Politics is war without bloodshed while 
war is politics with bloodshed.
Mao Tse-Tung9 (1893 -1976)

Chapter III

War and Politics: Nationalism and Colonialism

The Marxist views on war and capitalism have been discussed in the 
Introduction under “War and Marxism”. As mentioned earlier, the Marxists have 
various views on war and their views are bound by the circumstances leading to war. 
Their opposition and support for a particular war depend on whether that war serves 
or denies the cause of the proletariat. They believe that violence is necessary, 
progressive and legitimate against the aggression of the capitalist class and the 
imperial nations. Lenin had remarked long time ago that capitalism is war. He also 
believed that “wars cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and socialism is 
created” (“Socialism and war” 95). In the same article, Lenin believed that some wars 
in the past, despite all the horrors, atrocities and suffering, were progressive and 
benefited the development of mankind (95). Steven Seidman remarks that Marx 
thought that imperialism accompanies capitalism which destroys vital national 
cultures and brings vast incremental ruin (262). He also pointed out that Marx 
believed that European economic and political conquest of the non-European world 
was almost necessary to advance social progress (262). On the contrary, Alastair 
Pennycook remarks that Marx believed that “colonialism was justifiable and correct 
since it helped to destroy the fixed, unhistorical nature of primitive societies and to 
move them towards capitalism, a crucial step on the inevitable path towards 
communism” (57).

The Marxists are in favour of any war which is defensive and against the 
imperial states. They consider this kind of war as just and legitimate. O’Casey in Oak 
Leaves demonstrates this point of view when he calls for a war against the imperial 
Germany. This war is just for O’Casey to drive away the aggression of Germany.

Colonialism and imperialism is an advanced form of capitalism according to 
Marxists. Lenin wrote a book on this subject – Imperialism: The highest Stage of 
Capitalism in which he defined imperialism as “the monopoly stage of capitalism” 
(10). Hans Kohn remarks that “… imperialism and colonialism were the product of

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9 A Chinese Communist politician (1893 - 1976), and the founder of the People’s Republic of China.
late and over-capitalized capitalism” (262). The Marxist notion of modern war is that it is always driven and motivated by capitalism. They look at capitalism as an exploitative system which deprives people of their rights as human beings. The previous chapter points out how different writers like Brecht, Miller and Al-Hakim look at capitalism as a system of exploitation, domination and dehumanisation. John Arden, from a Marxist view, looks at colonialism as another form of capitalism as discussed in this chapter. The colonisation of other nations by the British Empire had always been associated with all sorts of suffering, torture and inhumane activities to the natives and to the Queen’s soldiers. Arden exposes all these atrocities of the colonial nation in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance.

Phil Mitchinson states that capitalism is a two-sided coin – private ownership of economy and the division of the world into competing nation states. And this division will lead to mighty battles between the classes in one society and also between nation states (para. 3). Based on Leon Trotsky’s statement – “foreign policy is an extension of home policy”, Mitchinson points out that “The home policy of the capitalists is a capitalist policy and so is their foreign policy. The peacetime policy of capitalism is determined by their class interests, profit, privilege and prestige. This policy is continued in war, which simply carries the horrors of capitalism to their limits” (para. 6).

Marxists’ opposition to war does not entail that they are pacifist. They favour violence and oppose it for the sake of the working class. They believe that the working class does not gain anything from capitalism in peace and in times of war. Mitchinson confirms this view:

In wars between capitalist nations to capture markets, raw materials or spheres of influence, whether fought by major powers or, as so often today, by smaller powers acting as the proxies of greater nations, there is nothing progressive to be found. Such wars are reactionary on all sides. Our attitude to war cannot be determined simply by the undoubted horror of suffering and death it entails for both the civilian population and the ranks of the troops, but only by the class interests of those waging war. Marxists are irreconcilably opposed to any war waged by the capitalist ruling class. The working class has nothing to gain from capitalism in peacetime or war. (para. 21-22)
To stop this unprogressive war between nations and to save the future of humanity from further horrible wars between nations is to reveal the truth that the working class can put a lot of change on the world as Mitchinson rightly points in his concluding lines of his article: “The working class represents the overwhelming majority of the population and once it is conscious of its power it will be possible to carry out a transformation of society quite peacefully and create a new world without borders and conflicts, whose only wars are against poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and disease” (para. 39).

Alan Woods and Ted Grant state that:

To approach war from a purely sentimental or pacifist standpoint is a futile exercise. It would be like a doctor who, instead of providing an accurate diagnosis and appropriate medicine, limited himself to weeping tears over the patient's symptoms. The patient may be grateful for this display of sympathy, but will not derive much benefit from it.

Therefore, the Marxists' starting point is that it is first necessary to understand the causes of war before conducting an effective struggle and this is only possible if the class interest behind wars is grasped (“Marxism and War” para. 1). According to the Marxists, war can be prevented by mass action and by the revolutionary struggle against imperialism and capitalism as pointed in these lines by Woods and Ted:

Every true socialist, every class conscious worker and trade unionist, every young person who wants to fight for a better world, must join in the most active and militant struggle against this unjust imperialist war. It is necessary to create the broadest possible mass movement against imperialism and militarism. It is necessary to oppose the monstrous aggression against the people of Iraq by all means at our disposal.

We must fight against the war, but we must do so with the correct methods, tactics and policies: the tactics of the workers' movement, the policies of socialism and internationalism that links the struggle against world imperialism with the perspective of the socialist transformation of society at home and abroad. (para. 105)

This thinking is present in Arden’s Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance which attacks the imperial power of Great Britain. Musgrave’s violence is to create ‘the broadest
possible mass movement against imperialism and militarism’ but he could not do it ‘through correct methods, tactics and policies’. The socialist cause advocated by Musgrave was to organise the coalminers against the policies of the Empire. His attempt had failed because it did not follow proper methods and tactics. This socialist cause is also explicit in O’Casey’s Oak Leaves where ‘every true socialist’ such as Feelim and Drishogue etc. ‘joined the militant struggle against the unjust imperialist war’ into which Germany plunged them. The following lines by Woods and Ted are relevant to imperialism which has marked the modern times with blindness.

The concentration of wealth and power into a few hands is an inevitable consequence of the present stage of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, when a handful of giant monopolies own and control the vast majority of the means of production. (para. 54)

The whole of world trade is controlled by no more than 200 giant corporations, the great majority of them American. All the important decisions are taken by the boards of directors of these big monopolies. Tiny groups of men and women, elected by nobody and responsible to nobody, decide the destinies of whole nations. They decide whether millions will work or be unemployed, will eat or starve, live or die. (para. 55)

Al-Hakim’s The World Is A Comedy is about this group of capitalists and monopoly companies that control the rest of the world to their advantage. Therefore, the President reacts against the imperial system by putting an end to war through disarmament. The play attacks ‘the concentration of power and wealth into a few hands’ which makes the life of the majority at stake.

Contrary to the Marxists’ ideology which saw the concentration of wealth and power in a few hands as an evil to society and mankind, Max Weber praised it and predicted that capitalism would be unstoppable. Marxists predicted the collapse of capitalism and the surfacing of socialism in the world which did not come true in some countries where capitalism is still dominating and ruling. Wolfgang J. Mommsen in ‘Max Weber as a critic of Marxism’ points out that “Weber predicted as early as 1893 that within a few generations, capitalism would permanently destroy all tradition social structures and that its advance impossible to stop” (115). There is always something good in what continues and something bad in what discontinues. That is why Weber defended capitalism and praised it as a good system because of the
good qualities it centred on such as “the combination of hard work, methodic economic activity, frugal life and the reinvestment of saving” (Löwy para. 27). He further defines the spirit of capitalism as “the ideas and habits that favour the rational pursuit of economic gain” (Bendix 54). This is how Marx and Weber differ in their views of capitalism as John Kilcullen points out:

On Marx’s account, Capitalism presupposes a ‘primitive accumulation’ that was achieved by forcible expropriation. According to Weber, the expropriation of some may result simply from the competitive advantage others have in a market. If a few become systematic in pursuit of money others will end up as their employees. (para. 20)

This chapter will attempt to focus on the politics of war. the national and the colonial aspects in particular, and to examine the political motives behind these wars whether they are for independence as in The Plough or for colonisation as in Musgrave. The discussion of The Plough will examine the reasons behind O’Casey’s reaction towards the Easter leaders and their preparation to rebel against the British colonisers. An attempt will also be made to answer questions such as how O’Casey looks down upon these leaders? What could be the reasons behind his humiliating depiction of the Easter leaders? Is it because he is anti-nationalist? Or is it because he is a socialist? Then follows the discussion of the politics of colonialism and its impact on both the colonial nation of Great Britain and the colonised natives of Cyprus as dramatised in Arden’s Musgrave.

According to Marxists, war is the creation of commercialism, the bourgeois and colonialism to choke the ringing cry of the multitude of the proletariats and the have-nots so that they may not wage the real war against the haves who have amassed their wealth at the cost of the naked and hungry humanity and who have forcibly and shamelessly snatched control over the means of production in order to deprive the masses who should really have them in their hands. Marxists believe that the capitalists subjugate nations, turn them into slaves so that they can easily be exploited. It serves two purposes at the same time. The colonialists get the unauthorised right to economic exploitation of the subjugated mass. This helps them in securing their second purpose easily. It is to instigate these people in the name of nationalism and freedom and thus to entangle them in a war in the name of nationalism and freedom. The entities of nationalism and freedom are the sham creations of the bourgeois and the colonialists which can easily beguile the masses from their real end – a war
against economic slavery and for real economic freedom. In the wars which call for national and political freedom, the powerful capitalists have the last laugh. They are powerful economically and politically. They possess the means of production in their full control. Thus they can create the huge monster of war-machine which can easily crush the weak, tattered and tiny masses under its feet as it treads on the earth. It can kill them in the fields and in their homes. No place is safe for them. At the end they are exterminated; their energy is lost; their passion for the noblest ideas of nationhood and the freedom die their natural deaths; they remain where they had been.

Arden and O’Casey focus on these issues related to the working class in their respective countries in the two plays selected for this chapter. They both believe that the politicians of their own countries exploit their own citizens in the name of war. The Mayor, the Constables, and the Parsons are similar to the Easter leaders because both the groups created an environment where they could subjugate their own people. These two writers write their own nations with the view that colonial wars or wars for independence are not only between two nations but also between two classes – the haves and the have-nots. To begin with Arden’s views towards the issue of the working class, one can note that Arden is deeply concerned with the state of the labour movement in the Empire. He looks at the issue of war waged by Great Britain as a two-edged weapon, with one edge it kills and starves its own people to death ‘because the Queen has wars outside’ and with other edge it kills and oppresses innocent people in their own cities. He looks at colonialism as another form of capitalism. As mentioned in the previous chapter that modern wars are waged for economic motives, the British Empire also waged wars with the same motives – to have control over the means of production and the natural resources of the colonised.

The British authority as in Musgrave controls the means of production and exploits the working class so that they do not object to the government or stand against its strategies. When Musgrave and his men reach a town north of England, they find the coalminers on strike due to low wages and under threats of job termination. The people seem to resent the internal and external politics of their own country and they cannot cope with existing conditions imposed on them. Therefore, they decide to go on strike so that the government may fulfil their demands. Arden is unhappy with the authority and the power structure of his own government. And it is no wonder if he expresses his sentiments against authority and against the Empire since he is a recognisable left wing playwright as described by Charles Grimes when...
discussing the leftist politics of Harold Pinter (259). So being a left-wing writer, it is natural for Arden to be anti-imperial and anti-capitalist since this is the core of the left-wing ideology. Majority of the Left reject specific wars because they believe that wars are motivated by capitalism and imperialism. The opposition of the Left to wars emerges from their concern with world’s workers, the victims of capitalists’ wars.

