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Socialism, Capitalism, and Militarism: A Reply to Dye and Zeigler

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In the December 1989 issue of *PS*, Thomas Dye and Harmon Zeigler argue that socialist nations are inherently more militaristic than capitalist ones because they are "driven by the bureaucratic imperatives of a society organized on collective coercive principles." In contrast, "capitalist states, whether authoritarian or democratic, rely principally upon markets to organize societal activity. Markets organize people for private enterprise and rely upon voluntary exchange to carry on these enterprises" therefore, capitalist nations are inherently less militaristic (Dye and Zeigler 1989: 812). Below are some major differences I have with their position.

Measuring Militarism

Dye and Zeigler (D&Z) find proof of an inherent relation between socialism and militarism in their assertion that "socialist nations spend larger shares of their gross national products for military purposes than capitalist nations." But why is the share of GNP a sure measure of militarism? D&Z do not tell us. Since socialist nations usually have much smaller GNPs than

capitalist ones yet often feel they must match Western spending in order to maintain security, it is no surprise they spend proportionately more of their GNP on defense. They are operating from a smaller industrial and financial base and in many cases are actually spending *less* in absolute amounts than Western nations.

This is certainly true if we compare NATO and Warsaw Treaty forces. Since the Western nations (including France and Spain) have a collective GNP of \$9 trillion, almost three times that of the Warsaw Treaty nations, then the West does spend proportionately less on defense. But in *absolute amounts*, NATO spends much more: \$440 billion to \$344 billion for the Warsaw countries (Center for Defense Information 1988). Why are the nations that spend more in absolute amounts to be considered less militaristic than nations that spend less? D&Z do not tell us.

D&Z conclude that "Soviet defense effort is approximately twice that of the United States" (D&Z 1989: 810). Even if we accept the dubious assertion that the Soviets try twice as hard as we, it does not

follow that they are twice as effective nor that the Soviet military is twice as large or twice as strong as the U.S. military. Only by focusing on "effort" and ignoring efficacy and strength, do D&Z manage to find an association between socialism and militarism.

D&Z admit that they "are not estimating military strength" (p. 801). They do not explain why they rule out strength as an indicator of militarism. After all, military strength is the purpose of it all. Western nations are generally militarily stronger in fire power, delivery systems, logistical support, and overall weapons technology than socialist ones. Certainly this is true if we compare the two most powerful nations in question, the United States and the Soviet Union (Gervasi 1986, Aldridge 1983). By not estimating military strength, D&Z allow themselves too convenient an omission.

Along with percentage of GNP spent on the military, D&Z offer another measure of militarism: the amount of "human resources" devoted to the military, specifically the number of persons under arms. D&Z themselves note that advanced

countries have shifted away from manpower and put more emphasis on weapons technology. They see this as "a potential reservation" but not enough of a reservation to deter them. They go ahead and measure only military personnel anyway, because "it is relatively easy to count the number of people under arms and to express this as a proportion of the population" (D&Z 1989: 802). That something is easy to count does not necessarily make it a valid indicator of anything.

D&Z correctly note that estimates of military spending between nations are highly unreliable, but again this does not cause them to move with caution. Methods used by the CIA and other U.S. government agencies to calculate the military spending of socialist countries leave much to be desired. D&Z fail to note that estimates of Soviet military spending are pegged at American rates. Thus, when the U.S. military builds increasingly expensive tanks with fatter cost overruns, Soviet spending on tanks is calculated as increasing even more than U.S. expenditures, since the USSR has many more tanks. And every time the military gets a pay raise, Soviet military spending is tabulated as going up, and the military spending "gap" increases still further in the Soviets' favor—since they have more soldiers (Cox 1984, Stubbing 1982, Holzman 1983). When such calculations are made on the huge Chinese army, the bizarre arithmetic result is that Chinese defense spending "equals" that of the United States. None of these problems seem to have daunted D&Z.

