

BOOK REVIEW

Jørgen Johansen and Brian Martin 2019 *Social Defence*, Nössemark, Norway: Irene Publishing, 2019, ISBN 978-91-88061-37-9

At least some of the ambiguity surrounding the term 'social capital' must spill over into 'social defence'. The term defence can scarcely avoid the connotation of militaristic preparation, and does not here. Yet the whole purpose of this book is to denounce militarism in all its forms, and there are other terms that the authors can invoke for the measures they advocate.

Social defence is intended to replace entirely the whole idea of armed defence. The book is at its strongest, and worthiest, in repeating the unnecessary horrors of war, and for the authors there is no such thing as a 'just' war. Too seldom do we unpack such glib obscenities as 'collateral damage' and reflect on their actual import. Such terms are, of course, designed to divert attention from the reality. Militarisation includes a multitude of sins: 'the adoption of military methods of thinking, and includes the glorification of soldiers and war, the creation and dehumanisation of the "enemy," the fostering of systems of command and obedience, and the use of the army to defend inequality and to repress dissent' (p. 23).

Johansen and Martin emphasize the massive wastefulness of defence spending, the sweeping and often irreversible devastation of the environment where fighting occurs, the multitudes of innocent civilians – children, women and the aged – who suffer maiming and death. The target assassination against non-tried enemies through criminal drone attacks launched by the sainted Obama are a case in point. Over three years drone attacks eliminated fourteen alleged terrorist leaders, at the 'collateral' cost of some 700 civilians – a two per cent strike rate. The authors advert to legendary tales of military incompetence hiding behind a veil of exhibitionist efficiency, but save the worst effects for the repression that subdues the nation engaged in war: 'Military means are in essence anti-democratic. As well as killing people, weapons destroy social networks, reduce respect for human rights, and lessen democratic institutions' (p. 33). So much for the claim of the neo-cons in George II's court to bring democracy to a shattered Iraq. In some countries, militaries have been compared to 'protection rackets': pay us, or we may attack you (p. 38).

Johansen and Martin adopt the term 'social defence' to show that defence is for society and not the state. How the state is dispensed with in this case is not explained. The silent implication is that states, because of sovereign power, are inevitably associated with defence structures. This sovereignty here is associated with the state's capacity for violence, yet this surely misstates the role of the state in drawing the ability to coerce away from private bodies within the territory as well as those beyond the borders. In any case this assumption clashes with the encouraging list of states, from Costa Rica and Iceland to Saint Kitts and Nevis, that do not have military defences,

supplied by the authors; yet even here it is conceded that such countries rely for defence on powerful allies.

Social Defence argues for the displacement of military forces with organised social action built up by long preparation and education of the civilian body. Johansen and Martin adopt the methods of social movements to add their version of the defence movement. Their organisation is foreshadowed by campaigns for nuclear disarmament, Greenpeace and other peace movements, the non-violent parts of the suffragist movement, while the labour movement is 'crucial'. They say that training for social defence should include the organisation of rallies, boycotts, and strikes, while fraternization with opponents is of the essence. Yet 'peacetime' training in such activities, when there is no concrete objective, seems to be an obstacle. Johansen and Martin say that the rise of social media has given the civilian population endless opportunities for counteracting the propaganda of authoritarian governments and tamed mainstream media. Yet herein lies a big problem. The methods advocated would seem very appropriate for a population oppressed at home, but the threat of mighty foreign powers is a more recalcitrant dilemma.

Fraternization is a key term for the authors. It is exemplified by the friendliness of Czech civilians to the invading Russians of 1968, who were socially 'disarmed' by the courtesies they received. Johansen and Martin do indeed recognise the problem. They mention how friendliness to the Hutus lessened the brutality of murdering the Tutsi in 1994, and how pacifist-leaning workers in Nazi Germany sabotaged some of the equipment and disabled some weapons, but these recollections really underline the tragedies of mass murder and mass destruction. How do you fraternize with drones, intercontinental missiles and aerial bombing and long-range artillery?

The intent of this book is entirely worthy. Were the whole world at the one time to adopt 'social defence', which I believe would be more accurately called 'direct action' or 'passive resistance', the world would be a much better place. Yet there is a long way to go. In a country such as Australia action as proposed by the authors would be better facilitated if the nation as a whole became much more committed to a democratic community, an idea that is under retreat at the present moment. Even so, while Johansen and Martin rightly denounce the glorification of war, the quasi spiritual sanctification of the ANZAC legend in Australia, somewhat diverted nowadays from its genuinely spiritual beginnings, is successfully inculcated as a basic constituent of our society in generation after generation. It is never quite the glorification of war, but the presence of war is the mystic counterfoil of the civic spirituality.

Johansen and Martin have given us a thought-provoking book that deserves to receive deep examination, evaluation, and further development.

Author

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