This leftist thinking is reflected in Musgrave’s opposition to the colonial and imperial wars imposed by the Empire on other nations. Musgrave vents his dissatisfaction with the Queen and the Empire’s politics of colonisation and subjugation practised by the British soldiers in foreign lands. The basic principle in the left-wing ideology is the proletariat which is common to both Arden and O’Casey. O’Casey’s The Plough centres on the issue of the working class in relation to the politics of nationalism and colonialism and also explains that the proletariats share the same common interest all over the world and that they should fight for it and not go after the false slogans of nationalism and colonialism.

Brendan Behan (1923-64) shares the same views on the issue of the working class in the Hostage (1958). Like O’Casey, he belonged to the working class. Through balanced argument, Behan attacks the imperial presence in Ireland and the blind nationalism of the IRA. The following passage from the first version of the play illustrates the imperial subjugation of the poor people in Ireland as well as in various British colonies as conveyed in Teresa speech:

> The English, the English always, hanging poor people and manipulating them always. And in every place – in Africa, in Cyprus and in Ireland. But Power will have his day – and the English will be down … the dirty murderers. (qtd. in O’Connor The Stages 80)

This chapter groups Arden and O’Casey for the detailed study because they belong to two opposing cultures – coloniser and colonised, yet they share common views towards war. They both believe that the real war is not between nations but between the haves and the have-nots. It might also be interesting to look how these two literary giants write their own cultures and how they criticise the politics of their own countries realistically. It is natural to get a writer such as Arden condemning the colonial and imperial power of his own country. It is a normal reaction on the part of Arden who felt it was unjust to colonise and subjugate other nations. In addition to the suffering which the native nation of Cyprus faces at the hand of the colonisers, Arden’s Musgrave focuses on the negative consequences that take place inside the
colonial nation as a result of the Empire’s engagement in colonial wars with the insurgents of the colonised nations. But one may wonder about O’Casey’s negative stance towards colonial and imperial power imposed on his country and especially his mocking treatment of the leaders of the Easter Rising. Instead of writing for his cause and glorifying the Easter Rising, he demeans the shallow patriotism of those who took part in it. He felt that those nationalists had increased the already intolerable life of the slum dwellers because O’Casey believed that the Rising would have a direct impact on the life of common people who were already unable to survive due to the miserable living situation in Dublin. In O’Casey’s view, this untimely political unrest is a further aggravation of the unbearable suffering of the poor Dubliners. Lady Gregory describes O’Casey’s reaction to the Rising: “He thinks the Rising was ‘a terrible mistake and we lost much fine men. We should have won freedom by degrees with them’” (Gregory 135). Bobby L. Smith also points out O’Casey’s view towards the Rising: “For him, the Easter Rising was not a holy war, and those who fought during Easter Week were no more heroic than those who participated in the ‘murdering hate’ of the Irish Civil War six years later” (“The Game” 190).

The Plough and the Stars (1926)

O’Casey stresses in The Plough that the Irish rebels are concerned with the issue of freedom and national identity neglecting the basic living needs of the Irish people. What makes O’Casey condemn the leaders of Easter Rising is their indifference to the slum dwellers’ deteriorating conditions, which forced them to loot the shops rather than participate in war during the insurgency between the British colonial soldiers and the Irish rebels. They become dazzled by the costly things – hats, sofas, clothes and pianos – of the rich people. They are happy with these things which they never could have in the past and which they may never have in future. Thus they are cajoled by these costly possessions – a reward given to them by the bourgeois colonialists for not waging their real war against the economic possessions of the capitalists. Thus the capitalists are safe again; the proletariat is once again in their hands and under their feet. He is reduced to such penury that he can not think again of any war – war for national freedom, political freedom and economic freedom because what he sees constantly before his eyes is the war-machine – the guns are everywhere.

As a matter of fact, O’Casey was known as a brave freedom fighter and he was concerned with the independence of Ireland from the imperial grip of the British
colonialism. But he did not think of the independence in the same way the Easter leaders thought. He was not against nationalism but against the politics of the Easter leaders who instigated the common people to fight without being aware of the power of the enemy and the poor living conditions of the downtrodden Dubliners. He was traumatised to find the Easter leaders propagating the independence without realising the huge gap between the enemy forces and the simple preparation for the Rising. Although he had been an active member of the Irish Citizen Army, he drew back from participating in the Rising because he felt that the rebels put the nationalist ideals before the socialist ones. O’Casey wanted the opposite to take place. In a later stage of his life, he was accused of being pro-English and came under scrutiny. Unable to bear the hostile atmosphere resulted from staging The Plough, he exiled himself to England: “Interestingly, O’Casey sought exile in the colonizing nation after the attainment of independence…” (O’Connor, The Stages of the Nation 37).

O’Casey’s strong advocacy of socialism and the labourers’ cause in Ireland was the main reason behind his criticism of the Easter leaders and his opposition to the rebellion. Being a socialist ideologue, he exerted his efforts to levitate the terrible conditions of the people. This idea is communicated through the Covey who has been strongly opposing the idea of rebelling against the British colonisers. He attempts to persuade the rebels with logical argument to hold them back from taking part in the rebellion telling them that “there’s no such thing as an Irishman or an Englishman, or German or a Turk; we’re all only human bein’s. Scientifically speakin’, it’s all a question of accidental gatherin’ together of mollycvels an’atoms” (143). Here, the Covey argues for the vindication of scientific socialism where only man and the dignity of man count. Other things are irrelevant and these other things are used by capitalism and colonialism to beguile the people and wage a war to establish itself in the world where millions are slaves to a few. The dramatist, like the Covey, feels that it is time now to unfurl ‘The Plough and the Stars’ for the right purpose by waging a war for the only right cause – for economic freedom. All other wars praised in history are mere sham; they have been wars waged by the capitalists and colonialists. But, he could not convince them and kept mocking at their behaviour till the last moment. Here is an example: “your mind is th’ mind of a mummy. … I betther go an’ get a good place to have a look at Ireland’s warriors passin’ by” (152). In another situation, the Covey again criticises the rebels for their fake slogans they are after especially when they lift up the flag, which stands for the workers. He considers this a misuse of the
flag – The Plough and the Stars – which has to be used for the cause of the workers and to establish a Workers’ Republic. This idea is encapsulated in the title of the play ‘The Plough and the Stars’ which O’Casey, as Jack Lindsay points out “uses [it] to express the gap between reality and the ideal, between the actual possibilities of the situation and the dream of freedom” (197). The plough is the symbol for the labour force but it is wrongly ignored by the Irish leaders as O’Casey thinks. The title O’Casey used for his play comes from the flag of the Irish Citizen Army to mock the way it has been misused. He meant to draw the attention to the huge contrast between the slogans the leaders advocate and the reality of the situation. In the play, the people whom the symbol stands for are brutally slaughtered in the revolt and they are the ones who suffer most due to the follies of their patriotic leaders. Lindsay points out the reason behind O’Casey’s choice of ‘the plough and the stars’ as a title for his play:

… he felt that the essential thing to stress was the tragic distance between the plough and the stars. By clarifying the point he hoped ‘to pull the plough a little nearer to the stars’, to lessen the gap between anarchic and romantic aspirations on one side and full consciousness of the terrible facts of human alienation on the other. To have pretended that the gap was not there and to have written a simple glorification of the uprising with perhaps some peripheral criticism, would have been to him the committing of an artistic and political sin. (198)

O’Casey felt that the Easter Rising of 1916 was not based on socialist principles which the flag stands for. He felt that ordinary people are used for another cause than what they aspire for. No doubt that O’Casey would love to see Ireland independent but he was sure that the Rising would not succeed and it would worsen the situation of the labourers further. Robert G. Lowery in “Prelude to Year One” points out the image of Ireland which O’Casey portrays at the end of his play: “After the rebellion, Ireland was stunned. A great historical moment has risen and passed and all there was to show for it were graves and gutted buildings” (151).

As mentioned above that O’Casey’s stance against the Easter Rising is because he first wants socialism to spread in the society and then all other social and political problems will be taken care of including colonialism and imperialism. In The plough, he seems to suggest that the presence of colonialism is because of the absence of socialist principles that call for cooperation and fight oppression against the ordinary man. Socialism is the ideology which O’Casey proposes in this play by
connecting it to the issue of colonialism and nationalism. Through the Covey, O’Casey’s socialist voice, the spectator gets to know the socialist ideas which O’Casey intends to communicate. It is the Covey who gives the audience a window into O’Casey’s state of mind making important remarks on the labour movement and making references to Karl Marx. Here are some significant statements made by the Covey: “There is only one war worth havin’: th’ war for th’ economic emancipation of th’ proletariat” (170). He asks Fluther “what you know about th’ Labour movement: what’s the mechanism of exchange? … What does Karl Marx say about th’ Relation of Value to th’ Cost o’ Production?” (174-75). The statement made by the Covey before Corporal Stoddart, a British soldier, explains O’Casey’s socialist ideas: “… D’ye know, comrade, that more die o’ consumption than are killed in th’ wars? An’ it’s all because of th’ system we’re livin’ undher” (The Plough 208)? In this statement, O’Casey implies that if there are wars to be fought, one should start with the most dangerous one. For him, fighting the colonial and imperial British forces is not of top priority. The first thing, he feels, is to fight for the poor who die of hunger because of the abundance that some people have and because of the system under which the slum-dwellers live. This is the main issue which O’Casey takes up in his play. It is the issue of the have-nots which has been ignored and manipulated by the politicians who claim to defend it. But, it is the politicians who stand against the working class and use them for their own goals. This is what O’Casey tells his audience in The Plough and this is why he does not favour the war against the British colonisers. He finds it illogical to fight the colonial forces without first fighting for the slum-dwellers of his own country.

O’Casey’s socialist ideas are not yet mature in this play. They become stronger when his career moves forward as discussed in Oak Leaves (1946) in the last chapter. Here in The Plough the Covey appears a weak character in comparison to the rest. However, he makes important remarks on socialist thought. In a conversation with the British soldier, the Covey tells him what socialism is:

CORPORAL STODDART. Ow, I know. I’m a soewhat myself, but I ‘as to do my dooty.

THE COVEY (ironically). Dooty! Th’ only dooty of a Socialist is th’ emancipation of th’ workers.

