

Canada at War

Address by Alastair Haythornthwaite - Joseph Mairs Memorial 24/01/2010

Any war waged has a cost. The expenditures in Afghanistan steal from needed and necessary spending in Canada. The Great Vancouver Island Coal Strike of 1912 – 1914 ended as the strikers were taken into the military to fight other workers on another continent. Those who remained at home paid for the war through the recent innovation of income tax.

As a junior nation in the British Empire, Canada's leaders sought to raise Canada's status from colony to partner of the United Kingdom.

Sacrifice of workers' blood was their method and this continues to this day.

In 1899, the conflict between Britain and the Boer settlers of southern Africa flared into open warfare. Canada sent an expeditionary force to abet Britain's imperial designs. Coal baron Dunsmuir named his new coal town, Ladysmith, after the wife of the Governor of South Africa to commemorate the war.

The Great War followed close behind and Prime Minister Borden served up thousands of young men to the new industrial war machine. Exploiting the tragedy and losses of Canadian families, our government raised the status of Canada in the world. The fielding some of the most effective and feared divisions was crowned by the spectacular victory at Vimy Ridge in 1917. Cementing Canada's army reputation as a world leading fighting force, the triumph won our politicians a seat at the Versailles peace conference. There,

France and England humiliated Germany and laid the ground for the next conflict, a generation later.

Immediately after the armistice, Canada, in concert with Britain, supported the White Armies of Counter Revolution attempting to overthrow the new Soviet republics. Our keynote speaker, Brother Isset will address the intervention in his presentation.

The interwar period was marked by a decline of the Canadian army. Military planning was still focused on an unlikely American invasion. The revanche of German militarism was poorly handled by the big European powers. When war again broke out first between the British Empire and Germany, and then Japan, Canada mobilized to support the 'mother country'. Until the invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941, the Second World War resembled the First as the dominant European powers pursued politics by other means; that is war. In 1942 the war became a true World War with absolute dictatorships attempting to dominate the less oppressive democracies and the USSR.

With the total defeat of the Axis, world power divided into two poles. One centered on the United States and the other on the socialist bloc. The relative influence of the former Imperial powers, France and Britain declined precipitously. France withdrew to concentrate on the European Union and Britain became a junior partner of the United States in the confrontation with the Soviet Union. In the former colonies of Africa and Asia, the suppression or subversion of nationalist movements and governments was an ongoing project. The United States assembled a series of military bases to cover the whole world.

The Cold War started in earnest with the three year conflict in Korea, 1950 to 1953.

Canadian forces play a role but the fighting was mostly between the US, Korean and Chinese forces. With the decline in British power, Canadian governments successively drew closer to America.

The absolute decline of French and British Imperialism came with the Suez crisis in 1956. An abortive attempt by France and Britain to seize the Suez Canal in concert with Israel was stymied by United Nations opposition backed by the USA. At this time the myth of Peace Keeping was born with the able assistance of Lester Pearson who went on to win the Noble Peace Prize and become Prime Minister of Canada.

The UN peacekeepers freeze unjust situations into long term situations. For the next decades, UN Peacekeepers stood between the aggressors and the injured, allowing the aggressor to retain the fruits of their crimes without having to face a counter stroke. In Cyprus, Turkey's annexation was protected from irate Greek Cypriots; in Syria, Israel's seizure of the strategic Golan Heights has been protected by Peace Keepers for over three decades.

In the 90's, the character of Canadian military interventions moved in concert with the aggressive approach of the United States, an attempt to dominate the world by armed force. With the end of Lenin's great social experiment, America was no longer constrained from the use of naked violence.

Invasions and interventions have blossomed. Somalia, the Persian Gulf, the former Yugoslavia and Haiti were all subject to multi-nation military attacks, coups or invasions to install regimes friendly to US corporate exploitation.

The installation of George W Bush opened a new chapter of Imperial America. Iraq was invaded and devastated. For years the Afghans have fought for their independence against a collection of Western forces including a formidable Canadian army battle group.

That our army, recognized as one of the deadliest in world, goes to the other side of the world to kill farmers on their own land is a shame Canada will take decades to atone for. The United States uses its client states and allies to spread the cost of world domination even as the American State enters a precipitous decline. Many of our political leaders have put the short term pleasures of the USA above the long term interests of Canadians and the peoples of the World.

Just as the great Coal Strike of 1912 -1914 petered out with the start of World War One with the enlistment or drafting of the strikers. Today, workers' aspirations for equality, justice and democracy are being put on hold to fight against a straw man of phantom foreign terrorists, all while America and its allies rain down death on uncooperative peoples around the world.

The only war justifiable is war made by people to liberate themselves from oppression. But today Canada participates in wars to extend corporate hegemony. That is our common condition with the strikers of 1912. The resources of our nations are used for profit and war, and in opposition to justice and democracy. But like those men and women nearly one hundred years ago, we know what justice looks like and will continue to struggle to see it implemented, at home and abroad.