

P. Sorokin, “War and the militarization of society,” *Artel’noe delo* no. 1-4 (1922): 3-10.

“Similar causes in similar conditions give rise to similar effects.” A basic principle of science.

§1

One of the numerous consequences of the extended and exhausting war is the change of social organization of the warring groups so that it approaches a military-socialist type society. I take this term from V. I. Lenin, who introduced it into daily use. We will settle upon what we mean by this term.

An ideal-limiting military-socialist society is also found where: 1) the scope of interference, surveillance, and regulation of life, behavior, and mutual relations of citizens on the part of the authorities is unlimited, 2) the scope of autonomy of the ‘self-determination’ of its members in the domain of their behavior and mutual relations is negligible, virtually null.

This is a society where power and its agents decisively regulate and normalize all behaviors and all relations of citizens: their activity, profession, clothing, food, residence, faith, convictions, tastes, marriage, number of children, etc. In other words, here all mutual relations: economic, family, marriage, legal, religious, scientific, esthetic, etc., are not left to the individual discretion and initiative of members of society, but are entirely established and normalized by the authorities, from above and centralized. Here people are not autonomous individuals, but are directed and managed by the authorities; not as something of inherent value, but as simple property of the latter. Speaking in purely juridical terms there are no private-legal relations here at all, and all relations are publicly legal, regulated from above.

From this definition flow the following trademarks of such a society: 1) *The competencies of the authorities are absolute and unbounded here.* Power here is higher than the law, “whatever suits the authorities holds the force of law”. Subjects like soldiers in training must implicitly obey all orders of the government. There are no “rights of man and citizen” that cannot be abolished, there is no sphere of behavior, right up to the intimate, that cannot be regulated. 2) *Complete centralization reigns.* There is no place here for personal discretion, for individual initiative, independent of the authorities. Decentralized autonomy of persons and groups cannot exist here, 3) accordingly, *there is not and cannot be private property here,* for all tools, means of production and circulation belong to the authorities (to “society”); they regulate production, exchange, and distribution and demand, it regulates from above, from the center, according to a unified state plan. This also relates to all spheres of behavior of the citizen. *The life of each of them from birth until death:* should he live or die, what to do, how to do it, to marry or not, whom and when, how to believe, what to eat, where to live, what to read, and so forth—all this is *predefined from above.* 4) *There is no class of capitalists as owners of the means of production and circulation,* because there is no private property for them. But there is not equality or absence of exploitation. Here the stratum of persons appropriating added value to themselves is constituted by the commanding layers of society with their nearest clients and helpers. 5) *All the structure of society right up to the psyche of its members has been adjusted to war and permeated by militarism.* Here everything is done by command, by warrant; everything, right up to science, teaching, and intellectual life. All of society represents a single military camp or

occupied fortress; unified military discipline reigns everywhere, permeating society from bottom to top.

There are the basic marks of an *ideal-limiting military-socialist society*.

War, as was said, changes organizational groups so that they approach this type. And it changes them all the more powerfully, all other things being equal, the longer and more onerous the war, the more the war goes on hurting society.

§2

One might ask, *why does war entail such changes of social organization?* For many reasons. The most important were shown by Mr. Spencer in his brilliant theory of military and industrial societies.¹

The first reason is that this kind of *military socialization of society is demanded in time of war by the self-preservation interests of the latter*. All other things being equal, out of two warring societies the one with the chance of winning will be the one where all of the population has been transformed into one camp subjected to a single will, to severe discipline, in a word, transformed into a disciplined army....

This is the first, basic principle (often unwittingly adopted by many, right up to the authorities of society itself), which gives rise to change of social organization in the direction indicated.

