

## Lester Pearson: Godfather of Canada's Cold War against the new "Red" enemy

"[T]here are two sides whose composition cuts across national and even community boundaries. The issues have by now been pretty clearly drawn, and ... can be described as **freedom vs. slavery....** [T]wo powerful leaders of these opposed sides have emerged—the **United States of America and the USSR.**

"We are faced now with a situation similar in some respects to that which confronted **our forefathers in early colonial days when they ploughed the land with a rifle slung on the shoulder. If they stuck to the plough and left the rifle at home, they would have been easy victims for any savages lurking in the woods.**"

**Lester Pearson, then Minister of External Affairs, 1951**

**Source:** "Canadian Foreign Policy in a Two Power World," April 10, 1951. Speech to a joint meeting of The Empire Club of Canada and Toronto's Canadian Club. [bit.ly/Empire-Club](http://bit.ly/Empire-Club)



accomplice," said Swift and MacKay, "in government attacks on dissidents."<sup>2</sup>

As chief architect of Canada's post-war anti-Red foreign policy, Pearson demonized the Soviet Union as the centre of global evil. The USSR was still reeling after 27 million of its citizens had died during Hitler's anti-communist crusade. After the Red Army liberated Eastern Europe and led Germany's defeat, the US replaced the Nazis as global leaders in the war on communism. NATO efforts to destroy the USSR used Cold-War "containment" strategies: surrounding the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons, isolating it with political and economic sanctions, and vilifying it with propaganda. Pearson had a central role in this new phase of the West's war on communism.

For decades, Canada and other Western powers had fought to contain the left. Canada even ran slave labour camps (1914-20) that interned thousands of single immigrant men, mostly Ukrainians, who were laid off from rural work camps. Elites feared that their growing protests in urban centres might spark a revolution.<sup>3</sup> In 1919, Canada was among 13 countries that invaded the newborn state of Soviet Russia with 150,000 troops to reverse the Bolshevik revolution.

One means of dismantling Canada's self-righteous myths is to examine this country's support for US militarism throughout the Cold War. This study leads to the conclusion that little has changed up to the present. Always a stalwart NATO warrior giving solid allegiance to US-led military, political and economic wars, Canada has taken on leading roles in a new Cold War now being waged by the American empire.

Facing Canada's history of duplicity is especially difficult because it means fac-

**F**or centuries, self-righteous myths have depicted Canada as a champion of democracy and human rights. Despite Canada's long record of genocide, land plunder and war profiteering, official narratives about noble 'Canadian values' still reign in our imagined 'peaceable kingdom.' Canada's ethnonationalist propaganda demonized First Nations as hostile subhumans to be enslaved, imprisoned on reservations and made Christian in residential schools. This White Power racism served imperialist containment policies designed to turn 'Red Indian' enemies into captive nations.

In the early 1950s, then-External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson pioneered a new containment policy. During the transition to a new world order called the Cold War, he rallied his powerful allies in Canada's racist old-boys' clubs. Pearson compared the new Red Menace to what he called

"savages lurking in the woods." These "savages," he said, had violently threatened the peaceful lives of innocent white Europeans whom he lovingly called "our forefathers." (See quotation above.) By conjuring up unsettling images of a Red-Indian bogeyman, Pearson helped manufacture consent for a brand-new, politically-Red enemy to meet the needs of NATO's capitalist powers.

On the home front, Pearson's fierce anti-communism justified Canada's systematic abuses of civil rights. As Ian MacKay and Jamie Swift note in *Warrior Nation*:

Pearson enthusiastically supported a Cold War against any Canadians suspected of viewing the world outside the newly hegemonic framework of the American imperium.<sup>1</sup>

Targeted for abuse by Canada's Cold-War elites were "peaceniks," radical unionists and others branded as too left wing. "Pearson had become an ever-more-aggressive

### "Manufacturing Consent" for fascism

**"If the triumph of communism is the worst imaginable result, the support of fascism abroad is justified as a lesser evil."**

**I**n 1988, just before the destruction of the USSR, Herman and Chomsky published a theory on the use of mass media "to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior" that "integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society." (p.1.) The media's "societal purpose," they explained, is to "defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state." (p.298.)

