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**Robert Forsythe**

**The  
WORLD  
GONE  
MAD**

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# THE WORLD GONE MAD

By ROBERT FORSYTHE

FROM experience I find that I am no more sensitive than my fellowman. If, therefore, I am oppressed by the feeling that there are malevolent forces at work in the world which may eventually bring us all to our ruin, I can assume that I am not alone in my forebodings. There is the difference, however, that while an ordinary newspaper reader may have moments of fear and moments of hope according to the trend of events at Geneva or Paris or Rome, there is no such solace possible for anyone who understands these forces at work.

It is to the interest of the British, for example, to preserve the League of Nations and to consider Mussolini's actions in Ethiopia as a form of aberration common to power-crazed dictators but that is an analysis which solves no problems. The truth is that peace, quite apart from any ethical considerations, is essential now to the safety of the British Empire. The further truth is that Mussolini, power-crazed or not, has no alternative but war for the economic problems of Italy. This would be true whether Mussolini was in command in Italy or whether the country was governed by Mr. George Lansbury, the Christian pacifist. What we are perpetually faced with are the contradictions of capitalism and it is futile merely to take out our wrath on a Mussolini or a Hitler, the principal war-mongers, when what is at fault is something more profound and fundamental, of which they are the symbols.

Put in the bluntest form, there is no lasting peace possible on this earth while capitalism lives. Neither prayer nor good intentions nor the most startling re-



versal of action by financiers and industrialists can alter the matter. If Mussolini, Hitler and the international armament trust were to turn angels tomorrow it would make no difference. When Ramsay MacDonald and the Labor Party were in power in Great Britain, they were as ruthless with India as any Lord Curzon or Sir Samuel Hoare. So long as they desired to maintain capitalism there was no choice for them. The liberals are perennially shocked by the surrender of principle of liberals reaching places of political control, but there is nothing more obvious than the fact that the Pilsudskis and Scheidemanns and Briands and MacDonalds are not only renegades but victims.

There is nothing more plain than the certainty of the threat of war so long as capitalism and its political form, nationalistic imperialism, remain on this globe. As John Strachey has pointed out, the Versailles Treaty was a monumental blunder of capitalism because it arbitrarily altered values which could not be altered. From a sane capitalist viewpoint it would have been infinitely better because of their respective technological developments, to reverse the positions of Germany and France as to colonies. In an age of national self-sufficiency, Germany, with its highly-developed industrial plant, cannot live without colonies. France, with its different economy, might very well survive without them. But France and Great Britain have colonies and Germany and Italy are driven to seek them. A temporary but common sense solution for capitalism would be for England and France to surrender some of their stolen possessions, but anyone who recalls the righteous uproar in London when it was revealed that Anthony Eden had attempted to forestall Mussolini's aggression in Ethiopia by the gift of a parcel of British colonial lands will hardly believe that friendship and sanity can ever overcome national greed and pride.

CAPITALISM has been good to many people. For the sake of discussion, let us assume it has been good to everybody. When everything favorable has been said for it, the conclusion remains that the contradictions of capitalism are making the ruin of mankind inevitable. It is no longer a matter of one nation oppressing another but of a final world conflict which will annihilate them all. If this seems extreme, let us confine our thinking to another World War which will be no more disastrous than the last World War. No sane person can face this prospect without terror and yet the certainty of the drive toward war is as fully established as a mathematical theorem. Such conjectures are no longer a matter of debate. Most of us have lived through one World War and its aftermath. The next would need be no more deadly to wreak injuries from which European civilization could never recover.

And war under capitalism is inevitable. There is no more possibility that capitalism can avert it than it was ever possible for capitalism to avert the last war. That it came in 1914 instead of 1907 or 1924 was a matter of detail. Whether it arises now out of the Ethiopian crisis or for some later cause is equally immaterial. Prior to 1914 there was the Agadir Crisis and the Bosnian Crisis. When these blew over there was a feeling that general wars were impossible in a civilized world. It was just as strongly felt that the Balkan Wars could have no effect outside their restricted area. The exacting analysis of Marx and Engels proving that by the very nature of capitalism a world conflict was inevitable was looked upon as the outmoded posturings of men who had long been discredited by the progress of civilization. But anyone who will study the diplomatic and economic forces active in pre-war days will see that peace could not have been indefinitely prolonged. The pedants who



seek to prove that the world would have been a different place for us all if only Kaiser Wilhelm or Sir Edward Gray had taken another sort of action at 2:13 on the afternoon of July 14, 1914, are as much beside the point as solemn editorials now on compromises, sanctions and the power of the great peace-loving peoples of the world. There will be no peace while capitalism remains.