There are others along with this. The breakout of war and training for war generally sharply change the forms of behavior of the populations of the warring countries. It “de-inoculates” the population from some actions and “inoculates” them from others, it disaccustoms the population from some forms of behavior and accustoms them to others. Here it is like a tailor who takes one suit off of us and puts on another. War and the barracks actually accustom people to behavior contrary to acts caused by peacetime life. Peacetime life develops personal initiative in people, love of freedom and peaceful productive labor, respect for persons, for their rights and their dignity. It suppresses malevolent actions: murder, violence, destruction, and other crimes. It is favorable to the development of science, art, and culture. In peacetime, victory goes, not to crude force, but to the person possessing the greatest intellectual [spiritual] abilities in various domains of life. The military regime and war have the opposite effect. They continuously *accustom the soldier to servitude and obeisance*. Reasoning is not demanded of him, only obeisance. They command and order him, but do not take counsel with him. He is simple material in the hands of the authorities. Personal initiative is not demanded of him, but only blind and unquestioning subjugation to the will of the authorities. All military service, all training muster are directed at making him a blind tool in the hands of commanders, in order to make a machine from an autonomous individual deprived of any autonomy, completely controlled from above, in the end, from a single center, headquarters. Military authority is itself despotic by nature. It is beyond control and without bounds. The supreme commander is an absolute ruler whose actions are not subject to discussion. His will is law. His rights during war are unlimited. He can throw hundreds of thousands of people to their deaths and no one has the right to rescind his order. And so forth.

¹ See H. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology* (3 vols., 1874-1896) [cites the 1898 Russian translation].

Centralization and comprehensive regulation from above is the soul of all military organization and all war. A nation that is often at war is continuously training itself in this direction. This training of course does not happen without leaving a trace, whether for the nation or for the authorities. The corresponding servile forms of behavior are directly or indirectly reflected, the more so the greater and stronger they are consolidated in the former, in all its social life and all of its social organization. The despotism of military authority transfers also to its civilian functions. During frequent and extended wars these traits are inculcated little by little in the whole nation and enable the approach of its organization to the type of the military-socialist society. The despotization of the authorities themselves also leads to this, and what is dictated by war also has to be said about other actions inoculated by bloody warfare. Instead of respect for the individual it preaches and demands murders, instead of respect for alien rights, their complete violation, instead of love it inoculates spite, instead of peaceful labor its demands destruction. All of this does not pass in vain for either the nation or the authorities, for any action of ours is reflected by ricochet upon us and gradually remakes us. This especially relates to acts inoculated by war. It accustoms the nation to servility, and the authorities to dictatorship and absolutism. From this it is clear why it leads to the rise and flowering of tyranny, to the devaluation of the individual, to destroying and ignoring all its rights, its dignities and freedoms, i.e. to the traits characterizing the military-socialist type of society.

Such is the second aspect of war leading to war socialism. Finally, war leads to the same result in a third manner. It not only decreases the population, but sharply changes its qualitative makeup. *It bears away the best from the field of life and leaves lesser human material to survive.* In wars it is really primarily *the healthiest and most able-bodied adult groups* who die. The sick and crippled are not taken in the army, and children and the elderly are not taken, but usually only people in the 18-45 age group are mobilized. Furthermore, criminals and morally tainted persons are also not taken in the army; they consequently do not fall under the risk of death. And that is not the least of it. Cowards, careerists, and persons without any deep sense of obligation try not to end up at the front, but to “dig in at the rear” somewhere; if they do end up at the front, then they strive to shirk danger. Persons who are honest with themselves, full of a sense of duty, do not do this; it follows that they are risking more here. Study of the victims of war even shows that in wars, whether directly or indirectly, intellectually qualified persons die in higher percentages than the unqualified. Thus, for example, in modern war the losses of all of England including the colonies were near 800,000. For every 1,000,000 of the population in England those with higher education and with scientifically qualified training come to around 2000. This kind of people died at a much higher rate during the war. One has to say the same about all other warring countries as well.² The slogan of the ancient Romans summoning to war went: “Give us your best.” This slogan is profoundly true. War takes away the best and leaves the lesser to live. But that is not all. Due to heredity war takes away not only the best, but also their posterity; it takes them away as the producers of future generations, and thus leads to the multiplication of second-rate people. Were this not so, second-rate people would be pushed into the background due to competition. The first places would have been taken by the better types and their offspring. “Wars are not paid for in wartime,” said Ben Franklin, “the bill comes later, after many generations.” And he is right. This tragic role of war does not manifest itself immediately, but later it is indubitable and fatal. Especially in large severe and frequent wars. Thanks to these

² [That is a somewhat problematic assumption in the case of the Russian empire, given the relatively low rate at which those with university educations were subject to military conscription.]

the qualitative makeup of the nation grows ever worse over the course of many decades, and in sum a great nation can become dull, a great state can go in decline. In this fatal role of war lies one of the main causes of the fall of ancient Greece and Rome, where thanks to a host of wars, almost all the “best” of both foreigners and citizens and their offspring died; new arrivals turned out not to be in a position to support the achievements of their predecessors. This condition (among other causes) entailed the death of ancient states and culture.