In November 1989, an analyst of Soviet military programs, Franklyn Holzman of Tufts University, claimed in a new study (reported in Silk 1989) that the CIA was overstating Soviet expenditures by some 50%. From 1975 to 1983, the CIA said that Soviet military expenditures rose by 4 to 5% a year. In 1984, the agency admitted the growth had really been only 2% all those years, but it failed to adjust its figures. Under the rubric of Soviet military spending, the CIA also includes civil defense, civilian space programs, and internal security forces, thereby swelling the size of the Soviet military budget. Similar items are not

treated as part of the U.S. military budget however. When these and other considerations are taken into account, Holzman reports, Soviet military spending is only 9% of its GNP.

D&Z fail to recognize that military personnel have different functions and different levels of readiness in various countries. A substantial percentage of military personnel in socialist nations are used for non-military purposes such as road repairs and other construction projects. Soviet and Warsaw Pact divisions are not as well supported logistically as U.S. and NATO divisions (Gervasi 1986, Cockburn 1984). The Pentagon itself observes: "Gross numerical comparisons are misleading since they do not account for size or capability" (Department of Defense 1982: 77)

Other Measurements for Militarism

D&Z arbitrarily decide that militarism can only be measured by the portion of a society's national and human resources devoted to the preparation and undertaking of armed conflict. Really? If we were to find that in 1935 France, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia had proportionately more men under arms and in active reserves and proportionately more of their material resources devoted to defense than Nazi Germany (Sevostyanov 1981, Rzheshesky 1984, Mason 1978), would this demonstrate that they were more militaristic than the Third Reich?

Why is not militarism also measured by the number of overseas bases, new weapons systems, advances in military technology and firepower, willingness to escalate or maintain the arms race, unwillingness to accept arms limitations proposals, unwillingness to respond positively to unilateral arms cutbacks by the opposing side, unwillingness to agree to a "no first-use" policy on nuclear arms, and unwillingness to join in a bilateral freeze on arms testing and weapons research and development. One could build some interesting measurements around these policy realities that would bring us to quite a different conclusion from the one arrived at by D&Z.

Let's pursue that point further. In 1957 and again in 1961, Moscow proposed a nonaggression pact between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization. The U.S. refused to negotiate the proposal. At various times throughout the 1960s, the Soviets proposed the banning of underground nuclear tests and a freeze on the production of nuclear weapons (long before the nuclear-freeze movement began in the USA). The Soviets also proposed that existing stockpiles be destroyed and conventional forces be cut proportionately by the East and West. In 1970, the Soviets made 26 separate overtures to limit the deployment of MIRV missiles. According to a report in the *Christian Science Monitor* (May 12, 1970): "After heated internal debate, the White House . . . refused to regard the 26 contacts as serious, saying that it was a trick designed to dupe the U.S. into delaying MIRV development."

From 1971 through 1980 the Soviets submitted proposals to (a) prohibit the further testing, manufacturing, and deployment of nuclear weapons, (b) outlaw any tampering with ocean beds, cloud streams, earth depths, the atmosphere, and the ozone layer for military purposes, and (c) cut back existing nuclear missiles. In 1979, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev announced a unilateral reduction of 20,000 troops and 1,000 tanks in Central Europe and invited the United States to reciprocate—even if on a smaller scale. In 1982, Brezhnev proposed a two-thirds cut in the Soviet and American medium-range nuclear arsenals in Europe. Resolutions calling for nations to stop making nuclear weapons and for banning all nuclear tests and nuclear arms deployments—including those in outer space—were passed by overwhelming majorities in the UN General Assembly. All the supposedly militaristic socialist nations supported these resolutions. The peaceful capitalist NATO allies opposed most of them, and the very peaceful capitalist United States opposed all of them (Parenti 1989).

It is argued that Soviet peace proposals are only "words." We must judge nations by what they *do* and not by what they *say*? Maybe so, but what nations propose in the diplo-

matic realm is often a reflection of their interests and represents a form of action. A nation that calls for mutual arms reductions and another that declines the offer are dealing in something more than a mere exchange of words. Both the overture and the refusal are actions of a kind; both represent policy positions (Parenti 1989).

