

**BOOK REVIEW**

Goliath vs David: A Short History of the Fight Against Organised Peace Work

By Holger Terp, (Editor, *The Danish Peace Academy*).

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In most political theory it is assumed that a nation's 'sovereignty' rests on possessing a monopoly of power or force. Because of this, political leaders tend to stress 'security first' when thinking about the building and maintenance of effective and capable states. It is assumed that states can only survive through time if they have a coercive capacity greater than that available to any single internal actor or combination of actors. It is also assumed that any state worth its salt will have a capacity to defend itself against external threat. National defence, therefore, provides additional justification for a complex and intertwined national security system. At the heart of all state systems, therefore, lies an 'iron fist' of military and police power. In the West, this iron fist is normally covered in a velvet glove so that citizens do not think – too often – about the coercive capacity of the state. The velvet glove is what the state provides its citizens in terms of education, health and welfare benefits and collective goods such as national infrastructure, roads, railways and other transport and communications systems.

Modern state systems, therefore, derive their power from coercive capacity but they get their legitimacy and authority from development benefits and wise rule. Effective, capable and legitimate states will ensure that political leaders, legislatures, judiciaries etc. function with minimal use of force. Those that choose to rule with an iron fist tend to be repressive dictatorships and autocracies. The reality, however, is that all state systems accord very particular privileges to the military and their associated intelligence,

surveillance and other agencies. When these institutions are questioned, challenged or opposed by citizens (spontaneously or in an organised fashion) most state systems are very quick to reinforce patriotic sentiment, suppress dissent and marginalise the dissenters either through ridicule, imprisonment or, in extreme cases, torture and death.

This book is a fascinating collection of cases documenting the ways in which different states target and have targeted organised peace groups and peace movements through the ages. It starts with the famous quote from Hermann Göring:

“The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.”

From this, Holger analyses the ways in which states all around the world have employed such techniques to discredit, delegitimize and marginalise those who challenge the power of the state. There is, of course, a long religious tradition of such dissent, from biblical injunctions to “love your enemies” to groups such as the Quakers, Mennonites and others. But this has been paralleled by a long line of humanist opposition to war and militarism as well.

Holger Terp weaves these dissenting traditions together, not by focusing so much on the groups themselves but on



the political responses to such groups. He has some excellent examples of conscientious objection to the First World War, such as how different men and women, and anti-war groups were targeted by the State. There is a poignant list of British conscientious objectors, for example, who died as a result of their treatment by the military for their principled opposition to the war. What is surprising about many of these stories is not that the state responded to them with such anger and vitriol but that their efforts to suppress dissent often just served to extend it. There are many cases of First World War dissent from different nationalities. Terp introduces the peace movements and organisations, citing official documents and first person reports to demonstrate how they were treated, and then moves on to a century of brutal state repression of organised peace work.

He looks at peace movements of the inter-war period: the non-violent actions of Gandhi and others in India and elsewhere and the efforts of all capitalist economies to smear peace activists as socialists, communists or anarchists. He has some fascinating material on the Gestapo arrests of Quaker representatives in Germany and the systematic persecution of other pacifists along with Jews, homosexuals, gypsies and others. He cleverly weaves the dictatorial responses to peace dissent with those of western

democracies. When the power of the state is challenged anywhere it elicits a swift and vigorous negative reaction.

In modern times, he looks at the ways in which activists for social change and wider social transformation, such as Martin Luther King, Martin Depp and others, also came under the persistent surveillance of the FBI and other intelligence agencies. Throughout this history there is a persistent strain of political courage in the face of considerable political provocation, informers, fifth columnists, agents provocateurs etc.

Terp presents a huge amount of rich material without editorialising. In doing so he has created a treasure trove of original cases of state repression of organised peace and social movement dissent around the globe. He leaves it up to the reader to discern patterns of state repression of political dissent and draw their own conclusions.

This is an extremely useful book for anyone seeking to understand how and why state systems seek to control and dominate those who try to stand up to the power base or those who would like to exhaust peaceful alternatives to problems before sending in the marines. I heartily commend it to the readers of the Journal of Conflictology. It shows us how callous state systems can be, and why most that is good flows from strong friendships and communities. ■

■ Recommended citation

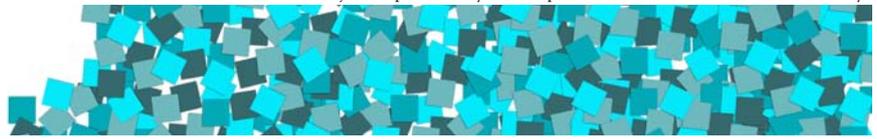
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