THE BIG GUNS

1. Pentagon Power .. by Matthew Josephson

[This is the first of three articles based on a work now in progress dealing with our huge new military establishment, its impact on the economy, its relation with big business and its influence on our political institutions. Mr. Josephson is the author of The Robber Barons and Sidney Hillman, Statesman of American Labor, among other books. The second article of this series will appear in next week's issue of The Nation.]

FOR A WHOLE decade we have, somehow, lived through cold war. Indeed, it was as long ago as 1940 that, in response to President Roosevelt's call to arms, we turned ourselves into the Arsenal of Democracy. We have been that ever since. But are we to become always more "arsenal" and less "democracy"?

Today the most prominent feature of our economy and national policy is our military program. Yet America was formerly regarded as the most unmilitary of the great powers. It used to be said that "the business of America is business." Now our biggest business is national defense—"the largest business the world has ever seen" it was called by General Lucius D. Clay, American quarter-master-general of World War II. The hundreds of billions we have been spending on war and on armaments or nuclear machines for defense since the war would make Calvin Coolidge, frugal President of a generation ago, turn in his grave.

After World War II ended we turned not to peace but, quite promptly, to a long-drawn-out arms race with our wartime ally, Soviet Russia. We counted at first upon our air supremacy and A-bomb "monopoly"; then upon making hydrogen bombs; and more lately upon intercontinental ballistic missiles. It has been a sort of atomic rat race. Thus we have lived from crisis to crisis, ever fearing the "impossible" thermonuclear war and ever preparing for it.

At length there came the veritable promise of armistice, or at least of detente, following the Geneva conference of last July. The hope of some standstill agreement for arms, difficult of achievement though it may be, has arisen to thrill the cold-war-weary people of all lands. (The source of President Eisenhower's great popularity can hardly be treated as a military secret much longer.) It has been like news of a reprieve from the sentence of universal destruction that overhung us and our progeny after us.

This interval of reduced tension and renewed diplomatic activity seems different from others that have, occasionally, interrupted the cold war in that more serious mention is now heard in informed circles of a sort of "technological stalemate" having been reached. Not only Dr. Vannevar Bush, but Admiral Arthur W. Radford and Sir Winston Churchill have suggested that the bi-polar competition for "super" and hydrogen bombs may be approaching the phase of "saturation."

In this time of renewed hope—that may prove to be transitory, or may conceivably mark one of the turning points in modern history—it would be well for us to look back over the road we have traveled these ten years, the years of the cold war. With immediate danger averted, at least for a brief period, we may draw breath and measure the peril that has passed close by. We must struggle to gain some perspective, hard though it is to do so with regard to recent events. For too long we have lived in a mood of existentialist dread. Civilization has been sleeping badly with its weekend case packed, ready to take off at any moment to the caves or the ruins.

Perhaps only in times to come (if humanity survives) will men know how much we have been obsessed by our fears and our terrible military designs alike; and how near we have come to turning our democratic community in America into the sort of military-police state we only thought we were trying to get away from.

WHAT KIND of "Americanism" do you prefer? Each epoch seems to have its own taste. Today's is military. But one of the oldest traditions of the real "Americanism" as we always knew it was our national dislike and suspicion of a large, standing military force. It was certainly one of the contributing causes of the Revolution in which this Republic was born. Thereafter subordination of our small army to civilian authority was written into the Constitution. In times of crisis we depended on militia and mass levies of citizen-soldiers rather than upon professionals. In peacetime we reduced such forces of regulars to skeleton form.