CORPORAL STODDART. Ow, a man’s a man, an ’e ’as to foight for ’is country, ’asn’t ’e?
FLUTHER (aggressively). You’re not fightin’ for your counthry here, are you?
PETER (anxiously, to Fluther). Ay, ay, Fluther, none o’ that, none, o’ that!
THE COVEY. Fight for your counthry! Did y’ever read, comrade, Jenersky’s Thesis on the Origin, Development, an’ Consolidation of th’ Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat? (The Plough 208-09)

Here, the Covey addresses the British soldier as comrade as he did earlier. He is a coloniser, yet the Covey calls him a comrade because they both share socialist thoughts. This particular point reflects O’Casey’s obsession with his internationalist concern towards the fate of the workers. He is not obsessed with the occupation as much as the workers’ emancipation. Arden’s view in this regard is almost the same. He is also concerned with the workers’ cause and has an internationalist view towards this issue. Like many other voiceless people who are forced to join the colonial wars of the Queen in Musgrave, the Corporal Stoddart is compelled to take part in the colonial wars. He is a passive socialist because he is fighting with the colonisers against the proletariat. The Covey feels that Stoddart believes in the socialist thought but he does not apply it in real life situations, otherwise he will not be fighting along with the colonial soldiers. Stoddart is proud to call himself a socialist but he is all confused about his duty because it is not a duty of his choice; it is a duty – a false one – imposed upon him by the bourgeois colonialist. The fact is that he does not know his duty as a socialist. The duty as fixed upon him makes him kill poor, innocent men and women. Where is the need for killing them; they are killed by their own poverty and disease; in this way more people are killed than by war. So where is the need of waging war for that? The socialist soldier should have cared for that. He should have been a soldier fighting against this capitalist system; he should have been a soldier waging a war against poverty and disease, and economic deprivation of the millions of workers. But, this British soldier fights against the poor people of Ireland, which he should not, in the Covey’s point of view, if he is a true socialist. His shift from the discussion on socialism to the fight in the side of colonial powers simply reflects the fact that the socialist principles are not yet well-understood. The problem with people, like the Stoddart, is probably that he just knows the name of socialism and not its principles. That is why the Covey asks him if he has read “Jenersky’s Thesis on the Origin, Development, an’ Consolidation of th’ Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat”
The Covey makes several references to Jenersky’s *Thesis* in the play as an indication of his deep concern with the proletariat, which has made him think that the Citizen Army has brought disgrace on the flag they carry, simply “Because it’s a Labour flag, an’ was never meant for politics” (151). He further asks questions related to socialism and communism: “What does th’ design of th’ field plough, bearin’ on it th’ stars of th’ heavenly plough, mean, if it’s not Communism?” and his answer is “It’s a flag that should only be used when we’re buildin’ th’ barricades to fight for a Workers’ Republic!” (151). Again, the dialogue above stresses the lack of true socialism, which, as O’Casey feels, is the reason behind war and colonialism. Through the Covey, O’Casey states that “If they [the rebels] were fightin’ for anything worth while, I wouldn’t mind” (185).

O’Casey is against the system which is less concerned with Socialism and Marxism. The lack of this knowledge actually symbolises the lack of real, sincere concern about the condition of the human lives. Knowledge of a theory does not matter; it is the application of the theory that matters a lot for the Covey as it does for O’Casey. The dialogue between the Covey and Fluther reveals that the proletariats are also unconcerned for their condition:

**THE COVEY.** Well, let us put it to th’ test, then, an’ see what you know about th’ Labour movement: what’s the mechanism of exchange?

**FLUTHER (roaring, because he feels he is beaten).** How th’ hell do I know what it is? There’s nothin’ about that in th’ rules of our thrades union!

**BARMAN.** For God’s sake thry to speak easy, Fluther.

**THE COVEY.** What does Karl Marx say about th’ Relation of Value to th’ cost o’ Value to th’ Cost of Production?

**FLUTHER (angrily).** What th’ hell do I care what he says? I’m Irishman enough not to lose me head be follyin’ foreigners!

**BARMAN.** Speak easy, Fluther.

**THE COVEY.** It’s only waste o’ time talkin’ to you, comrade.

(The Plough172-73)

The proletariat is as much responsible for his condition as the colonial capitalist. He is easily exploited for he is the least concerned: lack of consciousness and awareness is as much responsible – “what th’ hell do I care what he says?” (173). He listens to
what his enemy says but he does not bother about what his comrade says. Thus the allurement for nationalism and freedom is a curse for the proletariat which he is forced to bring in upon himself. The poor women understand this fact. Nora, Mrs. Gagon, and Bessie – all intuitively feel that their men have all gone wrong and are mad after wrong things and have been allured to court their death which can make things easy for the colonialist. In the play, O’Casey shows how the innocent civilians such as Nora and Bessie suffer a lot. The suffering of the combatants can not be compared to that of the common people. The audience feel the moans of these pathetic women who are the real victims to the clashes between the anti-British insurgents and the colonial forces. O’Casey gives much emphasis on the deplorable conditions of these women and ridicules the men of the Easter Rising who appear to be insane and worthless in comparison to women.

In discussing war and the politics of colonialism and nationalism in the Irish context, Frank O’Connor’s “Guests of the Nation” and Brendan Behan’s The Hostage come to mind immediately. These two works seem to have much in common about the issues related to the Irish identity and colonialism. O’Connor illustrates that the bond of humanity surpasses all politics of war. He demonstrates that I.R.A. men have humane feelings towards the two English prisoners who are to be executed. The common bond of humanity between these two groups is entangled between love and duty. It is hard for them since the execution is to be carried out by friends against their ‘friend enemies’. This bond of humanity which keeps bubbling even at the last moments of death is also conveyed in Wilfred Owen’s “Strange Meeting”:

I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . . (40-44)

In The Hostage, Behan portrays the capture of a British soldier whom the I.R.A. men are holding to exchange him for an I.R.A. volunteer. Like O’Connor, Behan also reveals to the reader the human cost of war. In the play, there is much discussion about the Irish nationalism and the British colonial affairs. Behan illustrates that the Irish identity is deeply rooted in the memory of the people. The impending death of the I.R.A. volunteer is nationalistic and is considered as a duty, as Meg thinks in the play. This bond of humanity is also present in The Plough. Two British soldiers break into a flat which they consider a hide for the rebels. They regret their action when
they come to know that the victim is a lady. But they excused themselves for the action because it is a part of their duty to shoot any suspect. It is the human being, whether a soldier or a citizen, a man or a woman, who is the victim to the follies of war – colonial or national.

Similar to *The Plough*, *The Hostage* also tackles the social cause of the working class and mocks the I.R.A. and the nationalists. At the same time it attacks the imperial presence in Ireland. In *An Gial*, the original version of the play, the characters make a reference to O’Casey’s attack on I.R.A. as pointed out by Patricia Kane O’Connor in *The Stages of the Nation:* “When Kate criticizes Patrick for his attacks on the new I.R.A., Patrick turns and says, ‘Listen to her! Listen to her! You’d think we were in a Sean O’Casey play’” (71). This is, of course, not to point out that Behan is against O’Casey’s attitude. But he is like O’Casey attacking them ironically. Behan is different from O’Casey in the treatment of the colonial and the national issues. While attacking the English imperialism, Behan ridicules the nationalist leaders and I.R.A. for being unresponsive to the cause of the working class. O’Casey did not romanticise the nationalists and kept mocking them throughout *The Plough* because of their false notions they had towards the cause of the people.

For O’Casey, nationalism is not worth fighting for if the real freedom to live like a human being is robbed. What is the use of the national freedom if the ordinary citizens and the slum-dwellers live miserably? That is why O’Casey attacks the leaders of Easter Rising for the false freedom they search for questioning this sort of freedom: “what’s the use of freedom if it’s not economic freedom?” (165) and he thinks that “there is only one freedom for the workin’ man: control o’ th’ means o’ production, rates of exchange, an’ th’ means of distribution” (165). O’Casey, through the Covey, makes these observations as a reaction to Rosie’s positive reception of the Voice of the Man imitating Parick Pearse.

The Easter leaders were mad after patriotic and religious speeches that call for war without realising the consequences they would face. Politics of religion was used for narrow goals. This is what political leaders everywhere do when war is approaching. They misuse religion to justify war for their people. This is because religion is said to have influential power over people. In *The Plough* people are moved by these speeches to take part in the revolution which is described as a holy act of war. So the rebels of the Easter Rising moved when they heard the voice of the man said to be Pearse calling them for the war against the colonial forces. In fact
O’Casey used these speeches of Pearse to ridicule them through the Covey. Those nationalistic sermons which urged to shed blood in the name of God were the main cause of suffering and destruction that Dublin and the whole of Ireland experienced. O’Casey was against the politics behind the Easter Rising. He was not anti-revolution in the sense that he did not want the freedom for Ireland but he was anti-nationalist in terms of the methods they adopted and the time they chose. Lindsay points out the reason behind O’Casey’s anti-Rising attitude:

… much he might disagree with the methods or idiom of the republicans, there could be no question at any time of opposition to their aims. So during Easter 1916, we could not expect him to take a simple attitude to the uprising. He naturally sympathised with any Irish effort to throw off the English yoke, but he might well think the procedures of the revolt to be ill-timed and badly prepared as well as far too limited in their ideology and too narrowly based. (191)

Pearse, the greatest rebel leader in the view of the Irish people, was introduced in the second Act of the play through the Voice of the Man delivering patriotic speeches to the crowd. The speaker, i.e., Pearse, had no notion of what it meant to engage in war. He knew of only one war which involves heroism and sacrifice of life in the name of nation and freedom. He eulogised the war against colonialism as the “Angel of God”.

Religion and divinity are associated with this war:

The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. … War is a terrible thing. but war is not an evil thing. People in Ireland dread war because they do not know it. Ireland has not known the exhilaration of war for over a hundred years. When war comes to Ireland, she must welcome it as she would welcome the Angel of God! (The Plough 169)

In the rebellion, Ireland lost around sixteen of its fine leaders such as Pearse and James Connolly and suffered around thousand civilian casualties. The Easter Rising, in O’Casey’s view, brought Ireland nothing but flames and destruction and further suffering. This misery was a result of intoxicating speeches of the rebel leaders. Pearse who drove many slum dwellers of Dublin into the insurgency. W. A.
Armstrong states that O’Casey adapted the following intoxicating speech from Pearse’s ‘The Coming Revolution’ delivered in 1914 (para. 4).

It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms. … Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. … There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them! (The Plough 162)

O’Casey did not also favour the politics of his socialist friend Connolly in the preparation for the rebellion. He thought that Connolly would stand for the cause of the workers but unfortunately he was persuaded to take part in the Rising because he was the head of the Dublin Brigade. He was seriously injured in the fighting and was imprisoned along with other rebel leaders to be executed. O’Casey felt that these leaders should have realised the danger of such revolution on the people. Robert G. Lowery comments of the politics of Pearse and Connolly and O’Casey’s attitude towards them:

O’Casey became enraged when Pearse and Connolly asserted that the British would never use artillery on capitalist property. Connolly, the historian, the socialist, had forgotten that, at the Paris Commune, ‘the French soldiers battled their way over the Communard barricades with cannon-fire, careless of what property the bursting shells destroyed’.

O’Casey tried in vein to reason with Connolly and Pearse. He suggested a debate on the subject; they did not reply. He sent an article to The Volunteer; it was not published. O’Casey, dejected, waited. (151).

O’Casey made use of another important patriotic speech delivered by Patrick Pearse.

Our foes are strong, but, strong as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God Who ripens in the hearts of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. They think that they have pacified Ireland; think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but, the fools, the fools, the fools! — they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace!” (The Plough 187)

O’Casey introduced this speech along with other speeches made by Pearse in the play because he found that the glorification of violence was endemic to the Irish culture, and it was the rush toward self-immolation that Pearse exalted in his soliloquies.
In many occasions in the play it is the Covey whom O’Casey uses to mock Pearse’s speeches. The Covey, like O’Casey, feels sick when he hears the Voice of the man’s sermon about war outside stressing the importance of sacrifice for Ireland and the way he puts the religious teachings into it. The Covey becomes furious and attempts to demotivate the people and dissuades them but to no avail. People are easily moved by the speeches and become motivated to join the battle. The Covey is against the politics of war which is used to drive those innocent people into the battlefield. He cannot act to stop it because the politicians use patriotic and religious language which defeats the language of reason and wisdom.

