

January 29, 1951

Dear Billy:

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Here follows more or less a digest of our conversation of the other night.

First we must ask are we at war with Russia. If we are not, then there is no purpose in this letter at all. I believe we are at war or rather that they are at war with us, and I think we are taking a licking. I believe that they are fighting us with subtle and effective weapons. These weapons have reduced a great many of our people to a state of terrified hysteria. In a word, we are reacting exactly as their psychological warfar intended us to.

I propose that we fight back with our weapons, not theirs. They use socialism as a weapon and a bait. I suggest we use capitalism as our weapon and I believe that it can be a very potent weapon.

Before I go on, let me say that I know my suggestions are highly immoral and terrible. I can only argue that war is immoral, that killing people is immoral, that there is no nobility in warfare and that the methods of war are nearly always dirty. The purpose of these opponents is to win. I see no reason why our purpose should not be the same. I will go on now to two suggestions for fighting back.

Proposal #1

The standard medium of exchange in Russia, as in the countrys controlled by Russia, is the paper note - In Russia 5-10-50-100 ruble notes. Checks are practically unknown. Nearly all transactions are carried out with small bills.

I propose that we make these bills in great quantities, make them as perfectly as possible - and we can do it well enough as almost to defy detection. After these small denomination bills are made, they should be aged. This can be done by putting them in a drum and rolling them with dirty clothes. They will become wrinkled and soiled, as though they had been handled for some time. This is important.

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The prevailing winds in Europe are easterly. Their rate and exact direction is known and predictable. Method for distributing this weapon is very simple - Bills should be packed in a container with a detonating device for wide distribution of the paper. Balloons should carry the container and the balloons should have a time device to drop the bills after a predicted journey and from an altitude great enough to insure a wide scattering of the money. Releases should be made so that the bills will fall on or near centers of population. This bombing should be done in quantity and without warning. There should be no identification on balloons or containers.

I do not think I need go into the effects of such a bombing. Russians are no less venial than we are. In fact, since they have so little, I think they may even be more so. In my little experience in

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Russia, I saw nothing to indicate any unique honesty. People finding the money would claim they had had it. The non-rationed stores would be swamped. If the bombs were well enough made, even their own money would be suspect. Every transaction would have to be scrutinized. Every one would suspect every one else. The money would have to be changed - a matter not only of great expense, but changing money causes suspicion of all money. Once changed, the new money could be duplicated. Mutual suspicion between government and people is an effective weapon.

If the charge should be leveled at us that we are using such a weapon, it should be answered not only with a simple denial, but word should be got through both by pamphlet and radio that some one in power was inflating the money and using us as scapegoat. Where money is involved, people will believe anything. If this is effective, other bombings could be carried out - police passes, ration tickets, identification cards, travel passes, orders - all the paper detail which a police state forces on its people. I believe that this weapon is more effective than the atom bomb because, whereas attack from without has a tendency to unite people, my weapon would cause them to fight each other.

Finally - my weapon is ridiculously cheap. For the cost of a destroyer, we could flood a nation with money.

Note: This weapon would be doubly effective on the satellites and it could be overwhelming on China. The Russians are not liked anywhere. It could be very effective to suggest that the Russians are inflating German, Hungarian, Balkan money. And as I said - people will believe anything where money is concerned. Frightful as this weapon is - I do not find it more immoral than tanks and gas and germs. And I do ~~not~~ think it could be more effective than any of them. This germ would be distributed by the enemy himself. Its psychological effect could be deadly. If considered at all - this weapon should go on the top secret list.

Proposal #2

It is my belief that any nation which employs ever increasing police power, both open and secret, is inherently afraid of its own people. The great numbers of arrests, transportations and executions in Russia would not indicate a great faith in the basic loyalty of the people. I think the Kremlin is afraid of the people, and the people are in great fear of the Kremlin. Where such a state of fear exists, I believe one can safely substitute the word hatred for fear. Eddie Gilmore, recently back from Moscow, told me that in his fairly large acquaintance with Russians, he did not know one who had not some relative who had been in trouble with the police.

Wherever one can split government from people - can cause tension and suspicion, can influence sternness and repression, one has exercised a powerful weapon. The Russians in their propaganda have succeeded in a limited degree in doing this to us.

Proposal number two is a method for increasing such tensions.

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Cells of secret resistance should be established in every Russian town and city. These cells should be designed and peopled, their technique of existence and their personnel conceived just as though they really existed. Once this paper resistance is established, orders and suggestions should be sent by radio and perhaps by dropped paper to the cells. These orders should be in code, but not in a code impossible to break. The orders should, as far as possible, be for the performance of certain things which normally are likely to happen anyway; i.e. breaking down of tractors, factory failures, air crashes, quota failures. The only unbreakable part of the code should be the names of the people involved. This is necessary, since such people do not exist, but the indication should be clear and general enough to bring local people under suspicion.

It is my contention that a group as jittery as the Polithureau and with a history as fantastic as the last thirty years has been, even if they suspected a hoax, could not take a chance on its being a hoax. Subtly done, this plan would be one further push in the direction of mutual suspicion. I have the plan worked out in detail. There is no need to go into it here.

Those are two of the proposals, Billy. I have a number more, which I would be happy to supply. It seems a shame to me that we are taking a beating in this undeclared war, when natural weapons are in our hands. The Russians are far more vulnerable than we are. It seems a shame that we are not doing anything to them as effective as they are doing to us. I think that the beauty of my two proposals lies in the fact that our own men do not get killed. In effect, we apply the simple principle of making them ~~yx~~ fight each other.

I should like to hear from you regarding this matter. It has occurred to me that if I cannot get a serious reaction on this matter, that it might ~~xxxx~~ be a good idea, far from secrecy, to write these and other proposals as an article for a national magazine. Even the proposals would, I think, throw a shiver of horror on the U.S.S.R.

Finally, none of these weapons could be used on us. We are a check country. And, besides, I seriously doubt whether the Russians could duplicate our money, while I am certain that we can duplicate theirs.

See you soon.

John Steinbeck

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