This propaganda model focused on five thematic "filters" of the mass media:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation...;

(2) advertising as primary income source ...; (3) the reliance ... on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; (5) "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. (p.2.)

With the "specter" of communism as "the ultimate evil," the media was key to creating a "cultural milieu in which anticommunism is the dominant religion." By "elevating opposition to communism to a first principle of Western ideology and politics," the media used it as a "potent" "political-control mechanism." As such, it served to

"fragment the left and labor movements" and to sideline "social democrats" accused of being "too soft on communists." During the Cold War, many "liberal" progressives supported US-led wars as long as they were justified with anticommunist pretexts. Meanwhile, "others lapsed into silence, paralyzed by the fear of being tarred with charges of infidelity to the national religion." (p.29.)

By stirring "anti-Communist fervor ... the demand for serious evidence in support of claims of 'communist' abuses is suspended, and charlatans can survive as evidential sources." These "charlatans" take "center stage" as media "experts" and "remain there even after exposure as highly unreliable, if not downright liars." (p.30.)

**Source:** Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 1988.

ing the villainous hypocrisy of some of this nation's most-beloved heroes. It also means confronting the powerful political descendants of Canada's much-glorified cult heroes.

### Collaboration in the Vietnam War

Noam Chomsky is among the scholars who debunk the national myth that Canada is a "peaceable kingdom" promoting high, moral values. To do this, Chomsky tags Canada's most iconic peacemaker as a virulent warmonger. "Lester Pearson," said Chomsky, "was a major criminal, really extreme." For example, "Pearson's support for the war in Vietnam," Chomsky notes, included Canadian government collaboration in "spying, weapons sales, and complicity in the bombing of the North."<sup>4</sup> (For more on Canada's role, see Victor Levant's *Quiet Complicity*.<sup>5</sup>)

As early as 1951, Chomsky noted, one of Pearson's many tirades against what Canadian elites saw as the evils of communism clearly affirmed his blind-eye support for the US-backed, French war in Vietnam: "If the valiant efforts now being made by France ... were to fail," said Pearson, all of South-East Asia, including Burma, Malaya and Indonesia, with their important resources of rubber, rice and tin, might well come under communist control.<sup>6</sup>

As a leading Cold War zealot, Pearson justified the genocide in southeast Asia (which eventually killed 3.5 million civilians) as a war to protect the "free world" from communism. As Chomsky noted in 2005, Pearson called Vietnam's independence struggle an example of "communist aggression." Chomsky also noted that Pearson claimed that "'Soviet colonial authority in Indochina' appeared to be stronger than that of France." Considering, said Chomsky, that there was "not a Russian anywhere in the neighborhood ... [o]ne has to search pretty far to find more fervent devotion to imperial crimes than Pearson's declarations."<sup>7</sup>

His hawkish stand on Vietnam was cheered by East European émigrés, like Lithuanians, Czechs and Slovaks. (pp.37, 45.)

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### NATO cofounder and peace cult icon

While state myths have created a cult around Pearson, Canada's beloved Nobel Peace Prize winner was actually a vociferous Cold Warrior. Besides using hateful anti-Red rhetoric to whitewash war crimes in Vietnam, Pearson rallied public support for other crimes against peace. These included many covert actions to squash anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>8</sup>

Canadian political, corporate, religious and media elites shared with their Western allies a fierce loathing for anyone who could be labelled communist. Their glo-

bal crusade maligned all individuals, groups, parties, movements and governments that dared to threaten the freewheeling reign of predatory corporations. In Lester Pearson, these fear-mongering elites found a capable voice whose skillful devotion to Cold War tropes served their shared, vested interests.

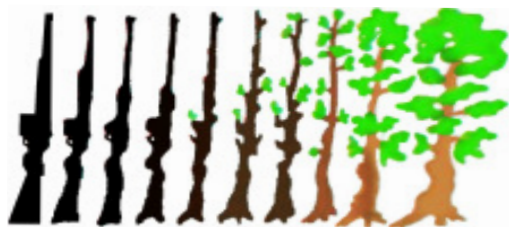
Pearson's subservience to the moneyed interests of empire helped ensure his rise to power through the Department of External Affairs. After joining that bureaucracy in 1928, Pearson worked his way up through Ottawa's ranks to receive top postings in the capitals of Canada's two imperi-

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