When deeds *are* forthcoming from socialist nations, the Western reaction has not usually been one of eager reciprocity. When Moscow did act in 1983, announcing a unilateral moratorium on antisatellite weapons testing (ASAT), saying it would refrain from testing as long as the U.S. did, the White House refused to join the moratorium and continued to push Congress for ASAT funds. When the Soviets acted again in April 1985, announcing a seven-month moratorium on new missiles in Europe, saying it would deploy no more missiles as long as the U.S. refrained from deployment, Washington refused to join in the action. The same pattern held when the Soviets unilaterally embarked upon a five-month moratorium on underground testing in August 1985 and extended the moratorium two more times for a total of eighteen months. Faced with such actions, it was the U.S. that retreated into its words, dismissing the Moscow initiatives as just so many propaganda ploys.

Today we see the same pattern. In 1989, Moscow announced unilateral and substantial cuts—estimated at over 10%—in its armed forces. In January 1990, the U.S. belatedly responded, announcing cuts that observers say *might* amount to \$2 billion, which is only about eight-tenths of one percent of the present military budget. Likewise, major cuts and pullbacks by the Soviet Navy over the last two years have elicited no commensurate response from the United States. If anything, Admiral Carlisle Trost, chief of naval operations, asserted that all naval arms constraints constituted “attempts to abrogate commonly accepted international law with respect to freedom on the high seas” (*Washington Post*, November 27, 1989).

President Bush has made clear that he has no intention of heading down the disarmament path: “A strong America must mean a strong

defense. . . . This is not the time that we should naively cut the muscle out of our defense posture.” He further cautioned against the idea that a “peace dividend” was in the offing. Since “it is impossible to know what will unfold in the next six months—let alone the next six years,” he said, then we must remain “strong” (*Washington Post*, January 13, 1990). By that logic, no nation should engage in substantial defense cuts since none can predict what the future will hold. Bush seems to have forgotten that future contingencies could be provided for by future actions, including resumed escalations in defense spending if need be.

The point here is that there are powerful pressures in free-market, private-enterprise America to keep peace-time military expenditures at the record level of spending for costly new and potentially destabilizing nuclear weapons (Center for Defense Information 1989). Defense spending creates a whole new area of capital investment and market demand without competing with the civilian market. It is a contracted market which means that its goods are already sold and paid for before they are finished. Over 90% of defense contracts ride on noncompetitive bids. There are guaranteed cost overruns of upwards of 300 to 400% on some items. There is a built-in obsolescence and a limitless demand. (How much defense is enough defense?) The Pentagon provides much of the research and development and even much of the investment equity. No wonder the defense market offers the highest profits of any state-side corporate investment. There are many people who are not eager to give up such wealth.

Who Threatens Whom?

Even if we were to accept the questionable proposition that socialist nations spend proportionately more and have proportionately larger armies than capitalist nations, D&Z fail to establish that this is an inherent “imperative” of the socialist system rather than a response to capitalist threat and attack. According to D&Z there is no such threat. “Until the advent of the Reagan doctrine, no socialist nation was

seriously threatened by a capitalist nation in the post World War II era,” they observe. In the 1980s, “the only invasion of a socialist state by a capitalist state was Grenada in 1986” (D&Z 1989: 811).

We might remind D&Z that western capitalist nations intervened with direct military force—or indirectly with surrogate forces that were supplied, financed, trained, and advised by the West—in Greece immediately after World War II, and subsequently in Guatemala to overthrow the left-leaning Arbenz government, in Iran to overthrow the nationalist-populist Mossadegh, in Brazil to overthrow the left-reformist Goulart, in Indonesia to overthrow the left-populist Sukarno, in Greece again in the 1960s to overthrow a left-reformist democracy and install a right-wing military junta, in Chile to overthrow Allende’s Popular Unity government, and in Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and several other Latin American countries in the 1970s when democracy began to cause transformations in the class structure that threatened to infringe upon the capital accumulation process.

D&Z make no mention of any of these except Chile, which they seem to discount because “whatever else happened, there was little United States’ assistance to guerrilla forces” (D&Z 1989: 811)—an odd way to dismiss the U.S.-sponsored overthrow of the Chilean democracy by a fascist military.

- Using mercenary forces, the U.S. invaded Cuba in 1961, a venture that ended in the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

- Capitalist South Africa and free-market Zaire both invaded Angola in 1974 *before* the Cuban intervention into that country. D&Z list only the Cuban action and ignore the troop actions by South Africa and Zaire.