His violent reaction towards the politics of war used by the Easter leaders is basically because he was sure that they would lose the battle and that the revolution would not survive. Before he dramatised Ireland’s most historic event, the Easter of 1916, in The Plough he was always reluctant and unsatisfied with unified leadership under the-plough-and-the-star flag. About ten years passed, but O’Casey could not forget this event which is considered by other writers, such as W B Yeats, a celebrated heroic act of the Easter leaders. But, O’Casey dispraised those leaders and mocked them which irritated many intellectuals and caused riots after the first performance of The Plough. It is clear from the play that Pearse’s speeches were meant to instigate people to join the rebellion against the colonial forces which worsened the situation in Ireland. It became clear towards the end of the play that all the sacrifices made for the sake of the national freedom were all in vain. Jules Koslow points out how O’Casey feels about the Easter Rising: “… he felt that national freedom alone didn’t solve the basic social problems of the people. Therefore, it is a combination of these two beliefs that made O’Casey question whether the sacrifices made by individuals were commensurate with the gains obtained” (42).

O’Casey’s view of the Irish nationalists can be contrasted with the views of Ngugi wa Thion’o and Micere Mugo towards the famous Kenyan rebel leader Dedan Kimathi in their co-authored play The Trail of Dedan Kimathi (1992). The question of the rebels’ leader is celebrated in the African context, Kenya, by Ngugi and Mugo. Unlike O’Casey who looks down upon the Irish rebels’ leader Patrick Pearse and his associates, Ngugi and Mugo celebrate and praise Kimathi who fought against British colonisation and against corrupt Kenyan leaders. He was convicted guilty in a private trial and later executed by the British government. Ngugi’s Kimathi is portrayed as a strong and defiant character fighting for a just cause. He did not acknowledge the
presence of a white judge when he was taken to trial. Kimathi articulates the socialist vision of the society (he was called a bush communist by the settler) towards the repressive capitalist class in Kenya. He wanted to revolt against this system which is created by the Empire with the help of totalitarian Kenyan leaders who sold their people and country to the ‘white man’. Ngugi in The Trail portrays the unfair trial of Kimathi by the British government in Kenya. He was charged of illegal possession of a firearm – a crime punished by death at that time. This charge was a safe elimination to Kimathi without being involved in social and political struggle with the rebels. Ngugi celebrated Kimathi and made him the hero of the Kenyans who was respected by land and people. Ngugi with high drama reflects the attitude of the majority of the Kenyans towards their patriotic leader, Kimathi, who kept propagating the cause of the people till his last moments. The following lines from the play illustrate Ngugi’s celebrated view of Kimathi, which is the view of the society as well except the traitors of the country. Here the dialogue goes:

WOMAN: Listen carefully. Dedan Kimathi has been captured.
BOY: So they say. But is it true what they also say?
WOMAN: What?
BOY: [becoming really excited]: They … they say he used to talk with God.
WOMAN: Yes. The fighting god in us-the oppressed ones.
BOY: they say…. they say that he could crawl on his belly for ten miles or more.
WOMAN: He had to be strong-for us-because of us Kenyan people.
BOY: They say…. they say that he could change himself into a bird, an aeroplane, wind, anything.
WOMAN: Faith in a cause can work miracles.
BOY: They say…. the say that the tree under which he used to pray fell to the ground?
WOMAN: There are people, my chilled, with blessed blood. And when something happens to them, the wind and the rain and the sun will tell…..
BOY: Maybe they only captured his shadow, his outer form…. don’t you think? … and let his spirit abroad, in arms.
Kimathi is highly praised by his nation as seen from the above exchange between the women and the boy. His courage and determination to free his country from the colonisers inspired the Kenyan masses to follow suit. He will live ‘as long as women continue to bear children’. Unlike Kimathi, Pearse and other Irish nationalists have been mocked at and ridiculed by O’Casey in The plough. The difference in attitude between O’Casey and Ngugi could be attributed to the level of sincerity of the leaders in their cause. Because of his honesty to the cause he is fighting for, Kimathi is described as ‘being poisoned by an oath’. This indicates the single-mindedness of Kimathi to carry out his goal. On the contrary, O’Casey might have well understood that the nationalists were not committed sincerely to the national cause they claim to defend. He was quite sure that the leaders were just showing off their patriotism to attain their own private interests. That is why the Covey mocks them especially when he hears the speeches delivered by Pearse to the Irish public. But in The Trail, one gets true and sincere words of the people towards their rebel leader who sacrificed himself for the freedom of Kenya. The following ‘Kimathi song’ expresses this view:

When our Kimathi ascended
Into the mountain alone
He asked for strength and courage
To defeat the whiteman

He said that we should tread
The paths that he had trodden
That we should follow his steps
And drink from his cup of courage

If you drink from this cup of courage
The cup that I have drunk from myself
It is a cup of pain and sorrow
A cup of tears and death and freedom… (qtd. in Gikandi 70)

As stated earlier, the speeches of the Irish rebel leaders had a great impact on the people who became blind to the consequences of war with the Britishers, which O’Casey did not appreciate. When the Man’s fourth patriotic speech ended with
“Ireland, unfree, shall never be at peace!” (178), people were moved by the Man’s voice of nationalism which O’Casey did not appreciate:

CAPT. BRENNAN (catching up the plough and the stars). Imprisonment for th’ Independence of Ireland!
LIET. LANGON (catching the Tri-colour). Wounds for th’ Independence of Ireland!
CLITHEROE. Death for th’ Independence of Ireland! The three (together). So help us God!

These three leaders had earlier a conversation in the public market after they heard the third speech of the man. They thought that Ireland was greater than a mother and a wife. Through those speeches one notices the development and the complication of the situation after every speech made by Pearse. The people’s patriotic emotions become intensified driving them further to sacrifice themselves for the national cause. Clitheroe leaves his home and wife and becomes fully charged with the man’s words which made him ready to fight. His voice in a commanding mode orders the “Dublin Battalion of the Irish Citizen Army, by th’ right, quick march!” (179), which exposes to the audience the level of patriotism the Irish rebel reached. This picture is ridiculed towards the end of the play when Clitheroe’s body, soaked in blood, is laying dead. The rest of his friends run away for their lives.

In addition to O’Casey’s socialism and its relation to his anti-war attitude, the politics of the Easter leaders, their patriotism and its effect on the ordinary man of Dublin have been discussed above. The following is a discussion on the image of Ireland after the rebellion. This vivid presentation of Ireland being on fire makes the play much realistic in serving the goal O’Casey intended to convey. He first begins his play with giving his audience a clear account about the politics of the Irish leaders and ends it with the horrible image about the destruction of Ireland. This shocking image of destruction and the loss of human lives is a reminder to the audience and to the people of Ireland of the futility of the rebellion against the monster of the colonial powers. O’Casey introduces this picture at the end of the play so as to make his audience realise how futile and worthless the speeches of Pearse are in comparison to the suffering of the innocent women and the destruction which swept Ireland after the revolution. This horrible image of Ireland and the misery of its people are conveyed to the audience through many ways, the stage direction is an example: “… the glare of burning buildings in the town can be seen through the window, in the distant sky. The
Covey and Fluther have been playing cards ... by the light of the candles on the stool near the coffin” (The Plough 200).

Military captains are scared and are not brave as they appeared before the rebellion. Their patriotism is ridiculed in the last Act of the play to point out to the audience the hypocrisy and cowardice of these leaders. They now realise that their own power is too little to fight the colonial powers which prove to be more superior and ferocious. Captain Brennan, one of the Easter leaders, shouts before the rebellion takes place “imprisonment for th’ Independence of Ireland!” (The Plough 178) is now presented as a coward military man during the fighting. He escapes to save his life leaving his friend Clitheroe dying of his wounds near “th’ Imperial Hotel” (The Plough 203). He changes his military uniform and disguises in the public. The Covey mocks this situation satirising the military kit of the leaders when they appear in public occasions. He knows that the leaders wear the uniforms to boast, but when the leaders are in danger they are ready to take them off to protect themselves. This is what exactly happens with Captain Brennan when he hides in the public. The Covey attempts to drive him away because of the threat he may bring to the residents: “There is no place here to lie low. Tommies’ll be hoppin’ in here, any minute!” (The Plough 207). O’Casey introduces the Tommies, a word referring to the British soldiers, at the end of the play to create feelings of revulsion at the actions of Easter leaders. He does not love the British soldiers or wants to make them appear superior to his people. But his introduction of the two soldiers at the end of the play is meant to make his people realise the huge gap between what the rebels claimed and the reality of the enemy forces. He depicted them cruel and pitiless to the suffering of the people around them though they a little bit regretted the killing of the innocent lady. Claire Gleitman points out the reason behind their callousness: “Mr O’Casey introduces two British Tommies, sullen and callous because they are strangers to the emotional family relationships already warmly portrayed before the audience. As the curtain falls they sip tea and sing…” (37).

The withdrawal of these leaders caused casualties among the civilians and created chaotic atmosphere for all the people which could have been avoided if there was little wisdom. This is the picture which O’Casey emphasises to the people saying that all these troubles and suffering resulted from the follies of the Easter leaders who could have saved the country and the civilians from brutal killing and destruction. As a result of the rebels’ unwise decision Ireland was on fire, ambulances roamed the
streets and the British soldiers hunted down the rebels everywhere shooting any suspect, because they found it an unfair fighting when their men were shot dead by snipers hidden in the public. Corporal Stoddart from Wiltshire with full war kit breaks into a living room searching for rebels and he is later accompanied by another Captain to round the rebels. They shoot at a window but they come to know that the person who has just been shot dead is one of the residents, a lady who was protecting her mad friend (Nora) from approaching the window for the fear of being shot. These two soldiers feel sorry for their action and justify it by saying “we couldn’t afford to take any chances” (210). The irony of the whole situation ends the play as the two British soldiers appear in the living room of Bessie, whom they have just shot dead. They heat a ready-made tea and drink it. This is what Seamus Deane calls as “the vicious collusion which has taken place between domestic, homely bliss and political and military violence” (153). The point that O’Casey aims to emphasise here is that Easter leaders are stupid and unwise and it is because of them that the situation has come to that point where innocent people are lying dead while the colonial soldiers step over them, drink tea and sing. Emil Roy comments on this situation:

After Bessie’s death and Nora’s departure in the care of Mrs Gogan, two uncomprehending British soldiers heat a kettle for tea. A chorus of ‘keep th’ owme fire burning,’ ends the play, as the flames of a dying civilisation rise outside. Their tea-time nonchalance may be, ironically, the sanest of inadequate reactions to imminent universal chaos. (78)

Thus O’Casey ends his play with Ireland under flames after a week of violence between the British soldiers and Irish rebels. The majority of the casualties were from the unengaged civilians who did not take any part in the rebellion. The Rising was crushed and many leaders were executed and many others were detained. The reason that made O’Casey reject the idea of nationalism from the beginning was his fear of the consequences that might aggravate the living conditions of Irish people, and he is proved right as the play dramatises. He presents the colonial soldiers, as depicted towards the end of the last Act of the play, as cruel and senseless human beings. Being a citizen of a colonised nation, O’Casey should have this kind of feelings towards those colonisers, yet he was aware of the power of his enemy. One may ask this question - do colonial soldiers like violence or is it forced upon them? Why did Arden’s four colonial soldiers dislike the act of shooting innocent natives? Why did they desert their regiment? Although they belong to the British Empire, their
humanity drives them away from taking part in violent actions against the natives of the Cyprus, a British colony. They react against the authorities of the British Empire to put an end to the violence taking place in a foreign land. The following play by Arden will analyse this point in addition to the issues related to the politics of colonialism and retaliation.

**Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance** (1959)

Musgrave was the chief for his three soldiers who deserted from the army for one reason or another. He brain-washed them and drilled them into automatons ready to any action demanded by Musgrave. He arrives along with his men into a mining town, north of England, the hometown of Billy Hicks, a private soldier killed by a sniper. Their basic mission is to warn people against the evils of war. But Musgrave’s plan is that he wants to exact a revenge for the five innocent people killed by the British soldiers in retaliation for the killing of their friend, Billy Hicks. Musgrave follows his logic – five killed for one, and now he wants to multiply the number – twenty five for five. John Russell Taylor comments:

... with the inexorable arithmetic of military logic Musgrave has decided that this five must again be multiplied by the five to produce the number of those in authority who must be killed so that the lesson on the horrors of war will be well and truly learnt (91)

Musgrave gets the chance in the marketplace to reveal his plan by covering and terrorising the people with his Gatling gun, especially the Parson, the Mayor and the Constable. Unfortunately, things go wrong and Musgrave is captured by the dragoons and sent to prison along with his friend.

The play dramatises the cycle of violence beginning with the killing of Billy Hicks in Cyprus which resulted in the killings of five innocent civilians. These acts of violence led to Musgrave’s mad plan of mass massacre. There is also another ‘live’ act of violence that Arden presents in the play to indicate that the politics of colonial wars are horrible and beyond the comprehension of the public. Arden introduces the killing of Sparky to prepare the audience to Musgrave’s faulty plan. Sparky the innocent among the four deserters is killed by his friend (Musgrave’s man). Shooting people like Sparky ‘is not material’ to Musgrave to establish order.

The Queen and the Empire is sarcastically praised by Musgrave and his men several times in their speeches during their mission. Musgrave at the end of Act II
ironically exclaims “GOD SAVE THE QUEEN” (Musgrave 75). Common people, such as Annie, have also criticised the Empire and its state of corruption and violence. Here, Arden’s intention is to portray the colonial nation, the Queen and the Empire through the mission of the four deserters and the reaction of the people towards their own Empire. The Bargee’s words are significant in this respect:

The Empire wars are far away
For duty’s sake we sail away
Me arms and legs is shot away
And all for the wink of a shilling and a drink … (Musgrave 14)

Here, the Bargee, in the ‘vast Empire’ expresses his sense of humiliation and suffering. The Empire sends these poor hungry soldiers away to fight for the glory of the Empire for just ‘a shilling and a drink’. The exploitation practised under the name of colonial wars is the central message of this song. One feels the Bargee’s state of agony and helplessness through his words. An arm or a leg is for a shilling or a drink. How cheap they are for their own masters. How cheap their bodies are for the sake of the Empire and the Queen. Hurst explodes in the marketplace expressing this kind of exploitation to the crowd. With his rifle up, he addresses the audience: “we’ve earned our living by beating and killing folk like yourselves in the street of their own city. Well it’s drove us mad – and so we come back here to tell you how and to show you what it’s like” (Musgrave 94).

Musgrave reinforces the nature of the relationship between the soldier and the Queen’s Empire in the speech he makes in the marketplace. He begins with praising the Queen and the duty of the soldier against the enemies of the Queen preparing the audience to his message. Here is his speech:

A soldier’s life is to lay it down, against the enemies of the Queen.

_A roll on the Drum._

Against the invaders of his home.

_A roll in the drum._

Against slavery, cruelty, tyrants.

_A roll in the drum._ (Musgrave 83)

This public speech made by Musgrave is to draw the attention of his countrymen to the futility of the colonial wars. The soldier’s life is offered to fight the ‘enemies’ of the Queen. He ridicules this idea and deep in his heart feels that the colonial wars are unjust. And he continues his speech to deliver his main message that
a soldier’s life is not necessary to ‘lay it down against the enemies of the Queen’ but against the enemies of the people, i.e., slavery, cruelty and tyranny. Soldiers’ life should be really devoted to fight this evil of communal corruption. He goes on telling how evil the imperial and colonial powers are bringing with him a concrete example for his demonstration so that his lesson can be perceived well. He has brought Hicks’s skeleton to show the people the cruelty of the colonial war upon soldiers. Awam Amkpa comments:

Disgruntled by their marginalization within the social context of their own nation, and violated by deeds committed in colonial massacres, Sergeant Musgrave's men have come to inflict a communal catharsis they hope will draw attention to the violence and repressive coloniality of English nationalism. (120)

For Musgrave, as it is for his men, these powers are the source of humiliation and exploitation of the people inside and outside their country. The real enemies to fight are those three evils mentioned by Musgrave and practised by the colonial nation over their people in the pretext of waging wars to protect the Empire’s interest overseas.

The play plainly enough gives a clear manifestation of the state of the colonial power and “offers a window to the multiple and overlapping layers of England’s imperial legacy” (Amkpa 181). Musgrave impartially states that the Queen’s Empire exploits soldiers as well as common people. The Empire sends soldiers overseas and keeps the public under constant fear from the unknown enemy overseas, imposes on them heavy taxes and commands them to abide by certain conditions. So the main purpose behind colonial wars, as Musgrave dramatises, is to ensure that the Empire’s interest is best served by keeping their own people under control and by sending the agitators and riot makers to fight in foreign lands.

Arden makes use of a realistic incident that took place in Cyprus when an anti-British insurgent killed a soldier’s wife and in retaliation the British soldiers killed around five innocent civilians. He changes the female citizen into a male soldier and builds up the events that serve to provide a vivid presentation of the state of the colonial war and its nature of “treat-you-like-dirt-but-you-do-the-dirty-work” (Musgrave 30). In the play, Hicks gets shot while he is returning back to his camp from his ‘duty’. Musgrave brings back the corpse of Hicks to his real killers. Who are the real killers? Who killed Hicks? If they are the anti-British insurgents, then the job is over. In a moment of anger, Musgrave and his men have run wildly to search for
the killers but they could not get them. Musgrave has come to a conclusion that they are not the anti-British insurgents, but they are the authorities who recruited them and sent them to fight for the Queen in streets and lanes of a foreign land.

Arden’s *Musgrave* is reminiscent of Brecht’s *Mother Courage* in its treatment of the political and social issues. Arden admitted of the influence of Brecht on his playwriting but stated that he did not copy him. Brecht’s epic theatre can be easily perceived in *Musgrave*. Though Arden stands neutral in his political views and does not suggest solutions to the social and political issues, he, as Brecht does, engages his audience intellectually without emotional attachment to issues raised by his characters. He borrows devices from Brecht’s epic theatre such as drums and songs. Like Brecht, Arden is described to be a Marxist whose main goal in *Musgrave* is to draw the audience to the evils of capitalism which led to war, colonialism and unrest in the home and foreign lands. He assigns the task of changing the British people’s attitude to Musgrave and his men. Since these soldiers know well the negative aspects of war and capitalism represented through colonialism, they can well teach the people the lesson. Similar to *Mother Courage*, *Musgrave* is full of paradoxical development and contradictions which makes it really an outstanding epic play. In this regards, J. L. Styan speaks of *Musgrave* as the best Brechtian play in English:

> It is an anti-war parable in which Arden repeatedly disconcerts his audience with unexpected and paradoxical development. Yet the Serjeant and three soldiers who come to a northern English town in mid-winter to show the civilians the horrible results of Victorian militarism turn out to be deserters. But can they also be pacifists if they kill one of their members when he tries to go off with a local girl? And Musgrave himself is so much a fanatic that he must preach his message at a gunpoint and threaten the citizens with a Gatling gun. He is an exact anti-hero, since the audience that sympathizes with his ends must be repelled by his means. (186)

Margaret Eddershaw also speaks of the Brechtian technique present in *Musgrave*:

> “Arden’s play *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1959) is Brechtian in its handling of the political issues, its use of a kind of pseudo-history, its adoption of an episodic structure and its exploitation of ‘popular’ music to articulate events and ideas” (56).

Using these Brechtian techniques of the epic theatre, Arden exposes the corruption of the colonial nation to the audience through various classes — the fellow
soldiers, i.e., the four deserters, the government politicians, i.e., the Mayor, the Parson, and the Constable and the ordinary people like Annie and Mrs Hitchcock etc. The fellow soldiers represent the suffering of the colonial soldiers in foreign lands. The speeches made by these soldiers explain their agony and hardships. Musgrave and his men speak several times about the bloody confrontations between the anti-colonial insurgents and the colonial soldiers. For instance, Musgrave had a nightmare the night before the marketplace meeting. He was heard shouting in his sleep “Fire, fire! Fire, fire, London’s burning, London’s burning” (Musgrave 64)! Mrs. Hitchcock attempted to wake him up but he was “timing the end of the world. Ten more seconds” (Musgrave 64). Later in the marketplace the four soldiers explain what it means to be in a foreign land. They narrate to the people the miserable stories of both the soldiers and the natives. The government politicians, Musgrave’s main target, leave an impression on the audience of the corruption and the exploitation prevailing in the British Empire during its colonial wars. Musgrave feels that these corrupt politicians should be taught a lesson so that they stop recruiting for this particular war at least. So Musgrave intends to demonstrate a mini-battle in the town so that people can draw the lesson and fight this colonial system. But, will he be able to do it? Or will he need a lot of bullets as Joe Keller in All My Sons? Of course, Musgrave will not be able to do it, not because he does not have enough bullets, but because the politics entangling the war can not be diminished. He has been a Sergeant and has enough bullets to exact revenge on the officials of the Empire. But it is a difficult job. The moment he directs his Gatling gun on the public and the officials, the first one to turn against him was his man. Musgrave failed and his plan came to a deadlock because the system he wanted to shake turned against him putting Musgrave and his friends behind the bars. In Taylor’s words:

Musgrave himself, for instance, is right and sympathetic in his outrage at the atrocities which have been perpetrated abroad, but his decision that they can be expiated and a clean start be made only by further shedding of blood is clearly much open to doubt; his ‘logic of order and discipline is humane and fails to take the natural way of things into account. (92)

Through Annie, Arden reflects how the common women suffer under such colonial system. She lost her man to the Queen’s war as Nora lost her husband to the rebels. She screams at Musgrave for the death of her soldier and shouts that the British Empire is a desert. Through Musgrave’s speeches, Arden gives his audience a
clear image of the corruption in a country that assumes to safeguard the interests of the Empire overseas, which is a wrong notion in itself and not acceptable to many. The Mayor attempts to take advantage of the people’s straitened circumstances by offering gold to those who will volunteer for the Queen’s army. This is their policy – they starve these people to death and then give them a chance to survive but only through war and army life. That is, life for the common people belonging to the colonial nation is difficult outside the army camp and always fraught with complexities. The situation that Arden criticises in this play is that the British Empire is based on the domination of its own people just, as Musgrave mockingly says, to feel proud to get more people of other countries who “can write British Subject after their names” (Musgrave 83). In Mother Courage, the rulers, the kings, and the officials favour this kind of system to attain certain political and economic goals. In a similar tone, the army leaders in The Plough use the same patriotic and religious language to drive people to war. Similarly, the authorities in Musgrave promote for war and recruit for the Queen’s army promising gold for those who will join:

MAYOR. … Here’s real gold. It rings true to me, it rings true to you, and there’s one o’ these for every lad as volunteers. That’s straight. It’s from the shoulder. It pulls no punches. Take it or throw it away – I’m set up here and waiting. …

PARSON. ‘And Jesus said, I come not to bring peace but a sword’. I know very well that the times are difficult. As your minister of religion, and a magistrate, it is my business to be aware of these matters. But we must remember that this town is only one very small locality in our great country.

…

PARSON. … nothing of our petty differences and grievances - but all united under one brave flag, going forth in Christian resolution and showing a manly spirit! The Empire calls! Greatness is at hand!