The idea of a military or "garri-

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son state” arising in America—so de-
testable to the founding fathers—
has been very much present in men’s
minds since the late 1930s and
widely discussed in conservative as
well as liberal circles. In 1941 the
eminent sociologist, Dr. Harold D.
Lasswell, prepared a “construct” of
recent politico-military develop-
ments abroad and at home, entitled
The Garrison State, in which there
was forecast some system resembling
Mussolinian fascism as a possibility
for America. Both in his 1941 paper
and the revised, version of it done
in 1949 (for the Committee on Eco-
nomic Development) Lasswell, while
expressing concern for the possible
loss of many of our ancient liberties
by all men, seemed to direct his
warnings primarily to the “business
elite” whose interests appeared to
him most seriously threatened by
military rule. His underlying
thought then may have been that
the powerful Roosevelt, as warlord,
might turn our “business state” into
a “military state.” It has not come
about quite as simply as all that;
but we have certainly changed. The
question is one of degree: how much?
The military or garrison state is
actually one of the oldest and most
widely prevalent forms of human
society, engaged in unending wars
with neighbor-states, with its exist-
ence and sometimes its exchequer
also dependent on its men of arms.
In more recent centuries, in Europe,
Prussia under Frederick the Great
was largely a military camp; while
Russia under the old Czars, also
without natural defense barriers and
with warlike neighbors, similarly
depended on its land army. On the
other hand England was favored by
being an island, developing its com-
merce and democratic institutions
more rapidly. The United States is
an island continent, sheltered by
broad expanses of ocean. (These, of
course, have shrunk to the narrow
time-space of a few hours by super-
sonic plane.)
The military-police dictatorships
of Hitler and Mussolini seem to us
retrograde in form Under the sol-
dier-leader, Hitler, all activities of
the society, as in ancient Sparta,
were subordinated to its military
purpose; civil rights, court-processes,
freedom of thought and press, parlia-
mentary discussions were all done
away with. On the economic front
consumer goods such as “butter”
were restricted in favor of “guns.”
The great armament build-up of
1934-1938, however, brought full
production, full employment, scar-
city of many materials—in short, a
kind of boom, although with all ma-
terials, credits and currency, as well
as prices and wages, under cen-
tralized state controls.
IN contrast, America has had both
guns and butter, in fact guns and
Bucks. We have held our military
organization subordinate, under the
law, to civilian authority, the Presi-
dent in command, Congress keep-
ing the all-important power of purse.
We have maintained our representa-
tive institutions and courts intact.
However, thanks to measures pro-
mulgated in wartime and renewed
under the very prolonged crisis of
cold war, we have formed the habit
of abusing our own excellent laws
safeguarding the rights and privi-
leges of the individual citizen Dem-
ocratic process, in other words, has
become coarsened. Fearing for the
safety of the Republic, as Chief Jus-
tice Warren has written lately, we
have been tempted at times to “imit-
tate totalitarian methods.” In ex-
tending security and loyalty controls
to more than eight million Ameri-
cans, he warns us, “we have reduced
our ancient liberties.” Certainly we
have made steady progress in adapt-
ing—though under varying legal
safeguards, allowing sometimes
more, sometimes less privilege of
due process, or appeal—the methods
of surveillance and thought-control
used by the military-police states we
condemn.
The atrition of some of our lib-
erties is often attributed to the fact
that the world war ended without
bringing peace, since the two most
powerful members of the victorious
coalition could reach no agreement
on peace terms. Thus, in the official
view, the world has become hope-
lessly divided into “two great garri-
sions,” one Russian-centered, the
other American-centered. Our peo-
ple have come to accept the notion
that our national policy is based on
military force primarily, and that
this has been brought about through
the power drive of the “Kremlin
clique” and the fatal incompatibility
of their system and ours which im-
pells us to fight for “world lead-
ership.” While Russia makes vassals
of its neighbors and abolishes free
institutions and free capitalism in
their territories, we establish a girdle
of forward air bases around the Rus-

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sian-centered power, foster free capitalism in the regions under our own military influence and also (where possible) a few free elections.

At home ever greater efforts are put forth by our government to increase the country’s military-technical striking power, to turn America more and more into a “fighting society.” The more military state we become the more we require an unswerving patriotism or loyalty in the populace, as Thorstein Veblen observed.

