

The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy. By Robert W. Tucker. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.)

In this brief but cogent book a Johns Hopkins Professor of Political Science wages polite war on those American diplomatic historians known as radical left revisionists. He is a brave man. Few scholars in our time have had a greater impact on the thinking of the nation's articulate minority than this group of historians. The cream of a generation of college youth, as well as many of their most influential elders in the academy, journalism, the churches and government, have been captivated if not completely convinced by the revisionist critique. In the works of William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, Walter LaFeber and others, readers learn that the ugly imperatives of American capitalism, real or imagined, have produced American imperialism. Tucker disputes this and ultimately defines America's place in the world in far more tragic terms.

The conventional school of American diplomatic historians, the so-called "realists" against whom the revisionists have reacted, are themselves quite critical of our foreign policy, as Tucker clearly evidences. The realists view United States policy as confused and moralistic, unenlightened by a realization of the appropriate uses and limitations of power. America's incredible expansion beyond the Western Hemisphere in this century is accepted by the realists as an accidental development, a result of conditions beyond our control, notably a necessary response to the post-World War II challenge of the Soviet Union.

The revisionists, however, refuse to accept the notion that the Soviet Union threatened our security; and they consider American expansion as part of a decades-old effort to protect what American leaders deemed to be our economic self-interest. Indeed, William Appleman Williams, the foremost revisionist, has declared that the Cold War must be understood as "a confrontation that occurs throughout our history." He locates the origins of the war in the triumph of laissez-faire capitalism over mercantilism in the late eighteenth century.

Tucker is willing to concede the radical left's point that the United States did not acquire an empire inadvertently, as a variation of the classic British creation of empire in "a fit of absent mindedness." But he is uncompromising in his rejection of a specifically capitalistic motivation for our thrust outward. Tucker carefully demonstrates that neither the facts concerning our foreign trade nor our private investments abroad support the revisionist position. And he wonders whether a Socialist America would follow a foreign policy "fundamentally different" from a Capitalist America. Would such an America fulfill the revisionists' dream and "no longer seek to influence the course of development of other peoples?" he asks.

In a world still composed of "the strong and the weak," writes Tucker, of "the rich and the poor . . . not only Capitalist states have sought to take advantage of their strength." The radicals fail to grasp, Tucker concludes, that power itself, regardless of the form it takes, engenders expansion. The radicals simply will not "confront the eternal and insoluble problems inordi-

nate power creates . . . will not acknowledge that men possessed of this power are always ready to use it . . . in order to rule over others."

The fault is not in our economic system but in ourselves.

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