(Musgrave 78-79)

The military life is not favourable to Musgrave, his men and the common people in the ‘vast’ Empire. This anti-army sentiment is rightly pointed out by Michael Paterson: “In Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance the army is seen not as a means of defending the populace nor even as a glorious conquering force of the Empire: it is a
means of brutal repression, a way of maintaining the status quo of the fed man, the clothed man” (56).

Similar to Arden, David Rabe (b. 1940) presents the horrors of imperialism and militarism in The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel (1972). This play exposes how soldiers as in Arden’s Musgrave and in Joan Littlewood’s Oh, What A Lovely war (1969) etc., are victimised by the monster of war. Like Arden, Rabe served in the army during the Vietnam War on which The Basic Training (the first play in the Vietnam War trilogy which includes Sticks and Bones and Streamers) centres on. His central character, Hummel, is stricken by war and could not cope with it and decided to commit suicide. Musgrave in a general term fits into any war context where soldiers and natives are victimised. It has that kind of a broad perspective which touches the life of soldiers. The sad life of soldiers as presented in the characterisation of Pavlo Hummel is also in the centre of Irwin Shaw’s Bury the Dead (1936). Shaw’s play is a step further in depicting the horrifying spectacle of war. The refusal of the stinking soldiers to be buried is appalling and raises many questions that confront those who are in power with the reality of war. Arden and Shaw present horrible images about the soldiers’ death so that others draw the lesson. With this dramatisation the two writers attempted to bring about a change of attitude among soldiers and public so that all work together and put an end to war. In Arden’s Musgrave, we have a similar reminder to the war atrocities for which the soldiers pay their lives. The Corpse of Billy Hicks dressed in a military uniform is presented to the audience to confront them with the horrible reality of war.

To convey the anti-colonial and anti-army sentiments, Musgrave makes a demonstration along with his fellow men in the marketplace attended by important government officials whose purpose is to recruit for the Queen’s army. Musgrave plans to bring home how horrible the colonial wars and army life are through a visual lesson so that the perception becomes clear and quick. Melvin Hoke points out that Musgrave “transforms his military devotion into an equally strong moral commitment to puncture the mythos of war by telling it like it is” (634). After the Parson and his friends finish their speech, Musgrave and his men begin their lesson by covering the people with a Gatling gun. Now he exposes a “skeleton dressed in a soldier’s tunic and trousers” (Musgrave 84) to the audience who get terrified and panicked. Here, Musgrave and his friends narrate and demonstrate their friend’s horrible story:

MUSGRAVE. …(He points to the skeleton.) This, up here, was a
comrade of mine – of ours. He was killed, being there for his duty, in
the country I was telling you about, where the regiment is stationed.
It’s not right a colony, you know, it’s a sort of Protectorate, but
British, British.

... 

HURST *(the frenzy rising)*. The streets is empty, but the houses is full.
He says, ‘no undue measures, minimum violence,’ he says. But bring
the killers.’

ATTERCLIFFE. The killers are gone, they’ve gone miles off in that
time – *sporting* away, right up in the mountains, I told you at the
time.

MUSGRAVE. That’s not material, there’s one man is dead, but there’s
everyone’s responsible.

HURST. So bring the *lot* in! It’s easy, they’re all in bed, kick the front
doors down, knock ’em on the head, boys, chuck ’em in the wagons.

ATTERCLIFFE. I didn’t know she was only a little kid, there was
scores of ’em on that staircase, pitch-dark, trampling, screaming.
they’re all of ’em screaming, what are we to do?

HURST. Knock ’em on the head, boy. chuck them in the wagons.

ATTERCLIFFE. How was I to tell she was only a little kid?

MUSGRAVE. *(bringing it to an end).* *THAT’S NOT MATERIAL!*
You were told to bring ’em in. if you killed her, you killed her! She
was just one, and who cares a damn for that? Stay in your place and
keep your hands on that Gatling. We’ve got to have order here,
whatever there; and I can tell you it wasn’t order ... *(To Hurst.)* You,
take a rifle. Leave your drum down.

HURST *jumps up on the plinth. takes a rifle and loads.*

... 

MUSGRAVE. Of course we didn’t find ’em. ... We didn’t even know
’em. But *I know* ’em, now. *(Musgrave 86-87)*

Musgrave has not yet stated who the real killers are and he gradually prepares his
audience to this reality. He initially responds to the senselessness and futility of the
colonial wars and the designs of the authority by I ‘know ’em now’ which has been
explicitly confirmed by Hurst later: “The ones we want to deal with aren’t, for
change, you and your mates, but a bit higher up. The ones as never get hurt. *(He points at the MAYOR, PARSON, and CONSTANTABLE.)* Him. Him. Him. You hurt them hard, and they’ll not hurt you again. And they will not send us to hurt you neither ...” *(Musgrave 94).* Musgrave wants the people to understand that the killers are not the anti-British insurgents but they are the authorities in the British Empire. Arden’s left wing ideology in opposing the imperial grip over other nations is clearly demonstrated here. Through the words of the characters above, one feels the agitation of Arden towards the killing of the innocent helpless people. As the words denote, Arden’s internationalist concern towards the cause of the common man and the working class is made clear especially through the words of Hurst which are much more effective and reach the heart faster. He states that the government sends them to foreign lands to kill and hurt “folk like yourselves in the street of their own city” *(Musgrave 94).* This socialist view towards the labourers is clearly presented in the play. Musgrave and his men attempted to support the workers in their strike against the authorities to get their demand fulfilled. There is no doubt about Arden’s socialist stance since he became a Marxist over the years as stated by Michael Patterson (265).

The above exchange between Musgrave and his men, in an attempt to expose the practices of colonial soldiers in the British colonies, can be compared to the speech of the settler in Ngugi’s *The Trail*. The settler must have been a historical sergeant, as Musgrave, who served in the empire’s armies overseas. Musgrave’s Gatling gun directed at the British audience is meant to tell them that they are collectively responsible for what is going on in the colonised lands. If the people stop the colonial war, the settler might have not been in Kenya using a similar gun against the native people, especially the rebels. As the speech below illustrates, the settler has become rich with thousand of cattle, acres of maize and wheat. More ironical, he gets angry with the British government for not protecting his land from the peasants and the ‘bush communists’ as Kimathi. Ngugi, like Arden and O’Casey, attempts to send a message to the people about the kind of exploitation exercised on people by the British Empire as well as by the tyrannical leaders of the country. The speech of the settler illustrates the atrocities between the coloniser and the colonised. It tells the reader about the oppression and the subjugation practiced against the natives, which is in the background of Musgrave. This makes Musgrave’s mission worthwhile and purposive. The speech goes like this:

*Settler: [pointing his gun at Kimathi as he is whisked out of the*
court and screaming at the top of his voice: Bloody bastard Mau Mau. And the cheek! British justice has gone beyond limits to tolerate this, this kind of rudeness from a mad bushwog. [shouting frantically to the already departed guard]: Hold it askari or I’ll shoot you together with that bush communist. [shouting even louder while the audience in court gaze at him in terror]: Field Marshall/ Prime Minister. Fucking black monkey. Listen, you’ll die now, wog. I’ll teach you justice. [makes for the open door through which the guarded Kimathi has just left. Then abruptly, hysterically, he turns back and faces the tense court audience]:

I had cattle and sheep—by the thousands:
Where are they now?
I had acres of maize and wheat:
Where are they now?
I had a wife and daughter:
Where are they now?
Killed. Burnt. Maimed
By this lunatic and his pack of bandits.

I came to this country as soldier
A simple soldier.
Fighting against banks, mortgages.
The colonial office, the whole lot
On my back.
[Pointing the gun to the African side of the audience. Anger and defiance greet him]

... My wife, my daughter, my property.
Now, now, you’ll die.
[Screaming and chaos as the settler threatens to shoot. He holds the ground in such a way that the only means of escape would have to be through the windows.]
OLD WHITE DAME: Stop it, Dick! [really frantically] Someone, take the gun from him quickly. It’s all the doing of these wild savages. [Hostile reaction from some of the Africa.]
WHITE OFFICER: [walks in with several African KAR soldiers. Addressing himself to the white settler]: Mr. Windhoek, put away the gun. The law will see justice done.
SETTLER: [resisting and threatening away]:
The law my foot! Did you hear that crank?
Did you hear the cheek?
And the blasted judge listened to it all.
No! No! This gun will be the judge…. (qtd in Ndigirigi 88-89)

The quintessence of the Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance lies in the sentences of a short dialogue between Musgrave and Attercliffe. Musgrave may not be concerned with the ‘generalities’ of war. They are statements that discuss general principles or issues rather than detail or particular examples.

MUSGRAVE. … ‘Cos all that we know now is that we’ve had to leave behind us a colonial war that is war of sin and unjust blood.
ATTERCLIFFE. (sharply). All wars is sin. Serjeant.
MUSGRAVE. (impatient). I am not discussing that single purpose at a single time: your generalities aren’t material: this is particular - one night’s work in the streets of one city, and it damned all four of us and the war it was part of. We’re each one guilty of particular blood. We’ve come to where it began.” (Musgrave 33-34)

One may say that Musgrave himself is not at all concerned with a discussion of war or the theme of war as such. He may not like to philosophise on war as such. But Arden’s inclination is towards that. It is apparent in the short, pithy statement of Attercliffe: “All wars is sin” (Musgrave 33). In his scheme of things Private Attercliffe stands very tall and has the authority to explain “the ‘moral’ of the play”.
In his introduction to the drama Arden says, “I would suggest, however, that a study of the roles of the women, and of Private Attercliffe, should be sufficient to remove any doubts as to where the ‘moral’ of the play lies” (Musgrave “Introduction” 7). And Attercliffe’s vision is stuck on ‘All wars’. It’s a rapid, clear, definite and critical reaction to the statement of Musgrave. He hates to limit the condemnation of war and the unjust bloodshed to a particular war. The vision of a sympathetic humanist and
visionary should include all wars – past, present and future – in his ken and condemn in the strongest term. The broad vision automatically includes the particular. When condemning war one should condemn all wars; the particular war, by itself, stands condemned.

But Musgrave too has his logic; it is that the condemnation should be limited to a particular war – to ‘a colonial war’ in which he had participated and whose madness he had just realised and whose unjust-ness he wants to teach to the people who glamorise it in the name of the nation and the Queen. Arden himself might have undergone the same transformation that happened to Musgrave. He served in the army and for sure that the army life and the colonial atrocities had a deep impact on him. Even if he did not have firsthand experience with colonial wars, newspapers reports were enough for him as stated earlier. So, like Arden’s, Musgrave’s logic proceeds from his limited particular purpose – to demotivate people and to make them realise its unjustness and its horror when the gun is directed to them: it is very easy to gloat over, to glamorise the death of others. But when it comes to one’s death, when the gun is directed to oneself, only then one realises the cruelty, inhumanity and futility of such death. So Musgrave is being particular, a realist creating a realistic situation of war, death and bloodshed so that it may have an immediate impact on the people for the particular impinges upon while the general slips through the mind. In their own case it was just the miracle of one particular night when their own comrade – the particular one – was mercilessly killed in a scuffle by a sniper. This miracle brought about a total change in the life, mind and attitude of few soldiers turning them into deserters with the mission of creating or recreating the horror of war in the minds of the mass. They thought that mere desertion of a few would not stop war; the demotivation of the mass may stop it. As they had been demotivated by the particular, so the people can also be de-motivated through this bizarre creation of a particular scene where the gun is turned towards the particular people in the crowd, and are threatened with immediate, uncalculated death.