Because of this one cardinal point, the world seems now to be taking part in some evil experience. There is a feeling of despair as one contemplates the childish little statesmen dashing from London to Geneva, from Rome to Paris, looking like nothing so much as helpless puppets jerked about by a drunken idiot. The pompous Mussolini mouthing his defiances on the borders of Northern Italy is nothing but a little boy, shouting to overcome his fear. The obsessed Hitler and the maniacal Goebbels with their cries against Bolshevism and their speeches filled with shrill screams of hate and impotence are symbols of a disease which is gnawing at humanity. What we are seeing is civilization, the sad European civilization of capitalist terror and hatred and cruelty, rushing to its doom.

**W**ITH their world reeling stubbornly toward its end, there was one last masterly stroke — the fantastic and hideous spectacle of Mr. Rickett and his Standard Oil concessions in Ethiopia.

Such a stupendous spectacle could only have been arranged by some Master Showman intent on furnishing a climax of madness which might forever represent modern capitalistic civilization. Never in the history of mankind has there been such a colossal jest. The protestations of sanctity of the British, the smug righteousness of the French, the heaven-delivered mission of the

Italians to rescue Ethiopia from its backward state—all jettisoned, all made ridiculous by the mystery man of oil representing capitalism at its height.

While Stanley Baldwin was finishing his vacation at Aix-les-Bains and Anthony Eden was courting back and forth with his futile propositions for compromise—compromise which would hand Ethiopia over to Mussolini but save black Africa for Britain, the British Home Office was making public its new handbook on anti-gas precautions. The effect of the unemotional pages, said *The New Statesman and Nation*, was “to turn what had hitherto been an horrific fantasy into a close and appalling reality. It is as if people who had been brought up to believe vaguely in the Calvinist hell suddenly felt on their faces the flames from the pit which is bottomless.”

There is no defense. Matters are indeed far worse than the Home Office suggests, for, while it makes it clear that high explosive shells would accompany gas bombing, it omits to say what we are to do when various gases with opposite actions are used together, or used, as they will be, in conjunction with thermite, which can be dropped in bombs weighing only two pounds, each able to start a fire which cannot be extinguished by any means so far discovered. Nor does it make any mention of new gases which we know to be almost ready for use. . . . The ordinary householder's chief defense is to shut all his doors and windows and to make one room airtight. . . . We are told how many people can live in a gasproof room of a certain size for twelve hours. We are not told what to do at the end of twelve hours if, as is probable, the other windows are broken and the district not yet freed from gas and gas contamination . . . for mustard gas and lewisite lie on the ground in liquid form and may continue to kill for several weeks after a raid. . . . If a concrete surface has been soaked with liquid mustard gas “it may be necessary to break up the surface and re-lay it.” . . . The handbook makes no pretense that effective gas masks can be provided for more than a tiny fraction of the population. . . . Of all the deaths known to man, there are few more painful than death from



mustard gas, though some of the new gases are said to produce an even more intense agony. . . . While Lord Londonderry, who has boasted of his efforts to prevent the abolition of aerial bombing, may successfully secure his own home in London against gas or retire into the comparative safety of his Durham estate, the mass of the population in poorer districts would be virtually helpless. Instead of wasting our time on precautions for the poor, it would be cheaper and more humane to make stocks of morphine available for those who prefer a gentler death. . . .

Separated by 3,000 miles of water, we may feel that America is safe from such horrors but the feeling is not shared by our own authorities. The gold vaults of the government have been moved from San Francisco to Denver and from New York to Kentucky. The ease with which Balbo brought the Italian air armada to the United States was as terrifying as the appearance of the German submarines off Newport during the World War.

THIS, then, is the destiny of capitalist civilization. These are the plans of the "civilized" world. The civilized world is made up of such ingredients as Italy, which saved Europe from Bolshevism; Germany, which saved Europe from Bolshevism; England, which saved the world from Bolshevism; and France, which saved Poland from Bolshevism and Rumania for Magda Lupescu.

