
"War when you are at it, is horrible and dull."

This is a book about a horrible war waged against black people by conspirators in foreign wealthy countries. The black people, like so many people before them, are seeking their dignity and their birthright as human beings - to be free and independent.

The conspirators, playing their ageless role to put down the search for freedom, the search for peace and independence, have recourse to only that which is available to them. No longer can some phoney war be waged. The authors show why, with great insight.

Instead, the so-called soldier of fortune must be sought: persons trained in modern weaponry in the most sophisticated armies ... men whose career for some reason or another is ended in the army which trained them. Despised by the professional soldier and private citizen alike, they are recruited to put down the freedom-seeking black nationalists.

Angola, and the trial in June 1976 at Luanda of the thirteen British and American mercenaries: the authors of this valuable historic work are at the trial. Professor Derek Roebuck, a lawyer-academic-author is there as, a member of the International Commission of Inquiry on Mercenaries. Wilfred Burchett who has so far refused to be burnt at the stake by the CIA is there as a journalist with an unequalled record as a war correspondent and an expert in Asian affairs. At the invitation of the Commission, the authors have written this book.

One of the captured mercenaries, a former Mafia enforcer in the USA, coined the phrase "The Whores of War". The authors have had recourse to this metaphor to give a title to the book. It is an unfortunate choice and tends to take away some merit from this outstanding treatise. The title is confusing, sexist and, despite protestations to the contrary, is insensitive to women and their struggle for freedom and independence in male-dominated society.

Nevertheless, the authors who, as a deliberative act, have avoided the 'soldier of fortune' description of the mercenaries, go to great lengths to explain their use of the title and, in the long run, they are probably correct in their difficult choice of a title.

"In each case economic power is abused to hire human bodies with specific intentions of avoiding public association with them and the responsibility for their welfare, and using money to exploit their moral weakness." (Preface).

A critic of Wilfred Burchett once said of him that he wrote like a bricklayer, to which Burchett replied that he did not find that offensive for, as he saw it, he picked up each fact like a brick, one by one, and carefully cemented them together into a whole. A strong undeniable whole that would stand any attack as to the truth in what he had to say. And so it is with this book. Burchett and Roebuck: just a couple of brickies putting things together.

It is certain that these two outstanding socialists would use that. No one who reads the book will be disappointed. It is a book written by two outstanding craftsmen, written objectively, without passion. The facts themselves damn the evildoers.

Professor Roebuck has made a special contribution in the closing chapters of the book in looking at the law generally as it attempts to deal in various countries with the legality or illegality of recruiting mercenaries to engage in a war in which their own country is not involved. Recruited to serve in a foreign army in a war against a country to which their own country declares itself to be on friendly terms.

The expose of the refusal of the countries concerned to stop the extensive advertising for, and engagement of, mercenaries, either within the existing law or new legislation, is challenging to all Australians, but particularly Australian lawyers.

It has been said: "Yet there is a souring of respect for law and the men who work it. Where there should be enthusiasm there is indifference. Where there should be understanding there is distrust. What should be a refuge in affliction is often a source of distress. And, even as its prestige declines, new dangers press in on every hand. The law is in a crisis as never before and freedom consequently in the direst peril."

(The Law in Crisis, C.G. Weeramantry.)

At a time when the contemporary bourgeois interpretations and evaluations of the theory of justice are being subjected to stress in their everyday application, there is increasingly a highly developed marxian criticism of the theory, especially in socialist countries. This criticism, of course, is not a one-way street.

However, Professor Roebuck, with great restraint, paints a picture that must make even the most conservative lawyer uneasy.

In Australia, not only were the contracts advertised, they were subject to special interview programs on national television.

In England and the USA, the situation was much worse. And yet the position has not been
remedied, but the reader should accept the facts as produced and ponder upon them. Who, indeed, are the conspirators? Who finances their expensive operations? Who could possibly put 'Colonel Callan' in charge of operations?

Four death sentences, three thirty-year sentences, three twenty-four year sentences - but the conspirators are free - hiding in the shadows of almost anonymity. Only the CIA is really identified.

The last paragraph of the introduction reads: "The tawdry and sinister image of the mercenary must be contrasted with that of the liberator: the man or woman who takes up arms only when convinced that all else has failed and when the unbearable oppression of others compels the moral decision to use retaliatory force. The inadequate bully stands against the ordinary man, not just the prepared revolutionary but the ordinary worker in field or factory for whom fighting is a horrifying intrusion into his life. . . . . . Sende Isabel and Andrew Gordon McKenzie: the pregnant peasant woman and her brutal unwanted intruder. May Sende Isabel’s child grow up in a world in which the mercenary monster has no place!"

These brickies have done well. Don’t miss it.

Roy Turner.

Civilisation at the Crossroads: social and human implications of the scientific and technological revolution, $4.50 (300 pp.), 1969.

Some copies of this very important pioneering work are still available. Published by ALR in 1969, the book is the work of a Czechoslovak interdisciplinary research team headed by Radovan Richta. It appeared late in 1967 in Czechoslovakia and undoubtedly resulted from the deep concern with the crisis in economy, politics and ideology which came to a head there at that time.

Its findings in turn provided the theoretical basis for the Action Program developed by the Czechoslovak Communist Party to meet that crisis.

These national aspects do not, however, detract from the universality of the problems dealt with. The book is a first-class piece of research and analysis about issues confronting all advanced industrial societies, as apt today as it was when published. Over 300 pages of text are supplemented by extensive tables and references. At today’s prices, it is selling cheaply.

Antonio Gramsci: The Man, His Ideas, by Alastair Davidson (100 pp.), 1969. $2.

This short book was one of the first works published in English about the life and work of the Italian marxist thinker and communist leader. It is still a valuable reference for those interested in Gramsci’s contribution to marxist thought and socialist politics.

A NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS

ALR is only too happy to receive contributions on any subject of interest to the left and the labor movement. We prefer the length to be less than 5,000 words but exceptions are made in special cases.

We prefer articles, on whatever subject, to be accessible to all interested readers prepared to make an effort, and therefore request that unnecessary jargon or ‘academese’ be avoided. For time and space considerations, we reserve the right to cut articles where this does not affect the basic sense of the discussion. Occasionally we propose style or sub-editing changes but only in consultation with the author(s).

We ask that all manuscripts be typed, double-spaced, on paper no larger than quarto size.

We ask those authors who do not hear from us about publication of their articles in a reasonable time to recognise that this is purely due to pressure of other work on our small collective. Usually we have not forgotten you.

APPEAL FOR BACK NUMBERS

Remaining gaps in our stock of back numbers have now been filled with the exception of numbers 36 and 38. We make a special appeal to readers who might have copies of these two issues which they no longer require to send them to us so that requests for them can be met. In addition, we would still be grateful for copies of numbers 29, 32 and 41, as numbers of these held by us are still small.