- “Capitalist-statist” Indonesia has invaded revolutionary East Timor and has killed about a third of the Timorese population.

- Using surrogate forces and with some early assistance from the United States, South Africa has managed to wreak death and destruction in socialist Mozambique.

- The United States invaded Vietnam and carried out the cruelest air war in history against Cambodia and Laos. D&Z have not a word to

say about what the U.S. did to these three Indochina countries, except to list South Vietnam (1965-1973) as a victim of *socialist* invasion (D&Z 1989: 811).

- D&Z seem to have completely forgotten the invasion by U.S. troops of the Dominican Republic in 1965 to “stop communism” or certainly to crush a left-reformist populist government.

- D&Z wrote their article before the U.S. invasion of Panama which crushed a populist-nationalist government. The official line is that the U.S. invaded to get rid of a drug-dealing Noriega. But having gotten rid of him, U.S. forces have stayed to raid the offices of the Democratic Revolutionary Party and incarcerate its leaders along with hundreds of other political leaders, labor unionists, military personnel, and intellectuals who might look favorably upon a left-populist agenda in Panama.

To determine who is threatening whom, D&Z devise a “threat control” by comparing nations in the same region (D&Z 1989: 808). From this they conclude that “Nicaragua has four times the military burden of its Central American neighbors (and over twice that of war-racked El Salvador)” (p. 810). In this instance, D&Z describe El Salvador as “war-racked” but not Nicaragua, which has suffered some 40,000 casualties in a U.S. sponsored contra war, has been invaded on two borders, has had its harbors mined and its coastal lines menaced by U.S. fleets and its air space repeatedly violated by U.S. planes, and has been subjected to a cruel economic boycott by the U.S.

Cuba too has been invaded and subjected to economic blockade and repeated threats by the U.S. Attempts by Cuba to normalize relations with the U.S. have been repeatedly rebuffed by Washington. Disregarding all this history, D&Z invite us to entertain the notion that Cuba’s defense budget and Nicaragua’s war budget are manifestations of their inherently coercive collectivism.

Many political scientists seem to think the world began after World War II. What of the many earlier interventions and wars perpetrated by capitalist nations against populist rebellions that threatened to develop an alternative social order in which

the land, labor, resources, and markets would be used for more egalitarian purposes rather than for western capital penetration and capital accumulation? D&Z do make a dismissive passing reference to the fourteen-nation invasion of Soviet Russia (1918-1922) immediately after World War I. But they do not tell us about capitalist Poland’s invasion of Soviet Russia in 1920 and the use of capitalist Rumanian troops and U.S. dollars to crush the revolution in Hungary immediately after World War I.

There is of course the whole dreadful history of imperialism, which involved the repeated use of the most brutal force and violence to keep the Third World open for capital penetration and accumulation (Stavrianos 1981, Szymanski 1981, Parenti 1989). What the French did in North Africa, West Africa, and Indochina; what the British did in Ireland, India, Africa, and China; what the Germans did in China and Southwest Africa; what the Portuguese did in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola; what the Italians did in Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia; what the Spaniards did in South America; what the Japanese did in Manchuria, Korea, and China; what the Dutch did in the East Indies and the Belgians in the Congo and the Americans in Central America and the Phillipines—composes a history that is no less horrible for being largely untaught and unnoticed in Western schools and universities. Any speculations regarding the peaceable nature of private enterprise ought to note the 400 years of violence used to make the world safe for colonial capitalism.

The United States alone has intervened with U.S. troops in Haiti 1891, Nicaragua 1894, Cuba 1898, Nicaragua 1899, Samoa 1899, the Philippines 1899-1901, China 1900, Panama 1903-1914, Dominican Republic 1904, Cuba 1906-1909, Honduras 1907, Nicaragua 1910, Honduras 1911, Cuba 1912, Nicaragua 1912-1925, China 1912-1933, Dominican Republic 1914, Mexico 1914-1917, Haiti 1915-1934, Dominican Republic 1916-1924, Cuba 1917-1933, Soviet Russia 1918-1920, Honduras 1919, Guatemala 1920, Honduras 1924, China 1925, Honduras 1925, Panama

1925, Nicaragua 1926-1933, China 1927, Lebanon 1958, Vietnam 1954-1973, Lebanon 1983, Grenada 1984, and Panama 1989—and I may have missed a few.