This very influence of war on the qualitative makeup of the population also serves as a cause favoring the growth of militarization of society. Any government (like any living thing on earth) strives to unbounded expansion of its competency, intervention, surveillance, and authority, if it does not meet with obstacles on the part of its subjects. It is easy to understand that physically stronger, biologically healthier, more developed, volitionally and morally capable individuals resist this tendency of power more successfully than physically and social-psychologically weak individuals. Just the fact that the former exist in society is already a barrier to the unlimited expansion of state power. War, having taken away mostly these elements from the field of life, thereby removes that obstacle and thus abets the growth of state surveillance and intervention and the reduction of the scope of liberty and autonomy of subjects. The remaining second- and third-rate material cannot manifest this opposition like the “better” ones.

Such is the third aspect of war leading to the indicated result.

§3

Following these preliminary remarks let us briefly verify the correctness of our fundamental assumption in the facts. The first confirmation to what I have said will be given by *the very organization of military groups and the entire army* (however: both in foreign and domestic wars). Take any barracks, any military sector, any combat-ready army, any besieged fortress. In every military society you will encounter all the basic traits of society as I have characterized them.

Authority in relation to the subject soldiers is here absolute. Its sphere of control is immense. It commands and the soldiers obey. Soldiers are malleable material, “cannon fodder” in its hands. The autonomy of their behavior is negligible. Their form of life is determined from above. Their occupations as well. Their dress, residence, food, reading, convictions, entertainments, etc., all of this is predetermined beforehand. The slightest protest elicits punishment. The slightest violation of discipline brings suppressive measures. Centralization is brought to perfection. Everything issues from above, from the center, everything is directed by it, everything is patronized by it. Freedom and autonomy have no place here. Criticism of activities from below is not permitted. Neither is assessing them from below. At any minute they may demand all manner of sacrifice, up to and including his life. He can do nothing. All the property of the military group is common property. There is no private property, apart from minimal items of personal use. But there is also no equality. The entire military group breaks down into a series of steps, starting from the supreme authorities and ending with the simple rank and file. The material level of life of these layers is sharply distinct: the general lives luxuriously, the infantry is often starving. The degree of privileges is also different: the scope of the rights of the general is not equal to the right of the simple officer, the rights of the latter are not equal to those of the infantryman. A stark inequality

reigns. In short, the social structure of military groups in general just happens to be the structure which belongs to a militarized society.

Comparison of the social organization of primarily primitive groups, frequently warring ones on the one hand, peaceful ones on the other, may serve as the second category of facts confirming my statements above. As Herbert Spencer has already correctly demonstrated, the social organization of warring groups of savages is a good deal closer to the type of military-socialist society, since the social structure of groups of civilians [literally, “peaceful ones,” but in English one frequent counterpose soldier and civilian in this sense], even of the same race, but small and rarely warring, is a good deal further from this type.

For example, among warring Zulus the authority of the sovereign is boundless. His subjects are his property, whereas among other tribes of the same Kaffir race, peaceful tribes, the extent of the interference of the authorities and their rights are completely modest. [... and so forth with further extended examples, including Sparta and Rome...]

With the onset of the war in all the warring countries military socialism began to grow as well. Warring societies, figuratively speaking, began to curtail themselves [fold in on themselves] under the influence of the increasing pressure of the military coil. Even freedom-loving, ‘individualist’ England did not avoid this fate.

