

# Rostow's View of History

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An American professor has advanced a new interpretation of economic history which ranges from a sweeping revision of Marx to a forecast of a revolution in global power and a plan to end the cold war. Professor Walt Whitman Rostow, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, recently unfolded his "Non-Communist Manifesto" in a series of lectures at Cambridge University and in the pages of the *London Economist*.

Hailed by the *Economist* as having made the most important contribution to economic thought since World War II, Professor Rostow predicts that within 60 years the absolute diplomatic and military supremacy of the Western and Soviet super powers will be broken by a universal wave of industrialization. By that time, so many nations will be able to produce nuclear weapons that the United States and the Soviet Union will be reduced to "middling" powers in respect to their control over world events. Unless a settlement of the nuclear arms race is reached in time, Mr. Rostow holds, world peace in the Twenty-first Century will be at the mercy of not two but a multitude of countries and the whims of their leaders.

Having made this warning as his main claim for urgent consideration of his theory, Mr. Rostow considers the major problem of reconciling the interests of the Communist and capitalist worlds. The key to their differences is Marx, he believes: the Communist prophet is outmoded; the capitalists must offer a more timely ideology, suitable to both societies.

The professor's approach to this task is based on his now familiar theory of the stages of national growth. Readers of "A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy," a 1957 book by Mr. Rostow and Professor Max F. Millikan, will remember that according to this view the life of a nation passes through five phases:

1. The traditional era, in which people live on the land, without benefit of modern science.
2. The transitional era, in which an elite group doubles profits by modernizing a few key industries and then plows these gains back into the economy.
3. The "take-off" era, in which these re-investments begin automatically to enrich all phases of the nation's life.

4. The mature era, by which time a nation's resources become fully developed.

5. The high consumption era, during which the national aim becomes the satisfaction of the peoples' demand for the good life.

Up to the fourth point, Mr. Rostow believes, he and Marx are agreed. But Marx did not live to see that, instead of destroying itself in search of new markets, a modern industrialized society tends to become "bored" with Marx's profit motive and turns its energies to other goals. It may seek military glory, especially if militant nationalism had been the driving force behind modernization. It may find satisfaction in creating a welfare state. Its natural peaceful bent, however, is to enter the high consumption era and cater to its peoples' desire for creature comforts.

Because the Kremlin clings to the Marxian belief that the West is doomed, however, it has continued to arm and to foment irresponsible nationalism among emergent nations at the expense of well-being at home. Because the West, ironically, is so deeply preoccupied with its booming consumer market, it has failed to grant enough aid to such non-Communist "take-off" efforts as India's Five Year Plan.

If the West remains strong enough militarily to discourage Soviet aggression, though, and if the West expands its economic aid to underdeveloped countries, Mr. Rostow argues, then Russia will be forced to negotiate. In the continued absence of war, Russia's rising domestic chant for a better life will become overwhelming. Further, as the actions of such "take-off" nations as China and Egypt have intimated, lesser powers may not shrink from using nuclear weapons to turn the cold war to advantage.

This is Mr. Rostow's conclusion: The West must convince Russia that the way of peace lies in the adventures of the high consumption age and that if the host of former colonies now, advancing to industrial maturity are not guided along this path, the other choice open to them will not be Marx but aggression.

Mr. Rostow has suggested a systematized approach to world problems at a time when new approaches are widely sought. Judging by the impact on international diplomacy of Professor George Kennan's disengagement proposals, Mr. Rostow's "Non-Communist Manifesto" has been translated into the language of international debate.

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