Musgrave’s logic and Attercliffe’s philosophy lead to one conclusion – war, in particular or in general – is a sin and the man or the men perpetrating war by participating actively in it or helping its perpetration indirectly on the grounds of nationality, morality, ethics, humanity, democracy etc., commits or commit a ‘sin’ by shedding unjust blood. Sin is upsetting the grand scheme of creating a world where men and women live and work together in perpetual joy. Murdering innocent people
without rhyme and reason is to work against the edict of God. Such people stand damned; they have to suffer in hell after their death. So Musgrave understands the consequences of war and it is this understanding that he wants to pass on to the people. And this understanding requires the arousal of the conscience of man. The conscience of each of the deserters has been aroused. It is not that they fear war for themselves and that they have run away from war. The fact is that “one night’s work” (Musgrave 33) has aroused their conscience and made them feel that “we’re each one guilty of particular blood” (Musgrave 34). The war is brought by soldiers and if their conscience is aroused against it they become deserters who can say, like Sparky with strength and challenge, “what had I to care for a colonial war” (Musgrave 34)? Down with the colonial war where only purpose is subjugation of innocent people who want to live independently, in their own way, their life as given to them by God.

To unload the conscience heavy with guilt of ‘particular blood’, they are ready to pay for it, to suffer or be punished for their action: “I’ll show you how your Billy can be paid for” (Musgrave 34). Only conscientious suffering can atone for the guilt. These soldiers are doing two things to collect their courage and stand up against the nation and its war-machine and to do something creative while the war-machine is still rolling on and creating destruction. For them now an individual, in his life and death, is much more important than the nation fighting a war to establish its colony and to subjugate the people by snatching their free life. Murder of an individual is a sin, a crime against humanity. As soldiers, they have committed this crime. This realisation dawns on them making them feel guilty. They atone for it by deserting and going against the nation. They are ready to pay a further price.

But what price to pay for it? How to atone for it? What to do to stop the warmachine? Can they do it by creating a mini war theatre in the city, by enacting a mini war there and thereby bringing the horror of war to the doorstep of the people so that the truth of war is revealed to them and an aversion against war is created in the heart of the people? Musgrave thinks that the appropriate way to arouse people’s repugnance against war is by working on their conscience. If he and his men can arouse the conscience against murder and war, their purpose is served.

In Musgrave’s mission corruption is the keyword. When he comes to this city of coals he finds the colonial corruption in another shape and form. This is the other face of colonial war within the country itself. The capitalist system thrives on war within and without the country. Within the country it thrives by creating the have-
nots. Without, it subjugates other people, enslaves them and deprives them of their wealth. Both within and without, it works on the same principle – a few thriving at the cost of the majority. Musgrave has understood this capitalistic colonial system very well: “Well, their riots and our war are the same corruption” (Musgrave 36) – the two faces of the same coin. So Musgrave has a greater chance of succeeding in his mission in this city seething with corruption on both the fronts – internal and external. So Musgrave is bubbling with confidence: “… choose your minute and blow: … this town is ours, it’s ready for us: and its people, when they’ve heard us, and the Word of God, crying the murders that we’ve done – I’ll tell you they’ll turn to us, and they’ll turn against that war” (Musgrave 36)! Arden’s Marxist ideology is apparent in these few words by Musgrave who craves for any chance to revolt against the system and against the injustice imposed on the coalminers. He thinks that it is time for the labour movement to stand against the authority and get their demands achieved. He wants to reduce this social gap which the capitalistic class created.

Arden depicts the conflict between the various classes which had resulted out of the unjust system, corruption and the brutal colonial war as pointed out by Javed Malick in Towards a Theatre of the Oppressed:

Set in an imaginary coal-mining town, *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* presents social conflicts arising out of the existence of an unjust order that produces bitter class conflicts at home and conducts brutal colonial wars abroad. The main agential polarization in the play, therefore, is between the hegemonic order – represented by the Mayor, who, significantly is also a mine owner (thus signifying the identity of economic and political powers), the Parson (who is also a magistrate), the policemen, and the dragoons – and those opposed to that order. The latter are divided into three groups – Musgrave’s soldiers, the coal miners, and the women. (89)

Arden goes on depicting how this ‘working class’ town looks like under a colonial nation. He reflects the government policy towards a certain class of people who are forced to produce to meet the demand of the bourgeois. The town, to which Musgrave reaches, is frozen because of the cold winter and no fire at home. The people are out of work. The colliers are on strike and they have been pushed to a situation in which their coal company refuses to allow its workers to work until they accept the working conditions that the company is offering them. And it is bloody. It
is not that only the battlefield is ‘bloody’. The workplace, in the capitalistic system, is also bloody. In the battlefield the people of the other nation are injured and tortured, physically and mentally. They are subjugated. Still worse is the situation within the country where the master injures, tortures and subjugates his own workers who belong to the nation to which the master himself belongs. This oneness of nationality does not matter. The colliery is the colony, the fiefdom of the rich master and others are his subjects who have to live and work according to the dictates of their masters. Workers produce but without any control over their products. These belong to the master. So the workers remain where they are—mere subjects, working hard and still suffering. This is corruption which Musgrave attempts to fight.

To Musgrave this is the frozen life of the nation—frozen both outwardly and inwardly. The inward condition is the most miserable: “... you’ve got six kids at home crying out for bread, you’ve got a sour cold wife and no fire an’ no breakfast: and you’re too damn miserable even to fight ...” (Musgrave 77). These people have no life left in them. The city is dead and silent as described by the deserters:

HURST. Hardly a thing. Street empty, windows shut, old wives on a Door step go indoors the minute I come. Three men on one corner, two men on another, dirty looks and no words from any of them. There’s one man swears a curse at me just now. That’s all. ... SPARKY. ... Three men at the corner-post, four men leaning on a wall. No words: but some chalked up on a closed door—they said: ‘soldiers go home’. (Musgrave 28-29).

It is a ghost-like town; yet it has some spark left in it which comes out in the shape of a ‘curse’, a ‘stone’ and a slogan on a closed door. The spark needs to be enflamed. And that’s what Musgrave needs and wants to do. Outwardly, it is frozen and dead. Inwardly, there is a vast reserve of burning coal, the suppressed human energy burning to explode: “... It’s a hot coal, this town, despite that it’s freezing—choose your minute and blow: and whoosh, she’s flamed your roof off! They’re trembling already into the strikers’ riots ...” (Musgrave 36). This town is now fit and appropriate for Musgrave’s lesson towards a better social change.

Musgrave’s end of turning the people ‘against that war’ is clear, purposive and grand although limited. Aftercliffe includes ‘all wars’ and people have to be roused ‘against all wars’—let there be no more killing in the world; in the kingdom of God let there be only the divine peace reigning. Here is Aftercliffe with these words:
All wars, Serjeant Musgrave. They’ve got to turn against all wars. Colonial war, do we say, no war of honour? I’m a private soldier, I never had no honour, I went killing for the Queen, I did it for me wages, that war my life. But I’ve got a new life. There was one night’s work, and I said: no more killing. (Musgrave 36)

Arden focuses Musgrave’s mission on a particular war – the Cyprus war in 1958. Abroad, the death of an army private has been followed by the murder of five innocent civilians. Musgrave’s mad plan is to exact revenge on the townspeople and “to work that guilt back to where it began” (Musgrave 34); to hold the town at gunpoint and confront its people with realities of warfare. Richard Gilman also comments on Musgrave’s mission:

... his mission is to strike a blow against violence and the cruelty of power politics, an act – the taking of twenty-five lives for the five his men were responsible for in some unnamed colony (Britain’s role in the Cyprus upheaval was Arden’s historical datum) – designed to teach the townspeople the horror and futility of political aggression and the exercise of military power. (112)

The politics of war which the play attacks is not limited to Cyprus or any other British colonies. The play is relevant to any war which turns to colonial domination and which lead to atrocities between soldiers and natives as it happens in our modern era. There are many sergeants like Musgrave and his men who were sent off to wars as pointed by Arden. Here lies the universality of the play in tackling the issue of war and its various aspects which took place in the near past (Cyprus), is taking place in the present time (e.g. Iraq) and may take place in the future. Here go Arden’s words quoted by Malcolm Page:

Cyprus may be a solved problem. May be Aden? Malaysia? Do I have to list them? Rhodesia was once a Victorian imperialist adventure. Vietnam has never been a British Colony, of course, but […] 1965-6 is ugly a year’s end as1958-9, when this play was conceived and written. I propose to give all my royalties from this production to Christian Action Funds for relief of political prisoners in South Africa. South Africa is the worst reminder we have of those historical grandfathers of ours who sent the ‘legendary’ Serjeant Musgrave and his men off to the wars. (22)
Although the plan is not appropriate, Arden, like Musgrave, feels that there should be some kind of protest “to bring home death … to the social order which sanctions it” (Williams 376). As a Marxist, he believes that the change towards the betterment of the society springs first from the ordinary citizen. So for him the seeds for change lie in these townspeople. He thinks if he can transform them then his objective is achieved. That is why he wants to confront them with the realities of the colonial wars so that they rise against the war policy of their government.

Musgrave turns into a missionary taking up this scheme as his duty with a missionary zeal. It is no longer his scheme or his plan. It now turns up into the world, the command of God. And this Word is taking him into creation – creation of a world free from ‘dishonour, and greed, and murder – for greed’ – through destruction and death. Hence the necessity and validity of Death – dance. It will be ‘God’s dance on this earth’: “What we show here’ll lead forward forever, against dishonour, and greed, and murder – for – greed! There is our duty, the new, deserters’ duty; God’s dance on this earth; and all that we are is His four strong legs to dance it …” (Musgrave 36). Musgrave further prays “The Word alone is terrible: the Deed must be worse. But I know it is Your Logic, and you will provide” (Musgrave 37).

It is said that when the sin is at its height God takes to punishment and destruction so that through purgation a new man is born and a new world is created free from dishonour and murder. That is the divine Logic which Musgrave intends to follow. So Musgrave’s intention seems to be quite different from the colonialists’ intention. His intention is to kill to create an aversion for senseless war and murder and death. He does not want to create the fear for war leading to subjugation. The colonialists create fear for the powerful war-machine so that the subjugated people can never dare to raise their heads and breathe in freedom and fearlessness. They impose the war for their greed. They are selfish. Musgrave has no greed and no self. He believes that it is only the initial process which is ‘terrible’ for it involves death. Only then self may come out and shine in its true divine glory shorn of all corruption and sin of dishonour. The task, the duty that he has set before himself is laudable. The dramatist must have been sanguine about the hero. But does he have enough passion for action through which he can achieve his end and make the people share his death-dance and realise the futility of particular war?

Expectation of life leads to death and the positive ultimately turns into the negative. This is what happens to Musgrave who attempts in his mission to bring a
positive attitude into the town and teach its people a practical lesson about the savagery of war especially the colonial war. His mission fails and he is sentenced to death along with his last man. His logic of making the people feel the horror of war and the aversion for war becomes illogical and puts him behind the bar. He fails because he basically does not know the complexities of the situation and the politics of the world. He is so simple and thinks that the world is simple too and will respond to his pacifist mission. At the end of the play he is left perplexed contemplating where he has gone wrong. All turn against him and against his mission, even his close soldier who at the arrival of the dragoons asks Musgrave to surrender. Musgrave and his men have started for the town with a very simple proposition. But soon Musgrave realises that it is not so simple and so he brings God and Scriptures into it. He thinks that they will help him but he does not know that wars are politically charged and do not succumb to religions and sculptures.

