

ARE THINGS REALLY ALL THAT BAD ? OF CABBAGES AND KINGS

by: George Barry, jr.

" Cry 'Havoc' , and let loose the dogs of war " , said Shakespeare; " Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world " , said William Butler Yeats. As the 1970's came to an end, mankind entered an era filled with the clouds of impending doom. Through the somnolent seventies, the world seemed to be diverging from the path of armed confrontation. As the Americans reeled from the horrors of Vietnam, the rest of the world seemed to hold its breath. But just as that breath had to be exhaled, so too the path of old had to be returned to. As Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan and American naval vessels steamed into position off the coast of Iran, the vision of plowshares being hammered into swords seemed to be on the minds of most men.

Will these prophecies of doom which have cropped up with the course of recent events come to fruition ? Is the world on the threshold of a cataclysm from which it will not survive ? The present world situation is, indeed, a tense one. The two super-powers are glaring at each other and making threatening noises as they each jockey for position on the chess-board of world power-politics. The recent movement of Soviet forces into the embattled nation of Afghanistan seems to indicate that, for the time being at least, the U.S.S.R. has control of the center squares. But the Americans, despite the lingering trauma of Vietnam, seem willing to counter with armed force, a previously unthinkable possibility. As Hugh Sidey, a columnist with Time magazine sees it, the U.S., which he refers to as " the sleeping giant " has finally been awakened by the combination of the Iranian crisis and Soviet saber-rattling. It is also important to note that Sidey takes considerable glee in his observation, which would lead one to believe that the Americans are ready to cast off the shroud of the seventies by reacting decisively, perhaps even over-reacting.

One must conclude, then, that the state of the world is cause for worry, perhaps even fear. We have laboured under the impression of western impregnability to the flows and fluctuations of the rest of the world. Revolutions and rebellions in other nations come and go, but the democracies of the west continue to burn bright. One must remember, though, that this flame has come close to being extinguished several times since the end of the Second World War. The Berlin Crisis, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the permanently tense situation in the Middle East and the revelation that even our much vaunted economic supremacy may be in question, something which became obvious in the Oil Crisis, have all hinted that the illusion of our stability is just that. It seems that our belief that the reality of creature comfort which is ours as citizens of such secure nations has blinded us to the reality of the rest of the world. We must remember that, as history shows us, the world has had many more days of war than it has enjoyed days of peace.

Any nation which continues to believe in its own invulnerability in the face of the changing structure of the world is populated by fools. With the dagger of nuclear war placed permanently on the throats of all men, no nation is inviolate or must consider itself so. The words of the prophet Isaiah, whether one believes such stuff or not, should be remembered :

" The earth will burst asunder, the earth will shake apart, the earth will be convulsed, the earth will reel like a drunkard, and it will sway like a hut. Its rebellion will weigh it down, until it falls, never to rise again. " Throughout our history, many of our greatest writers and thinkers have, following in the traditions of the biblical prophets, hinted, sometimes obliquely and sometimes quite explicitly, at the possible fall of the west and of civilization in general. The memory of the Roman Empire dies hard.

So here we are, you and I, entering a decade in which the threat of " Havoc " and of " mere anarchy " has once again risen. But there is room for hope,

though. The possibility of nuclear war is something which no sane government leader would wish to risk for it is, indeed, a no-win situation. And we must assume that the nations who seem to hold most of the cards are lead by sane men. President Carter, by his calm, restrained, reaction to events, by his willingness to use the vehicles of world diplomacy and by his general use of common sense in the face of seeming absurdity, has shown himself, so far, to be a man of great ability. The ageing leadership of the Soviet Union is more of an unknown, however. If one was a betting man, it would seem that the smart money is riding on the continuation of an era of peace. The Soviets, it must be remembered, are not merely faced by the worn and haggard visage of Uncle Sam, for they have, poised in their backyard, a nation of some one billion souls which, given the technology, could easily rise to a dominating role in the world. And the world today is a complex place, so any would-be prophet who climbs up on his mountain-top and spouts off about the end of the world is merely playing on our heightened sense of anxiety. Man has always been precariously balanced between the states of war and peace. Today is no different, we are only a little more aware of it. But, while you may not have to sink all of your hard-earned money into lead-lined underground bomb-shelters, you would be well advised to take an active interest in the world around you. Kabul may seem like a far away place right now, but by burying your head in the sand you could run the risk of seeing its ramifications exploding in a mushroom-cloud on the horizon someday. It is the ultimate insanity to wage senseless war and, if we all agree and make our opinion known maybe we won't have to have the damn things anymore

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