In determining who is a threat, we might also look at the two super-powers. One cannot overlook—although D&Z do—that there is no ring of Soviet bomber bases surrounding the United States, but there are over 300 U.S. bases, many of them with nuclear arms, surrounding the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty nations. So who should feel threatened by whom?

Fanciful Speculation

Finally it should not go unnoticed that D&Z offer no plausible explanation for their contention that socialist countries are more militaristic than capitalist ones other than the speculation that it is because they are socialist and capitalist countries are capitalist. They seem to reason that militarism is an outgrowth of bureaucratism (an arguable point) and since socialist countries have more bureaucracy (another arguable point), they must be more militaristic. This contention is no doubt pleasing to the advocates of a free market laissez-faire ideology, but it is a bit strained to say the least. And it stands rather wobbily without the support of any evidence.

The evidence that D&Z offer is no evidence at all. The military allocations of socialist countries is not proof of any argument but is itself the thing to be explained. What I have argued is that D&Z’s measurements of military spending are highly questionable, that their definition of militarism is self-serving, and that they ignore a good deal of political reality and a whole history of threatening encirclement, military intervention, and diplomatic and economic hostility from the West, especially from the United States, which would explain why socialist countries have felt threatened.

Both capitalist and socialist nations have felt threatened by each other: the socialists because of capitalist encirclement, invasion, military threat, economic aggression and boycott; the capitalist because the mere existence of a socialist society is a threat to the highly privileged system

of global capital penetration and accumulation. The function of a major capitalist state like the United States is not only to protect particular capital investments but to protect the capital accumulation process itself throughout the world.

As Eastern European socialist countries and China move toward capitalist forms, leaving themselves increasingly open to capital penetration, their existence will become less of a threat to global capitalism and they will no longer be targeted by western military forces, at least not to the same degree as today. Instead they will be accorded aid, technology, and other concessions.

But I predict that when no longer faced with the "menace of a Soviet military bloc," the United States will continue to support an enormous global military machine of about the present magnitude, first, because it is a wonderful source of capital accumulation and profit for the military-industrial complex and, second, because the U.S. still must suppress revolutionary forms of socialism that might arise in the Third World. Admiral Trost said as much (*Washington Post*, November

27, 1989) when he noted that the U.S. Navy has more to do than merely deter the Soviet Union. It also must "show the flag" and provide logistical support for U.S. forces in "regional crises." This is what some of us call imperialism.

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Socialism and Militarism: Confronting Ideology with Evidence

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Socialism is not merely a way of organizing an economy; it is also a secular religion. And as a religion it cannot be falsified; it cannot be disconfirmed by empirical evidence in the minds of its adherents. Non-believers might think that the spectacular collapse of socialism around the world—its demonstrated unpopularity and illegitimacy—would impress Marxists in American universities. But academic Marxists remain insulated from world events, spinning out theoretical webs undisturbed by critical evidence.

Recent events provide more dramatic evidence of the centrality of military force to socialist regimes. The collapse of socialism in Eastern

Europe came about as a direct result of Mikhail Gorbachev's decision not to use military force to sustain these regimes; socialism survives in the People's Republic of China only because of the violent repression of Tiananmen Square.

It is our thesis that militarism is inherent in the socialist state—in its reliance on centralized bureaucracy and coercive principles or organization. In addition to these organizational imperatives, socialist militarism is driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology—by the perception of history as a struggle between opposing social systems and by related notions of "capitalist encirclement" and "wars of national liberation."

We presented evidence in support of this thesis (Dye and Zeigler, *PS* 1989) that socialist nations spend larger shares of their GNPs for military purposes than capitalist nations, and keep a much higher percentage of their population under arms than their capitalist neighbors. We examined aggregated figures for socialist and capitalist nations; we controlled for wealth as well as military threats; and we made before and after observations of nations that experienced socialist revolutions. We found that the militarism of socialist regimes is independent of economic development or military threat levels. It can be observed in both cross-sectional comparisons of socialist and