Other recognizable features of the garrison state emerge here, gradually altering the appearance of our society. The national defense program calls for enormous federal expenditures and these in turn give scope to new interest groups. The professional men of arms, the military experts, seize the initiative to launch more and bigger military projects and lay hands on all the facilities they can possibly use. The National Military Establishment centralizes power within itself, becomes a bureaucratic institution of monstrous size.

In this age of technological warfare the government, besides deploying large forces on land, sea and air, also carries on extremely important research and experimental projects through government bureaus and by contract with private corporations, universities and technical schools. These are necessarily managed, as was the A-bomb project during the war, under regimes of strict military security. Many thousands of scientific and technical men now labor in silence and secrecy, with their experimental findings unpublished, while their letters are opened, their conversation recorded and their telephones are tapped by the security police. Secrecy is the watchword and affects ever wider areas of scientific and educational activities, as universities and schools are brought into the government’s military-technical program and increasingly subsidized. “Our job is not to advance knowledge, but to advance the military,” was the rueful remark made recently by one of America’s leading weapons research men, Dr. A. G. Hill, head of the government-sponsored Lincoln Laboratory at M.I.T.

During this “bi-polar” struggle for the world the drive for internal security and discipline spreads from the area of government personnel to defense industries, to trade unions, and even into libraries. From the repression of the partisans of communism in America we move on to that of other dissenting groups of Socialists, religious pacifists or liberals—and sometimes simply of persons whose opinions are considered “unsound” (e.g. “disloyal”) by men vested with new and unaccommodated powers of surveillance. The hearings before the A. E. C. Security Board, last year, of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the man who contributed most to the production of America’s A-bomb weapons during the last war, have been described as a species of “purge trial” followed by his excommunication from all service under the federal government, which previously awarded him the Medal of Merit. As Senator Ralph Flanders warned in a speech before the Senate:

> It is not only that we are sacrificing to defense our standard of living and the free independence of our economic life. We are sacrificing our freedom itself. We are being forced to shift the American way of life into the pattern of the garrison state . . .

ONE WAY of measuring the degree of change toward the military state suggested by the economist-historian, Josef Schumpeter (in his book, *Imperialism*), is to try to judge whether and how far the business class of a country is being drawn into alliance with the military. When a nation, such as Japan (in former years) maintains an out-sized military establishment, when its officer corps is linked to a definite ruling class, when high military circles assume an ever-larger political influence and “responsible statesmen can act only with their consent,” then, Schumpeter holds, we have come to the predominantly military state.

We in the United States are not yet under the full domination of the military and the security police: but their influence has certainly grown to be enormous and ubiquitous. A half generation of war and cold war has seen “professional military men moved up to positions of great responsibility and trust,” as the *Combat Forces Journal* has observed (December, 1952). In consequence “politicians have sought to enroll this or that general or admiral for their party and put him up for high office.” We elected our most famous army general as President in 1952. Even before that President Truman surrounded himself with aides, envoys and ambassadors who were professional military men; he appointed one of them Secretary of State.

The very size of our peacetime armed services and their demand for extremely costly and complicated weapons, aerodynamic or nuclear, has brought about an important change in the relations between the military services and Congress. The need has grown for contracts calling for long-term testing and production schedules that carry over from year to year. Thus Congress has practically lost control of its annual military budgets, according to the Washington correspondent of the New York Times (September 15, 1951), since only a minor portion, about one-third of the outlay, is subject to change or reduction. Moreover, members of congressional committees who have long supervised military expenditures nowadays frankly confess that they find it impossible to understand the very detailed and technical “justifications” for drafts on the Treasury that are presented to them by General Staff officers and examined, very largely, in secret session. Typical expressions of congressional bewilderment are: “It is impossible for this committee to go thoroughly into every operation of the air force”; or “I am willing to take the word of the General Staff, the people who are running this show.” Would not anything less, in these hours of danger, appear, perhaps, disloyal?