This imperial and colonial system which is based on capitalist motives can bring only murder and death through its war-machine. Sparky’s death heralds the end of the world. Even if it is not dead physically, mentally and spiritually it is already dead. Mental and spiritual death is in fact death-in-life, much more dangerous than the physical death. And another indication of this living death is the continuing emphasis in the drama on winter, ice and cold – the symbols of death, lack of fertility in nature. Man is impotent; nature is infertile. Nothing grows; there is no sight of life in the city. The city seems to be almost dead. This is the system under which these people have been living. They feel ‘cold’ in their hometown and that is not yet enough and they have to feel cold in the Empire’s colonies. To some ‘It is not material’, as Musgrave always screams, if a soldier is brought home bones in a wooden box. Bones are for the sake of the Empire and for the sake of the Queen. This is the system which Musgrave attempts to shake, because it debases human beings that they are turned into dogs loitering in the battlefield and licking the hot blood of soldiers and howling in joy. This idea has been expressed symbolically by Annie licking the hot blood of Sparky sticking to her fingers: “Annie looks at Musgrave and at Mrs Hitchcock, then licks her hand, laughing in a childish fashion” (Musgrave 70). Is she mad? Even if she has gone mad, there is reason in her madness. In war, imposed by the imperial and colonial powers, people shed blood as if they, like dogs, are hungry for it. They enjoy it in ‘childish fashion’. A child enjoys breaking the head of the doll; he claps and laughs with joy once it is broken. The child dances the Death-Dance. This prophetic
vision of Musgrave is just a reflection of this persistent Death. Only its scope has been extended to include London – the centre of capitalist colonial power and corruption which Musgrave attempts to eliminate.

The Empire is the cause of suffering of these people who are forced to leave their homes to safeguard its interests in foreign lands. Annie is unhappy with Musgrave and his Empire because she has lost her ‘soldier’ to the Queen’s colonial wars. She exclaims in the face of Musgrave “God damn you, he was killed! Aye, and in your desert empire – so what did that make” (Musgrave 63)? Significantly Annie calls the vast British Empire a ‘desert’ which has a symbolic and mystic connotation. The ‘desert’ of Annie points to Nature and Man. In the context of Nature it refers to the drought-hit land where there is no water and hence no vegetation can grow. In the vast desert of this business, materialistic world where man lives a life of “dishonour and greed and murder – for – greed” (Musgrave 36) the soul of man, his spirit, his divinity is lost. He is turned into a hollow man. What grows in this Empire is corruption and exploitation for its own people, who are used as means of subjugation of other nations and subjugated for other means.

Like Arden, Howard Brenton exposes the vicious and ugly face of imperialism. He depicts the negative aspect of the empire’s colonial war in Ireland and compares it to the Roman conquest of Britain. In *The Romans in Britain* (1980), he draws analogies between the Roman conquest of Celtic Britain and the British colonisation in Northern Ireland. David Christopher and Christopher MacCullough point out the anti-colonial message of Brenton’s *The Romans in Britain*:

His later play *Romans in Britain* (1980) featured the homosexual rape of Druid priest by a Roman soldier. Many critics saw it as gratuitous sexual violence, a cynical attempt to gain publicity. But he defended it as an exploration of the empire-building, a critique of colonialism and of the British military presence in Ireland. (Christopher 67)

*The Romans in Britain*, in broad terms is concerned with colonialism and imperialism – the succession of invasions that created the English and the current occupation of Ireland. Part I deals with the imminent Roman invasion of these Islands in 54 BC and Part II sets the scene just prior to the Saxon invasions that resulted in the creation of the English. (MacCullough 46)
How easy this truthful tale of man’s life in the desert of the vast British Empire is. It is easily described in mere two words “twisted” and “malformed” (Musgrave 95). This tale stops at death; it does not go beyond that. Annie turns this tale into a song in which her man is a scarecrow made of “rotten rag” and “bone” (Musgrave 95) symbolising his death. The man dies and leaves behind himself his ‘rotten rag’, the decayed body and his bones. This decayed body releases the spirit, the soul, the bird which flies out to the sky. Then nothing remains with the man. He turns out to be as lifeless a thing as the scarecrow. This is what Musgrave intends to do – to use the dead body of Billy as a scarecrow and to terrify the birds – the people of the city. He would dance round the dead body and will call it his death-dance. He invites others to join his death-dance. But then Annie disturbs it by exposing his deed and his actual intent: “(Holding up the tunic) Hey, here’s the little hole where they let in the bayonet. ... His blood’s on my tongue, so hear what it says. A bayonet is a raven’s beak. This tunic’s a collier’s jacket. That scarecrow’s a birdcage. What do you want” (Musgrave 95)! Here, one is reminded of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar where Antony stands in the public place with the dead body of Julius Caesar in his hands and points to each hole in the body of Caesar made by Brutus and his group in the name of the Roman Republic. She actually speaks her dialogue and acts like Antony; there is the reverberation of his speech in her dialogue. And she is as effective as Antony. Attercliffe understands the fact and accepts it without any argument: “Oh, it’s material. And no goddamned accident. I said it to you, Musgrave. it washed it all out” (Musgrave 96). Hurst grows rebellious:

HURST: frantic. I’m going to start shooting!

General reaction of fear: he clearly means it. He spits at Musgrave.

You and your everlasting Word – you’ve pulled your own roof down! But I’ll prop your timber for you – I’ll give a One, Two, and a Three; and I’m opening fire! (Musgrave 96)

Musgrave has failed. Yet the question remains with him: “what made it break down” (Musgrave 101)! The Answer is in Robert Jordan’s words: “The world will just go on in the old way – ... wars will keep on happening interminably. People may have the horror of it brought home to them occasionally, but they will forget about it again” (61). The answer also comes from Mrs Hitchcock: “Ah, there’s the moral of it. You ask our Annie” (Musgrave 101). Both the women are the wisest. Annie has already provided the answer in her dialogue interspersed throughout the drama. She may be
merely a “whoor-to-the-soldiers” but she is “a class” (Musgrave 60) by herself in her vision, wisdom and understanding of the human life, of the real problems of life and their real solutions. She knows all these things the best. Musgrave proves to be a mere pigmy before her. The dramatist also puts his confidence in these two women beside Attercliffe as stated in his introduction to the play.

The moral of the play does not clearly lie with Musgrave. The real action only lies with him. After deserting the army he might have decided to retaliate. The reaction might have been natural. The dramatist tries to explain his natural reaction turning itself against the people of the cold poor city: “I think that many of us must at some time have felt an overpowering urge to match some particularly outrageous piece of violence with an even greater and more outrageous retaliation” (Musgrave “Introduction” 7). This may be true as far as his contemplated action is concerned. But the moral meaning that he attaches to it is not at all supportive of and attached to his action. Human life is not that simple. Solutions to the problems of human life are not that simple too. Musgrave has just scratched the surface and that’s why he has failed. The depth lies with Annie who has explained the mysteries of life. The real problem of man is not just war. this war or that war. The crux of the problem lies in the capitalistic, imperial system that man has developed. Arden is against this capitalistic system, in Paterson’s words: “Arden is not all concerned to be fair to these corrupt and autocratic individuals. As a socialist, he rejects the capitalistic Establishment, and his interest is only in the most effective way of replacing their hegemony with a fair and democratic system” (57). Musgrave thinks that it is this capitalistic system which is based on dishonour, greed and murder. And in developing this system, Annie has suggested, man has created a desert Empire in the world which can deliver only Death and nothing but Death. Attercliffe asks if instead of a Death-dance “we can start an orchard” (Musgrave 104)? For that is the real opposite of war. The apple can grow and the orchard can be raised in only a fertile land. So instead of ‘desert’ land one should have fertile green land; instead of war and violence one should build up stability, harmony and respect for the life of man on this earth. Man has been lost in this ‘desert’ of war since time immemorial and gained nothing except devastation, destruction and agony. Mankind has the choice to make this land heaven based on cooperation and fellow feelings for one another or to make it hell with fire and counter fire and bloodshed.
This chapter analysed Arden’s disapproval of the colonial exploitation and the use of arms against the innocent people and also focused on O’Casey’s stance towards the politics of nationalism during the Easter Rising. These writers are socialist ideologues and they wrote these two plays as a protest against the authority and power in their communities which targeted the workers. For them, colonialism and nationalism were mere pretexts to exercise these forms of power on the voiceless part of the society. In Musgrave, Arden exposes the suffering of both the colonial soldiers and the colonised natives. Through Musgrave and his men, one gets to know how the soldiers of the Empire are mistreated and despised in foreign lands. They are stoned by the natives and abused. The four colonial soldiers deserted their army because of the harsh situation they might have been facing. They kill or they are being killed.

Arden is unhappy with the British Empire and the torture exercised on its own people before sending them overseas. The strikes of coalminers and their clashes with authority explain Arden’s dislike with the form of the British power structure which keeps the labour force under exploitation. He exposes to his audience how these common people are humiliated and starved first and then recruited to the Queen’s army, the only easier option for them to make a living. No one is satisfied with the politics of the Empire. Those at their homeland (the colonial nation) are on strike and unhappy with the way they live and those stationed in British colonies are distressed and unable to continue serving under their regiment. Their escape was the only ‘logical’ option to go back to their Empire and revolt against the system so that they can put an end to the colonial violence. For Musgrave, it is this colonial system which has to be rehabilitated to establish peace and harmony inside as well as outside the Empire. The plough also dramatises a similar situation of confrontation between the colonial powers and the Irish insurgents in Ireland. In the last Act, the play depicts how innocent civilians are being slaughtered by the British soldiers. It explicitly holds the leaders of Easter Rising accountable for the misery of the Irish people. In a dialogue towards the end of the play, one may find the British soldier excusable for their attacks on some residential blocks.

It is clearly enough that Musgrave and The Plough look at war from a socialist point of view and advocate an internationalist view that workers all over the world should fight for their demands and rise against their own governments. In these two plays, one can easily understand how both Arden and O’Casey look at the proletariat as a victim of war and how he is exploited by the officials of their own respective
countries. O’Casey makes a remark towards the end of the play on the importance of the internationalist socialism which has to stand against such wars which only target the poor class. When the British soldier, Stoddart, who claims to be a socialist, approaches the Covey in search for rebels, the Covey insist that the duty of a socialist is to fight against tyranny and injustice exercised on the working class wherever he is. So the main reason behind O’Casey’s disapproval of the politics of the Easter leaders is these socialist principles which he wants to establish. Similarly, Arden’s approach to war in the play also emanates from the socialist ideology. As mentioned above, the Left shares with socialism many basic principles that are concerned with war, capitalism, imperialism and the proletariat. Therefore, Arden’s opposition to the colonial wars and the politics of his own government clearly manifest his leftist and socialist beliefs. He considers the wars imposed by the British Empire as oppression on the working class in their own cities as Hurst points out in the play. Arden shares with O’Casey an internationalist view towards the labourers’ cause. He is not only concerned with the labourers inside the Empire. Hurst’s speech about “…killing folk like yourselves in the streets of their own city.” (Musgrave 94) in the marketplace, reflects this internationalist concern towards the proletariat. So he urges them to stop this exploitation and to transform this system within the Empire. And this kind of transformation will definitely lead to grand transformation overseas levitating the living condition of the proletariat. The situation of the soldiers and the natives in Iraq is very much similar to what Arden dramatises in Musgrave. Arden is quoted in “Serjeant Musgrave rides again” published in the Guardian stating the relevance of the play to the Iraq war: “You’re also dealing in Iraq with a situation that is not fully understood by the soldiers, who are getting panicky because people are shooting at them, which is exactly what I was writing about in Serjeant Musgrave” (para. 3). There are many soldiers like Hurst but they cannot go home to tell the people about the nature of war and its dehumanisation to those who are engaged in the business of fighting and who are ‘out there’. The following chapter will argue how the violence of war regardless of its motive leads to dehumanisation and crises in values.