I have no wish to taunt the honest people who have been thankful that civilization has been saved from the Red hordes. One can only stand aghast at their world's desire for death. They are our own people. If we scream at them to look where their precious civilization has brought them, it is only from a desire to save them. If we are appalled at the sight of Bishop Manning turning his pulpit over to Matthew Woll to denounce the American Communists, we are



no less overwhelmed by the seemingly suicidal intent of the Roosevelt notes of protest to Russia. What malevolent genius is it which prompts this form of madness at a time when the world is tottering?

If prayer could keep the world alive, I should have no objection to prayer; but we have had 2,000 years of Christianity and there is no sane Christian who even contends that the power of the church is able to still the warlike forces of the world. If it were possible to arm so completely that no nation would dare attack another nation for fear of the cataclysmic effect upon them both, I should raise my voice for armament; but the most stupendous military establishments in the history of mankind are obviously heading only toward the annihilation of all nations. If combinations of great powers could be formed to keep the peace by main and ruthless force, there could be a basis for agreement even at the cost of tyranny triumphant; but there are no such combinations possible. Under capitalism there are no interests but the interests of aggrandizement; no such interests even if there were honest devoted people in power to desire them. Capitalism ethically guided is not capitalism but failure. Unless it is ruthless and realistic, it falls. It falls in any event when its opportunity for expansion is halted. It has been halted. The struggle for the few remaining unexploited areas makes war inevitable.

When Sir Samuel Hoare speaks at Geneva, he speaks not of cure but of delay. When Nicholas Murray Butler, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, spends his time denouncing Communism, he speaks as a man bereft of his mind. Where, in any of the sectors to which he appeals for help, does he see hope for mankind? If there is hope from anywhere but Communism, let him say where it is. The great civilized powers have saved civilization from Bolshevism. There remains now only

the task of saving civilization from itself. Civilization! What a strange name for death and destruction. Is it Bolshevism which has brought the capitalistic powers to ruin? Do the Butlers and Hearsts say that it is the fault of Soviet Russia that 15,000,000 American workers are out of jobs? Do they contend that it is Stalin who is urging Mussolini to attack Ethiopia and bring the world down about his ears?

But we do not want to argue the merits of Communism. There is no time for that. There remains only the need of discussing life or death. We say only one thing and we say it to sceptics, God-fearing men and women, lords and ladies, blacks and whites and yellows, rich and poor. There is one hope in the world: Communism. Everything else has been tried and has failed. Other failures have not been final and deadly. This failure would mean the end of civilization as we know it.

Does anyone assume that Soviet Russia is a hundred times worse than its bitterest enemy claims it to be? Despite such lies, it would still be the hope of the world. Does anyone believe that the people of the Soviet Union are exclusively beasts and villains and murderers? The charges against them could reach new heights of mendacity and viciousness and still they would be the hope of the world. If not Communism, what else? Name it!

**W**E say that a Soviet world would be a world of peace. We speak to the people of the world. It is not a question of whether we are friends or enemies. We don't ask you whether you are Christians or non-Christians. We ask you only if you want to live

When you go to disaster, we may have to go with you, but as Marxists we shall not be driven like dumb animals to the slaughter. We ask only that you under-



stand these forces before it is too late. Whatever happens there will be no end of Communism. There is a definite probability that the Soviet Union would survive a general conflagration. It is a huge country; it is owned by a union of peoples who have glimpsed what the future in a sane world can be and they will not surrender easily. It may survive intact and triumphant; it may survive in a reduced form; it may be brought down by the madness of the rest of humanity. But ideas do not necessarily disappear when nations disappear. Even if it is confined to the minds of a few men living on the remote and frozen wastes which are now being discovered by the Soviet adventurers in the North, the idea will carry on. It will carry on because there is no other idea possible of being carried on. Is there any mortal so demented as to wish to preserve the sacred fire of capitalism? The civilization which the good people speak of with such fervency is entirely in the hands of the Communists. If it cannot be saved by Communism, it is lost.

This is the ultimate. This is the truth, the final truth, the unescapable truth. But there are ways of fighting even the inevitable, ways of altering the world as it progresses to its end. For us here there is the practical need of fighting for our lives in such united-front groupings as the American League Against War and Fascism. It is a place where all can join who love life above destruction. Nothing is hopeless when there is an understanding of the obstacles and a tearing away of the black veils of obscurantism. We tell nobody that to fight against war they must fight immediately for the full Communist program. We ask them to fight for themselves.

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