascist nations were notorious in their insistence that the woman's place was in the home. Yet, the war against Fascism, although it utilized women in defense industries where they were desperately needed, took no special steps to change the subordinate role of women. The War Manpower Commission, despite the large numbers of women in war work, kept women off its

policymaking bodies. A report of the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, by its director, Mary Anderson, said the War Manpower Commission had "doubts and uneasiness" about "what was then regarded as a developing attitude of militancy or a crusading spirit on the part of women leaders.. .."

In one of its policies, the United States came close to direct duplication of Fascism. This was in its treatment of the Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast. After the Pearl Harbor attack, anti-Japanese hysteria spread in the government. One Congressman said: "I'm for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps. ... Damn them! Let's get rid of them!"

Franklin D. Roosevelt did not share this frenzy, but he calmly signed Executive Order 9066, in February 1942, giving the army the power, without warrants or indictments or hearings, to arrest every Japanese-American on the West Coast-110,000 men, women, and children-to take them from their homes, transport them to camps far into the interior, and keep them there under prison conditions. Three-fourths of these were Nisei-children born in the United States of Japanese parents and therefore American citizens. The other fourth-the Issei, born in Japan-were barred by law from becoming citizens. In 1944 the Supreme Court upheld the forced evacuation on the grounds of military necessity. The Japanese remained in those camps for over three years.

Michi Weglyn was a young girl when her family experienced evacuation and detention. She tells (*Years of Infamy*) of bungling in the evacuation, of misery, confusion, anger, but also of Japanese-American dignity and fighting back. There were strikes, petitions, mass meetings, refusal to sign loyalty oaths, riots against the camp authorities. The Japanese resisted to the end.

Not until after the war did the story of the Japanese-Americans begin to be known to the general public. The month the war ended in Asia, September 1945, an article appeared in *Harper's Magazine* by Yale Law Professor Eugene V. Rostow, calling the Japanese evacuation "our worst wartime mistake." Was it a "mistake"-or was it an action to be expected from a nation with a long history of racism and which was fighting a war, not to end racism, but to retain the fundamental elements of the American system?

It was a war waged by a government whose chief beneficiary- despite volumes of reforms- was a wealthy elite. The alliance between big business and the government went back to the very first proposals of Alexander Hamilton to Congress after the Revolutionary War. By World War II that partnership had developed and intensified. During the Depression, Roosevelt had once denounced the "economic royalists," but he always had the support of certain important business leaders. During the war, as Bruce Catton saw it from his post in the War Production Board: "The economic royalists, denounced and derided . . . had a part to play now. ..."

Catton (*The War Lords of Washington*) described the process of industrial mobilization to carry on the war, and how in this process wealth became more and more concentrated in fewer and fewer large corporations. In 1940 the United States had begun sending large amounts of war supplies to England and France. By 1941 three-fourths of the value of military contracts were handled by fifty- six large corporations. A Senate report, "Economic Concentration and World War II," noted that the government contracted for scientific research in industry during the war, and although two thousand corporations were involved, of \$1 billion spent, \$400 million went to ten large corporations.

Management remained firmly in charge of decision making during the war, and although 12 million workers were organized in the CIO and AFL, labor was in a subordinate position. Labor-

management committees were set up in five thousand factories, as a gesture toward industrial democracy, but they acted mostly as disciplinary groups for absentee workers, and devices for increasing production. Catton writes: "The big operators who made the working decisions had decided that nothing very substantial was going to be changed."

Despite the overwhelming atmosphere of patriotism and total dedication to winning the war, despite the no-strike pledges of the AFL and CIO, many of the nation's workers, frustrated by the freezing of wages while business profits rocketed skyward, went on strike. During the war, there were fourteen thousand strikes, involving 6,770,000 workers, more than in any comparable period in American history. In 1944 alone, a million workers were on strike, in the mines, in the steel mills, in the auto and transportation equipment industries.

When the war ended, the strikes continued in record numbers- 3 million on strike in the first half of 1946. According to Jeremy Brecher (*Strike!*), if not for the disciplinary hand of the unions there might have been "a general confrontation between the workers of a great many industries, and the government, supporting the employers."

In Lowell, Massachusetts, for example, according to an unpublished manuscript by Marc Miller ("The Irony of Victory: Lowell During World War II"), there were as many strikes in 1943 and 1944 as in 1937. It may have been a "people's war," but here was dissatisfaction at the fact that the textile mill profits grew 600 percent from 1940 to 1946, while wage increases in cotton goods industries went up 36 percent. How little the war changed the difficult condition of women workers is shown by the fact that in Lowell, among women war workers with children, only 5 percent could have their children taken care of by nursery schools; the others had to make their own arrangements.

Beneath the noise of enthusiastic patriotism, there were many people who thought war was wrong, even in the circumstances of Fascist aggression. Out of 10 million drafted for the armed forces during World War II, only 43,000 refused to fight. But this was three times the proportion of C.O.'s (conscientious objectors) in World War I. Of these 43,000, about 6,000 went to prison, which was, proportionately, four times the number of C.O.'s who went to prison during World War I. Of every six men in federal prison, one was there as a C.O.

Many more than 43,000 refusers did not show up for the draft at all. The government lists about 350,000 cases of draft evasion, including technical violations as well as actual desertion, so it is hard to tell the true number, but it may be that the number of men who either did not show up or claimed C.O. status was in the hundreds of thousands-not a small number. And this in the face of an American community almost unanimously for the war.