This shift of social organization and social life in the direction of military socialism was expressed in a thousand concrete forms. The most important symptoms of this phenomenon were: 1) *In the domain of the political-legal*: the expansion of functions, competencies, prerogatives, and rights of the authorities; and the constriction of rights of autonomy of behavior of civilians. Everywhere, not even excluding England, normal laws were supplanted by laws of wartime. Freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, etc. were subjected to limitation; speech and press were subject to censorship. The introduction of emergency and military provisions meant the transfer to the authorities of exclusive prerogatives. This especially had an impact in warring countries other than England. In short, in this sphere the growth of military socialism clearly manifested itself.

2) *The same thing also happened in the domain of the country’s economic life*. And here the extent of the interference of the authorities rose at the expense of the autonomy of behavior and mutual relations of the citizens themselves. Most economic relations in the sphere of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption, previously regulated by the citizens themselves, aside from and independently of the authorities, now fell under the accounting, control, revision, and direct management of the latter. The whole business got started in the domain of production relations and military industry working on defense, and then gradually state regulation expanded to other domains of economic life as well. Private property in a hundred forms was subject to limitation, and the longer the war went on, the stronger it became. State monopolies began to grow. An entire series of branches of industry transferred directly into the hands of the state, others merely under its control. Concerns about the state’s ability to produce, regulate, and distribute were subjected to the same fate [i.e., limitation]. In short, the place of an economy regulated by autonomous will of private individuals was replaced by “coercive-regulative state economy.”

3) *The same thing happened with the psychology and ideology of the masses.* The place of peacetime psychology with its aversion to blood and naked violence began to be taken by military psychology (in various concrete forms), entirely issuing from *the principle of naked violence*, viewing in it the sword of redemption that cuts through all the Gordian knots of social disorder and wickedness. Violence, bloody struggle, “direct action,” have begun to seem the anchor of salvation. Bringing paradise to earth by coercive military means, by means of violent seizure of power, by “military dictatorship” of saviors subject to “iron discipline”: this has come to seem something completely proper and capable of achieving the goal. The aversion to blood has disappeared. Faith in the life-giving power of peaceful struggle has become “bourgeois prejudice.” The psyche of people has been militarized to the final depths. Even the terminology of people has become militant. The successful growth of the ideology of violent social revolution serves as a partial manifestation of this general phenomenon, the faith in dictatorship, the quick growth in the number of members of “leftist” currents that have made the principle of violence the alpha and omega of their politics, and the declining success of peaceful ideologies (social reformism, social conciliation, and peaceful evolution).

4) *Centralization has increased in colossal fashion, the bureaucratization and militarization of institutions.*

The further history of this “novel of history” is curious. The war has ended. And what do we see? We see how in all countries a reverse process has come about, a demilitarization or decline of military socialism. The unbounded rights of the authorities have been reduced to the bounds of normal law, their interference is limited, industry and the economy are being freed of state oversight, military provisions are being replaced by normal ones, the rights and autonomy of citizens are growing, freedoms as well, and the limitations on private initiative and... property are gradually falling away. In short, the spring of military socialism is weakening, society is starting to return to peaceful forms. The same is happening in the sphere of social psychology and ideology. “Reformism,” “conciliation,” and “evolutionism” are again raising their heads. Society is moving to the right, not excluding the working masses, too (the unemployment crisis hinders this in no small measure). This has clearly manifested itself in recent socialist congresses in Italy and Germany, at the labor party congress in England, etc. Were it not for the crisis, this process of “demagnetizing” society from the spells of military socialism would proceed even faster. If there is war again, the process will come to a stop, and the crisis of military socialism will arise once again. That is the way things stand in the West.

Things are no different here at home. The war ended in 1920. And then what? At first it was scarcely noticeable, but slowly already in 1920 a process of demilitarization of social started: concessions, the food tax, private trade, cooperatives were the first clear symptoms of the turnaround. The New Economic Policy in which there would be, in the correct words of V. I. Lenin, “more of the old (pre-communist) than in our previous economic policy” made the turn clear even for the blind. The demilitarization (decommunization) process was transformed before our eyes and is proceeding with amazing speed. And once again, if there will be no war, it will proceed further.

If there will be war again, things will turn out otherwise...

Translation: KH