With the growth of military business to colossal proportions many business firms shift from the civilian market to the handling of defense contracts, upon which they come to depend in increasing measure. The center of power itself seems to shift toward the top of a pyramid where central decisions are made for the

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allocation of vital materials, tools, plants and even of subsidies for them. It is not quite correct to say, as does Lasswell, that "Business men . . . tend in fact, if not in form, to become the hired administrators of government programs." The representatives of business also move up toward the center of power, to staff many government commissions and supervise the administrative work of the giant Military Establishment. An extremely close and confidential relationship is formed (as in pre-World War II Japan, or in Germany before 1914) between the directors of manufacturing concerns specializing in defense production and military officers charged with procurement.

In recent years we have seen a significant backward and forward flow of top-ranking generals and admirals to executive positions in industrial corporations and of big business executives into the many administrative and semi-military bureaus of our Defense Department. Modern war has become "the war of factories." In World War I America's "vast and relentless munitions industry," as Ludendorff wrote in his memoirs, turned the scales against Germany. In World War II our forces were again victorious, many military commentators have said, not so much because of the warlike genius of our commanders as because of the overwhelming weight of armor that poured from our factories. Since World War II there has been a long marriage festival between the men of the sword and the men of the factories.

WE HAVE lived through so many nerve-shattering events in these past ten years that we have become punch-drunk; our minds no longer register the fact that this "peace-time" Military Establishment in our midst is approximately ten times the size of our prewar military force and costs about twenty times as much (reckoned in prewar dollars). We have scarcely begun to measure the impact of such an extraordinary investment of our labor and productive wealth upon our economy and our body politic.

When President Eisenhower was commissioned a lieutenant in the Regular Army in 1915 it had a little over 100,000 men. Supplies consisted mainly of breech-loading rifles, some mules and fodder. Today, in peacetime, Eisenhower commands armed forces of over 3,100,000; in addition to this the Defense Department employs an additional 1,200-000 civilians to do its paper work, the total of 4,300,000 personnel being about seven per cent of America's active labor force. Of the three armed services, the air force alone has become "the world's biggest business," as former Secretary for Air, Thomas K. Finletter pointed out. It has larger assets than General Motors, A. T. & T., Standard Oil, General Electric and U. S. Steel all put together. The total property of the Defense Department in equipment, military, structure, depots and air bases at home and all over the world has been valued at $140 billion, according to an estimate prepared by Charles R. Hook, former President of the N. A. M. It is, as Mr. Hook concludes, "a colossal operation." The cost of defense during the last five years, from fiscal 1951 through 1955, has averaged about $40 billion annually, to which should be added some five to six billion dollars more for atomic energy and foreign aid, now chiefly military in form.

Formerly it was our custom to dismantle our armed forces after war. But following World War II, our military for the first time in history refused to beat their swords into plowshares. We acquired at last what the founding fathers, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, most feared: a standing army, and one of huge size. The professional military men who command its operation now dispose of a wealth and spending power beyond their wildest dreams. The impact of this vast spending power on the national economy surpasses that of any previous government operation in peacetime.

During the 1950s President Roosevelt, under the inspiration of Keynes's theory of "compensatory spending," carried out a large federal relief and public-works program aimed at stimulating business recovery and employment. But Roosevelt and Keynes were "pikeis" compared to those who now draw up our modern military budgets.

World War II brought maximum production and full employment, while also storing up inflationary forces which, after the war, burst forth in a rising wage-and-price spiral. Wars, though cruel and wasteful, have almost always in the past stimulated mechanical progress and trade and offered great fortune to those quick to grasp their opportunities for profit. Moreover, loans, bounties and rapid tax write-offs allowed by government subsidized the major part of our increased wartime capacity, so that when the shooting was over we were half again bigger and richer industrially than five years before. After the war military expenditures were stabilized at what was actually a very high level. As J. K. Galbraith has said: "Even at their postwar low in fiscal 1948, military outlays were greater than all federal spending in the pump-priming days of the New Deal." In justification of such outlays members of Congress pointed out that Russia had the world's largest army, that communism was "making war on the United States," and "nobody was going back to the prewar basis."

Then came the "police action" in Korea.

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